

ECC Food for thought - part 1

What should a 21st Century Church be like?

+George suggested four points and challenged us to think about these at our next Leadership meeting:-

Bottom up - that is **communal**. Not a club - we don't exist for the attendees, but solely for the sake of everybody else.

Careful about self-absorption, we create petty rules of our own which can serve to marginalise or exclude.

Freed up - that is **spiritual**. The Church community set within a wider community should live and serve in the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

This will give us the warmth of relationship that people respond to.

A **joined up** Church - that is **relational**. "Do me a favour..." One of the biggest causes of dysfunction and distress amongst us today is loneliness and the inability to make and keep relationships. This is where the Church can build - but we have to be like this "joined up" ourselves. Those at the heart and head of the Church need to have good, honest, frank relations.

Openness and transparency are vital - all stems from a core of good relations.

A **down to earth** Church - it is totally **incarnational**. If God is prepared to get his hands dirty with other people then so should we - but humbly in a servant, like Jesus.

ECC Food for thought - part 2

What do we value at St Chad's

Si Jones asked us this question. There are too many things which are valued for us to treat them all as if they were our “values”, but I suggest we think and pray over this list and look for common themes mentioned by several of the groups who were there on the Friday evening

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Church family• Sense of community• Fellowship• Caring/Pastoral Support• Bible based sermons/ teaching brought into the 21st Century• Lay people involvement• Diversity of worship styles• Prayerfulness of evening services• Youthwork• School assemblies/ Support work/Creche• Outreach/mission work• Fair trade stall• Shoeboxes• Ecumenical• Prayer chain• Monday prayers• Home groups• Links with user groups• Alpha Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family• Encouragement• Sharing our faith• Sense of belonging• Genuineness• Variety of preaching and teaching• Everyone is accepted• Welcome• Variety of gifts• Non-judgemental• Open to God and each other• Value the Word of God• Homegroups• Friendship• Understanding• The young people!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The building• Caring• Welcoming Church• Prayer• Peace• Generosity to<ul style="list-style-type: none">• - the community of Patchway• - community groups• - Church community• - the presents to shop keepers• - Schools• Worship• Inclusive as the Body of Christ• Families• Youth work<ul style="list-style-type: none">• - clubs• - schools• - services• - STOMP, St John's, Badgers• Catering• Musicians and flags
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His next question was where do you currently see the Lord at work in our Church. Again we need to discern and sift through this list (with gratitude that God is at work, of course!).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday Drop-In sessions • Creche and Pre-School Services • Tuesday Fellowship • Prayer life within the Church • Young families coming to Church • More young people in Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the youth work • A lot of caring and supporting • Tuesday Fellowship • Home-groups (we want more home-groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers to prayer • New young people • Howard and Nigel • Holy Communion (feeds us and togetherness) • Breadth of services • Secular activities (togetherness)
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And his final question was what would the leadership need to be mindful of as we seek to grow?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity to gifts within people and to encourage them to grow • Deeper faith to pray for younger people to come to Church • Being able to communicate with people • Deeper prayer for revival • Variety of services • Confidence in who we are so as to attract people to come in • Unity of spirit with regard to vision • One Lord - one faith - one baptism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindful of the mind of God • Look out to where the Spirit is working • The aspirations of all ages • Not alienating anyone • Being aware of people's feelings • Seeking God's confirmation • Open mind • Strong, Godly leadership • Sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The older age group • Church values being extended to the wider Church and to Patchway • Being in the community including Charlton Hayes • Teaching young people about the faith • Redesign the building • Resistance • We want full pews, caring for all, young people, teaching and the Holy Spirit with us!
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ECC Food for thought - part 3

Reflecting on the Church Growth report and St Chad's

The Church of England recently published the report *From Anecdote to Evidence*, the result of 3 years of research on Church Growth. They have identified various patterns and I have tried to read this and reflect on our life here at St Chad's. The full report is available on-line at <http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/FromAnecdoteToEvidence1.0.pdf> if you want to have a read for yourself. I have quoted parts of the report below and have included page numbers in case you want to go back to the original and read them in their context.

