PRAYER OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Christ has no body now on earth but ours;
no hands but ours; no feet but ours.

Ours are the eyes through which the
compassion of Christ must look out on the
world.

Ours are the feet with which He is to go
about doing good.

Ours are the hands with which He is to
bless His people.

Amen.
From your Transition Mentor:

Thank you to all who contributed to this report – it was very inspiring to meet so many dedicated people who are faithfully serving the church across Alyn Deanery and I am also very grateful for your hospitality (especially the chocolate biscuits, before Lent...).

One overriding impression from our discussions and conversations was the wealth of potential still to be unlocked. Building on the foundations laid by Alyn Deanery, there are many opportunities for churches to work together to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to serve their local communities. This is not a new task - churches in the area now covered by the Deanery have been serving their communities for hundreds of years. However, it is an old task made new by the need to work with communities in the twenty-first century.

Alyn Deanery is fortunate in having a wealth of resources to draw upon for this task including faithful and talented people, both ordained and lay, and beautiful buildings, often placed in the heart of the community. The following report includes some suggestions as to the ways in which this potential can be unlocked.

2020 Vision challenges us to change those things which make us less effective in bringing others to Christ and to keep those things which are the irreducible heart of our faith. Both require courage – to move forward, holding lightly to the things of the past, especially if they prevent us from leading others to Christ and to continue to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, even if this is met with ridicule and opposition.

The Deanery has many challenges to face as it moves towards becoming a Mission Area, including the need to continue to discuss the question “What is the church?” and as a corollary, “What is my church?” Does it seem more like a club, only open for a few hours per week, operating solely for the benefit of its members? Or is it truly the body of Christ, where everyone offers their own unique gifts and talents in the service of the Lord?

When we recite the creed, we say “We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” but what do these words mean for us today? For example, will we see
ourselves as one church in the Mission Area or will we continue to focus on my parish, my church, my vicar, my pew.

2020 Vision encourages us to fulfil our mission and calling as God’s people. Work now needs to begin to discern the exact nature of that mission and calling in this Mission Area and this will only be accomplished with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Prayer should be at the heart of the work of the Mission Area, underpinning every decision, every activity.

The prayer of St Teresa of Avila was selected for use before meetings and conversations as it seems most appropriate for discussions relating to “Unlocking Our Potential”. Every line can also serve as a challenge to us all – Are my hands being used to bring hurt or healing at times of discord and anxiety about change? Am I, are we, looking at other people within our church, within our communities, with the compassion of Christ?

Even though our time together is over, I will continue to pray for the Deanery as it moves forward to become a Mission Area and I look forward to hearing great things about your work in the future.

Best Wishes

Elizabeth
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Alyn Deanery

Alyn Deanery is situated to the north of Wrexham, extending from Isycoed in the east, to Bwlchgwyn in the west. It was formed in 2012 from the two smaller deaneries of Minera and Gresford and at present, includes twelve churches grouped into six parishes, served by five stipendiary priests, five Readers and a growing number of Worship Leaders and Pastoral Assistants. Two of the parishes are more rural in character and the remainder are designated as “urban villages”.

According to the 2014 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, (WIMD, http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research), some parishes are amongst the 20-30% most deprived in Wales whilst others are amongst the 40% least deprived, indicating wide variations in affluence within the population. Age range also varies even between parishes that are geographically fairly closely situated. For example, 2011 Census data reveals that the mean age of the population of Brymbo was 35, 9% of the population were aged between 0-4 and 24% of the population were aged between 30 and 34, compared to Gresford with a mean age of 48, where only 4% of the population were aged 0-4 and 18% were aged 30-44. These (and other factors such as percentage in employment, health, life expectancy etc.) affect the specific context for each church in their mission to serve the local community.

An appraisal of the socio-economic context is essential for effective mission. For example, many churches are looking to develop Messy Church as a way to engage more children in the Christian faith. However, this may not be an effective use of resources in parishes with a low percentage of children and young people. Conversely, if the area has a high number of older people, their needs should also be considered.

A further point for reflection is that the character and culture of a community may have changed over the past 30 years, especially in areas with new housing developments so the perceptions of those who have lived in a community for many years may not give a complete picture of the nature of the community today.
Methodology

A qualitative, semi-structured approach was adopted as the most apposite as it provides a coherent framework for discussions and conversations, including the interjection of additional questions as appropriate for amplification or further explanation of key points, whilst allowing the respondents more freedom to express their hope and fears.

The conversations and discussions were initially framed by the question “What are we doing here?” which due to its very ambiguity, can be interpreted in a number of ways, opening up debate so that respondents have the opportunity to explore those areas of most interest and/or concern to themselves. At a later stage in these discussions, the conversation moved on to the question “What next?” which again led to some interesting outcomes.

Several methods of data collection (from both individuals and groups) were adopted including face to face meetings:

i. pre-arranged meetings
ii. ad hoc conversations
iii. attendance at services or special events
iv. attendance at PCC meetings

Other methods included:

i. Email correspondence
ii. Telephone conversations

In addition, there were invitations to speak to churches and to lead a workshop at the Deanery Conference.

Before the commencement of any meetings, details of the role of the Transition Mentor were sent to all churches and people were invited to make contact via phone or email. As a matter of courtesy, individual discussions took place with stipendiary clergy before any meetings were held with churches within their parishes.
The respondents were drawn from all the churches in the Deanery and included both church and non-church members:

i) The Archdeacon, Transition Missioner, Area Dean, stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy, Readers, Worship Leaders, Pastoral Assistants, Churchwardens, Treasurers, members of church congregations.

ii) Community Centre Managers, Local Councillors, Head Teachers of Church schools.

**Ethical principles**

All participants who engaged in discussion or conversation were advised that the information they provided would be anonymous but not confidential as their comments would be amalgamated with those of others to contribute to a report which would be within the public domain. The same principles have been adopted for any email correspondence. Therefore, specific churches, parishes or individuals will not be identified in the report, except for those references to information which is already in the public domain.

**Reflexivity in research**

Qualitative research demands the recognition that the way in which the research is conducted and the characteristics of the researcher affect outcomes. The Transition Mentor was a married, Christian female, perceived to be older or younger than the respondents, (dependent on their perception of their own age), all of which factors would have affected the depth and content of the discussions and conversations.

**Nomenclature**

In this report, the term *church* refers to an individual church community, the term *parish* being reserved for those churches which were grouped together into benefices. This is an important distinction as in some instances; there were more differences between churches in a parish than between parishes.
Awareness of 2020 vision

It was heartening to discover that most church people had at least heard about 2020 Vision. However, the extent and depth of this knowledge varied between and within parishes. Misconceptions were not uncommon, including the concern that parishes would no longer have their own vicar. One of the joys of the role of Transition Mentor was to be able to dispel some of these fears - once it was made clear that a parish would still have its own priest, many people were more enthusiastic about other aspects of 2020 Vision, especially the concept of Unlocking Potential. However, there is still work to be done to continue to provide consistent information, across the Mission Area, about proposed changes for the future. It is imperative that lay people in particular are kept informed about future changes as 2020 Vision evolves over time - a perceived lack of transparency in decision making within the Deanery is one of the barriers to wholehearted engagement with 2020 Vision.

Recommendation 1: Conduct Parish Audits.

- Conduct Parish audits to determine the socio-economic context for mission and ministry for each church.

Recommendation 2: Provide regular updates on 2020 Vision.

- Identify a mechanism to keep parishes informed of future changes within the Mission Area.
CULTURE CHANGE

Attitudes to change

One of the challenges for the Deanery will be to embrace the cultural changes required when becoming a Mission Area. The Church in Wales Review (2012) reported both low morale and a yearning for creative ways of ministry to be released, combined with a sense of frustration that any move forward was liable to be repressed. It is interesting to note that all these emotions were expressed at various times across the Deanery.

Firstly, there was the sense that there is no hope for the future – that the church in its present incarnation will not survive the twenty-first century. This attitude tended to be expressed in churches that were served by a small team of older people on whom the burden of care for the church was placed and who were feeling worn out from their work for the church.

It was very encouraging, when explaining the nature of the Mission Area as a group of churches working together, to see the re-emergence of some hope that, if churches were to work together, there would be greater opportunities to share the workload. However, this will be entirely dependent on the generosity of the churches in the Mission Area in their care for other church communities. One may also reflect that there should be a more equitable sharing of workload between members of a church and this would also allow other members of the congregation to use their gifts as God intended.

Secondly, there were those who were enthusiastic about the opportunities offered by the Mission Area and were hopeful for the future, if the intentions of 2020 Vision were actually realised. Hopes for the future include more church fellowship, the opportunity for evangelism “that we can spread our love to the community, explaining what it is like to know God”, greater community engagement “and be the heart of the community” and changes to worship, so that it is more “dynamic” and “interesting” especially for younger people.

For this group, their greatest fears tended to be that 2020 Vision is one more in a line of initiatives which does not come to fruition – “that a new concept of Mission does
"not flounder". Providing this enthusiasm for 2020 Vision is not stifled, this group are a key resource for active engagement in Unlocking Our Potential.

The third group were those who felt that 2020 Vision did provide opportunities for the future but that, based on their past experiences, these would not be realised. Examples of new ideas were given which had been discounted because of opposition by some church members or the clergy. For example, there had been an offer to provide a lay-led, child-centred family service with modern music in addition to (rather than replacing) the usual Sunday service. However, this was, as reported to me, prevented by the combined opposition of the vicar and church members.

One must acknowledge that not every idea will be feasible. However, if the default position is that there must be unanimity between every member of a congregation before moving forward, inevitably, stagnation will be the result. This group were more sceptical about the opportunity provided by 2020 Vision and suggested that only time would tell as to whether this was a real initiative or merely “rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic” (a phrase which was commonly used across the Deanery in this context).

