

Notes of a meeting of the Churchwardens of the Undercliffe (UMC) and Axe Valley Mission Communities (AVMC) to consider potential pastoral re-organisation together.

Held on Wednesday 24th April 2019, at Woodbury Village Hall.

Present

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| Penny Doe, Diocesan Mission Community Development Associate | Jill Hitchcock, Combyne with Rousdon |
| Ann Harding, Axmouth | Christine Galvin, All Saints |
| Rose Tidball , Axmouth | Mandy Loveridge, Minster, Axminster |
| Martin Wells , Uplyme | Karen Wilkes, Minster, Axminster |
| Nicola Russell Holy Cross | Rev. Prebendary Cate Edmonds, AVMC |
| Tim Purrett, Chardstock | Tracey Voysey, Ordinand in training, AVMC |
| Debbie Burrough, Membury | Rev. Clive Sedgewick, Rector AVMC |
| Richard Whitworth, Combyne with Rousdon | |

Rev. Clive Sedgewick opened in prayer, then introduced the purpose of the meeting as an opportunity to explore ways of working together in the future to enhance the work of each parish. He indicated that there should be a focus upon mission-based development, maintaining the characteristics of each parish in service to their community and that there would be no imposed changes or worship styles. Working together in a larger mission community could bring additional opportunities and sharing of resources. Through discussions with the Bishop of Crediton and the Archdeacon, support has been indicated for the appointment of a second, full time priest to the proposed, enlarged Mission Community

The Rector made clear that decisions would not be made by the clergy and lay team but by the churchwardens and PCCs of each parish. Minutes of this meeting are to be made available to all in order to support open communications and enable everyone to make their views known. He explained that tonight's meeting is an opportunity for churchwardens to meet one another for informal discussion, that the clergy and readers are meeting next week, and a further meeting will be held on the 25th May to enable each PCC to consider and vote upon their decision regarding this working together as a single Mission Community.

Clive introduced Cate Edmonds who has knowledge of the process of pastoral reorganisation from a previous role as Rural Dean. Cate explained that this is a slightly odd situation as the Archdeacon will be leaving in June. The process should be that following discussions, each PCC would need to formally agree a decision to merge. This would initiate a legal process through the Rural Dean, the Old Deanery Team and the Bishop. This is to be a 'bottom-up' process, signed-off by the Diocese.

Clive introduced Penny Doe, who explained her role as the Diocesan Mission Community Development Associate, and that she would be acting as the facilitator for the discussion. Penny led an introductory activity, followed by an activity to consider the hopes and fears

surrounding a possible merger into a larger Mission Community.

Tim explained the need to know more about the other parishes in order to be able to identify hopes and fears. Churchwardens from each parish shared their information: -

Uplyme – Martin explained that Uplyme is a very successful, self-generating church, driven from within, with 18-20 years' experience of lay-led ministry and services which is well accepted by the congregation. They host 28 mission-led outreach groups as initiatives to introduce people in the community to church, and the vision that 'by our actions we'll attract people into church', for example 38 people attend the breakfast activity.

There has been a Rector in Uplyme since 1280, but with recent partnering with Axmouth there has been an acceptance that the Vicar cannot lead everything, and the congregation have totally accepted this. There is now a challenge of a proposed 0.5 clergy post with 0.25 deduction from their salary for living in the Vicarage, leaving an income to the incumbent of just £6,500. Martin said that every church needs a leader and moving forwards, they are looking to see someone identified as the person looking after Uplyme, someone to refer to, to support PCC meetings, and provide encouragement.

Martin explained that they received a legacy of £100,000 which has been used to fund a youth worker with a salary and they are concerned that it might not be possible for this to continue at the end of the 3-year period.

Nicola asked what work this person does. Martin explained that he works with Vibe, Youth Alpha, and works with Seaton Baptist church amongst others. He added that with a merger, it would be possible for his work to be spread more widely and that Uplyme could gift this to the wider circle. Joining together would give a new perspective for this work and it could be looked at differently. Clive added that Simon currently also works through contacts with Axminster schools and football activities. Penny asked about work with Church schools in Uplyme and Martin explained that Mrs Ethelston's school next door uses the church premises every day. This was made possible by the re-ordering of the church 4 years ago and the installation of chairs which creates a flexible space. He explained that they are looking for links with Woodroffe School to maintain contact with teenage youth from year 7 onwards.

