

GENERAL SYNOD

The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society

Summary

A report on the recent work and future vision of the Presence and Engagement Programme

Presence & Engagement: The Story So Far

1. The Presence and Engagement (P&E) programme was initiated to support and resource parishes which the 2001 census revealed to have notable religious diversity. The language of 'Presence and Engagement' seeks to convey the incarnational nature of the church's life among people of other faiths. The programme focusses on the theological, missiological, pastoral and practical implications of the country's increased religious diversity. Thinking particularly about local contexts, P&E asks what Christian, and specifically Anglican, mission and ministry looks like in a multi-religious society.
2. P&E parishes are those where more than 10% of the population self-identified in the census¹ as being of another religion. It is not that these contexts need proportionally more support than others, but different types of support. The particularities of multi-religious settings have not been widely appreciated – clergy in these parishes experience different joys and challenges to those who mainly minister to Christian and non-religious people. These include navigating occasional offices for mixed faith families, serving as governors for schools with diverse intakes, or organising civic occasions including leaders from other places of worship. These specific situations raise broader theological questions, and grappling with these produces insights which are a gift to the whole Church.
3. Established by General Synod in 2005 [GS 1577], the programme has since reported at the mid-point of its first quinquennium [GS Misc 897] and at the outset of its second [GS 1838]. Much important work has been carried out, including establishing a network of diocesan advisers to support local churches. Now P&E is entering a new phase, responding to two emerging factors. One is the Renewal and Reform programme, with several strands resonating with P&E – notably Renewing Discipleship and Ministry, Evangelism and Witness, and Setting God's People Free.
4. The other is the geo-political context. In 2016 the Casey Review² raised concerns about links between religion and integration while the Community Security Trust reported record levels of antisemitism.³ The EU Referendum prompted discussion about the UK's identity and the place of different communities. Concern about international religious freedom and religiously-motivated violence, expressed in the

¹ The data from 2001 was updated with that which was produced by the 2011 census.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf>

³ <<https://cst.org.uk/data/file/b/e/Incidents%20Report%202016.1486376547.pdf>>

desire to show solidarity with co-religionists abroad, impacts interfaith relationships at home. This connection between global and local is keenly felt in P&E parishes. Meanwhile the government promotes 'British Values' as a unifying code for people of all faiths.

5. The National Programme Coordinator (part of MPA) and the P&E Task Group, made up of experienced clergy and lay interfaith practitioners, have worked hard in the past quinquennium to widen P&E's relevance, ensuring the programme resources Anglican churches of all traditions and in all regions.
6. The network of lay and ordained diocesan interfaith advisors (DIFAs) enables P&E to track trends and areas of concern at local level. The majority of dioceses have appointed a DIFA as a point of contact for clergy, bishops and diocesan staff on matters relating to other faith communities. To mitigate the risk of isolation, the DIFA network has been strengthened in recent years to encourage sharing of knowledge and resources through regular conferences and communication. P&E aims for all dioceses to be represented in the network by the end of this quinquennium.
7. In addition to the DIFA network there are four autonomous Presence & Engagement centres, in Leicester, Birmingham, West Yorkshire and London. Their role is to identify and promote good practice in Christian relations with those of other faiths, and provide training in religious literacy. These centres were established in 2007-8, developing programmes shaped by local priorities and demographics. Since 2011, a shared strand has been *Near Neighbours*, discussed below.
8. **The St Philip's Centre in Leicester** has become an important training hub for IME 1-3 and 4-7, in addition to providing bespoke training for lay people and serving clergy, including Deans, Archdeacons and Bishops. It is also a point of contact with Central Government, notably the Home Office, Foreign Office and DCLG, as well as enabling public sector organisations including the Police, Armed Forces and NHS to be better equipped for religiously diverse settings. The St Philip's Centre will continue this work in the coming years, developing new material addressing more complex topics as the need arises.
9. **The Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre in Birmingham** delivers bespoke training and support for P&E parishes and diocesan staff as well as offering consultation. This includes regular emails to all clergy and lay ministers in P&E parishes. It has built close partnerships with city stakeholders and community groups, leading to joint endeavours such as the Birmingham Conversations, a dialogue process addressing civic and local issues. The Centre is currently prioritising the development of tailored support for clergy of all traditions within Anglicanism. It also plans to establish Christian-Sikh and Christian-Hindu networks, to assist with negotiating geo-political issues that cause tensions between Birmingham's communities.
10. **Yorkshire's Faithful Neighbours** (formerly Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity) was established to focus on Christian-Muslim relations given the particular demographics of the Northern Mill towns. It currently works across all five Episcopal Areas in the Diocese of Leeds, equipping lay and ordained Christians for positive engagement. Future priorities include creating space for difficult conversations around migration and extremism, and communicating the relevance of P&E for all parishes as an integral part of the Diocese's Mission & Ministry plan.