One may also reflect that, as the Mission Area has not yet come into existence, anxiety, denial and fear can be expected as initial responses to the proposed changes, leading to predictions from some churches in the Deanery that nothing can change without church agreement (especially with reference to financial issues) and genuine fears that any change might be for the worse, accelerating the decline in congregational numbers if those who currently attend do not like the changes that are implemented.

These fears need to be acknowledged, including the acceptance that the consequences of change may be negative as well as positive, so that realistic discussions can take place, where all involved can voice their concerns. This can lead to more stable and productive outcomes than the avoidance of any debate.

The key in these discussions is to reemphasise the Vision for the future and to continue to focus on Unlocking Our Potential. However, it also important to stress that doing nothing (however attractive this may seem) will still bring about change,
though the consequences may be the very opposite of those intended – i.e. church closure, which is seen as the greatest fear of all.

**Churches working together**

One element of 2020 Vision which met with a mixed reception was the concept that church communities should work together. Some churches were eager for greater collaboration, only noting a residual anxiety that their church might be “left out”, or still feel isolated and there was a general acknowledgement that working together could be very beneficial, so that the Mission Area could lead to “more understanding, friendship and fellowship between areas”, “sharing resources and talents” and “see problems from other viewpoints”.

Although it was generally accepted in principle that church would benefit from working with others, the inevitable “but...” often crept in and a more prevalent opinion was that working together was not feasible in practise as “some people prefer not to be involved with other churches” and the argument that “we will lose our identity as a parish community”.

The groups to which we belong contribute to our sense of our own identity and self-esteem so we are motivated to enhance our sense of self by promoting the groups to which we belong. This leads us to categorize others as “like us” or “not like us” (the in-group and the out-group, Tadjfel, 1979).

At present, a common attitude of church members is that they support, fund and identify with their own church (the in-group). Churches even within the same parish see themselves as separate from each other – and are eager to stress the differences between them. For example, one particular area of differentiation was the self-identification of the churches as “urban” or “rural” with the belief that these churches did not have the same issues to deal with so could not work together. One could argue that this is an example of out-group bias.

However, if the Mission Area is to work effectively together, all these issues need to be addressed. One of the most effective ways to reduce out-group bias is to redefine and enlarge the boundaries of the in-group. In this context, being a member of the
Mission Area needs to become the in-group identity. (As a starting point - other categories to work towards could be “being a member of the Church in Wales”, “being a Christian”, “being a child of God” etc.)

However, redefinition of one’s social identity does not emerge by chance – this is a process which needs consistent engagement. One of the most effective ways to develop a sense of shared identity is to engage in a common task where everyone feels their contribution is useful and valuable. Other ways include the development of personal relationships with others so that they are seen as part of the in-group.

Perceptions of Age

A further cultural change which is required is the attitude to and perception of older people within the church. A constant in the conversations throughout the Deanery was the need to focus on attracting young people, children and their parents to church. However, churches should also be exploring ways in which they can support those who currently attend, including older people, especially those whom Winter (2013) quaintly refers to as “enjoying life in the departure lounge”. Concerns for the future should not lead us to focus on one age group above all others – we are all of equal value in the eyes of Christ and all, regardless of age have God given talents which we can use in his service.

Both within our society (as reported in the mass media) and in churches in the Deanery, older people were caricatured as being the ones who were resistant to change. However, this resistance is not the sole prerogative of older people and can be exhibited by people of any age, including the young. It is important to recognise and value the contribution that older people can bring to the life of the church (the bible includes many examples), as older people bring wisdom and the counsel of years to a debate.

Older people also need to see themselves as of equal value and worth in the church – it was very concerning to hear older people dismiss their ability to be of use in the future. “I am too old now” was a fairly common motif, echoing the discriminatory ageism prevalent in our society. However, Psalm 92: 14a advises that older people
“shall still bring forth fruit in old age”, (the remainder of this verse, 14b, also notes “they shall be fat and flourishing”)

Finally, age should not be seen as an exemption certificate from engagement with 2020 Vision – we are better together, all those who currently attend, regardless of age or infirmity. Everyone can still be of service in God’s kingdom, and we all have our unique contribution to make.

**Recommendation 3: Reaffirm the rationale for 2020 Vision and the need to Unlock our Potential.**

- Invite honest discussions about hopes and fears for the future.
- Identify and implement specific projects which will be more effective when churches work together.
- Affirm the contribution of everyone in the life of the church.
- Encourage older people to continue to explore their calling.
The Church in Wales Review (2012) notes that the church is “still characterised by a culture of deference and dependence” (Church in Wales, review, 2012, p. 4), epitomised at parish level by the “Father knows best” approach. According to 2020 Vision, a more collaborative approach is envisaged, where lay people fully participate in the life and leadership of the church – one of Bishop Gregory’s marks of a Mission Area is that it has a “strong leadership team” including lay and ordained members.

Although one could argue that the concept of collaboration between clergy and church members is not a new initiative within the Diocese, the proposals for greater collegiality between clergy, licensed ministers and lay people within a Mission Area led to much discussion as this was perceived by many within the Deanery as a paradigm shift in the culture of the church.

Therefore, continuing dialogue is necessary to reiterate the rationale behind the need for a collaborative approach. Churchgoers reflected that for the last several hundred years, parishes have been led by the clergy, supported by lay workers and members of the congregation. However, these roles have not been seen to have parity of status - the Vicar has been seen to be the professional, supported by amateurs. Those who hold offices in the church (Churchwarden, Treasurer etc.) recognised the importance of their role and contribution to the life of the church but some were very reluctant to envisage occasions when they might take the initiative in suggesting new ideas. Parishes with a vacancy also expressed the view that any developments would have to wait until a Vicar was appointed – it was the Vicar’s job to determine any initiatives and take the church forward.

Collaboration between the clergy

Within a Mission Area, clergy will have more opportunities for collegiality, working together to address issues of common concern related to community engagement, the development of discipleship etc. However, they will need support in developing team working approaches both within the Mission Area Ministry Team and the
Leadership Team - one cannot expect a collegiate approach to emerge fully formed overnight.

In addition, whilst embracing the idea of collaboration in principle, clergy also expressed reservations about the practicality of implementation. One might expect a degree of resistance from clergy as the increased involvement of lay people may be seen both as a challenge to their authority and to the very heart of what it means to be a priest. However, as the Church in Wales Review, 2012, p.7 makes clear, “this is in no way undervaluing ministerial and priestly ministry” and should lead to productive debate about the role of the priest in a Mission Area.

**Workload of the Existing Clergy**

One overarching finding which needs to be recognised is the volume of work undertaken by the current team of clergy within the Deanery. For example, most pastoral work related to baptisms, weddings and funerals, contact with local schools and Care Homes, visitation of the sick etc., is at present undertaken by the clergy.

Whilst they themselves recognised that this was an important and fulfilling part of their ministry, there was also an acknowledgement that there were more opportunities here which could be explored but could not be developed under the current system of working as there was insufficient time available.

**Collaboration between the clergy and lay minsters**

There was considerable variation in the degree of collaboration between the clergy and other lay people including Readers, Worship Leaders and Pastoral Assistants. Although the clergy in the Deanery reported that they value and make full use of authorised Lay Ministry, discussion with the laity themselves revealed some disquieting perceptions of the relationships within the Ministry Team. Although some of those involved in authorised Lay Ministry felt valued and supported, others did not.

For example, whilst some trained lay people felt that their contributions were valued and that they were consulted about their degree of engagement, others felt that the clergy regarded them as subservient, expressing the view that “we are supporters, not servants of the clergy”. This concern was also expressed by those who had been
trained as Pastoral Assistants but were not allowed to visit and Worship Leaders who were not given opportunities other than that of any other lay person, (for example, reading the lesson) to lead aspects of worship.

These findings echo those of the Church in Wales Review (2012, p.4), which notes that trained lay people feel they are “simply not being properly used”. These perceptions of some of the authorised Lay Ministers need to be acknowledged and addressed as soon as possible – successful collaborative working can only be achieved in a culture of mutual respect and acknowledgement of each other’s worth.

**Collaboration between the clergy and lay people.**

At present, many congregations are reluctant to embrace the concept of shared ministry, arguing that it is the role of the Vicar to lead and the congregation to follow (the analogy of a Shepherd and his sheep being cited). A commonly expressed viewpoint was that this model had operated for centuries within the church so expecting both clergy and lay to enthusiastically adopt a more collaborative model could not be expected in a short space of time. For example, when discussing aspects of church life such as community outreach, a common response was that any initiatives had to be generated by the Vicar – “we can’t go suggesting things to the Vicar – XX wouldn’t like it” was one verbatim comment.

For example, some clergy expressed the view that until now they have enjoyed relative autonomy in “my parish” so the idea of having to discuss decisions with lay people was met with some scepticism, particularly as this whole debate is framed by attitudes to churchmanship. For example, a comment was made that Worship Leaders should not be used to lead the ante-communion as “they don’t understand the liturgy”.

The role of lay people in the ministry of the church was acknowledged but this was seen as a supporting rather than a proactive or leadership role. Further discussions on this led to acceptance that the skills of lay people might not have been identified or recognised by either themselves or the Ministry Team. (One must also acknowledge that the perception that it is the Vicar’s job to do everything can also be used as an excuse for idleness and a reason for inactivity by lay people).
Amongst lay people, concerns also related to competence and a lack of confidence in their own skills and abilities. “I am just a ...” was a common expression. One way in which the latter issue can be addressed is to encourage lay people to recognise the gifts and talents they already possess. However, it was notable that many lay people either did not identify and acknowledge their gift(s) or dismissed their own gifts as unimportant in comparison to those such as preaching or teaching. For example, people were surprised to hear that the gifts of befriending or hospitality are important in the life of the church.

