

Learning from Creative Thinking and Planning for Rural Mission and Growth

This document draws together some of the contributions to a Renewal and Reform Seminar on Rural Mission and Growth that took place in February 2018. It identifies some of the strategic approaches that are starting to show benefits and that could be used in other rural places. The document shares some specific examples of good practice, and some case studies of useful ideas and approaches.



The narrative this document offers is one of hope for the future. It shows that with prayer, listening, careful focus on what God is prompting, reflection and action, positive changes can come that will enable more people to come to know God in their lives. It also indicates that change takes time and patience, there are barriers that need to be overcome, and some things will not work first time or even at all. These examples all have some key factors in common.

- Prayer has been the bedrock on which everything has been built. It is the essential starting point for everything and continues through the initiatives or events.
- Do things together. Create a team of people, making use of the gifts and skills God has already provided from the churches, the wider communities, other denominations and organisations.
- Be prepared to review: pray, listen, reflect, pray and then adapt, change or stop.

Introduction

The experiences described in the following stories illustrate the diversity of approaches to enabling and developing mission and growth in rural communities. It shows that one size does not fit all, that it is important to play to the strengths of clergy and congregations members, and that being strategic is not a bar to the Holy Spirit. All the case studies reflect a mixed economy approach to parish ministry with new approaches sitting alongside existing Sunday worship. Strategic Development Fund investment has been important for only two of the initiatives in this account. The other initiatives and ideas have come out of local response to opportunities and needs.

The nine stories of mission and growth in rural communities detailed here are:

1. Investment in intergenerational mission in the market towns of the Diocese of Hereford, making use of the experience and learning gained from growing rural parishes.
2. Patient pioneer mission in a large rural team ministry in the Diocese of Salisbury making creative use of a post of team vicar.
3. A large benefice of small communities in the Norfolk Fens benefiting from a pioneer LLM [Reader] and a strategic approach to mission.
4. Culture change in Cambridgeshire, where a new model sees a multi-parish benefice now thinking of itself not as a collection of isolated parishes but as a singular group of worshipping communities, some of which are parish-based.
5. The creation of locally-based learning communities to facilitate discipleship and evangelism in rural parts of Devon.
6. Investment in a major initiative in the Diocese of Exeter to support the use of church buildings for mission.
7. A large benefice in Lincolnshire, playing to the strengths of congregation and community for creative outreach.
8. Helping children and adults pray.
9. Telling the Christmas story in a new way.

Each case study reflects the voice of the person who wrote it and so experienced the approach described.

Enabling Rural Mission and Growth

What are the most important points to emerge from these examples?

- Prayer is the basis of everything that bears fruit, whether this is for a diocesan strategy or for individual parishes and multi-church groups.
- Pray, pray, pray and continue to pray. Expect things to take time and have patience when things do not happen as expected.
- Be positive and creative, identify good stories of what is already happening in the parish or benefice and tell them. A positive narrative helps engender confidence in existing congregations.

- Use the gifts, skills, resources and ideas you have and build on these. Try to avoid worrying about what you do not have. Even if it all feels very negative, start with prayer, as everyone can be enabled to pray.
- Outreach takes all shapes and forms. Take time to listen to and pray about the needs of the communities identifying together wherever possible, what might be appropriate for people.
- Activities, outreach and other projects are always best done in partnership with other churches in a benefice, other people and organisations in the community, and ecumenically.
- Do not run initiatives simply with a view to bringing new people to traditional Sunday morning worship, they are unlikely to do this. Communicating this to existing congregations is important.
- Review, take feedback, reflect and pray, and be prepared to adapt, change or stop.
- Strategically used posts, such as a pioneer or missionary, can help to build relationships, encourage and enable people and act as catalysts for new activities and initiatives.
- The mixed economy is hard work but worth it for the spiritual and numerical growth it can bring.
- It is essential to enable, develop and encourage the ministry and mission of lay people in all aspects of the life and work of the church in rural communities.
- Provide training and development for lay people as locally as possible, long travel times and distances are a barrier to learning and participation.
- Locally based learning communities are a good way of providing space for people to pray, learn together, share experience and expertise. They are helpful in encouraging fresh expressions of church and the renewal of inherited church.
- Create teams of lay and ordained working together in parishes or across a benefice for new initiatives.
- What are the small steps that can be taken, the 'one-degree shifts' that can help people to explore faith afresh or perhaps for the first time?
- Culture change is helped by lots of small actions, communicating well and repeatedly, and incorporating an expectation of change into different aspects of church life, which together nudge congregations and benefices towards change.
- Strategies for multi-church groups do not have to be complicated and can be shaped to help encourage mission.
- Church buildings can be a tool for mission – especially when working in partnership with the community.
- Long-term patient engagement with the whole community is needed for mission and growth in rural areas. There are unlikely to be quick fixes.

Jill Hopkinson

July 2018

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1. A strategic approach to intergenerational mission in market towns

Elizabeth Hackney, Caroline Pascoe and Jane Pearce, Diocese of Hereford

As a diocese we have been on a journey of missional listening, asking ‘What do we hear God calling us to be and do?’ We termed this journey ‘Follow!’ and we sought to notice what God is doing amongst us – to look for the signs of growth and new life – and to join in. This led us to a piece of strategic work in our market towns, influenced by our experience of wider rural areas.

Listening

Our first priority was to discern and generate a vision of what the church could look like in Hereford Diocese – what was God leading us to work towards? After listening to all generations in our communities, in schools, pubs, towns, villages, churches and community centres, we heard a sense of longing and a desire for change, articulated by grass roots, to reach grandchildren, family and friends so that they know God’s love for them. There was a growing recognition for a need to reach missing and new generations – the 95%.

Our listening also showed us that our communities value us as Christian people and our church buildings are places of inspiration and peace. They wanted us to be more confident about our Christian identity and not shy about it. This feedback helped us to crystallise an expression of our calling as a diocese today that we owned and shared for ‘inspiring our generation’ and *each* generation – our friends and families, neighbours, colleagues and the people we meet to Follow Jesus Christ. We all have a part in God’s Mission – in evangelism and discipleship.

This set us up for the next stage in our strategic development, to create a MAP [Mission Action Plan] for our diocese. We’ve been engaging with MAPping for eight years, but now we looked to align our MAP against the shared priorities of:

- spiritual and numerical growth
- contributing to the common good – making a difference in our communities
- reimagining ministry.

We also have a commitment to putting our resources where there is greatest missional need and opportunity.

We have developed a shared language of scales of action. ‘One-Degree Shifts’ – the small things we do slightly differently that can facilitate bigger changes – and taking ‘Bigger, Bolder Steps’, so that any parish, however tiny or traditional, has something they can do.

It is early days with intentional MAPping, but the signs are very good and we are seeing some natural, unforced outcomes as benefices and deaneries collaborate more. For example, spreading Open the Book teams across a whole deanery that feeds into one

secondary school, and then taking little steps to build on what is happening through the relationships with the children and their families.

