

St Mary's MAP – Congregation's comments on the MAP, February 2019

Report for the PCC 14 March 2019

This report sets out in full all the comments received in response to the invitation to comment launched in Church on 10 February. Comments from different parties are separated by the solid lines.

A few comments included personal information which I have edited out as far as I can to preserve anonymity in this report.

At this stage, Members are asked to prayerfully reflect on the comments made. No commentary has been added. I will update the PCC orally on the next steps in progressing the MAP.

Simon Emerson

My comments were around baptism which I think would be preferable within the main service, as does happen in many churches. By so doing we could have a dedicated Sunday in which more than one family could be introduced to the Christian Family. This would enable them to feel more comfortable and for us to be more inclusive whether in the church or outside.

I find it quite sad when on sidesperson duty a host of folk are stood out in the rain or cold, creating a `them` and `us` scenario. I always encourage them to come in before we all leave and to have a biscuit if with children or coffee if still on the go!

Last Sunday as we all jollied out to home a small gathering of those bereaved were stood outside waiting for the interment of ashes. It just seems wrong to me and something not difficult to improve upon.

The training and use of First Aiders was missed from the MAP document. They are useful both with and elderly congregation and their knowledge can be used in outreach.

Baptism should always be within the 10 am service to be welcomed into the Church family. This may cause "discomfort" for some attendees, (but) they often bring to Church younger family and friends whom we can "embrace".

Please don't get rid of pews.

A follow up after Baptisms would be helpful. As would a name of the child who receives a Christingle.

We haven't had a Garden Party for years and I'm sure the Rectory Garden would be big enough

More social events in in the Rectory Garden.

The following link references St Helen's, Abingdon which was reordered several years back. Am not for a moment wading in to suggest / demand that SMS think anything like so big ... but it does show what can be done with a large (indeed, England's 2nd-widest) church + imagination & commitment; no harm being aware of such things:

<https://uk.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images?p=st+helen%27s+church+abingdon&fr=mcafee&imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.astroft2.co.uk%2Fablingdon%2Fab201-dist-ltdk-s2h550s1-q40.jpg#id=1&iurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.astroft2.co.uk%2Fablingdon%2Fab201-dist-ltdk-s2h550s1-q40.jpg&action=click>

1. Thanksgiving for the Mission of the Church

The above is celebrated in the Church's Calendar on November 29th and there is a commissioning service on pages 312 –314 of Common Worship – Daily Prayer. I suggest that day, which is a Friday, be the starting point of MAP and church members be expected to attend.

2. Welcome and follow-up

Suggest a card for completion be in every pew which would be followed up by "welcome pack" because difficult for side person to know newcomers. Wastage of packs if the stranger never returns. We used to pray for Streets. Why not now?

3. Growth in understanding

I don't think a survey would be useful. It is surprising what some Christians do not know about the faith. I discovered recently that some of the congregation do not believe in the resurrection of the body Most people believe in some form of spiritual resurrection despite what they repeat in the Apostles' Creed! I think gentle teaching is required with an acknowledgement that some of the faith is very difficult.

I think more use should be made of a better selection of books to educate; I cannot see what purpose is being served by the current shelves- are the books for reading or for sale? *I could give some thought to a proper use.*

4. Sunday School

This is very important. Agree with all comments and suggestions but the most useful action is visiting and invites thro' the door. When we were at Sullington we visited and put invitation cards thro' doors: the next week the numbers increased from 2 Or 3 to 18. we continued for a month or so and then got tired and the numbers fell away.

The administrative work of visiting and leaf-letting need not be done by Jacky.

Put an item for Sunday School regularly for review on PCC agenda and ask Jacky what resources she would welcome.

5. Glebe Surgery

This is due for completion about the autumn time. It seems to me that there should be an opportunity for the church to enquire how the church could co-operate, not in a "churchy" way , but in a "neighbourly" way – delivering prescriptions etc. What "dogsbody" type of work would be welcome? Important not to be thought of being "religious". Suggest the Rector speaks to both Drs. Newsom and Whitehead.

6. Contributing to the Common Good

Religion and Art are very closely related; there are a lot of artistic people about; Art is also therapeutic. We could hold an Art Show either annually or biennially in the church; important to have it in the building to draw people in. Could be competitive and for selling. Rupert would be the ideal person to advise/organise. *I would not want to organise but happy to approach Rupert for discussions if Committee agrees idea. *

7. Book

The Joy of the Gospel- A Six-Week Study on Sharing Faith by Paula Gooder. £7.99

“This six-part course for parishes and Lent groups is based on Pope Francis’ much acclaimed recent reflections on mission and evangelism, published as *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel).”