2020 Vision says “We are stronger together” and suggests that Mission Areas should be “equal partnerships between clergy and Church members – to unlock our potential as the people of God answering His call in today’s Wales”. (2020 Vision Toolkit).

However, as indicated above, not everyone has fully embraced the concept of shared ministry. Further dialogue would be beneficial in enabling all those concerned (clergy, trained lay people and members of the congregations) to explore the benefits of working together as the body of Christ, each with individual gifts and talents to be used within the Mission Area.

**Recommendation 4: Reaffirm the rationale behind a shared approach to ministry.**

- Provide a forum for clergy to explore the role of priest within a Mission Area.
- Identify and value the distinctive roles of priest and lay ministries in a Mission Area.
- Explore the benefits of shared ministry with church congregations.
- Discern individual gifts and talents and identify ways in which these can be used.
- Identify training needs to facilitate the development of shared ministry.
- Engage in training that will facilitate the development of shared ministry.
CHURCH BUILDINGS

Church buildings and the Mission of the Church

One could argue that church buildings in the Deanery are one of its greatest assets in the Mission of the Church... and also one of its greatest financial burdens.

Travelling around the Deanery, I have been impressed by the care and good stewardship of these resources. However, it is essential to remember that the church building is where we worship, not what we worship. In some churches there seemed to be a disproportionate emphasis on the importance of the building in its own right, leading people to quite extreme statements “if my church closes, I won’t go anywhere else”, indicating the confusion which can arise when we use the same word (church) to mean both the building and the gathered people of God, the body of Christ. In many people’s view, the building is the church.

Therefore, two key questions need further exploration within the Mission Area: “What is the Church?” and “What is the role of a church building in the life of the church and its mission to the community?”.

Accessibility

It was encouraging to note that most of the churches were open at least for some of the time during the week and those churches who do not yet offer this facility for the local community need to address this as soon as possible – a church building which is only open for worship for one or two hours a week becomes more like a club house than a place for prayer and worship.

However, apart from one or two exceptions, it was not clear that the church was open. One might argue that anyone can try the door. However, if people have not entered the building before, they are less likely to feel confident enough to walk up the path and may even feel that permission is required to do so.

Churches need signage to indicate that they are open to the public and that visitors are welcome. It has been suggested that this would encourage vandalism and anti-social behaviour. However, if prospective visitors are not aware that the building is
open and therefore do not enter, it is not serving the purpose for which it was intended as a place for prayer and worship.

People also need encouragement to enter their doors – even if the initial motivation is the historical interest. For example, some of the churches in the Deanery are part of the Open Churches network and information about the churches (accessibility, toilets and opening times) is provided on the Open Church website which also provides leaflets which can be downloaded.

None of the churches in the Deanery are featured on the current Sacred Doorways Project website, a tourism initiative working with historic churches and chapels across rural Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire, to raise their profile as visitor attractions and encourage their sustainability through Heritage Tourism. Each of the churches in this project have literature about all the other churches in the cluster and provide a suggested Pilgrim trail which visitors can follow.

One suggestion is that the Mission Area could adapt this idea and produce their own booklet with details of all the churches so that visitors to one of the churches could be encouraged to visit others (tick off the whole set). For example, The Sacred Doorways project has a Pilgrim’s Passport with space for visitors to tick off or stamp each church on the trail.

The HistoryPoints organisation also provides details of churches on their website and currently, only one church in the Deanery is included. If a venue has not already been featured, the editor notes that they would be pleased to receive some historical information which would be placed on the website. They then create QR codes on a small plaques or stickers to suit the location. There would be no cost to the church for this.

However, the information provided on these sites about the churches solely relates to issues of historic interest - there is no information about service times or the actual life of the church.

**Access for wheelchairs and pushchairs**

Most churches had accessibility issues for wheelchairs or pushchairs. This was generally resolved in relation to external access through the provision of ramps, even
if these were temporary. Making churches accessible is a costly and time-consuming process. However, if the church genuinely wants to be open, in all the connotations of that word, accessibility must be a priority. Internal access is also important – in many churches, people in wheelchairs were “parked” in the aisle or at the back of church which does not lead to a feeling of inclusivity. Improving access into church and promoting of a feeling of inclusivity within church for everyone was seen as a key priority for change in some churches.

**External appearance**

The Deanery is fortunate in having a number of churches of historic interest and all the churches have some positive features in terms of their external appearance. However, this needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. Familiarity can lead to an inability to notice the way in which the church appears to visitors. For example, in one parish, the church was described by its members as being geographically situated “at the centre of the community”. However, as there have been new developments in the area, the perception of non-churchgoers was that the church is now on the outskirts of the community, with limited passing footfall.

Those who do not attend church on a regular basis can easily be dissuaded from entering if the first impression is not positive and attractive, as Giles (2004, p.8) notes “our work to proclaim the living God is undermined .... by buildings which speak of a geriatric God incarcerated in an old people’s home”.

The first impression of the church will be formed in the first few moments and signage on the doors with a list of Don’ts immediately creates a sense of exclusion. One may argue that notices like these are essential if visitors are to respect our sacred space but we need to question our intentions here – to whom does the church belong? Is this our space to which we graciously invite visitors or is it already their space as well, (even though they may not yet realise this)? Is our priority to encourage people to enter the church and thereby have the opportunity to discover the church as a place of prayer, or are we more concerned to preserve our clubhouse for the use of its members?
Internal Appearance

The same comments pertain here. Churches need a regular spring clean, especially in the entrance porch, to ensure that there is no unnecessary clutter. For example, redundant pews and other furniture, broken books etc. need to leave the church, not remain in a corner. Whilst there may be reluctance to let go of things from the past, and perhaps a sense of disloyalty if items have been donated, it is also important to provide a church for the future which serves both current churchgoers and new church members. For example, pews may be marvellous examples of carpentry from the nineteenth century but may not be suitable in form or function for a church in the twenty-first century.

Once people have come in to the church, there needs to be some information about the use of the building – these are places of worship, not just historic monuments. Some churches had guide books but these tended to focus on the stained glass, the monuments etc. and often any specifically Christian literature was placed in an obscure corner or was dusty and unappealing.

There are lots of excellent resources available at minimal cost which churches can display to attract visitors’ attention. For example, Lifewords (www.sgmlifewords.com) produce a leaflet entitled “Look around you” which provides a meditative walk around the church focusing on the use of the font, the pulpit etc., in the life of the church.

Facilities

Many churches do have lavatories and a kitchen area. It has been suggested that concern about such facilities is a focus on a more trivial or irrelevant aspect of Mission. However, conversations with parents of small children and senior members of the congregation reveal that these very practical issues can have a major impact on church attendance - parents are reluctant to attend if there are no toilets for children (and are shamefaced about taking the child outside in the churchyard) and older people with medical conditions do not want to experience anxiety about having to leave church before the end of the service. Some churches have a toilet which is unlocked on request, again leading to an additional barrier to usage – adults may feel disinclined to ask whether they can go to the toilet.
Kitchens for the provision at least of hot drinks are another useful resource. Providing hospitality at the end of a service (and for “special “services which may be attended by many more visitors than usual) is an excellent way to encourage fellowship amongst those who have attended church, both church members and visitors.

The development of loving relationships with others takes time and having a “chat” over a cup of tea after the service is a non-threatening way for people to come to know and understand other members in the congregation. It is also an excellent opportunity for hitherto unsuspected pastoral needs to be revealed. The church is the body of Christ and we worship together (“Our Father who art in Heaven”, “We believe in one God”) so it was discouraging to hear church members voice the opinion that church worship was solely a time for them to develop a relationship with God, not with other people in the congregation – a pray and run approach.

**Children’s Area**

Although many churches provided a small section for children that could be used during the service, this was not always the most appropriate option. One suggestion would be to ask both parents and children who do attend church (reportedly “rarer than hen’s teeth” in many parishes) to suggest ways in which provision for children could be enhanced. Examples of good practise included the use of a separate side chapel with quiet toys and games and the removal of pews within the body of the church so that children in push chairs were not parked in the aisle.

**Use of the Church Building**

As indicated above, maintenance of the church building is one of the financial burdens on parish finances and The Diocesan Churches Conservation and Development Officer is a useful source of support to help parishes “identify appropriate solutions for church buildings and sites that meet the needs of the parishes whilst conserving and enhancing their architectural and historical significance”. ([http://stasaph.churchinwales.org.uk](http://stasaph.churchinwales.org.uk))

Only using the building for a maximum of 3 hours per week (Sunday and mid-week services) seem a waste of a valuable resource, particularly as the use of the church
building throughout the week was identified by several churches as their priority for change for the future.

It was suggested that churches with appropriate facilities could offer coffee mornings or afternoon teas to groups in the community, providing an additional source of support. Churches that had seen the Diocesan Conference 2015 DVD of stories from across the Diocese were also more enthusiastic about the ways in which the church building could be utilised more effectively in the mission of the church.

In particular, the provision of hospitality and time for a chat for people with dementia and their carers was seen as an ideal example, the actual usage being determined by local need. For example, one church suggested that this could be offered to parents with young children who were differently-abled.

Recommendation 5: Conduct an audit of church buildings to assess:

- The ways in which the church buildings contribute to the mission of the church – could this be more effective?
- Their external appearance, perhaps by asking non-church goers to comment on their impression of the church.
- Their internal appearance. Does the internal conformation and layout meet the needs of the worshipping community for the twenty-first century?
- Visibility to the wider community. Are details of the church are available on the internet or through projects such as the Open Churches network, Sacred Doorways or HistoryPoints?
- The information provided for visitors (including those who come for the Occasional offices). Is it fit for purpose? Can a visitor gain some idea about the Good News of the Gospel, the use of the building today etc.?
- The toilet and kitchen facilities (or lack of them).
- The provision of a Children’s area, with appropriate resources. Ask children who attend church what they would like in this area.
- The accessibility of the church building for those with mobility issues including those in wheel chairs, pushchairs etc. Are all areas fully accessible? If not, why not?
Church Halls/Parish Rooms

Some of the churches in the Deanery are fortunate to have additional resources in the form of a Church Hall or Parish Room. These are currently utilised to a greater or lesser extent both for church functions and as a source of revenue for the church, when let out to local groups. Examples of good practise include the use of these facilities by a variety of local groups including Brownies, handbell ringers and the W.I.