Bigger, Bolder – Intergenerational Mission

Our next strategic step was to think about what ‘Bigger, Bolder’ action we could do as a diocese that would make a real difference to achieving significant missional growth. A number of factors influenced our decisions, particularly what we were seeing in terms of growth in our more rural parishes.

As a diocese we have seen growing numbers of younger generations and new Christians through Messy Churches. At the time of our listening process, we had 46 Messy Churches in Hereford Diocese. Café Church and other informal fresh expressions of church were also growing. Many of these were made up of people of different ages – and we heard parishes talking about ‘intergenerational’ church – gatherings that connected the generations together. We also saw Open the Book Teams, Pray Bake Read¹ and Prayer Spaces in Schools connecting the generations, mainly led by lay teams.

Many of our market towns, along with our more populated parishes, were often reaching less than 1% of their population. In our rural parishes, this percentage was much higher. Over all, we were also better at reaching our older generations than younger ones and clergy deployment was skewed in favour of the rural parishes. We therefore decided to target six more populated areas as part of our strategy – three market towns and three large lower-income parishes. They were mostly parishes that had predominantly more traditional patterns of worship, older congregations, lots of occasional offices, more clergy-focussed schools work and lower levels of lay leadership. They were areas of great opportunity for evangelism and discipleship.

We decided to create a dispersed mission team that would focus support on the market towns and lower-income estates. The ‘Intergenerational Missioners’ would each be placed in one of these key parishes for 80% of their time and during the other 20% of their time, they would be part of a diocesan Mission Support Team. There was a shared funding model, with 25% of costs being contributed from the local parish, 25% allocated from diocesan funds and 50% coming from Strategic Development Funding. The aim of the Intergenerational Missioners work is to be catalysts for mission and growth, bringing expertise, energy and experience into the parishes, impacting the deaneries and the diocese as a whole. Before applying for funding, we learnt from four parishes that were beginning to show signs of growth and piloted the shared approaches with them – these parishes were made up of two market towns, one large village, and one lower-income estate.

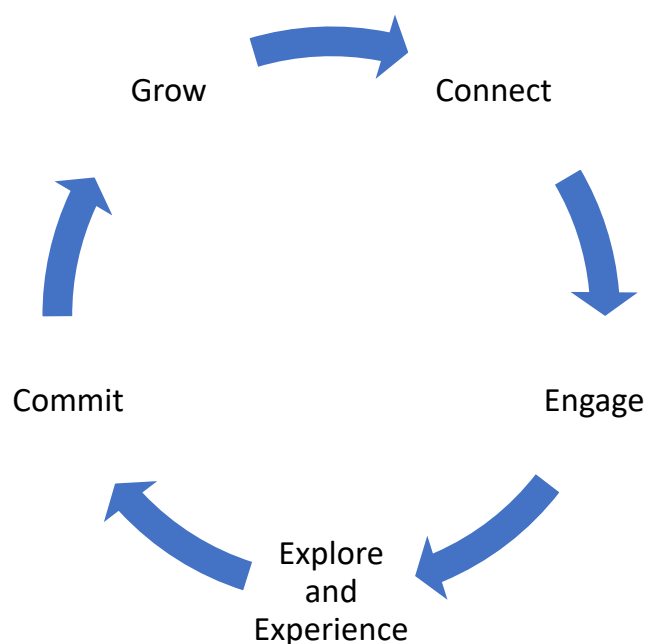
In January 2018 a team of lay Intergenerational Missioners was appointed. Our goals through this was to seek spiritual and numerical growth through deepening discipleship and

¹ <https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/pray-bake-read/>

growing in confidence within evangelism, but also to model lay leadership. The team and Lead Intergenerational Missioner are already having a positive impact on widening the backgrounds, and lowering the age demographics, of lay leaders within the diocese.

Our diocesan listening and MAPping showed us that parishes were least confident about spiritual and numerical growth, and so we wanted our Intergenerational Missioners to use a shared approach that would enable parishes of all sizes to be more confident about evangelism and discipleship.

We decided to use Stephen Cottrell's 'Growing Christians' model, adapting it to use our own language. Each Missioner supports parishes to develop ways in which they can 'connect' with new contacts, 'engage' in building relationships and help people to take steps to explore and experience faith, support others to 'commit' to following Jesus Christ and 'grow' in their faith (and support their own growth as disciples). Alongside the cycle, we developed a set of questions to help parishes to think about each stage, encouraging 'little steps' to be taken between each stage.



We are expecting market towns to think very widely about their approaches, activities and new initiatives. We encourage them to record both quantitative measures such as how many people are connecting, engaging, committing, growing and what age ranges; as well as qualitative information, for example, how and why, or why not, individuals or groups are connecting, engaging, committing, growing? The parishes are encouraged to look for opportunities that they can build on.

Connecting Points

Rural parishes (from small market towns to deeply rural communities) have five big connecting points, where people are making connections with church, whether we are intentionally seeking this or not:

- life events (occasional offices)
- schools
- festivals and special occasions
- open churches (Hereford Diocese has a high proportion of open churches and lots of community events)
- online via achurchnearyou.com or social media.

All of these things, if we do them well and intentionally, are places where we can grow and help people to take little steps of faith – even before we start to look at other evangelism and discipleship opportunities.

New Congregations

As well as looking to ‘grow Christians’, our shared approach seeks to ‘grow new congregations’. We are looking for a mixed economy of worship in each intergenerational mission parish that will include new congregations. Worship will be varied in each place, drawing from learning in rural areas where Messy Churches, Forest Churches and Café Churches, along with more informal and intergenerational worship styles, are leading to growth. A new Forest Church has been started at a Scout Hut in the middle of Hereford City. In Telford, The Living Room is a community space for all generations and a large Messy Church continues to grow. In Ross on Wye, Lydia’s Place grew through young people who attended their friend’s funeral and wanted a space to share their sense of bereavement and life.

It is tempting to think that what works for rural will not work for market towns, but so far, we are not finding this to be true. It takes the same attention to relationships, follow-up, engagement and the nurturing of faith journeys. Intentionality is just as key – along with collaboration and everyone taking part in God’s mission.

The locally-deployed Intergenerational Missioners are already making a difference. We are already seeing huge steps forward in mission, evangelism and discipleship in these parishes. The Missioners are building relationships, encouraging people and acting as catalysts. The Growing Christians cycle is producing results and more parishes are beginning to use it and replicate the approaches in different contexts across the diocese.

The changes that have taken place in rural ministry over the past few years including re-imagining of the role of clergy and strong collaboration between ordained and lay are becoming more relevant to clergy in market towns. As market towns start to see a mixed economy of congregations grow, more confident lay leaders and teams will be needed. We

are also seeing greater ecumenical collaboration and many different denominations in many areas, seeking mutual flourishing and growth. Where ecumenical links are strong and mission focussed, spiritual and numerical growth is taking place. We are also seeing an increasing number of people wanting to be part of our Missional Learning Communities and more ordained, lay, paid and unpaid workers identifying with intergenerational mission and even being called to be Intergenerational Missioners.