“The Joy of the Gospel seeks to foster a renewed commitment to the common task of evangelization at every level of church life—we commend it warmly to our churches”

Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham
Tim Thornton, Bishop of Truro.

Could be useful for individual and/or group study. * I will order a copy to assess*.

8. Graham Jeffery

His cards are very popular-e.g. “Preach the Gospel use words if necessary” and “If you see someone without a smile, give him one of yours.” Useful resource, Sullington still has a supply.

I listened with interest to your presentation about the MAP last Sunday in Church. You asked for comments on the draft and whilst my experience of such plans is now quite dated I feel your efforts should be encouraged so I am responding with one or two thoughts. Some may not be relevant or may be impractical but I shall leave it up to you as to how appropriate you feel they are. My objective in writing this note is to positively support what is being done.

1. The principle of a SWOT analysis is familiar to me, but usually with the T for threats. On reading your draft I wondered whether whilst dropping the T for threats, the MAP should nevertheless explicitly identify the challenges built into realising any opportunities undertaken. Additionally in identifying the challenges might there also be a B for Benefits; this might reinforce the purpose of each opportunity.

For example increasing the flexibility of the church building would have the benefit of enabling *local people to live out their faith as part of our parish community*.

2. A message I was always taught about planning was “*If you don't know the place to where you are going you won't recognise that place when you get there*” so I would fully endorse the sentiments expressed in section 6.4 along the lines of specifying what is to be done, by whom, when and what is the intended outcome.

Similarly as is stated the priorities may not necessarily be new things and it is important to maintain what the parish already does well; forgetting this can so often defeat the overall objective.

In other words I agree with what is stated.

3. A few years ago I came across a leaflet that was actually produced locally which introduced me to the concept of the Triple Bottom Line. You may well be aware of this concept for measuring success not simply in terms of financial success and I wonder whether it might be adapted to measure the effectiveness of the MAP in its implementation.

It might also fit neatly into the diocesan themes of *Church Growth, Contributing to the Common Good and Reimagining Ministry*, (though I do agree with you that this latter theme is rather nebulous). By making such connections I wonder whether it might just be that those who consider a business orientated strategy is not for a church community may find the MAP becomes more meaningful in the context of our local church.

4. In looking at what is currently done well I have been impressed by the coverage and distribution of Parish Magazine *The Three Heralds*. It connects the 3 churches together and clearly demonstrates integration within the local community. Relating this to the young organisations which the church might seek to include, there may be some mileage in involving some of the younger organisations, Cadets, Scouts, Schools etc. to contributing to either a dedicated section in the magazine written *by them for them* etc. - or even suggest an occasional special edition where they are guest editors;

I imagine the Three Heralds is a burdensome challenge but I think it is well received amongst the non-churchgoing people of Storrington.

5. Mention is made of Welcome Packs and this indeed sounds like a good idea. Working out how it should be implemented may need a little thought. For visitors, unfamiliar with the physical surroundings entering the church, where so many of the regulars know one another might be somewhat intimidating. A personal welcome and perhaps showing visitors to a seat and then possibly having a welcome pack already in the pews, may work better than being handed out to unsuspecting visitors as they arrive.

My point is that with all good ideas thought should be given to how they might be implemented.

6. A point of detail that I mention simply in passing: The central part of the [Sunday morning](#) Eucharist is of course the taking of Communion. As an observer I sometimes notice that some of our elderly parishioners understandably navigate the central chancel steps with a little difficulty. The sides-people do a sterling job in guiding us all to the altars and in other churches, albeit some with more difficult steps than St Mary's, someone stands at either side of the chancel steps to help stepping up and stepping down. It also adds a further personal and inclusive touch.

From comments at choir practice yesterday, folk simply do not seem to know what it is all about - and a number who were involved in the last one think that it sank without trace. Do we need something slightly shorter and easier to understand?

For myself I am happy to a point with what is down on the church web site. We are caring and, I believe, welcoming. I think it was said that there are over 100 people volunteering in various areas of church life. Although you pointed out the churchyard team on Sunday, I would also add so many other people/ groups who do so much in our church.

HOWEVER

We have lost almost all of our young folk/ families in the last few years (and, SORRY, but this was partly our own fault - some did NOT feel welcome, other absences were not followed up)

Our church members are strongly involved in so many ways within the community but the church per se seems not to be so. How do we as 'Church' reach out into the community and share in what 'they' are doing? How do we become visible? MAP rightly suggests that we should look at one community link, but I feel that this is absolutely essential. We are one of the largest congregations in the area but the average age of our congregation is frighteningly high and continually growing higher. We have so much to share.