However, in some instances, these facilities were not being used to their full potential. Offering these buildings for local community use would be a proactive way to engage in outreach, (as indicated above) especially if the church itself did not have appropriate facilities such as toilets and a kitchen. Information from local councillors reveals an interest in working with the church to serve the needs of the community and the provision of a meeting place for local support groups would be one way to develop a partnership with local community groups.

I was advised that Church Halls must either be self-funding and/or another revenue stream for the church. However, if these buildings are seen as an integral part of the outreach and mission of the church then this aspect needs to be reviewed – can the church offer these facilities to the local community to address community need? For example, whilst visiting one church with a hall, I observed several young mothers with small children in prams walking past and discovered that there is no mother and toddler group in the locality.

Recommendation 6: Conduct an audit of the use of Church Halls/Parish Rooms.

- Liaise with local councillors and community groups to identify ways in which the hall could be used by the community.
- Consider offering these facilities for community use, with no financial charge, as part of the Mission of the church.
COMMUNICATION

Effective communication needs to be a key priority for the Mission Area if churches are to demonstrate Bishop Gregory's third mark of mission is "A Mission Area sees Churches working together".

A view commonly expressed was that decisions had already been made about the Mission Area/Leadership Team/Finance etc. which had not been disseminated to the churches and that the role of Transition Mentor was “window-dressing” to create the illusion of consultation. This belief that decisions are made without reference to those who will be affected by them has led to a culture of mistrust. This needs to be addressed as a matter of priority as this mindset will inevitably affect motivation for change.

One may argue that there is no basis in truth for this perception (although some churches did provide anecdotal evidence to substantiate their concerns). However, it is one’s perception of a situation which determines action. A key focus needs to be the development of trust in and within the Mission Area which can only be achieved over time.

One of the most positive aspects of the role of Transition Mentor was the opportunity to address misconceptions about the development of the Mission Area. In particular, people found it difficult to accept that the Diocese did not have a readymade blueprint which would be imposed on the Mission Area. Assurances that this was not the case led to three responses:

i) disbelief – some people were unable to accept that the Diocese did not have a master plan which would be rolled out in each Mission Area (and sympathised with me as I also did not seem to have knowledge of the “plan”).

ii) anxiety that there was no predetermined approach to the development of the Mission Area. This was most noticeable in churches that had a strong view that the Vicar was the Shepherd of the congregation, with sole responsibility for guiding the sheep.
iii) hopeful expectation that at last there would be an opportunity for change. However, this was the least likely response.

Internal Communication in the Mission Area

If the Mission Area is to operate as a cohesive unit, internal communication needs to be effective so that everyone has a clear understanding of the vision, the mission and work of the Mission Area.

However, one of the concerns commonly expressed was that as the churches in the Deanery do not work together at the moment on a regular basis, the introduction of a new name (Mission Area instead of Deanery) would lead to little or no discernible change. More effective communication between churches in a parish and parishes within the Mission Area was cited as a priority for change, one person commenting that “we have better links to the moon than we do with our neighbouring church”. Currently, churches are also not aware of good practise in other churches even within their own parish or in other parishes in the Deanery. (Some churches did claim to work closely with others. However, the examples cited were usually for social functions “we always support their hot-pot supper”).

When groups of churches are working together on mission, this needs to be clearly articulated to all other churches in the Mission Area, providing exemplar material of good practise and practical guidance on practical issues. For example, several churches in the Deanery have Messy Church. However, there are variations in the ways in which this is delivered. Guidance on the relative advantages and limitations of these approaches could help other churches who are considering a trial of Messy Church and existing providers could serve as an outreach team to support other parishes.

Internal communication could also include the times of prayer and bible study groups across the Mission Area, special events and services.

However, an argument frequently expressed was that no one would want to travel to the other side of the Deanery for a service as the current focus is one’s own parish.
The view was also expressed that people are not interested in what is happening in other parishes – their focus is their “own” church. This is one of the challenges facing the Mission Area - to broaden the concept of what constitutes “the church”.

**External Communication with churches outside the Mission Area.**

There were no clearly articulated polices relating to external communication with churches outside of the Deanery. Many (but not all) churches have access to and contributed to STAR, (although this is sometimes on a sporadic rather than a regular basis) which was seen as a useful resource for communication, but only for those who had access to or used their computers for church “business”. Churches also need to celebrate their activities, submitting items to the Diocesan magazine, “Teulu Asaph”.

**External Communication with the Community**

One issue which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency is the way in which the church communicates its life and work to the community. Notice boards are a prime example. In several instances, the notice boards were well set back from the road or were not facing the passing traffic and the font size for the information about service times, contact details etc. was only legible close up. Notices on the board were usually those given out to the congregation i.e. in a font size suitable for close reading. One could argue that it would only take a moment to come into the church grounds and go right up to the board. However, if the churchyard gates are closed, this just poses another barrier for those seeking information.

Many churches have excellent newsletters, a church or parish magazine, giving details of service times and special events. (An example of good practise is a decision to ask the local church school to provide all the pupils with a copy of the Sunday newsletter). However, in many cases, these resources were only circulated amongst church members. In two churches, I was advised that the church should not be advertising itself in the local community as this could offend those from: other Christian denominations; different faiths; no faith. However, provision of information by a local church does not preclude others from following suit and as the first mark of
mission is “to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom”, we should not be afraid to proclaim the faith of Christ crucified.

If we hope to welcome those who do not attend regularly, we need to provide lots of information on a regular basis about the times of services and the facilities we offer – if the church has accessible toilets, this needs to be made clear as this will be encouraging for parents and those with medical conditions who need access to such facilities.

As many people are more accustomed to using electronic means of communication, the Mission Area will also need to provide internet based resources. Discussions about the use of a website, blog or Facebook gave cause for concern to those who do not have access to computers or the skills to use them. In general, it was a lack of confidence in the ability to learn new skills rather than the cost implications which were the main deterrent for most people. It was concerning to hear parishioners describe themselves as “too old to learn”. This may partly be a means to avoid taking on a new challenge. However, in many cases it was a genuine belief in their lack of competence to embrace technology. As younger people regard electronic methods as their primary means of communication, these can be seen to be an integral part of mission.

**Training Provision**

The Diocesan Communications Officer provides training on “Publicising Your Parish”, which includes the use of social media and websites and “What is your church communicating”, which includes the appearance of churches, notice boards, banners and the type of welcome visitors receive. Both of these sessions would provide invaluable information for churches in the Mission Area, to address the concerns identified above. The Diocesan Communications Officer is also available to meet with Mission Area Leadership and Ministry Teams to discuss ways to develop more effective internal and external communication.
Contact Information for Church officials

It was interesting to note that only landline numbers were provided in the Diocesan Handbook and this posed some considerable difficulty when trying to contact those church officials who were often away from home due to work or family commitments. Further investigation revealed that many people do have mobile phones but these are reserved for “private” use.

A simple solution would be for churches to purchase a pay-as-you-go phone which could be provided for church use, the church paying for the occasional top-up as required. (This could also be passed on as roles change over time.) The same comments pertain to email addresses – many church people do have email but reserve this for private usage only. However, most email providers allow the creation of multiple accounts and it only takes a few moments to create a new email address which could be used solely for church related queries, thereby further enhancing the accessibility of the church to the outside world where email is now a customary method of communication.

Mission Area Directory

If churches in the Mission Area are to work together effectively, with a cohesive “team” culture, contact information for the various groups within each church or parish should be available to all. At the present time, many churches use the Vicar as the conduit for passing on information. However, this does not seem the most effective use of their time (unless the Vicar is of the opinion that they need to act as a gatekeeper for any contact between their church and others in the Mission Area). For example, if a church wants to set up a prayer group or a Café church, a directory of those already involved would enable effective feasibility studies and provide vital practical information at the planning stage.

A Communication Policy for the Mission Area

Both internal and external communication will play an important role in the Mission Area, building up a sense of shared identity within the churches and as a means to reach out to the communities which they serve.
The Mission Area needs to develop a policy relating to the governance and delivery of communication within the Mission Area. For example, the Mission Area may appointment a Communications Officer who would liaise closely with the Diocesan Communications Officer to establish good practice within the Mission Area. Each Parish may then also appoint someone with specific responsibility for communications, both internal and external, which are then forwarded to the Mission Area Officer.

**Recommendation 7: Produce a Communication Policy (guiding principles) for the Mission Area.**

- Explain the methods used to achieve the aims of the policy (i.e. the specific strategies to be implemented) with clear guidelines for areas of responsibility and actions at Mission Area, parish and church level. The Diocesan Communications Officer could provide advice and support for this development.
- Identify appropriate methods of internal communication between churches in the Mission Area.
- Consider ways to develop meaningful relationships between churches through regular social interaction. For example, provide transport and attend services in each other’s churches, social events etc.
- Assess the ways in which the church communicates with the local community (and the wider world). For example, are church notice boards cited in a suitable location and provide legible information? Is information about the church and its activities widely circulated in the community?
- Develop a website, blog and/or Facebook page for the Mission Area with links to each of the churches, providing details of the life of the church including services, facilities, etc. It would be particularly important to flag up any access issues and the provision (or lack) of a disabled toilet. (A non-internet based version would also be required for those who do not have access to electronic forms of communication.)
- Create a Directory of contacts for church groups and organisations, to be shared across the Mission Area.
DISCIPLESHIP: How can we be better disciples and express that in our lives?