Next Steps

We have many opportunities and many challenges. Our next strategic hurdles are around having buildings fit for mission and levels of giving that respond to the missional opportunities God has set before us. We picture a mixed economy of church buildings that release resources for mission – people, time, and energy as well as the buildings themselves. Some churches may become festival churches and others mission hubs.

In the autumn of 2018, we will begin another listening and conversation cycle as a diocese, as we seek to take even bolder steps and inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to shine as lights in the world in our communities, schools, homes and work places. This will build on new insights through the Setting God's People Free initiative, which has been another helpful tool in discerning next steps. Finally, perhaps one of the ways God has been speaking to us across contexts and age ranges, is through prayer. As a diocese, in our intergenerational mission parishes, through our Missional Learning Communities, through our support of rural, market town and city parishes and through our listening processes, we have seen opportunities, expressions and confidence in prayer grow. As we have prayed, God has moved. Our prayer is that we continue to intentionally grow – spiritually and numerically and inter-generationally. We pray that we continue to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we inspire each generation to follow Jesus Christ.

2. Patient pioneer mission – the Beaminster project

Jo Neary, Pioneer Team Vicar and David Baldwin, Team Rector, Beaminster Team Ministry, Diocese of Salisbury

A team of rural churches in West Dorset with 12 parishes, 15 church buildings, 6 schools, 1 town, 15 villages, and a population of approximately 6,000. We are trying to grow, flourish, bring people to know Christ, deepen relationships and create community.

Following the departure of the previous Team Vicar, a group was gathered to pray for a vision for the new Team Vicar role, discerning a commitment to the mixed economy, maintaining the old and introducing new. In April 2012 a Pioneer Team Vicar was licensed.

The work began with prayer. A weekly 'Café Prayer' was introduced to focus prayer on doing new things in the team. Everyone was welcome, and usually a dozen people met to pray in silence to listen to God. This prayer continued for a year before setting up anything new. Alongside the commitment to prayer, we prioritised learning, with preaching focused on discipleship, set up training courses and small groups to explore fresh expressions of church. We encouraged people to share their story of faith and this culminated in a vocations day asking the question: "What are we called to do?"

How we set up a project

Initially we prayed that God would lead us to the correct project. We prayed about the areas of our church life which were currently failing or had little going on: schools, children and young people, connecting with our communities. We prioritised silence alongside prayer to try to hear and listen to God's prompting. We encouraged people to speak about what God might be saying. And then we tested these ideas by praying about them further. This led to a slow period of discernment – we committed to a year of prayer before any new projects, but we felt the listening and discernment was an absolute priority, and the Holy Spirit guided us.

Once we had a sense of the focus for a project we visited other people doing similar things or we researched via books or the internet, talking to colleagues or using our networks.

We do not do anything without a team. Once we have identified, through prayer and discernment, the project, we start gathering a project team, identifying even at this early stage who the leaders might be for the future. We would only start something if at least two other people were working alongside us, who would eventually take over.

Our first project was in Lent 2013. We trialled for four weeks an after-school club in one of the church schools. The children joined us straight after school for activities based around a Bible story, culminating in worship together with parents and children. After four weeks we asked them: do we carry on? The resounding yes came from children, parents and the

volunteer team. This project still flourishes five years on. It is the biggest congregation in that village, 25% of the school attend the club. Volunteers come from both local church and the village, people have come to faith through volunteering and the team is now at the point where it can run without clergy being present.

Our second project, Walk in Wednesday, was a much larger scale community outreach. We committed initially for a year and said we would review then. We also promised clergy attendance for a year to ensure a pastoral presence and to show how much value we placed on the project – committing our time demonstrated this. Over the last two years we have maintained a chaplaincy approach to the project, with lay and clergy part of the chaplaincy team, but it doesn't need all of us there all the time, thus releasing time for new things.

Trialling is a great way of testing whether the vision is correct. We believe that if projects flourish then presumably that is what God wants us to do. If we are faithful to His call, we believe God is faithful to the projects we begin. However, if after the trial period it seems or feels wrong, we can easily shut down, re-evaluate and pray more. Following the trial period, we reflect with the leadership team, project leaders, and people who attend about how the project is going. We usually do this through conversation or informal questionnaire. We invite honest feedback and will make changes if necessary. We listen to the those who attend the projects, too. We try to keep this process of reflecting and revising a constant feature of the ongoing projects.

Working across boundaries

Most of our mission work is for the whole team. It will have a geographical base, but it is financed, staffed and promoted teamwide. This can be challenging, particularly with oversight responsibilities. Some PCCs take oversight of a project, e.g. an after-school club has oversight from the PCC in whose village it takes place. Other things, e.g. Messy Church, is overseen by the Pioneer Priest and Rector, yet is run by a lay team. Finance can be tricky, we have finally set up a Mission Fund, but this has taken six years to help PCCs and people take financial responsibility for mission. God has provided, often through the generosity of individuals or PCCs being prepared to underwrite projects. We do not charge for anything; every project is free at point of access. No-one is excluded on grounds of cost although we provide the opportunity for donations. Having said that – most of our projects are cheap and some even make money.

Schools

We value relationships with our schools highly and invest much time in them. Relationships have grown through regular participation in the schools through collective worship, Prayer Spaces in Schools, Christian identity and helping to recruit foundation governors and have borne fruit through parents and children coming to other outreach or mission events. An

after-school club has produced people who attend Messy Church and have decided to be confirmed, and in another village the family service has developed from school-based relationships.

Community of the Annunciation

As our projects became established and flourished, our attention towards praying for new things was diverted, mainly because we were busy and focused on what was going on. However, we were surprised that despite outward success the spiritual energy slowed down, enthusiasm waned, and things felt harder. When we reviewed we realised our prayer life had diminished; so we began again and, thankfully, God faithfully answered our prayer. The answer was a new community with a focus on prayer and a common rule of life.

The Community of the Annunciation arose out of direct revelation/leading of the Holy Spirit and was hugely influenced by Simon Reed's book, *Creating Community: Ancient Ways for Modern Churches*. We knew everything we did must be led by, sustained and rooted in prayer but we had neglected this. When we prayed things happened. But it was a wakeup call to us that things stopped growing when we didn't pray.

Mixed Economy

In the Beaminster Team, God is calling us to develop Christian community whilst maintaining traditional church. Our energy goes into the new, not the old – and is starting to cause concern amongst traditional members of our church. Across the team, we have seen stagnation although not decline in Sunday attendance. In the church in Beaminster, we have noticed some growth and certain services in villages are better attended. Our theology of growth has evolved from 'bums on seats, money on the plate' to 'deepening relationships with God and growing community – wherever God wants.'

There are a variety of ways in which people have responded and are participating, reflecting spiritual growth as well as some numerical growth. It is our experience that through work in developing community and investment in building relationships, we are growing new communities of faith. Around 250 people of all ages are now involved in the wider life of the church and in worship, through this approach, although not on a Sunday. We have also noticed that this means more people are now involved in social and fundraising aspects of church life too. Significantly, a small number of these new attenders have made a profession of faith and now worship regularly in our new congregations.