POSSIBILITIES.

A large church - can we not use it more?

I know I should **NEVER** say what I have known in the past, but in our last parish we leafletted each street in the parish over a two year period, and told them that they would be prayed for in church the each week during the following month, we shared in village day events as well as inviting folk to our own, we pushed for Baptisms at the main service and had a good follow up for funerals and Baptisms, and a very strong push ended up with the average number of under 12 year olds rising from under five at our Family Services to 23 – resulting from church members working together and sharing skills/ time etc. These are NOT suggestions for Storrington. Others know better than we do the strengths and weaknesses and needs of our community/congregation. Perhaps the only suggestion I might put forward would be to have a non-Eucharistic morning Family Service once a month or to make the first Sunday Eucharist much more child and outsider friendly.

With God on our side what can stand against us - but, without active outreach we will not grow just simply grow old in His love and Service. I cannot and will not criticize anyone - WE are His Family/ His body here on earth, here in Storrington. At my age I am happy simply to grow old with the congregation - it is just that I feel that He wants something more from us and too many people do not acknowledge Him in their lives.

The only thing I ask/pray is that if we are to do something, it is something which will unite us and not divide us, that as many people as possible are on board and then in hope, trust AND in prayer let us answer His Call.

I've just read through the draft MAP. Some good stuff there and I know from experience how much work has gone into that. I have only a few odd thoughts to offer - nothing earth shattering- but here they are, as I shan't be in church on Sunday:

The strength of tolerating disturbance during services is a really important point to make and I'm glad it's there.

I'm sure that the present Visiting Team would welcome inclusion of visiting to newcomers. We always saw that as a future possibility. We are looking to train more members in the foreseeable future.

Children's and youth work feels to me that it needs to be across boundaries, ecumenical or otherwise. Then St Mary's can supply what we've got to offer - as you say, maybe support for Splash depending on what they need.

I've no particular thoughts about new community projects except that this too could helpfully be tackled from an ecumenical point of view if the churches were encouraged to look at this together, which is presumably what happened with Splash originally. St Mary's problem on going it alone is that we don't have a hall space of our own. Any mileage in more involvement in the diocesan Family Support scheme locally (not sure it's called that).

Longer term- get rid of the pews and open up the Tower area to provide good space (controversial!!)
I can't believe I've said that - I've always liked pews!

PRAY PRAY PRAY

At the beginning of the interregnum, when the first MAP was produced, I found a prayer partner in order to pray for the appointment of a new Rector. This prayer partnership is still ongoing and we pray regularly for the clergy, PCC volunteers etc etc. St Mary's needs more prayer partnerships, prayer groups, quiet days and committed personal prayer before we can answer the questions put forward in the MAP.

In Acts Ch 1 the apostles decide themselves to propose another apostle. They prayed after the proposals and nothing more is heard of that choice – Matthias. God had another Apostle planned – Paul! Can we learn a lesson here?

In reading the Draft, some words from Bishop Richard's February letter about strategic thinking came to mind: *'In our case our strategy must flow from a clear understanding of **who and whose we are.**'* Perhaps the Plan should start with a brief statement setting this out. It would be instructive to invite members of the congregations to suggest appropriate wording. A follow up question could ask 'How does this define our purpose?'

The Draft is thorough in its scope and detail and covers a wide range. Have we the resources to do justice to all the suggested actions? To be successful, perhaps the saying, *'Do fewer things but do them well'* has merit.

The idea of a survey, set out in A.4 makes sense, as does the need for research as indicated in 3.2 and 3.9. There has to be a commitment to act on findings.

While making newcomers welcome is important, as set out in 4.2, sensitivity is necessary for those who wish for privacy.

With regard to finance mentioned in 3.8, as is common in many of our Parish Churches, no regular emphasis has been placed on what scripture teaches us about giving. It is a sensitive matter however tactfully presented. But without clear guidance on the principles, how are Church members to respond appropriately?

There are two things which are not specifically mentioned in the Plan which could be included. The first is the need for all we do to be supported by individual and collective prayer by all members. (This is hinted at by the Diocese in B). Perhaps a day of prayer before the MAP is finalised would be a suitable start and set an example. Rather than re-introduce a detailed prayer calendar, a monthly sheet briefly setting out a few current prayer concerns would be helpful.