The first of Bishop Gregory’s Marks of a Mission Area relates to growth in faith and mission. “Our discipleship is attractive, leading to spiritual growth for existing members and numerical growth for the Church community”. Discipleship is both an individual and a corporate activity which includes prayer and bible study.

However, for many people, discipleship was equated solely with church attendance (faithful church going was seen as the primary mark of faithful discipleship). Whilst the corporate worship of the church is an essential part of our life together, discipleship also involves the exploration of our faith and the deepening of our knowledge and understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, through prayer and study of the bible.

Prayer and Spirituality

Prayer should be at the heart of the work of the Mission Area, underpinning every decision and every activity. For example, the prayer of St Teresa of Avila was selected for use by the Transition Mentor in meetings as being most appropriate for discussions relating to “Unlocking Our Potential”.

Christ has no body now on earth but ours; no hands but ours; no feet but ours. 
Ours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. 
Ours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. 
Ours are the hands with which He is to bless His people. Amen.

It was interesting to receive the feedback that copies of this prayer, produced as small prayercards which had been left in churches by the Transition Mentor were all taken away.

Evidence of current good practise includes parishes where people are encouraged to join with the clergy in saying Morning Prayer during the week and specified time for prayer before the morning service on Sundays. A mid-week Eucharist provides an opportunity for discussion centred around discipleship and is followed by lunch – an ideal way to learn, worship and share fellowship. An initiative which was particularly
valued was the use of a Prayer Chain, where church members pray for specific needs within the parish. This is an especially useful way for those with mobility issues to have a real ministry in the life of the church as contact between prayer chain members is by telephone.

However, it could be argued that we are too perfunctory in our prayers at church meetings – they bracket the business of the meeting and the “Grace” is almost always said at the end but one may question whether Jesus is actually invited in to the discussions which take place. How might the conduct of Mission Area /Parish/church meetings be different if we really believed that Jesus was present, informing our attitudes and our actions?

We also need to reflect on prayer in worship. For example, intercessions can enable us to pray in a meaningful way for our own communities (businesses, schools, shops, streets etc.) and the wider world. However, churchgoers observed that they can also seem like a shopping list, with generic categories of prayer for “the sick, the bereaved, those in ...”, which do not enable people to engage in any conversation with God, especially if no time is given for the congregation to reflect and to bring their own concerns before the Lord.

It was very inspiring to hear about the importance of private prayer in people’s lives and there was a thirst for more support in ways to explore and deepen prayerlife. However, few parishes had a regular prayer group and those who did, had low attendance. This apparent contradiction needs to be explored in more detail.

In particular, the timing of such groups needs consideration as the previous patterns (for example, 7.00 on Wednesday evenings) may no longer be suitable. The numbers attending the Deanery Lent Study Group, (see below) which has been held on different dates and times during the week could be used as an initial indicator. However, the best approach would be to ask church members themselves as there may be differences between each church.

A further suggestion from the Diocesan Director for Spirituality was that praying together involves enormous trust in each other so that we need to build up trust within our church community. Another issue is that fear of the unknown, not knowing what to expect may lead people to be wary of attending.
A helpful practical suggestion was that Sunday worship could be used as a means to explore prayer and spirituality, including teaching about different ways to pray. Ample resources are available for this, including those provided by Mark Yaconelli, the Diocesan Missioner in Residence, who is currently running practical workshop sessions on Spiritual Direction. These are attended by clergy and lay people across the Diocese and Mark will be producing a booklet of resources based on the course for use by Mission Areas, including details of creative ways to meet with Jesus in prayer.

**Bible Study**

The Deanery is already working together to provide bible study courses for Lent and is intending to continue to develop this practices. Using the same materials across the Deanery and publicising the dates and times for sessions provides a wider opportunity for people to find a day and time suitable for their personal circumstances.

However, outside of these seasons, many churches did not have a regular bible study group and of those who did, there was very low attendance as a proportion of the number of Sunday worshippers. One may reflect that even if someone attends church on a regular basis, they may only hear some exegesis of biblical material for a limited period of time each month.

This lack of opportunity was not seen as a particularly important issue and the view was often expressed that even if a group were to be offered, church people would be reluctant to attend because they would not want to have their own interpretation of scripture challenged by others. One comment was that “people have their own beliefs”. Although this reflects a post-modern perspective which focuses on personal experience as the primary arbiter of belief, it does lead to some concern that inappropriate or inaccurate beliefs relating to the Christian faith may be unchallenged. A notable example was the commonly held belief that if the church building was closed, the church would close i.e. the church was not defined as the body of Christ, the gathered people of God.
Resources for Discipleship

A key resource for the Deanery in its exploration of discipleship are the Diocesan Living and Learning resources for discipleship which can be used “to help groups consider what God is calling each of them and their Churches to be and to do and to learn to reflect on their life and faith together”. (http://stasaph.churchinwales.org.uk/life/steering-groups/developing/living-and-learning/)

However, relatively few churches had heard of this initiative and scepticism was often expressed as to whether church goers would attend, for the reasons outlined above.

The question “What are we doing here?” is particularly apposite in relation to discipleship – unless we find time for reflection and prayer, our activity within the Mission Area will merely be “busyness”. As Covey (2004, p.98) notes, “If your ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step you take just gets you to the wrong place faster”. The Diocesan Director for Spirituality also noted that we already have a wealth of resources within the church. However, we need to find ways to share our treasures more generously with others both within and outside the church.

Exploration of the reluctance to engage in activities which develop and deepen discipleship needs to be the primary focus of attention for the Mission Area – if those who are current members of the church are reluctant to go out of their way to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their call to discipleship, then we cannot expect others outside the church to be drawn to us. Many churches expressed concern about the low numbers attending worship in relation to the number of people in the community. However, if churchgoers are not enthusiastic about their faith, are not interested to join with others to develop their prayer life, or to discern Jesus’ call on their lives, then we have nothing to offer.
Recommendation 8: Appoint a member of the Mission Area Leadership or Ministry Team to have specific responsibility for the development of Discipleship within the Mission Area.

- One may argue that discipleship is the responsibility of everyone. However, it would be more effective if someone was appointed to act as co-ordinator for the development of initiatives related to discipleship.
- Conduct an audit of current physical resources for discipleship including prayer leaflets, booklets and courses. This prevents unnecessary reduplication between parishes and will enable churches to access a wider range of materials.
- Conduct a skills audit to identify those within the Mission Area who already have the skills to encourage and develop discipleship.
- Identify and offer training within the Mission Area for those who need further support.
- Explore the reasons why there is low attendance at prayer and bible study groups.
- In consultation with churches in the Mission Area, identify, plan and deliver initiatives to foster and develop discipleship.
WORSHIP

Bishop Gregory’s first mark of a Mission Area is that it shows a passion for worship, witness and growth and all churches in the Deanery showed enthusiasm for at least one of these elements. However, discussions about the current nature of worship and opportunities for change led to the greatest diversity in opinions.

All churches agreed that worship was the underpinning foundation for the life of the church. However, many churchgoers were adamant that the services they have at present should not be altered in any way, as they were the preferred option for those who currently attend, and should be the preferred option for those who do not yet come. This attitude is to be expected – if we value something, we often find it difficult to accept that this may be of no import to others – they must have got it wrong and if we just persist, they will be won over to our way of thinking.

This provides us with the opportunity to reflect on what it is the irreducible heart of our current worship: which elements, if they were changed, would lead us away from our Kingdom values and which need modification to meet the needs of the unchurched in our communities?

It is interesting to note that in some churches in the Deanery, change in the type and pattern of worship was seen as one of the priorities for change – the comment being made by one church member that “we don’t want to go the way of the dinosaurs” in not being able to adapt to changing circumstances and one of the commonly expressed Hopes for 2020 Vision, was that worship should become more dynamic.

There was a universal recognition that young people, children and their parents are not attracted to what we currently offer and that attracting people through the door was the first challenge which was not being overcome at the present time.

The predominant service across the Deanery is the Holy Eucharist which is offered on most Sunday’s and mid-week services in some churches. The Eucharist is much loved by churchgoers and there is a common agreement that a reduction in the number of Eucharists would be detrimental to the life of those who currently attend church. Conversations about the reasoning behind these attitudes revealed the belief that, at the Eucharist, as Jesus is actually present; one is guaranteed to meet the
Lord, more than at any other service. However, others found it difficult to articulate the reasoning behind their attitudes. Therefore, further discussion of the question “What is Worship” would provide an opportunity for fruitful exploration and teaching for church members. (On a more prosaic level, insisting on the Eucharist as the main service was also seen as a way of ensuring that this would have to be conducted by the Vicar.)

There was almost universal agreement that the Eucharist is not the most appropriate service for those who infrequently worship in church. The reasons for this include the language of the liturgy – even the 2004 rite includes terminology such as “incarnation, salvation and redemption”, which need some explanation for non-churchgoers or those with only a minimal knowledge of Christianity.

One may also reflect that Eucharistic Prayer 6, described as suitable for use when a significant number of children under 7 years are present, includes references to the bread and wine as “the body and blood of Jesus”. This terminology may be incomprehensible to small children. (However, dependant on one’s theology of the Eucharist, one may also argue that we can never fully comprehend the mystery of faith). If we hope that non-churchgoers or those infrequent in worship will attend church (and continue to come), they need to find the words used are accessible in meaning and enable them to engage wholeheartedly in worship.

Alternative non-Eucharistic services included Morning Prayer and Family Service, often led by authorised Readers and/or Worship Leaders. There was some degree of variation in the type of service labelled “Family Service”, ranging from a formal service with a set liturgy using archaic language to more informal services with opportunity for “audience participation”, especially by children.