Challenges

Only one project has failed, probably as we didn't follow the structure of pray, recruit a team, trial, feedback, then establish the project. Other challenges reflect the time it takes

for new initiatives to develop. Walk in Wednesday was an immediate success with older, isolated people, but it has taken sustained work and effort to attract parents with preschool children. Many people felt it was a failure because it did not instantly attract lots of families. Instead, it met the need that initially presented and through building relationships and trust, other things came to grow.

Maintaining tradition whilst starting new things is time consuming and creates more work. Some feel these approaches are not 'proper church' as it is not on a Sunday; others feel resentful about the time and effort focused on new things. Yet it has been energising as we meet and establish relationships with new people who previously had no contact with church and no experience of faith.

We feel that a programme-centred approach to discipleship, such as Start, Alpha or Pilgrim, is only part of the solution for new faith and existing congregations. Finding time to walk alongside individuals and help them discover God is also part of the answer, which takes time.

We have been partially successful in raising up teams and enabling people to lead. Yet we still have some way to go in building confidence for people to manage without clergy support, and we also need to work on building relationships of accountability.

Learning Points from pioneering in a rural, multi-parish context

Jo Neary, Pioneer Team Vicar

- Don't go too fast and pray and plan and then pray some more.
- Assemble and equip your team before you start anything.
- Trial things if you can, then look for feedback and react to it.
- Do one thing and do it well – don't overstretch volunteers.
- Build up community partners and connections.
- Good relationships with schools bear fruit.
- Presence and visibility help things happen.
- It takes time to build trust but once people trust you, they will come with you.
- Don't be afraid to dream and don't be afraid to fail and don't be afraid.

Learning Points from the Team Rector

David Baldwin, Team Rector

- Rural ministry is not a second-class ministry.
- Multi-parish ministry demands lots of us – working hard and sacrificially as a team is essential.
- We must enable everyone to be involved (if they want to) and help discern their particular God-given calling.

- Don't feel a failure if traditional church is declining.
- Be encouraged by small growth.
- Share the good stuff with others.
- Don't be afraid to take risks.

Resources

<https://churchofenglandfunerals.org/gravetalk/>

<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/>

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk/> (used a lot for resources for After School Club)

<http://www.pilgrimcourse.org/>

Mission Shaped Introduction (MSI) <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/resources-3/mission-shaped-introduction/>

Robert Warren, *Developing Healthy Churches: Returning to the Heart of Mission and Ministry*

Simon Reed, *Creating Community: Ancient Ways for Modern Churches* (informed much of our thinking for the Community of the Annunciation)

Paula Gooder and Michael Perham, *Echoing the Word: The Bible in the Eucharist* (underpinned the theology for Lord's Supper service).

Mission Shaped Church including Mission Shaped Parish and Mission Shaped and Rural.

Current projects running or recently completed in the Beaminster Team

Walk in Wednesday – community outreach, “open house”, café, activities, lunch – all within the church building. Although the weekly communion service takes place in church whilst Walk in Wednesday is going on and attendance has grown, the actual project is not evangelistic. However, through the relationships built we have seen an increase in funeral ministry, people returning to church and attendance at Messy Church.

After School Club – like Sunday school on a Monday afternoon, after school, in school. Average attendance, 25 children and 10 adults, making it the largest congregation in the village. Parents opt in to join us for worship; we have two or three parents who make this a priority.

Messy Church – monthly on Saturday afternoons. We have over 50 children on our books, but attendance fluctuates from as low as 11 to as high as 40 children, plus adults and volunteers. Most families now engage with something else alongside Messy Church, e.g. Walk in Wednesday, after-school club, school's ministry, 10.15@ Salway Ash, Youth group.

Breakfast@10 – on 5th Sundays, informal café-style worship. An attempt to reach the families we connect to through school and Messy church. We haven't really managed this, although it is enjoyed by regular congregation members who prefer a more informal style of worship.

Monthly youth cell connected to confirmation and post confirmation. Confirmation has grown through our increased focus on schools. We now offer confirmation to those in Year 6 to help them connect into something church-based as they transition to senior school. We now have a small youth group meeting monthly and 90% of this group also come to Messy Church or 10.15@ Salway Ash.

Community of the Annunciation – community focused on prayer and common rule of life. Meeting twice per week to pray and study scripture. Attendance is variable, but we commit to pray at home if we can't be present together. Membership is around 20 people.

10.15@ Salway Ash – all-age, open-table Lord's Supper preceded by activities and coffee. This was an all-age, non-Eucharistic service but the regular families who were coming asked if it could become Eucharistic. There is no written liturgy, it is all done through call and response. All are welcome to share bread and wine, and it has become a home for some of our newly confirmed young people.

Weekly prayer meetings/monthly prayer walks in five villages. In response to work done through Thy Kingdom Come, five out of 14 villages now meet regularly to pray. These activities are lay-led.

Pilgrim – one group in a village has now worked through the whole course and are continuing as a small group. A new Pilgrim group is about to begin in a second village.

Grave Talk – organised by a lay team and delivered first at Walk in Wednesday as an afternoon activity option and then again over evening sessions in a different village in a pub. Very thought provoking and well-received discussion opportunity which we will run again.

Christmas Outreach workshops (October half term). Over the last two years we have offered craft and activity workshops during October half term linked to our Christmas themes. We are widening it this year to offering four "Holiday club days" with Bible-themed activities, sport and lunch in four different villages in the summer holidays.

3. Seed and runner mission

Ken Waters – Priest in Barton Bendish, Beachamwell with Shingham, Boughton, Methwold, Wereham, West Dereham, Whittington, Wretton with Stoke Ferry in the Norfolk Fens of the Diocese of Ely

This very rural benefice in the Norfolk Fens [part of Ely Diocese] has eight parishes and 11 congregations. The Ministry Team is large and predominantly lay, made up of four Licensed Lay Ministers (LLM) [Readers], two Authorised Lay Ministers (ALM) and a Priest. The benefice also has a LLM Pioneer, the first licensed in the diocese, whose last year of training as an LLM was focused on pioneering.

The LLM Pioneer leads on fresh expressions of church within the benefice as well as leading Services of the Word across the group. The intention is to respond to the changing needs of the rural communities we serve and explore how current practices need to change.

As a Ministry Family [Team], we believe we should consider fundamental questions of belief and faith, seeking different ways to be and do church, looking to connect with people in our villages, particularly those who are un-churched or de-churched, aiming to form new faith communities. To follow the Holy Spirit, hearing God's call to go where our communities are, to make church happen; designing, developing and customising events and church services that are focused towards engagement with all our communities but particularly those who find existing church doesn't speak to them.