Some initial comments from the introductory summary in the report.

“There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another. What seems crucial is that congregations are constantly engaged in reflection; churches cannot soar on autopilot. Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment.”

Professor David Voas (p7)

So we cannot look at somewhere else (a “successful” Church, whatever that means) and merely copy their style - we have to work at find out how to grow St Chad's for ourselves, although the report gives some valuable pointers for us to think about.

Researchers have concluded that, while there is no single recipe, there are common ingredients strongly associated with growth in churches of any size, place or context.

- Good leadership
- A clear mission and purpose
- Willingness to self-reflect, to change and adapt according to context
- Involvement of lay members
- Being intentional in prioritising growth
- Being intentional in chosen style of worship
- Being intentional in nurturing disciples

All of the above are linked to growing churches. (p8)

So there are characteristics we need to try to develop, although fortunately there is much of this that is already in place at St Chad's.

Style of worship and where a church places itself in terms of its theological tradition appear to have no significant link with growth, so long as there is consistency and clarity and the chosen style and tradition are wholeheartedly adopted. (p8)

From my own perspective it needs to be re-stated that numerical growth is not the be all and end all of Church - there is the growth in depth of the discipleship of those we have, the growth in terms of the care we show each other, and the growth in terms of our influence for good in the wider community. However, growth in numbers is important because, when it is done properly, it does demonstrate health and vigour within the Christian community.

The report gives several "ingredients" which are part of the recipe for growth. I have listed each one along with a quote from the report and then jotted some notes about how this relates to St Chad's. Feel free to scribble and makes notes on these as you read through for future reference.

As we think about the question of growth it is worth also reminding ourselves of the Diocese's aims for 2014 - that 10,000 people share the story of their faith in Jesus with someone who isn't a Christian in the hope that 500 people will be baptised on College Green at Easter 2015. Don't we want to be part of that? Also the Archbishop is doing an Alpha supper at the Cathedral in September 2014 to which we would hope to take people as a start of our own Autumn Alpha Course.

Context

What the report says

The socio–demographic context is important to numerical growth and the level of participation. Attendance is often highest as a proportion of the population in rural areas where growth is hard to achieve; growing churches are often found in cities where relatively few people are active [Christians].

Comparatively low attendance levels found in towns and cities are in part the legacy of urban decline that began many decades ago, though this is now potentially being reversed.

Growth is easier to find in areas with younger, urban, ethnic minority attenders. (all these quotes from p10 of the report)

How does St Chad's look?

We are clearly an urban Church with a very low share of the population in attendance. We do have “young, urban and ethnic minority attenders” already, and the social mix of the area (age, family make-up, ethnicity) will undoubtedly change as Charlton Hayes grows. This would suggest that our context is potentially ripe for growth!

Questions

Do we know our context very well? (For example, according to the 2011 Census data for Patchway which year of age is the most represented? The answer is 26 years old - and there are twice as many of them as any age over 66! Here's the link <http://www.ukcensusdata.com/patchway-e05002064#sthash.WmyZNdDk.dpbs>)

We are aware of an issue with visibility of our Church location, and the difficulty in raising our public profile in our somewhat disjointed community. Where and when do people from Patchway congregate? How do people communicate?

Leadership

What the report says

The findings confirm that effective leadership leading to growth is a combination of having specific qualities and skills with an intention to grow. (p10)

The leadership qualities which stood out in the survey as being significant in relation to growth included:

- *Motivating*
- *Envisioning*
- *Innovating*

Other important elements of leadership behaviour which are likely to be associated with growth include:

- Having the ability to engage with outsiders and newcomers
- Being intentional about worship style and tradition
- Having a vision for growth and doing new things to make it happen
- Prioritising growth
- Being good at developing a vision and goals
- Abilities in training people for ministry and mission (p11)

How does St Chad's look?

I would suggest St Chad's is rare in having such a strong and mature leadership team. We have discussed the question of succession (not to be getting rid of anyone, but to sensibly plan for the future). However most of our meeting time is business focussed rather than envisioning or innovating - so perhaps the flavour of our meetings needs to change.