However, it was acknowledged that the actual number of children and young families who attend these services is still a very small proportion of young families with children living in the area. Low attendance was attributed to several factors including the timing of the service (earlier than 10.00 was not seen as suitable for families with young children who want a lie-in on a Sunday), the length of the service (30 minutes was regarded as the maximum for young children) and the music (Churchgoers acknowledged that while they loved traditional hymns, more modern songs could also have worth and be more attractive to younger people.) Whilst opinion varied as
to the amount of movement and activity children should be permitted in church, there was a general consensus that children (especially those under the age of 7) would find it difficult to sit still and listen for more than 15 minutes at any one time.

Therefore, once again the Deanery has a marvellous opportunity to develop church worship which will be attractive to children and young families today. One suggestion would be to involve local church schools and children in the design of Family Services – discussion with Head Teachers and visits to the schools provided a wealth of examples of dynamic approaches to worship.

**Messy Church**

It was interesting to note that the focus on engagement with children and youth in general was related to church membership. A view commonly expressed was that children and young people were the church of the future and it was essential to instil habits of churchgoing when young, or there would be no one attending church in the future. However, engagement with children and young people should be motivated by more than self-preservation – one of the marks of mission is “To teach, baptise and nurture new believers” and this may be more effectively achieved outside of Sunday worship in the parish church.

For example, several churches in the Deanery provide Messy Church. This is an ideal way to engage children and their parents and churches who *genuinely offer* Messy Church on a regular basis reported encouraging attendance. However there was a failure to define this as “real “church and some consternation that very few if any of those who attended Messy Church also came to the main Sunday service. A common attitude was that Messy Church should be a feeder for the main church. However, the Messy Church website specifically states that it is not “a way of getting people to come to church on Sunday – “*There are examples of people starting in Messy Church and deciding to join Sunday church as well but these are the exception rather than the rule. If people wanted to go to established church, they would be going by now*.” (*http://www.messychurch.org.uk/what-messy-church-and-isnt)*.

Several churches also expressed an interest in setting up Messy Church (although this should not be seen as a panacea for all ills) and this will enable the Mission Area
to demonstrate another of Bishop Gregory’s Marks of a Mission Area, which “sees Churches working together, to support each other because together they are stronger, sharing what has worked well for them” as churches who have a well established Messy Church can provide encouragement and practical advice to those considering this development.

Some work has already begun on this - at The Deanery Conference churches were asked to:
   i) Describe what they were doing already which they could share with others
   ii) Identify new initiatives which they would like to explore.

Churches were then matched up to share expertise.

Shared Ministry
The Deanery is fortunate in having several Readers and a growing number of Worship Leaders to assist in worship, enabling the Mission Area to demonstrate a “Shared” approach to Ministry. Examples of good practise include churches where Readers or Worship Leaders lead the Ante-Communion and Intercessions and lay members of the congregation read the lessons and assist with the distribution of the elements.

The creation of the Mission Area Ministry Team will provide an opportunity for both lay and ordained members to explore in more detail the various nature of their calling where all are valued for their individual gifts and contribution to worship.

- Discuss the question “What is worship?”
- Consider whether patterns of worship support the discipleship of current church goers.
- Develop worship which will attract those who do not currently attend, proving them with an opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- Affirm the gifts and contributions to worship of every member of the Ministry Team, both clergy and lay.
NURTURE

The bulk of the pastoral work conducted in the Deanery is undertaken by the clergy. However, there was almost universal acceptance that, whilst the clergy see this as an integral part of their role and ministry in this area may be one of the most fulfilling aspects of their vocation, due to constraints of time, there is little opportunity to increase their volume of work in this area.

At present, clergy provide Baptism preparation (with assistance in some parishes from lay workers), wedding preparation and pre-funeral visits. However, both clergy and laity acknowledged that there is a need to provide on-going pastoral support to those who come to church for these offices. However, Pastoral Assistants expressed frustration at not being used. For example, one Pastoral Assistant has been asked to support the vicar in home communions. However, despite several requests, they are still waiting for the vicar to set this up.

This is another key area where the Deanery has an opportunity to Unlock Potential and provide on-going support for the community which they serve.

Baptism

Several churches write to families after the baptism and invite them to Family Service, special services, Messy Church or, having provided a knitted teddy at baptism, invite the children to a teddy-bear’s picnic. However, take-up on these offers tends to be limited. One may reflect that, for the reasons outlined above, the worship on offer may not seem appropriate for small children. Potter (2015) also notes that before change can happen in church, relationships have to be developed. Young families with children cannot be expected to turn up to church if they have no contact with church people, especially if their perception of church is that it is judgemental or unwelcoming to children. For example, in some parishes, whilst the church describes themselves as welcoming to children, the perception in the community is that they are not.

However, building relationships takes time and there is a need for honesty in this process –befriending people solely for the purpose of getting them into church will not lead to the development of trust. As identified above, the clergy may not have
more capacity to engage in post-baptism contact with families but this is an area which may be fruitful for Pastoral Assistants to explore.

**Weddings**

Weddings also offer an opportunity for offering continuing support to the couple and a number of options might be considered. For example, inviting small groups of married couples for a meal in a local pub and asking them to bring along their wedding photos and another suggestion (which is already being explored in the Deanery) would be to invite married couples to a special service to renew their wedding vows, including the provision of some hospitality afterwards.

**Funerals/ support for those in distress**

Several churches currently have an ad hoc system for post-funeral visits. However, these tend to be by church people for church people and there is no consistency in the length of time this is continued after bereavement. This is another area where support by the church could be extended to the community. One must recognise that visiting bereaved families requires training and apart from Diocesan training for Pastoral Assistants, other organisations such as CRUSE offer loss and bereavement awareness training.

In all these instances, a productive way forward would be to involve the young families, couples and the bereaved themselves in identifying ways in which they would like to be supported in the future. For example, according to a Community Centre Manager, the provision of a regular mother and baby coffee morning would give young mothers the chance to meet, share experiences and have some time away from home.
Recommendation 10: Extend pastoral support to the community after the occasional offices.

- Identify ways in which the church can provide on-going support after the occasional offices, in consultation with young families, couples and the bereaved.
- Use existing Pastoral Assistants in providing this support.
- Identify and train those who could become involved in this specific aspect of pastoral work. The Diocesan Director of Training can provide advice on this initiative.
EVANGELISM

The occasional offices of Baptism, Weddings and Funerals are also an opportunity for the Mission Area to engage in evangelism.

This was an area of concern for most churches as it was generally acknowledged that the first mark of mission ("to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom", www.anglicancommunion.org) was not being adequately addressed by the church. However, there were also a number of dissenting voices who argued that their church should not engaged in evangelism in the twenty-first century as this may offend others, in direct defiance of Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28: 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

Many churches argued that their evangelism was fellowship with others in the context of coffee mornings or lunches etc. However, it was also acknowledged that there was no opportunity to discuss the Gospel, even at those events attended primarily by church members. Living out our faith in our daily lives is an important and valuable way to proclaim the Gospel. However, there are other ways to bring the Good News of the Gospel to others without resorting to wearing a sandwich board.

For example, organisations such as www.sgmlifewords.com/uk/ provide Christian Literature (attractive leaflets, modestly priced) which can be left in the pews for those attending Baptisms, Weddings or Funerals. Leaflets are also available relating specifically to evangelism and more general prayer cards (for hope, peace, direction etc.) which can be left in church. Visitors have the opportunity to look at these resources before the service and to take them away if required. These have proven to be a particularly useful way to introduce the Gospel in a non-threatening manner. Other organisations such as www.soulfood.me/ provide small leaflets on topics including grief, parenting etc. which include a QR code, guiding people to sign up for free bite-sized thoughts, straight to their phone (via text or email). These resources can also be made available at church run social events which non-church goers may attend.

A notable feature of Church schools (see below) were the displays which showcased the life and work of the school including photographs of children.
engaging in a variety of activities, displays of children’s work etc. Merely by walking through the school, one would have a clear idea about the activities in which they engaged. However, when visiting Church Halls in the Deanery, it was noticeable that there was little or no information about the church, its life and work. This is another non-threatening way in which churches can engage in evangelism, providing a “snapshot” of church life and visual information about the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who hire the halls for secular purposes.

Lack of confidence and competence in proclaiming the Gospel were seen as key barriers to evangelism. This was based on the perception that one must be a biblical specialist to be able to speak about the faith so that inaccurate or heretical information was not being passed on through lack of knowledge. Churchgoers generally saw themselves as amateurs, not entitled or equipped to speak about their faith to those who do not attend church. They were also reluctant to speak about their own faith to non-churchgoers for a variety of reasons: fear of ridicule, it’s personal not public etc. This is clearly an area where lay people need encouragement and training. Discussions with the a Deanery Evangelist revealed that there are a wealth of resources available to support churches. The Diocesan Evangelist would also be pleased to support the Mission Area in exploring ways to develop evangelism and emphasized that this must always be based on prayer – prayer for guidance, prayer for priorities, prayer for the parish and prayer for the Mission Area. Without the guidance and counsel of the Holy Spirit, we may have good intentions but not follow God’s calling.
Recommendation 11: Appoint a member of the Leadership or Ministry Team to develop and co-ordinate evangelism across the Mission Area.

- One may argue that evangelism is the responsibility of every Christian. However, to ensure that this is developed across the Mission Area, it would be more effective if someone was appointed to act as co-ordinator for this initiative.

- Implement practical activities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. A Deanery Evangelist would be pleased to provide advice.

- Identify and deliver training in speaking to others about one’s faith. As indicated above, this is an area where church members need to develop both confidence and competence.
COMMUNITY: How do we engage with the cares and concerns of the community around us?