11. **The Kings Centre in Southall** seeks to resource and inspire the church's mission and ministry in multi-religious parishes, chaplaincies and schools in the Greater London area. Building on the work of the London Presence and Engagement Network, whose mandate ended in 2016, it delivers interfaith awareness training for clergy, theological colleges and mission agencies. A centre for cross-cultural teaching and learning, its vision going forward is to catalyse church planting in multi-ethnic contexts.
12. Alongside P&E's parish-focussed work, the programme works closely with bilateral bodies such as the Council for Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum and the Hindu Christian Forum, as well as the Interfaith Network UK. The Anglican Inter Faith Network offers a Communion-wide lens while the Churches Forum for Interreligious Relations, hosted by CTBI, provides an ecumenical angle.

A Vision for the Next Quinquennium: A Christian Presence in Every Community

13. Presence & Engagement has four guiding aims for the next phase of the programme, the first of which is maintaining a Christian presence in every community. The Church's continuing presence is crucial in religiously diverse contexts. Clergy in P&E settings speak of having the care (or cure) of all the souls of the parish as a cornerstone of their understanding of ministry. God's grace is for everyone, meaning a presence is vital in all communities – not just those where the majority are of Christian heritage. Moreover Anglican clergy often convene conversations between faiths, particularly where the Church of England is the only Christian presence remaining.
14. Yet the Church faces significant challenges in its desire to be present in every community. This is certainly the case in some religiously diverse areas, where there is a need for honesty about the health of inner city churches. In many P&E parishes (thanks to a combination of migration patterns and property prices) the majority of worshippers no longer live in the parish. Where less affluent congregants remain by necessity rather than choice, unsurprisingly they struggle to embrace the Church's changing role in diverse communities. The 2005 P&E report spoke of widespread anxiety about demographic change and a lack of desire or capacity to engage – sentiments echoed in more recent research. Many clergy are excited about the opportunities multi-religious contexts provide for building relationships and sharing faith, but find this attitude is not shared by their congregations.
15. In sharp contrast is the energising relationship between P&E clergy and Church of England schools, which are often favoured by parents of different faiths. Accordingly work has begun to create more intentional connections in the area of education, to be developed in the coming quinquennium. With the NCIs Education team, P&E helped facilitate a 2015 conference for students and teachers from CofE and faith schools on British Values. A follow-up event hosted by the St Philips Centre saw sixth formers explore ways scripture is employed to justify violence, using an easily-replicable model.
16. Another encouraging area is the role of cathedrals which, as tourist destinations as well as worshipping communities, often have increased interaction with people of other faiths. Urban cathedrals in particular are seen as being for all people in the city, frequently serving as venues for civic events and vigils after atrocities. P&E is keen to explore the part cathedrals can play in sustaining Christian presence in urban areas and modelling fruitful encounter between faiths, and share examples of good practice.