Questions

Do we need to restructure or rethink our way of doing leadership in order to capture the "intention to grow"? What would the right balance be?

What of the qualities of leadership listed in the quote from page 11 are we currently lacking?

Having a clear mission and purpose

What the report says

Churches that say they have a clear mission and purpose are far more likely to report growth. (p11)

How does St Chad's look?

About this time last year we did some work to go through the Strategy for Growth. I think that was a good step forward and we did try to consult widely and allow people to express their opinions, however I am not sure that sense of looking for growth has permeated into the wider congregation.

An interesting article in this week's Church Times reports that despite lay people being optimistic about Church growth, only 27% said that they were in the habit of inviting people to Church. (Church Times 31/1/14 page 3)

Questions

How do we raise an awareness and expectation of growth amongst the wider congregation?

It would be great to encourage some of our folk to share in the Diocesan aim for growth by sharing their faith. How do we raise the profile of thinking about our testimonies and being ready to share them?

We have been trying to have regular social events to which friends can be invited with people knowing the events will not be cheesy. How do we further a culture of invitation?

Being ready to self-reflect and learn continually

What the report says

“Vitality comes with reflection and choice; the particular style is less important than the fact that it has been considered and embraced rather than adopted by default.” Professor David Voas (p11)

How does St Chad’s look?

We work hard and are very busy as a Church community, but we don’t spend a great deal of time in reflection.

Questions

Might it be worth spending some time defining some of the good things we do that have developed over time so that we can be sure that they are as we want them and that we can also think about whether changes and developments are the right thing?

This process of looking at the report and then ourselves is a reflective action, but as mentioned above how do we create the space to think like this together regularly?

Being willing to change and adapt

What the report says

The researchers commented: "At a minimum, the arrival of new people disrupts what might be a cosy club. In all probability there will need to be larger changes in the timing and type of worship, in how and when the building is used and crucially in shifting lay leadership towards younger and more recent members. Such changes are uncomfortable...." (p11)

How does St Chad's look?

There is no point in change for change's sake, but we do need to recognise the changing environment we find ourselves in.

Questions

Assigning roles to Lay people as well as ordained Clergy

What the report says

A church where volunteers are involved in leadership, and where roles are rotated regularly, is likely to be growing – especially where younger members and new members are included in lay leadership and service. The results show that a church is more likely to decline if the number of volunteers is limited and roles are not rotated. This is particularly challenging for small congregations with fewer potential volunteers as rotation of roles in these circumstances may be difficult. (p12)

How does St Chad's look?

Although we are not a small Church I would suggest we feel like one; we have quite a few folk who do might struggle if offered some up front responsibility (that is not a criticism of St Chad's - it does demonstrate a high level of care and acceptance). As a result we perhaps only look for new faces to do readings or intercessions, for example, when we have a gap in the rota rather than when we have somebody we feel we can include in this way.

We have seen friction in evidence around the areas of overlap between roles. Defining roles is important, but also mentoring new people into them and being willing to look beyond our own role to make sure all the right things get done in the right way.

Questions

Who are the people with potential - and where to include them?

How do we define our roles and responsibilities so that they work well and are accessible to new people?

Actively engaging children and teenagers

What the report says

Growth is found where there is a high ratio of children to adults. Churches which offer programmes for children and teenagers are more likely to grow. Three quarters of churches that offer retreats, conferences or camps for youth report growth, against half among those who do not. (p12)

How does St Chad's look?

I would rate St Chad's very highly in this area, without wanting to risk sounding complacent in any way; not just in the provision of youth and children's work but in the way that there is genuine care and compassion shown towards our teenagers. There is an issue with regard to them seeing this provision as their escape from the potentially hard surroundings they live in and so seem less eager to invite others along.

We have work to do soon capturing a vision for the next couple of years of youth work and opportunities have opened up for greater presence in Schools (Patchway Community College and Coniston Primary have both welcomed our youth workers back in the last 12 months).

An interesting observation from our Deanery residential last month was the number of Clergy whose faith began in teenage years. It seems crucial that we continue to invest heavily in this area.