By having a dedicated Pioneer, we see this as a catalyst for growth of fresh expressions within our group of churches in two distinct ways:

1. *Seed based mission* – which is self-funding, self-governing and self-reproducing.
2. *Runner based mission* – extending from an inherited church context.

By introducing a pioneering aspect into our Ministry Family, we see this growth as intentionally missional, continually looking for ways to make the love of God known. We use a 'business-style' matrix to assess and review all our work, including different projects and approaches. If the projects meet the criteria in the matrix, we continue with them. If they do not, we ask why, pray, reflect and if necessary look to gradually withdraw resources or stop it or hand it over to someone else. A good example of this was when we established a regular men's breakfast as a fresh expressions initiative. The breakfast has proved to be very popular, but it was impossible to include reference to God, prayer or worship; though it was obviously filling a much needed fellowship requirement for a group of men. This project started with seven men in the vicarage for breakfast and grew into 25-30 men having breakfast and a guest speaker in the local pub. Instead of discontinuing it, it was handed over to a community group who continue to run it very successfully.

In contrast, in October 2015 we introduced an 'Adult Messy Church', which is very much a 'seed' project. We specifically make it clear to those who attend that it is a church initiative. There are Bible-based crafts, with a 'God Spot', which is short, sharp and sweet. The intention is to engage in one-to-one conversations, plant the seeds of faith and help it to grow. This was purposely not about creating a feeder activity to encourage more to attend worship on a Sunday morning, but reaching out to new unchurched people. In fact, the first session we ran we banned all congregation members from coming so that we could see if there was interest out in the community for such an initiative.

We mentioned earlier we had eight parishes and eleven congregations; the extra three congregations come from our regular family services (loosely based around the Messy Church idea) that take place on a Saturday afternoon or a Thursday after school. These either happen in church or in a village hall, depending on the facilities available in the local church. These three 'runner' mission initiatives help families engage with the Christian faith, who would or could not come on a Sunday morning and attract young families who can find worship in a way that suits them.

In one of the smaller villages in the Benefice, where the church was struggling with low numbers on a Sunday, we have introduced a quarterly Saturday morning Breakfast Church, which has quadrupled the attendance. It attracts people from all denominations and is proving very successful.

WISSEY VALLEY BENEFICE MISSION GROWTH MATRIX										
									→	
WEAK	UNATTRACTIVE			AVERAGE			ATTRACTIVE			
	DISINVEST			CONSIDER WITHDRAWAL			DOUBLE OR QUIT			
	Kigali Partnership (??)						Barton Bendish Adult Messy Church			Colour Key
							Table Top			Barton Bendish
							Youth Fresh Expressions (JT)			Beachamwell
							NEW 'Soup-ermans Club'			Boughton
							Youth Work			Methwold
							(Stoke Ferry Youth Club re-thinking)			Wereham
							NEW Messy Church Beachamwell			West Dereham
										Whittington
AVERAGE	PHASED WITHDRAWAL			HOLD			TRY HARDER			
	BCP Morning Prayer			Flexible Fellowship			Community			Community
				School Collective Worship			High School			Outreach
				Compline			Café Cre8/Toddlers			Knitting Group
				Prayer Group			Wretton Family Messy Church			Concerts
				Cre8 Saturday Workshop			(3 per year - rethinking)			
				BCP Evensong			Picnic (Tent) Church			
							(2 per year Sping/Summer)			
STRONG	RETAIN			GROWTH			LEADER			Discarded
				Coffee Mornings			Lunch Club			Coffee Morning
				School Collective Worship			Messy Church			Breakfast Club
							Family Messy Church			Mid Week Com
							Cre8 (Messy Church)			
				SERVICES						
				River Songs of Praise						
				Praise & Pints						
				Christmas Community Services						
				Monthly Communion + Coffee Morning						

4. The small things contributing to changing culture

Alison Myers, Team Rector, The Lordsbridge Team of Churches, Diocese of Ely

It usually takes time to change culture but it is not impossible. The culture of a community is held within, and reinforced by, the language, symbols, rituals and stories of that community. The Lordsbridge Team introduced the phrase 'a network of worshipping communities' as part of the culture change which accompanied a change of organisational model. Alongside this new language we are using symbol and ritual, stories and role modelling, to reinforce a new way of working together and a new focus on mission. We are taking an approach of little and often, and often repeated.

The Lordsbridge Team of Churches (a Team Ministry in Cambridgeshire to the west of Cambridge) was brought together in 2010. It has 11 villages and 11 parishes, each with an ancient, listed parish church and an open graveyard. Covering an area of 45 square miles, populations range from 250 to just under 3,000, with a total population of 12,300.² Substantial new edge of village development is already approved for the next few years increasing the housing stock of some villages by 20-25%. The village communities are mixed, including those who have lived there for more than a generation, those who moved in as young families in earlier village expansion, young families and those who use the villages as dormitories. Local employment includes farms and agri-business, cafés, shops and small businesses, public services such as schools and healthcare, the university and new high-tech businesses. There are three church schools, out of a total of seven primary schools, a secondary school and a Sixth Form college.

Each parish has an active worshipping community associated with the parish church – nine of these meet every Sunday morning and the other two alternate their morning service, with a sprinkling of early services too. There is a Team Rector and two Team Vicars.

Vision

Our vision is of a blended network of worshipping communities, where each parish church is a small but confident community of Jesus' disciples engaged in its particular village mission field, with local ministers doing the basics well. Alongside these, we are pioneering and experimenting so that we have at least one new congregation or worshipping community in each parish.

To realise this vision, we have adopted a networked organisational structure and are changing working practices but, alongside this, intentionally working to change culture is vital. The culture of a community is held within, and reinforced by, the language, symbols, rituals, stories and role models of that community. An accumulation of small actions in each

² Census data from 2011.

of these areas nudges the culture into something new. Here are some of the things that we have done.

Language

We often need new language to articulate something new, otherwise it is hard to hold on to it and to share it with others. It is hard to think further about it together. With changed language we can have a changed conversation, and that contributes to changing thinking and changing culture.

In the Lordsbridge Team, we now describe ourselves as ‘a network of worshipping communities’ rather than 11 parishes. This phrase suggests something more flexible, less static, than a fixed number of parishes having all the expectations that come with being a traditional parish church. Thinking of ourselves as a network of worshipping communities immediately frees us from the silos of the parishes, creating space for different forms of collaboration across parish boundaries and for different geographies. Not specifying the number of worshipping communities means that we can follow this up by explaining that 11 of the worshipping communities meet in ancient parish churches; that the twelfth is loose youth community, run across villages; the thirteenth is a weekday toddler church; the fourteenth a monthly ‘tea and prayers’ for seniors meeting in a village hall; and so on.

The phrase ‘the Lordsbridge Team is a network of worshipping communities’ was first used in the set of three principles formulated by the newly formed Team Council. It is repeatedly used on many key documents.

Ritual and symbol

Other forms of language are the often-overlapping languages of symbol and of ritual. As Christians we understand the power of the symbolic and of ritual – baptism and communion as cases in point. Here are some that we use to contribute to changing culture.