Going out into the Community

A Mission Area has been defined as “a group of church communities working together, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with a particular locality, going out into the communities they serve rather than being inward looking” (2020 Vision Toolkit) and community engagement is one of the areas which has the most potential for development within Alyn Deanery.

The 2011 Census (Wales) Household Questionnaire (2011 Census Wales, www.ons.gov.uk) posed the question “What is your religion?” and it was encouraging to note that, on average, 60% of the population within Alyn Deanery stated that they were Christian, even though the first option on the list available for selection was “no religion”. This is an interesting finding as research on questionnaire response bias indicates that when filling in a lengthy form, respondents are predisposed to tick the first available choice and the option of “other” was also available.

However, an analysis of the data provided in the Diocesan handbook 2015-16, indicates that, on average, only 2% of those on the civil role are on the electoral role of churches in the Deanery. One may conclude that these figures provide an example of the “believing but not belonging” approach identified by Davie (1994), who argues that this group should be classified as “unchurched” rather than non-believers. This provides an exceptional opportunity to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who identify themselves as Christian but may not have the chance to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their faith.

Some churches are already becoming more aware of opportunities to work with the local community through participation or support for community events such as the village fete, lunch clubs, etc. However, it was acknowledged that these occasions were seen as examples of individual participation in community life rather than that of the church and church members expressed reluctance to speak openly about their faith as such events, a common response being that it was not seen as “appropriate”. (See above for comments on Evangelism).
When discussing community engagement, it was also noticeable that social events in church or run by the church at community venues featured prominently, including hot pot suppers, bingo and coffee mornings, providing opportunities to develop and deepen relationships with the non churchgoers.

Many churches still maintain a “come to us” mentality, with the underlying subtext that any outreach should be reciprocated by the community through church attendance. This is a difficult issue – one of the main fears for the future was that churches would close and love for one’s local church community provides a real motivation to ensure that this continues for the foreseeable future.

However, a fundamental question which needs to be addressed is why churches should go out into the communities they serve rather than being inward looking. The answer is provided in the definition above – to “share the Good News of Jesus Christ with a particular locality”, even if this does not lead to an increase in church attendance (and thereby, finances).

Discussion on this question led to some interesting responses. For example, when church members were asked to explain why they wanted more people to attend church, answers included the need to keep the church building open, as more people were equated with a healthier financial position. Another reason was that church official are getting older so “young blood” is needed to fill the posts of Churchwarden, Treasurer etc.

These comments indicate that the rationale for community outreach needs to be discussed in more detail. Is our community outreach motivated by the need to get more people to attend church or is our primary goal to share the Good News of the Gospel? (One may argue that both are important. However, if we are seen to have ulterior motives in our community outreach, this will influence our effectiveness and lead to issues of trust).

This is a challenging question, especially for those churches that have declining financial resources. One solution is the proposed “theology of generosity” advocated for Mission Areas, so that more affluent churches can support the mission of those less well endowed. However this was one of the most contentious areas for discussion. (See Mission Area Finances, below)
The needs of the Community

Effective community engagement is dependent on being aware of the needs of the community. However, Alyn Deanery covers a wide geographical area with diverse communities, so each parish will need to consider its own context. For example, issues experienced by post-industrial parishes such as Brymbo may be different to more rural areas such as Isycoed, and the 2014 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, (WIMD, http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research) reveals that some parishes are amongst the 20-30% most deprived in Wales whilst others are amongst the least deprived.

A key element in community engagement is to have some effective way to identify the needs of the community. One may argue that Churchgoers are members of their local community but they may only have limited contact and relationships with specific elements of that community and some churches have misconceptions about their community.

For example, one church explained that there were few critical community needs in their parish, even though investigation of the WIMD revealed that it was one of the 20-30% most deprived areas in Wales. Another church claimed that there was no crime in their area even though the Police Crime Maps (www.police.uk) reveal a significant number of anti-social behaviour offences and burglary.

Perception of community need is also influenced by perceived community identity. For example, several churches spoke about the grief and loss still evident in the community after the closure of heavy industry and mining.

Community Centre Managers also noted that this perception is only relevant for those who have lived in the community for several years, (including churchgoers whose families may have been associated with the area over several decades). Those who have moved in to the area more recently, perhaps onto new housing developments have no links to this heritage and look to the future, not the past. Both these aspects of community life need to be acknowledged.

Some of the churches had regular contact with the local community council and were fortunate to have council members on the PCC. For those churches that do not have
these links, a way forward might be to invite a Local Community Council member to speak to the local churches to keep them informed of local needs.

Local Councillors revealed a willingness to work more closely with the church and made several suggestions as to the ways in which the church could better serve the community, including a Befriending Ministry to the housebound and older people in the community who are looking for more volunteers, a Luncheon Club who are on the lookout for volunteers and a Play Development scheme which needs good quality clothing for children.

Discussion with Community Centre Managers revealed that it was often difficult to identify the most effective ways in which to support people in the community as there is a reticence to take up offers of support and any new initiatives in Community Centres have to run for a while before there is a reasonable level of take-up. Managers were also keen to stress that the church should not view those in need as “the deserving poor”. In order to offer effective help, the church would need to build up relationships of trust with people outside of the church over a period of time. It was suggested that the most effective way for the church to engage with the community was to offer support to existing community run groups.

**Hope and a Future**

Members of the congregation from most of the churches in the Deanery have now completed the Hope and a Future course, developing lay leaders who have been trained to identify community needs and address them, learnt how to make decisions, plan church initiatives and review progress. However, at the review meeting, when those who attended were asked about their next steps, most of the ideas still focused on encouraging people to come to church.

Further work needs to be done here – the Hope and a Future initiative is intended to address one of the key areas for 2020 Vision that churches in a mission area go out into the communities they serve rather than being inward looking.
Links to local schools.

Another way in which the church can fulfil the 2020 imperative to “share the Good News of Jesus Christ with a particular locality, going out into the communities they serve rather than being inward looking” is to support local schools.

There are varying degrees of liaison between the local church and the school including the provision of assemblies, which are primarily taken by the stipendiary clergy with some support from lay ministers. During a vacancy, these links are not always maintained, as in some areas, the Vicar is the key link between church and school. Not all schools enjoyed a close relationship with the church, which was in some instances seen as not being particularly welcoming to children.

The following examples indicate some of the ways in which churches are currently supporting their local Church schools:

- Displays in church of work in school
- School children visiting church for activities related to their curriculum
- Using the church building itself (architecture, stained glass etc) as a resource for the school curriculum.
- Using the school building for Messy Church
- Using the school building for a holiday club supported by church members
- Church members going into school to support reading.
- Open the Book
- Visiting the cathedral for its educational activity programme

Activities which are to be developed:

- A regular service in church led by a school class.
- School children preparing and delivering elements of Sunday worship in church.
- The development of a coffee shop at school for parents.

There were also many examples of good practise in Church schools and one may reflect that in these instances, the church can learn from the school. For example, schools today promote the “pupil voice” and schoolchildren are expected to
contribute to decision making in the school including the opportunity to comment on new appointments.

One school has an “Aspiration Tree” and children are invited to write a time framed aspiration on a paper leaf which is attached to the tree. The school then assist the child to achieve its aspiration, some of which were very moving. In today’s climate in church with the focus on declining, elderly congregations, one may question whether we focus on the negatives and forget to have aspirations ourselves.

Another example of good practice is the provision of a “reflection” area in each classroom, so that children can have some quiet time during their working day. Do we have a “quiet area” in our homes where we can be quiet with God?

All schools have a Mission statement and these are used to develop school values. Activities and behaviour (both students and staff) is then assessed against these values. For example, in church schools, the pupils work together to consider the following set of values:

*Compassion; Courage; Perseverance; Forgiveness; Generosity; Justice; Friendship; Respect; Service; Thankfulness; Trust; Truthfulness.*

This approach provokes questions about the values we adhere to when we work together with others (regular church members, those who attend for the Occasional Offices, visitors, members of our community etc.). It would be an interesting exercise for each church to adopt the values indicated above or, as a gathered congregation, to work on their own. This activity in itself would lead to a valuable dialogue about the nature of our church today.

Many schools also have a motto and mission statement and these can be very informative for the church. For example, Mottos include “we are all different fish but in XXX school, we all swim together” and “together with God, everyone lives, learns and loves” and the Maelor Church Schools Federation prayer is:

- Thank you for caring and looking after us
- Help us to value and protect our world.
- Remind us to have courage, forgiveness and respect for others.
- Guide us to achieve a brighter future with you by our side. Amen.
Links between church and school may be strengthened if the church were to display the school motto in church, use the school prayer in church worship and pray regularly for the life and work of the school.

One of the main barriers to schools utilising the church building on a more regular basis was the cost incurred. Health and Safety issues mean that a bus has to be hired due to the dangers of walking on roads with no pavements. The cost implications meant that visits have to be planned carefully for maximum impact rather than more informal and regular relationship which would be preferred.

Youth & Children’s Work

As discussed above, a priority for change identified by many churches was the need to engage more effectively with children and young people. Members of the congregations acknowledged that despite offering Family Service once a month, relatively few children and very few young people attend church and it was observed that their own children/grandchildren did not attend church. The reasons given for this included:

- Both parents were working so Sunday was the only family time.
- Children were involved in sporting activities on a Sunday.
- The time of the Service – early services before 10.30 were seen as unrealistic – parents and children want some time for relaxation on a Sunday (a lie-in).
- The type of service not being seen as appropriate for children/young people. Unintelligible language and unfamiliarity with the music were specially noted as a key barrier.
- Reluctance to ask them – this was a private matter.