17. While the church in P&E parishes may not be renewed in its current form, there is potential for creative initiatives to develop. One example is Christ Church Sparkbrook, Birmingham, where over 80% of the population are of other faiths. In 2012 they closed their Sunday congregation, establishing a missional community to pray and serve the local area. The Sanctuary has been meeting since 2013 - following Christ and bringing together cultures of East and West in a meditative style of worship. Indeed a recent Church Army report⁴ identified greater diversity and connecting with a community's unreached groups as increasingly significant drivers for Fresh Expressions, making P&E contexts fertile ground.

A Vision for the Next Quinquennium: Building Bridges through *Near Neighbours*

18. P&E is committed to enabling Christians to build bridges and engage with their neighbours of other faiths for the common good. The church is a reconciled and reconciling community, and a climate of fear in some areas following the EU Referendum makes this even more important. P&E clergy were instrumental in anti-hate crime initiatives last summer⁵ and continue to work on related issues.

19. The *Near Neighbours* programme, funded by DCLG and delivered by the Church Urban Fund through P&E centres and other community hubs, encourages interfaith social action and interaction as well as training young leaders. Up to March 2016, *Near Neighbours* had disbursed over £3.6 million in small grants to 1,120 projects – estimated to have benefited over 940,000 people. This work is overseen by local coordinators, supporting grassroots community groups to design a broad range of events and activities to bring people together. As of May 2017, a further £1.6m has been allocated to extend the project for another year with the hope that in due course the geographical areas covered will expand.

20. Evaluation of *Near Neighbours* by Coventry University has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the programme's success in involving those with no prior experience of interfaith work. Indeed *Near Neighbours* consistently challenges stereotypes about what interfaith engagement looks like. For example, St Cuthbert's North Wembley won a grant to grow their weekly Memory Café, which combats loneliness among older people of different faiths. The Memory Café places the church at the heart of the community in an area with few facilities, and St Cuthbert's has seen an increase in Sunday worshippers.

21. Such joint projects can be a good measure of the health of interfaith relationships in an area, as in some places it is challenging to get relationships to permeate beyond leadership level into communities. Another project which supports local engagement is the Christian Muslim Forum's Church-Mosque Twinning Project, encouraging neighbouring places of worship to build relationships. That said, ownership by leaders is crucial if engagement is to thrive in parishes. This is important both ceremonially (through festival greetings from bishops to faith communities, and visible diversity of civic occasions such as Remembrance Sunday) and strategically (with a bishop/archdeacon holding the P&E brief).

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http://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/286719/Church_Army/Church_Army/Our_work/Research/The_Day_of/The_Day_of.aspx

⁵ Examples are outlined in a Mission and Public Affairs paper here:

https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2552147/hate_crime_and_the_churches.pdf

22. Also of note in regard to joint working is the experience of chaplains, who have long operated in multifaith settings in universities, healthcare and prisons. In the next phase, P&E will endeavour to learn from chaplains, considering whether and how their insights into multi-religious cooperation can be applied in parishes.

A Vision for the Next Quinquennium: Sharing Christian Faith

23. P&E's vision is that churches become confident in sharing the gospel sensitively and effectively with people from other backgrounds, and welcoming those who embrace Christian faith. P&E's report to General Synod in 2011 proposed research into evangelism and witness in multi-religious settings. This was carried out through a series of workshops with clergy, considering four key questions which continue to guide P&E's work in this area. How are P&E parishes engaging with these topics in their particular contexts? What unique challenges do they face, and what opportunities do they find? What insights might the experience of P&E clergy reveal which are valuable to the wider Church? How can P&E ensure it supports and resources churches of all traditions, while acknowledging the range of theological perspectives on these issues?

24. Chief among the findings⁶ was the need to respond to those of other faiths wanting to explore Christianity; something which clergy do not always feel well-equipped for. Whether or not churches were proactively seeking to share faith through evangelism, those of all traditions were doing so reactively. Frequently this was in response to enquiries from people who 'just turned up' and asked about Jesus, or requested prayer for healing or a family situation, having had no prior contact. Often these conversations were challenging if bibles or other resources were not readily available in the enquirer's first language. Churches in the Diocese of Manchester are addressing this need through the Alexandria Library, a bookshop located on the city's 'Curry Mile' which stocks books in a range of languages as well as offering English conversation classes and bible study groups for speakers of other languages. While there is a wide range of literature available in other languages, it is not always easy to find without the assistance of such specialist retailers. Therefore P&E now provides signposting to resources, both physical and online, through its website – and is happy to respond to individual queries.