- Whenever we meet for a united Lordsbridge Team service – on fifth Sundays or for another special occasion – we bring out a box of large candles. During the intercessions, we name and light one candle for each worshipping community – 11 for the parish church communities, then a twelfth, thirteenth, *etc.*; then a last candle for the worshipping community that we’ve not yet thought of. When we first started doing this we had the original 11 and then one for the unknown community. On the most recent occasion we lit 16.
- Three years ago, one of the team wrote the Lordsbridge Team prayer to capture some key ideas in words that enable people to hold them before God. This prayer has been distributed on contact cards and is used in each church as an extra collect or in the intercessions.

Lord God, in your love you sent your Son.

In your grace you brought us back to you.

In your mission you placed us where we are and formed us into a team.

Call us onward to your purposes and growth.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

- Three years ago, we introduced the 'Lordsbridge Prayer Pilgrimage' – a week in which all the ancient churches are open and contain locally created prayer stations or similar. Widely distributed publicity encouraged congregation members and others to visit the churches of the Team over the course of the week and to pray for each other. After the second of these weeks, a small group developed a route that linked the church buildings largely via ancient bridle paths; a leaflet is now permanently available. We now time this to coincide with the national prayer movement 'Thy Kingdom Come'.

Stories

Humans are storytelling beings, we make meaning by the stories we tell. Changing the stories from those of decline and regret to those of possibility and potential is vital for culture change.

- One of the ways we tell stories here is via a bi-monthly e-newsletter to all the congregations. It is filled with stories of community presence and mission activities told by different congregations, sometimes in pictures. Each issue also contains something about mission and something about prayer.
- Opportunities arise from time to time to tell the stories of different worshipping communities, through preaching and through small groups. During one particularly stretched summer, the Team Rector preached at some point in almost all the 11 parish churches, using the same address to lay out a vision of the network of worshipping communities for 10 years hence.

Heroes and role models

Cultural analysis looks for the 'heroes' of a community because these people, whether alive or dead, real or fictional, influence the community's identity. When a community finds new heroes, that contributes to culture change. It is difficult to introduce new heroes deliberately – heroes don't really work like that – but potential role models can be introduced or made more visible. Our best example is the Team Pioneer Curate, with us for two years, briefed with bringing a mission focus to what we do on a week by week basis and modelling a range of activities, thereby disturbing the system of cultural norms.

What has happened as a result?

These aspects of cultural change are part of a wider and long-term project of change involving organisational structure, recruitment, training, vocations and the introduction of a 'resource hub'. We have only just begun to change the culture. However, we have already seen the following:

- Many of the church communities are more actively mission focused, exploring further forms of community engagement with four regular, seasonal or pop-up community cafes starting in the last 3-4 years.
- In the last 4 years the number of worshipping communities has risen from 11 to a network of 15 or 16 (depending on how we count them) as we have become more intentional in growing different forms of church.
- The networks of those in different worshipping communities who know each other are slowly growing. It is becoming increasingly possible to gather people with common interests and callings across communities for mutual support and learning. For example, we run a termly gathering for contemplative prayer drawing from multiple parishes called 'Sacred Space'.

This is not without its challenges:

- Though it is growing all the time, only a small proportion of people in each parish church 'get' the idea of working as a network. This is inevitable when the previous culture around being a village church is deeply embedded.
- Our Team Pioneer Curate has recently moved on so we need to find another way to keep this degree of focus on speaking about and modelling mission. One day being pioneering and missional will be embedded in the culture but, until we get to that point, an intentional focus of specialist hours keeps us moving in that direction.
- When there is a vacancy, recruitment of clergy who can easily fit into this trajectory of culture change is vital. The wrong appointment could cause the whole team to go backwards or to pause while the new person 'catches up'. Recruitment has worked well so far but this is a risk for the future.
- It is easy to do something for a while and then forget to reinforce it sufficiently for it to make a lasting impact as other things distract. This problem can also arise where one or two members of the team set something up but others in the team are less committed to making it happen.

Remember:

- Little and often, and often repeated, is the best policy for culture change.
- Bringing in someone new, such as a pioneer, is a good way of disturbing the existing system and precipitating change, but this can be risky; so make sure you have the right person in mind.
- Be in it for the long haul – culture change takes a long time.

More detail – creating a network of worshipping communities

In the last 4 years, as we have become more intentional in growing different forms of church, the number of our worshipping communities has risen from 11 to a network of 15 or 16 (depending on how we count them). Eleven of these meet in the ancient parish churches; their long history means that each is shaped by its village context. The twelfth is a loose youth community, across villages. The others, currently, are a weekly toddler church, a weekend Messy Church and a monthly seniors ‘tea and prayer’. Each is locally run and engages its context, and is supported from the centre.

The 11 parishes have active worshipping communities associated with each of the parish churches – nine of these meet every Sunday morning and the other two alternate their morning service, with a sprinkling of early services, too. There is a Team Rector and two Team Vicars.

Starting points

We came at this from three directions. Firstly, how do we make the work of our new multi-parish benefice more sustainable? Secondly, how do we become more missional? And thirdly, what gifts do we already have in these village church communities?

The first of these questions came from the reality that multi-parish benefices are often treated merely as a series of parishes now bolted together but still trying to do what they have always done in the way they have always done it, with increasing amounts of desperation and burnout amongst the clergy. The ‘minster model’ (e.g. Nick Spencer’s *Parochial Vision*) was a valuable attempt to break free from this mould and work with a different, more sustainable, structure. However, that model only works where there is a potential ‘minister’ church. The collection of villages in a multi-parish benefice may not naturally fit this model, as was the case for us.

The second question arose from the statement in the Ely diocesan strategy: ‘An equal number of Fresh Expressions and traditional forms of church by 2025’. So, we found ourselves asking these supplementary questions: How do we hold together the different realities of traditional and new forms of church in a multi-parish context? Can we make space for the innovative whilst continuing the best of parish ministry? How can we affirm

the reach of our parish churches alongside reaching beyond them? So, as well as looking for an organisational structure that would be more sustainable in terms of ministers' workloads, we recognised that organisational structure can support or inhibit creativity. The longevity of the parish structure, and the expectations of what a parish church should be and do, exert a strong gravitational pull which can stifle innovation. We were looking for something that retained the best of what we inherited but enabled new things to emerge more freely.

The last question made us recognise that village churches, at their best, are good at being a community, and are well-embedded in their mission field, i.e. their village. In addition, they are typically relatively small communities.

Networks

Early on, we recognised that a network is a nimble and flexible organisational structure, which allows separate, small and, to a degree, diverse entities to co-operate without creating a hierarchy. The phrase 'network of friends' captures this use of the term. Our thinking was drawn from various business studies including Arie de Geus' *The Living Company*, the work of Peter Senge and, more recently, Satya Nadella's *Hit Refresh: The Quest to rediscover Microsoft's Soul and imagine a better future for everyone*.