Questions

Where is our next generation of teenagers going to come from?

How can we build on the good work of recent years most effectively for the next phase of youth work and engaging with the new families moving into the area?

Actively engaging with those outside the existing community

What the report says

Looking outward is central to mission and many growing churches are those which engage with their local community. In the survey, some programmes providing social services (including debt counselling, aid work and night shelters) along with some environmental projects were shown to have a positive impact on growth. (p12)

How does St Chad's look?

I have found it interesting this last year accustoming to a new social situation and the way in which the St Chad's (the Parish Church for Patchway) is seen by the community as being of little influence or as having much to offer. I suspect that this is a factor of Patchway's history. However, the Council and Southern Brooks have been welcoming of efforts to work together, and Sovereign Housing valued the work we did for their new residents.

Questions

How do identify the most fruitful areas for us to get involved with, or do we allow the wider community to determine these for us?

Good welcome and follow up for visitors

What the report says

Many survey respondents from growing churches attributed growth to a welcoming atmosphere “belonging and caring”. People talked about the welcoming atmosphere or culture of the church. The most direct route to growth comes from members inviting and welcoming family, friends and acquaintances.

Making contact with potential new members after they attend services or activities is associated with growth and comments reflected the importance of building on-going relationships. These included: being made to feel part of the family; coffee times and chats; a greater desire to love and serve one another; working alongside one another on fundraising and other projects. (p13)

How does St Chad’s look?

I think St Chad’s is an open and welcoming place once people have found us, but perhaps we need to give thought to different access points into our Church community (a bit like there being lots of different stairs and escalators in a big store). We have a good informal group who actively seek out newcomers and visitors, but perhaps we need to work at following them up more pro-actively so that one or two positive visits don’t fizzle out. This may become especially important with a high number of people moving into the area.

Questions

Where are the activities or groups that newcomers can easily and comfortably be a part of as they start to get to know us and feel they belong?

How do we formalise follow-up without looking like we are desperate or putting people under pressure?

Committed to nurturing new and existing Christians

What the report says

Two thirds of churches which said they offered encouragement and support through specific discipleship courses or courses “preparing members to be a Christian witness in their daily lives” showed growth. In those which reported none or “some emphasis through preaching”, less than half were growing. (p13)

How does St Chad’s look?

The Alpha Course seemed well received and the scale was, I think, manageable for us.

This term I opted against organising a specific Discipleship Course and opted for inviting people to participate in conversations around the subject in order to try to encourage a wider involvement. In light of the above quote this may not have been the best option.

Questions

Vision

What the report says

“Vision for growth” was mentioned as a general reason for growth – reflecting the truth that growth is not mechanical but results from a deep reflection and commitment, a desire to experiment and a desire for renewal. (p13)

How does St Chad’s look?

This time last year we worked on the Strategy for Growth. We made something which I think is far more demanding and realistic than the previous versions. There is still much to do.

Questions

Fresh Expressions and Church Planting

In our increasingly less homogenous and dislocated society there has been much growth in Fresh Expressions of Church and Church Planting. As a rough guide a Fresh Expression is a an attempt to grow a new congregation intentionally into an existing network of people (e.g. a Messy Church based on the children and families connected with Callicroft School) whereas a Church Plant is generally similar to the sending Church but in a different location (e.g. a worshipping community based in Coniston Community Centre).

From the report (p16)

A fresh expression of Church seeks to be:

- Missional: to serve those outside church
- Contextual: to listen to people and enter their culture
- Educational: to make discipleship a priority
- Ecclesial: to form church

How does St Chad's look?

Historically St Chad's has planted Churches; the plant a Coniston thrived for a season (its having died does not mean it was a failure) and Holy Trinity was a plant which is now standing on its own feet (and whether this is a success or failure now is up to them, but St Chad's did much good).

Questions

Resourcing such a move would be demanding, but it is probable that some form of Plant or Fresh Expression will be the way to build the Kingdom on Charlton Hayes and almost certainly onto the eventual runway site. How do we start to prepare for such a potential move?