The second concerns the wider Church. While our members individually are involved with other Christian organisations, as mentioned in 2.7, the Plan says nothing about a formal

Parish link with a Mission or a Parish overseas. Such links have been shown to be greatly beneficial to both parties, as follows:

Mutual support, not least in prayer.

Awareness of connection with the worldwide Church

The broadening of vision.

First hand knowledge of different expressions of faith gives encouragement.

Increased understanding of different cultures and needs.

Exchange visits.

Building of friendships.

If a link were to be established, lay involvement is essential. It would spiritually enrich the life of the Church here.

My only thoughts on the draft is whether the congregation should be tasked with attracting younger (pre retirement age) members/families, not by evangelism, but by introducing activities that might make the Church seem more relevant to modern life, that non-churchgoers could support and participate in and in the process, become more aware of the Church.

This would need to use the time and energy of congregation members and not increase the burden on the Clergy. It would clearly have to be a 'good cause ' but will probably also need to be a fashionable cause too, if it is to be effective in attracting non-churchgoers.

As an example, Kathryn has been musing over the Church renting an allotment and using it for therapeutic benefit projects and probably ecological benefits too. Other fashionable projects could involve homelessness or other aspects of the environment. Essentially it would need to be something meeting Church values and that villagers and village institutions, including the school , might be willing to get involved with.

I am sure other parishes would be able to advise on whether this approach is successful or not in recruiting new congregation members.

Could such a venture qualify for the Bishop's target of one new project, rather than putting the burden of that target on the Clergy?

Young people:

Has St Mary's considered Messy Church?

Perhaps Sunday School should be at a different time - on Sunday or in the week.

Mother and Toddler Groups in the Church during the week – perhaps one morning – toys and games would be needed for preschool children.

Youth Activities for very young children – All Stars; the next age group – Star Shiners; for older children Star Academy.

Involvement with sports groups, perhaps at the leisure centre.

Involvement with local schools both primary and secondary. The Vicar takes an assembly occasionally. Part of Personal and Social Education and the links to life skills.

Young Adults – those on apprenticeship schemes or at university. Offer a place to come and chat.

Clergy to go into the pubs in the area and see what the response is from young adults. This idea came from a book called "How to be a Bad Christian" and there was a regular meeting in the pub called "Holy Joes". This has to be run by clergy and not laity.

I thought that PRAYER was a subject raised at the original meeting with a view to having regular meetings and possibly setting up 'prayer triplets'

Perhaps this could be added if not too late?

The lack of organised prayer could almost be described as a 'weakness'?

Strengths

This has been covered well, but Inter-church activities such as lent lunches could be added to the strengths already noted.

Weaknesses

1. Clergy do not have young family attending to act as a catalyst for families with children to attend - clearly a sensitive issue,
2. No youth group or less formal service targeted at teens and families unfamiliar with the church,
3. Inadequate follow up from 'rites of passage' to ascertain why those attending do not come to church for services,
4. Limited communication of initiatives. What the church is doing is confined to PCC reports and occasional notices given in services leaving the congregation and certainly the wider village community unaware of what work is being done,
5. The fixed pews are noted as a weakness. However, re-ordering involving removing pews is of questionable benefit given that there is an abundance of halls in the vicinity of the Church; viz Village Hall, Old School; (2 rooms already associated with the church for Sunday School, baptisms and funerals) and the Guide Hall and a little further; Storrington First School Hall, Sullington Village Hall and formerly Rydon CC hall and gym. Re-ordering may alienate the predominately older congregation driving some of them away and not result in sufficient younger people attending to replace them. Appeals are given out for erecting and dismantling the stage - any pews removed would need to be replaced by portable seating requiring additional volunteers and storage.

Opportunities

1. Follow up from 'rites of passage' possibly with a service geared toward families of the recently baptised, married and bereaved, see 3 below,
2. When establishing links with schools and youth organisations, offer periodic youth services, (perhaps fortnightly), in a similar manner to Church@4, where the why we do what we do in services such as Eucharist and Baptism could be explained,
3. A service, (perhaps monthly), with a lighter non communion content to reach out to and be inclusive to those members of the community that do not feel comfortable with the more formal 10:00 Service. Resourcing with clergy and lay people would not be a problem if it

were to replace the current monthly 10:00am 'Family Communion' service. Alternatively two evening services a month could be used instead. Conversation from follow-up to 'rites of passage' to gauge appeal as first step.

The analysis should include “threats”. In particular, the increasing secularisation of our world and the great missing age gap in our congregation between the very young and much older people. Committed stalwarts of the church are not being replaced by a new generation.

End