In response to Martin's comments, Richard acknowledged the worry about leadership, and explained that the Rector acts as the leader for all six churches in the Axe Valley – so the concerns Martin had voiced, applies to them already. He said that they anticipate that this would extend to all eight churches with the merge.

Nicola asked if Uplyme church is financially viable. Martin explained that they have never not been able to pay the Common Fund and are in a very fortunate position to have enough to fund new activities when something is identified as needed for the community.

Martin later added that Uplyme church supports charity work in Uganda, having raised some £85,000 over 3 years – with a PCC member dedicated to work on charity fundraising.

Axmouth – Rose described congregational growth from 20 to 35 over the last six years – with Kate's support; and that 80 people attended the Easter service. Their challenge is with work with children and young people, as there is no school in Axmouth and very few young families. It was acknowledged that it is really the older people in the community that needed support. There is a lot of outreach activity into the village, fundraising by the Friends and rotas for church activity are well supported by community spirit, eg. The Ship Inn lunch which provides important friendship and fellowship. The 50/50 share of the proceeds of the

summer sale gave £1500 each to charity and the church. They pay the Common Fund request each year and when the quinquennial survey identified the need for significant masonry work, £30 – 40,000 was raised in the community.

Chardstock – Tim explained that Chardstock church is a large building which can seat 300 but is struggling at the moment due to limited support from the village. There is a lot of community support for the annual street fair, which is a community event and which the church takes part in, and the church holds concerts, coffee mornings, and the St Andrew's Day Fayre for fundraising.

The regular congregation is 15 – 18, with 38 for the Easter service. The 'Friends of the St Andrew's Church' is possibly about to collapse. The school is at the other end of the village, but no children attend church. Sunday school closed 4 years ago.

Penny asked what the response might be if it were suggested that the church close; Tim felt that the older people might be concerned but that many 'in-comers' may not. He explained that they hold five or six funerals a year and 2 or 3 weddings.

Cate shared that she leads collective worship in the school and that although there wasn't enough parental support for the children to walk to the church for a Christmas service, the children are to come down to the church this week for an Easter service.

Clive added that the PCC and church members work very hard and are doing a superb job. He had received very positive and supportive comments from villagers regarding the work of those in the church family.

Holy Cross – Nicola explained that Holy Cross is peculiar in that they are a 'gathered' congregation. The chapel building was initially donated from the big house for estate workers – there is no village. It's a very welcoming church, with a stable, mainly elderly congregation. It holds a traditional single eucharist service each week, with everyone knowing 'what they'll get'. The average congregation is 24, with 43 for Easter. The church pays its Common Fund and the congregation funded repairs which were needed recently. Nicola explained that she felt the merger is a 'no brainer' and we must do it, not talk for months but 'get on and do it' – particularly as we've already been without a 0.3 clergy role for 7 months in the AVMC.

Membury – Debbie described how the church, school and village hall are positioned next to each other. They lack children in the village, and some go to school elsewhere – with only 30 attending Membury Primary. There is a variety of services at 11.00 each week, with an average congregation of 15 – 20, but the church was full with 70 at Easter and Christmas – lots of support on Festival occasions and special days rather than weekly attendance. They 'tick along' with rotas for flowers and cleaning, and fundraising, eg. Friday's concert.

Compbyne with Rousden and Rousden Estate. – Richard described how the lovely little church serves three separate communities – with activities at the Peake Hall which was previously a school – there is no water at the church. There is a lack of regular worshippers, sometimes up to nine, but sometimes services are abandoned when there are only two people. There is good financial management of the church, supported by generosity in the past. The village community rallies if anything needs doing and there would be opposition to any suggestion of closure. The building is at least the same age as Notre Dame which received such tremendous support following the fire last week. Locally St Mary the Virgin

arouses similar feelings of care and community spirit.

The PCC are working with the Growing the Rural Church team and have recently sent out a questionnaire asking the question on, How important is the church to you?