25. This work builds on *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* [GS 956], written in response to a 2009 Private Members Motion on the Uniqueness of Christ [GS Misc 905B]. GS 956 noted that "a consistent feature of the life of the Church in England has been the desire to share faith in Christ with those of other religions,"⁷ while acknowledging the historic negative manifestations of this desire particularly in relation to Jewish people and as a conduit for colonialism. It went on to assert that "working together for the common good is an end in itself consistent with the Great Commandment, but it is not the only Christian imperative in relating to other faiths. The challenge...is so to expose ourselves in the process that the very ground of our being – the love of God in Christ – is evident in our lives so that others may encounter Christ and come to faith."⁸

26. Evangelism and conversion in multi-religious contexts are often linked to migration. For example, Stockton Parish Church has welcomed and baptised over 200 Iranians in the past five years. Their presence is a great joy, and their deep faith an encouragement. It

⁶ The full report is available at:

<<http://presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/P%26E%20Evangelism%20and%20Witness%20Report.pdf>>

⁷ Paragraph 20

⁸ Paragraph 79

also brings challenges, particularly the complex practical and spiritual support of those seeking asylum in the UK, and balancing the needs of new believers with those of existing congregation members. Helping people navigate the legal system is time-consuming for clergy, and many people choose to move elsewhere once they have leave to remain, to be close to friends and family or for work. Thus this type of growth is exciting but costly and transitory.

27. P&E is developing a national strategy in this area, with an initial clergy gathering in June 2017 to inform a joined-up approach. There are pressing concerns about the assessment of religious asylum claims⁹ and availability of liturgy in other languages, plus strategic questions about how to create authentically multi-ethnic churches shaped by the presence of new arrivals, beyond ensuring they can access what already goes on. How might these individuals be nurtured as leaders so they can share their gifts with the church?
28. Furthermore, there are tensions in some parishes between maintaining positive interfaith relationships and offering an invitation to the Christian faith, which GS 956 helpfully recognises. How can we safeguard constructive relations with all people of other faiths while also welcoming individuals who wish to follow Jesus? There are a range of perspectives within the Church about appropriate evangelism; P&E parishes have been described as fragile ecosystems, which are easily disrupted. The Christian Muslim Forum's 'Ethical Guidelines for Christian and Muslim Witness in Britain'¹⁰ are useful in cases where both parties are motivated by a desire to share faith. However this pattern of mutual evangelism is not common to all interfaith encounters and in some contexts the topic causes considerable distress – particularly where there is a negative historic precedent. Thus confidence in the gospel must be couched in care and humility.
29. Also relevant here are the numerous other language/ethnic group congregations hosted by Anglican churches, the subject of recent research conducted by Aston University and the Diocese of Birmingham.¹¹ In some cases these congregations wish to become part of the Church of England. For example, St John's Southall hosted an Asian congregation which over time has integrated into the main congregation so that it reflects the community's demographics. This subject merits further exploration.

A Vision for the Next Quinquennium: Equipping People for Ministry

30. The fourth aspect of P&E's vision is to see an increased number of clergy and lay people passionate about and equipped for ministry in multifaith contexts, while existing clergy in P&E areas are better supported and encouraged. Each of the three areas outlined in this report so far – continued presence, engagement for the common good and contextually-appropriate witness to the gospel – rely on Christians committed to living and working in religiously diverse communities.
31. However P&E parishes face a particular clergy recruitment challenge. In the Diocese of Birmingham, an offer of training and accompaniment is advertised with P&E posts to encourage potential candidates who would value additional support. It remains difficult

⁹ Existing guidance for clergy is available at <http://presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Asylum%20guidelines%20for%20clergy.pdf>

¹⁰ < http://www.christianmuslimforum.org/downloads/Ethical_Guidelines_for_Witness.pdf>

¹¹<https://research.aston.ac.uk/portal/files/17849739/Minority_congregations_use_of_Anglican_Church_spaces_in_the_Birmingham_Diocese.pdf>

to attract applications, and so further work may include advocating for more curacies in P&E parishes, providing supported exposure to interfaith work which might cultivate a passion for ministry in these settings.