Whilst this was seen an important area for the development of Mission, members of current congregations felt that they had little or no expertise in these areas and were of the opinion that the appointment of a Youth and Children’s worker would be an important step forward.
Recommendation 12: Appoint someone within the Mission Area Leadership or Ministry Team as the Community Engagement Officer:

- To liaise with churches in the Mission Area to identify, prioritise, plan and deliver a programme of community engagement across the Mission Area.
- To identify sources of funding to support community engagement.
- This initiative will be facilitated by those who have been trained on the Hope and a Future course. The Diocesan Community Engagement Officer could also offer support and training.

Recommendation 13: Appoint someone within the Mission Area Leadership or Ministry Team as the Schools Liaison Officer:

- To work with schools in the Mission Area to discuss the ways in which the church can give support to the school.
- In consultation with the school, identify priorities and plan and deliver a time framed series of activities.
- Explore sources of finance to enable schools to use the church as a resource.

Recommendation 14: Appoint a Youth and Children’s worker for the Mission Area.

- Their role could also include the delivery of training for those interested in working with Youth and Children.
- The Diocesan Under 25s Officer would be pleased to offer support and advice on this initiative.
THE SHAPE OF THE MISSION AREA

One of the key areas for discussion which arose during the consultation process was related to the size and composition of the Mission Area. Discussion took place with clergy, trained lay ministers and members from each church and this provided an important element of the consultation process as individual churches within a parish often had very different perceptions of their church in relation to the parish, the Deanery and the proposed Mission Area.

Although the stipendiary clergy in the Deanery were of the opinion that a decision had already been made that the existing Deanery will become the Mission Area, almost without exception, lay members of churches in the Deanery were unaware that a decision about the size and composition of the Mission Area might have already been made before the consultation process. A view commonly expressed was that the current size of the Deanery was far too large to form an effective unit in the future – the term “unwieldy” was used on a number of occasions.

Concerns expressed about the existing Deanery becoming the Mission Area can be summarised as follows:

- The geographical size of the Mission Area would be extensive – this would make working together as a cohesive unit difficult to achieve. For example, transport would be a key issue. Many people felt that it was neither practically nor financially feasible to travel across the Deanery, especially as there are no regular public transport links in the evenings and on Sundays.

- There are profound differences in the cultural identity and ethos of the churches within the existing Deanery and concerns were expressed that in the Mission Area, this would lead to a bland “globalisation” approach, (the coffee chain model was used as an example) so that the distinctive character of each church would not be identified, recognised or valued. This was of particular concern in areas who where an appreciation of their past industrial heritage was a major factor in community engagement and in more rural areas who felt that the semi-urban parishes in the Deanery had no real understanding of their special value or distinctive requirements for ministry.
On a practical level, it would not be feasible to expect the Mission Area Leadership Team (or the Ministry Team) to be able to take into account all the disparate needs of each church. Local churches need to have greater, not less, flexibility to respond to local needs.

Churches within the same parish do not work together on mission at the moment so an extensive Mission Area would be even less effective in promoting a collaborative approach. (Some churches were eager to emphasise that they were already working together effectively – however, most of the examples cited related to social events such as coffee mornings, hot pot suppers etc.)

The amalgamation of the previous Minera and Gresford deaneries to form the existing Alyn Deanery was not deemed to have been “successful”. Success was defined as the development of closer working and social relationships with other churches across the enlarged Deanery.

A generally held belief amongst lay people was that, in fact, there had been some significant reduction in contact and collaboration between churches since the creation of Alyn. For example, several churches referred to social events within the previous deaneries (picnics, meals out) which led to good working relationships between parishes as people from different churches got to know each other.

Although these comments are based on perceptions rather than an objective evaluation of the situation, the uniformity of opinion on this matter from churches within different parishes across the Deanery lends substance to these beliefs. It is also important to recognise that behaviour is influenced by attitudes – whether these are valid or not.

When encouraged to identify benefits if the Deanery were to become the MA, very few were forthcoming. These included:

A larger unit may be more viable financially and the inclusion of a wider number of churches could mean that more support could be made available to those in
financial difficulties. (This view was generally expressed by those churches who felt that they were struggling financially).

- A larger unit would give a broader range of churchmanship; if the churchmanship in one’s own church did not suit one’s own needs or preferences, there would be more opportunity to go elsewhere.

Overall, lay members of churches across the Deanery were of the opinion that the following churches would make an effective grouping:

Group 1: Llay, Gresford, Rossett, Holt, Isycoed.

Group 2: Brymbo, Bwlchgwyn, Minera, Coedpoeth, Pentre Broughton, Southsea.

Gwersyllt was seen as being equally applicable to either grouping.

An alternative suggestion by some clergy was that the existing Deanery becomes the Mission Area.

A number of reasons were given for this suggestion including:

- Economies of scale – it would be more effective for a larger area to share resources.

- Having a wider pool of expertise upon which to draw: there are 12 churches at present in the Deanery, served by 5 stipendiary clergy. Having two Mission Areas, smaller than the existing Deanery would lead to two very small teams of stipendiary clergy. In addition, although some of those licensed to ministry (Readers, Worship Leaders and Pastoral Assistants) would prefer to work only within their local church, others have expressed a willingness to work across the Mission Area.

- In agreement with lay people, as indicated above, a larger unit would be more financially viable.

An area of concern which needs to be addressed is the extent of lay consultation which has or is to take place before the creation of a Mission Area. Many lay people expressed the view that the activity of a Transition Mentor in meeting with and
listening to lay people was mere “window dressing” and their views were only being sought as a cynical box-ticking exercise to give some appearance of consultation. This perception of the lack of transparency was not solely related to the creation of the Mission Area – a not uncommon view was that “church people are the last to know”.

Whatever the composition of the Mission Area, this needs to be seen to have a distinctive identity, rather than merely a rebranding of Alyn Deanery. The Mission Area needs to be perceived as a new entity, providing new opportunities for churches to work together, to proclaim the Good News to the communities which they serve through a shared approach to ministry. To this end, the Mission Area needs its own name and logo, which should encapsulate the characteristics of the whole Mission Area.

Finally, the formation of the new Mission Area should be marked by a celebration which also acknowledges the work which has already been done to further the Mission of the church – 2020 Vision is looking to the future but should be based on the firm foundations of the past.

**Recommendation 15: Further dialogue and consultation between clergy and lay people in the Deanery before the final composition of the Mission Area is agreed.**

- If a decision has or is to be made that the existing Deanery become the Mission Area, the reasons for this should be fully explicated to all the churches in the Deanery so that concerns can be raised.
- These concerns need to be discussed so that both clergy and lay people in the new Mission Area are fully aware of the rationale behind any decisions which have/are to be made.
- In consultation with those parishes that are to form the Mission Area, agree upon a new name and logo.
- Celebrate the work of Alyn Deanery and look forward with confidence to new opportunities within the Mission Area.
GOVERNANCE OF THE MISSION AREA

An area which generated enthusiastic discussion was the governance of the Mission Area and the way in which the roles of Vicar, PCC, Churchwarden and Treasurer would change, if at all, in a Mission Area. The relationship and lines of authority between the Deanery Conference and the Mission Area Leadership and Ministry Teams also needs clarification. Although it was generally agreed in principle that a shared approach would bring many benefits, there were some concerns as to how this would operate in practice.

Further work is required here as 2020 Vision evolves over time and church people need to be involved with and kept fully informed about the nature of the decision making processes set up for the governance of the Mission Area. In particular, PCCs are very keen to maintain autonomy in their own parishes. As the Mission Area has not yet come into existence, further discussion is also required about the practicalities of working together as a cohesive unit.

Mission Area Finances

Discussion about Mission Area finances led to the most dissent. Once it had been made clear that parishes would keep the monies they have on deposit (and the debts they have accrued), some of the fears surrounding this issue were allayed. Churches with financial concerns were encouraged by the concept that within a Mission Area they might be supported to continue their mission and ministry. However, parishes that are at present paying their share, were concerned that they would be expected to pay more to support “failing” parishes, arguing that as they already have to work very hard to maintain their own church, they should not be expected to support churches who do not work as hard and/or who are not as generous in their giving.

It was acknowledged that some churches, despite their very best efforts, cannot generate sufficient income to cover all their overheads. However, the general consensus was that these churches should close.

Discussion about the concept of a shared approach to funding that is “rooted in the theology of Christian giving and generosity” (as identified in the 2020 Vision Toolkit)
met with little or no enthusiasm. In particular, Churches emphasised the need to protect their own identity and autonomy to determine the spending of any monies they drew in during the year. The concept of a shared approach was also seen as a threat to giving - churchgoers would be disinclined to be generous if they thought their offering was not going to benefit their own church.

It is clear that this whole debate is framed by the concept of “what is church” identified above and to the change in culture required if churches are to work together successfully. The Mission Area needs to be seen in a more holistic way if individual churches are to identify with its vision and goals.

Recommendation 16: Determine the governance of the Mission Area.

- Define lines of authority, roles and responsibilities of the Leadership and Ministry Teams, the PCC, Churchwardens and Treasurers in the Mission Area.
- Clarify the relationship between the Mission Area Leadership and Ministry Teams and the Deanery Conference.
- Disseminate this information in a regular and timely manner to all churches in the Mission Area.
- Explore the theology of Christian giving and generosity.
- Discuss the governance of finances within the Mission Area, in consultation with the Diocesan Finance Officer and the Diocesan Funding and Parish Support Officer.

CONCLUSION

There are many opportunities within the emerging Mission Area for the development of discipleship and fellowship, care and service, through a shared approach to ministry which values the individual gifts of all. However, we need to be mindful that, as Jesus himself acknowledged when sending out his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few” (Luke 10: 2). This poses a challenge for each one of us - am I doing all that I can to serve and follow the Lord?
The Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola:

Teach us, good Lord,

to serve thee as thou deservest: to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do thy will.
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