There is going to be a succession issue with regards to the PCC as no-one is wanting to join, and there would need to be time for learning the roles. They are currently conducting a community survey about the future role of the church.

With their geographical location mid-way between the current mission communities, they feel that there will be good opportunities with the merger.

Penny said that with the recent fire at the Notre Dame, she had been reflecting on the theology of sacred spaces both for people who attend church, and those who do not.

The Minster, Axminster – Mandy reflected that the Minster is different as a town rather than village church where the community spirit is not as great. The Minster has a central position in the town and lots of activities take place on the green, eg. the Cherry Fair. People see the Minster as a venue for christenings, weddings and funerals without an understanding of how it is funded and maintained.

The congregations fell following two closure periods after a major fire and then two interregnums over a fairly short period of time, but there is now some growth since Clive has been here. 10-15 people attend the 8 o'clock service and 35-40 the I am service. Some members of the congregation would like this service time to be changed to better enable them to engage with family events and to go out to lunch. Christmas and Easter services are well supported. Tuesday and Friday weekday communion services are also well supported. The congregation is mainly elderly, with the majority aged 70+. There have been children's groups in the past, but families now attend sports and other commitments on Sundays, and after-school activities in the evenings - the world is changing and we need to change with it.

The Minster meets its Common Fund payment and a small number of individuals generous giving currently supports the Church – but this may become more difficult in the future, as there are no younger people 'in the wings'.

Martin reflected that we should see Easter attendances as a buoyant sign.

Penny added that there has been a shift, and people who call themselves Christians do see attendance at 3-4 special services a year as Christian behaviour.

All Saints – Christine explained that All Saints serves a group of hamlets with the church at the centre of the community, along with the church school and the Village Hall. They have a range of services with an average attendance of 15, mostly elderly folk. Tracey leads a successful 'Together at 10' service with 20-25 adults and 8-9 children.

They have struggled financially in the past, and in 2004 started a monthly country market and breakfast event - which now is mainly breakfast - raising £3,000 a year towards their Common Fund request. This is a very popular get-together for all the community.

The church has a lovely spirit and is used by members of the community during the week as a special, quiet space. The church is well loved, and a chancel restoration project has recently been completed.

In conclusion, Clive said that there is a desire across the mission communities to move forwards, with lots to be thankful for, much to build on, and we now need to look in

different ways to face the changes and issues in society, and discuss the developments which could benefit all parishes. We need to gain momentum for change over a period and not only look to resolve short term issues. We do have an ageing population and need to think about young people as part of our mission. We may need to face difficult decisions for the future - for example we may need to think about the buildings.

Penny added that the aim of the mission communities is to share but maintain the distinctive flavour of each and not measure success numerically – through unity and diversity.

Questions: -

Richard asked that if there is to be a second full time priest, would the plan be to base them in the Chardstock or the Uplyme vicarage – as knowledge of where they would be based might help to inform decisions.

Penny answered that she didn't know the answer to this at this time.

Martin asked what the timescale will be?

Clive answered that it is hoped for PCCs to have reached their decisions by the 1st September 2019, or sooner if possible.

Cate added that it may take 18 months or more for the formal legal process to create a united Mission Community - to be completed and signed off by the Chancellor of the diocese, but that this wouldn't preclude working together and a clergy appointment before then. She explained that there might be certain circumstances in which particular arrangements may be needed during this period, for example if someone from Uplyme wished to be married in the Minster, this might need a special licence.

Martin asked if the merger would affect the patrons of individual churches. Penny explained that it wouldn't as the process isn't about homogenising, but being able to work together, knowing one-another better and being able to move skills and resources across the group. Cate gave the example of the AVMC dementia service which is held at All Saints due to its facilities which is for all to attend.

Clive asked the permission of everyone present to be able to share contact details with one another to support communications as the process continues, and with the clergy team and readers. He asked if anyone wasn't happy with this, to let him know.

The next meeting is to be held at The Beacon in Kilmington on Saturday 25th May from 10.30am – 1.00pm. He will provide information to share with PCC members in advance.

Clive thanked everyone and Penny for attending the meeting – which then ended with the sharing of the grace.

Notes taken by Andrea Sedgewick and Tracey Voysey