32. Yet a lack of applications for P&E posts is symptomatic of the wider need to increase the number of ordinands. The task is two-fold; ordaining people to P&E parishes and ordaining people from P&E parishes. Thus P&E will encourage people currently worshipping in P&E parishes to explore vocation. This will connect with the important work of CMEAC and Ministry Division, so that the leadership of churches in P&E settings might better reflect the demographics of the parish and decouple traditional associations between ethnicity and religion, attesting to the fact that the Christian message is for all.
33. Theological education plays a role here too. In 2015, P&E collaborated with the Queens Foundation to research the teaching of interfaith engagement in theological education institutions.¹² While some TEIs draw on P&E centres and interfaith organisations to deliver modules, others rely on personal contacts. Ensuring TEIs are aware of the resources offered by P&E will enhance the stability of this provision.
34. While all ordinands should receive teaching on mission in a multifaith world, there is currently no mechanism to identify ordinands with a particular interest in relating to other faiths. P&E is developing tools to recognise them at an earlier stage, creating a cohort equipped for ministry in diverse settings. This ties in with the need to develop a new generation of Christian scholars with a focus on other religions, to offer the church fresh and stimulating theological material in this area.
35. A continuing focus is on ensuring that clergy in P&E areas feel their ministry is recognised, valued and supported. Currently this takes place through the DIFA network, as well as the resources on the P&E website. Some dioceses hold annual gatherings to affirm and equip P&E clergy and lay ministers, which are greatly appreciated by those who attend. DIFAs are available as a resource to support this kind of initiative and bishops, diocesan staff and clergy are encouraged to make use of them.
36. However P&E also challenges the notion that engaging with people of other faiths is a specialist subject, only for the 'qualified'. The lack of confidence in connecting faith to everyday life highlighted by *Setting God's People Free* [GS 2056] is magnified where that life takes place in multi-religious settings. This may manifest in concern about causing offence, so preferring not to broach the topic of faith. Often people have not been given a theological framework through preaching or discipleship to apply to their routine engagement with people of other faiths at work or in the local community. P&E focusses on empowering Christians to recognise their interactions with people of other religions as authentic expressions of their Christian faith. In addition, the three areas outlined above demonstrate that there are many opportunities for lay leadership in P&E settings, whether in establishing new forms of contextual Christian presence, developing social action projects, or journeying with new believers.

Conclusion

¹² <http://presenceandengagement.org.uk/sites/default/files/Proofs%20final%20%28web%20ready%29.pdf>

37. This report has outlined ways that P&E is committed to continuing to explore what Anglican mission and ministry looks like in our multi-religious society. It builds on the programme's work since 2005, while acknowledging key developments both within and outside the Church which affect how this question is approached and answered. Violent events which have occurred during the writing of this report underscore the pressing need for religions to find ways to live together, and churches have a significant role to play in enabling diverse communities to "pursue the things that make for peace".¹³ Yet the political and media attention directed at relationships between different faiths as a result of atrocities should not distract from the distinctive theological imperative within the Christian faith for seeking intentional connections with those who differ. That is why the language of Presence and Engagement remains so important – in recognition that our work with other faiths is rooted in the Church's identity, informed by context yet not dictated by trends. It flows from our place in the local community – loving, serving and witnessing to people of all faiths in the name of Christ, and being enriched and renewed in our own faith by doing so.

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June 2017

¹³ Romans 14:19, NKJV