Alongside this management science, we explored the example of the early church in Acts as a network of, for the most part, small communities of Christians who gathered in their particular place to learn and worship together, and who shared resources – people, teaching letters, finance – for shared benefit.

From this idea we developed the principle that 'the Team is a network of worshipping communities each rooted in its local context'.

Missional communities

Taking this a step further, we considered the work of Bob Hopkins and Mike Breen in *Clusters: creative mid-sized missional communities*, in which the authors advocate breaking large churches down into locally run missional communities (15-60 people), small enough to become well embedded into their local context but connected together so that they can be supported from the centre with resources, administration and growing leadership. A missional community has four dimensions:

- UP – a growing relationship with God
- IN – social and pastoral links with itself
- OUT – a missional focus beyond itself
- ACROSS – membership of a resourcing and support network

The rural multi-parish benefice has multiple ready-formed worshipping communities of this size, already embedded in their village context. They are also already connected, as a minimum, by sharing clergy. There are large urban churches spending time and energy to create a structure that we already have in the villages. But these rural worshipping communities are often without the supported local leadership, the shared resources and the missional focus.

Adding this thinking to our model of a network of worshipping communities gave us two additional things:

- We developed the idea of a light centre, so that support and resource are spun out to the 'mission edges' that are occupied by the various worshipping communities and where resources are contextualised and delivered. We are resisting the temptation to draw resource into the centre or to centralise things around the clergy. We use the principle 'central support, local subsidiarity'.
- We can add more worshipping communities to the network as they emerge, in addition to the 11 communities that worship in ancient parish church buildings. These new communities or fresh expressions of church can therefore relate to different groups of people, different geographies and different networks than the traditional parishes. The ease with which this can be done enables experimentation without raising the stakes too high.

Adding more detail to the model

Each worshipping community has a 'lead minister', who can be lay or ordained, paid or voluntary, and can be shared with another community. Each lead minister is developing a 'local team' for that worshipping community, though exactly what that looks like depends on the context. Decision making and finances operate at PCC level or at community level (where there is no PCC).

The lead ministers, with one or two others in key roles, make up the 'core team' which meets together weekly. A Team Council (representing key stakeholders and meeting three times a year) acts as a Council of Reference for the core team and oversees projects that provide support to the worshipping communities. This core team and the Team Council constitute the 'centre'.

We have increased our missional focus by welcoming a pioneer curate as part of the core team for the last two years who has provided role modelling and coaching to a number of the worshipping communities (both traditional and new).

What has happened as a result?

Our vision is of a blended network of worshipping communities, where each parish-based church is a small but confident community of Jesus' disciples engaged in its particular village mission field, with local ministers doing the basics well. Alongside these we are pioneering and experimenting, so that we have least one new congregation or worshipping community in each parish.

Impacts

This organisational model supports this vision and is part of a long-term project of culture change. We have seen the following impacts:

- Many of the church communities are actively exploring further forms of community engagement with four regular, seasonal or pop-up community cafés starting in the last three to four years. We are seeing the fruit of this investment in building reputation and networks as we sow the seeds of new congregations.
- We have increased the number of LLMs [Licensed Lay Ministers – Readers] and ALMs [Authorised Lay Ministers] and in most though not all parishes churches, clergy are working with small local teams of LLMs, SSMs and clergy with PTO. 'Usual Sunday Attendance' in Lordsbridge has risen by 3.6% from 2013 to 2016 against a backdrop of a decrease of 4.2% over the same period in rural churches in the diocese as a whole.³
- In the last 4 years the number of worshipping communities has risen from 11 to a network of 15 or 16 (depending on how we count them) as we have become more intentional in growing different forms of church. To date, these include a weekly weekday toddler church, an embryonic missional community meeting weekly in a café, a monthly Sunday morning Messy Church reaching beyond the normal congregation, a monthly Sunday afternoon children's church, and a monthly community for seniors based around tea and prayers. There is room and there are ideas for more.
- Centrally run projects that support the worshipping communities include weddings administration, youth work coordination, regular gatherings to encourage different ways of praying, a school of theology, a bi-monthly newsletter to share stories, a process of checking and sharing to make sure we have ministers in Sunday services, and a growing bank of downloadable service sheets. We have recently been awarded a grant to develop a 'resource hub' to increase our administrative capacity to better support our missional vision.

³ Statistics for Mission 2013 and 2016.

This is not without its challenges:

- Not everyone (including some ministers) understands this paradigm shift and some are keen for their vicar to lead with parish-based programmes rather than grow mission-orientated, locally-led projects and communities.
- Some existing ministers (lay and ordained) are reluctant to embrace the more team-based ways of working.
- The new worshipping communities are fragile and an earlier one has now 'closed' as people have moved on, though a number of things have been learned from the experience.
- There is still work to be done on lightening the load of legal and practical responsibilities held by the parish church based communities, particularly the smaller ones. Much of this is outside of our control.
- We need to grow more lay leaders and ministry team members equipped to lead mission projects. We have more ideas and opportunities than people to work with them.
- This structural change is part of a broader cultural change. It will take time!

Applying this approach elsewhere

- Make sure that this model of a network of worshipping communities fits your context.
- Change the way you describe the team or benefice and find ways of symbolically and literally reinforcing the new description. Keep stating and restating the model and vision in different ways.
- Create a 'light centre' and work out what it can do first to support your worshipping communities to demonstrate the concept; but don't mandate the use of centrally created resources, offer an opt-in.
- Find a way to increase the focus on mission – this may need to be a dedicated resource since all the existing ministers may well be fully stretched on 'business as usual' activities, at least until a new way of doing things fully emerges.
- Grow local shared leadership and shared ministry in every way you can, regularly ask broad vocational questions, consider yourself a 'training benefice'.
- Think about how to provide administrative support centrally for economies of scale.
- Be in it for the long haul – culture change takes a long time.

5. Local learning communities for discipleship and evangelism

Barry Dugmore, Diocesan Mission Enabler, Diocese of Exeter

Mission Sheds

Exeter Diocese Local Mission Resource Hubs (Mission Sheds) aim to support local churches in living out the diocesan vision of growing in prayer, making new disciples and serving the people of Devon with joy.

Mission Sheds are locally based and gather three to four times each year (usually for 2 hours in an evening or Saturday morning) and have been running for two years. Once a year we host a day event called Mission Shed Central with key note speakers and a practical seminar/workshop stream.

Three hubs are in rural contexts. We aim to provide, facilitate and grow local learning communities for lay or ordained leaders and teams. Through the Mission Sheds we aim to help people to grow in confidence as part of church communities or teams involved with faith sharing, starting a new congregation, exploring whole life discipleship, or starting a fresh expression of church. Through the network we also aim to offer consultancy and peer mentoring.

The core aims are to:

- Share good practice in growing church renewed-expressions of inherited church or fresh expressions of church.
- Encourage the initiation of new and growth of existing fresh expressions of church.
- Provide a learning community where pioneers, incumbents, lay practitioners and lay teams seeking to become more pioneering can learn from each other, be assisted, and energised for mission and growth.
- To provide or identify resource partnerships for those hoping to trial a fresh expression of church or re-expression of inherited church that shows potential for growth.
- Enable intentional learning together, prayer, church planting, discipleship, evangelism, etc.
- Accompany, travel alongside and with others seeking to develop and grow church.

A key aspect of Mission Sheds is that training and resourcing is delivered at the local level rather than hosting centralised courses and events. The learning agenda is shaped by the local context and team, in addition to a menu of topics from the mission enabler.

What have we learnt?

Lay leadership – we are reflecting our vision for collaborative ministry by ensuring that we have a coordination team for each Mission Shed of lay and ordained people. This is well received by those who come along to Mission Shed gatherings.

There is a wide variation of understanding of what it means to be a mission-shaped church. Many lay people who attend Mission Sheds are finding that obstacles to outreach and mission are not entirely due to building related issues. They also stem from long term lack of vision for growing disciples from clergy and a resistance to change from people who hold positions of power and influence in the local church. There is huge work to be done in re-enabling or re-engaging the church for local mission, especially given the older demographic in many rural church congregations. That said, we are discovering places where people are growing as disciples, who are willing to help others catch a new vision in rural communities, and who are becoming key people across rural networks.

The word evangelism casts fear into the hearts of many! Using different descriptions and inviting facilitators from different contexts is helping rural churches to see that some of the ministry that they are already engaged in and are good at, is part of being evangelistic.

The culture of hospitality, encouragement and empowerment is especially welcomed and with regular opportunities for sharing learning and experience, informal networks are starting to develop across parochial boundaries.

Given the isolation that rural churches often experience, people enjoy meeting up with a common purpose and are finding the interaction develops their way of thinking about new ideas or develops their thinking on how to start new things in church.

Creating a common or shared vision with the wider team takes time. Developing an agreed learning agenda with the Mission Shed leaders has helped improve this. Drawing in expertise from wider experience is helping to provide high quality and relevant input, exposing people to new ideas and stories of experiences of others in similar contexts.

We have now hosted two Mission Shed Central events (whole day events on a Saturday) with key note speakers and a seminar stream, and have had good attendance (around 100 at each event) with a mix of clergy, lay and across different traditions. Seminar streams are led by lay and ordained speakers from different contexts and traditions, and from those developing inherited or fresh expressions of church.

Building awareness is taking longer than anticipated. We are working hard on raising awareness and getting wider engagement across rural communities to participate in Mission Sheds. The busyness of local church leaders often means that their attendance is not as wide spread as we would like. As a result, publicity and information is not always communicated to the whole mission community (group of churches). We know there are many more people who would find Mission Shed a great resource and encouragement but do not get to hear about it. With this in mind we are looking at ways of improving communications with hard-to-reach congregations.

6. Buildings as resources

Marian Carson, Growing the Rural Church Project Manager, Diocese of Exeter

The Growing the Rural Church project (GtRC) is funded to provide support to 100 rural churches between 2017 and 2023. We work with rural Mission Communities to develop their resources to enable them to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy. We do this by supporting rural Mission Communities to partner with their local communities and external agencies to find sustainable missional, community, commercial or cultural uses for their church buildings, which benefit the whole community. When we do this, we ensure that the public spaces offered by our rural church buildings, both for worship and extended use, are sustainably managed and remain open and available for regular worship. Relationships between our rural churches and their local communities are strengthened, and more people are drawn into the life of our rural Mission Communities.

The identification of churches which could benefit from the project's support is part of the ongoing process of mission action planning in our rural mission communities (groups of churches). With support from the Mission and Ministry Development team, mission communities produce and regularly review a Mission Action Plan, which focuses on the three strands of the diocesan vision to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy. How each mission community expresses itself in each strand is often influenced by the context of their church buildings. Essentially, the mission community asks:

'If we want to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy, then how do we use our church buildings to support our activities?'

Where a rural church building emerges as a resource to be developed, a challenge to be surmounted or something needing creative thinking, then the GtRC is invited to offer the mission community support.

GtRC's Approach

GtRC's engagement with a mission community usually starts during mission action planning conversations. The GtRC team will then usually meet with PCC and congregation members in preparation for supporting them to consult with their community about the church building. Consultations are tailored to the local context and can involve public meetings, questionnaires, and attendance at events and festivals. The outcome of a consultation varies according to the context, but it is always GtRC's aim to ensure a wider cross section of the community is drawn into the conversation and the life of the rural church building going forward.

GtRC's Learning So Far

Reflecting on GtRC's experience of engaging with rural communities so far, two things stand out. The first is that people are passionate about heritage buildings, which in the case of rural communities, is usually their local church. For many people, the church building is 'their' church, a symbol of their village or community identity and should be open and available to them, however often they chose to engage with it. The second is that, to rural worshipping communities, their church building does often feel more of a burden than a blessing. Too often, in the last year, have we heard that 'dealing' with the building takes our rural mission communities away from their desire to be 'church' as the people of God in their communities.

Through our projects so far, we are seeing glimpses of what can happen when conversations are facilitated between people with one or both of these passions in local communities. Step by step we are seeing more churches reclaiming their role at the centre of their communities, as a place of worship, as a piece of heritage, as somewhere that meets community needs. This develops when worshipping and non-worshipping members of communities are coming together to ask two questions: 'what does our community need?' and, 'how might our church, as people and a building meet that need?' Even more crucially, what happens as a result of those questions seems to be successful where a real church-community partnership emerges, rather than the worshipping community taking yet more on and adding to their 'to do' list.

Over the last 18 months, we have learned that this approach takes time, more time than perhaps the GtRC team initially anticipated and we now understand that from initial engagement to a sustainable plan is at least a 12 to 18 month process. The other thing we have learned is that our supportive relationship with rural churches and their local communities doesn't end when a sustainable plan has emerged and initially implemented. We are regularly called upon for ongoing advice and troubleshooting, which has implications for our resourcing. Going forward, we will therefore plan in more capacity both during project delivery and ongoing monitoring phases.

Here are three examples of GtRC's work in practice.

St Mary Magdalene, Huntshaw with Devon Communities Together

St Mary Magdalene in Huntshaw is in the Two Rivers Mission Community, north Devon. With only one Sunday service a month and a PCC of three people they were considering whether they might have to close. They asked GtRC to support them to talk to their community about the future of the church.

In partnership with Devon Communities Together, GtRC ran a community consultation event. From this event several people have come forward and offered their support to set up a Friends Group which will take on the responsibility of caring for the church building.

Through being given the opportunity to talk with the PCC, local families have also been able to become involved in shaping the worship and new family services are now planned alongside the existing monthly traditional service. The Friends Group are planning a programme of fund raising activities which they hope will place the church building back at the heart of the village community.

All Saints, North Molton: Developing a Community Enterprise with Stir to Action

North Molton is a large village situated just below the Exmoor National Park. Very active in their community, the church was already in process of applying for funding to conserve the tower of their Grade 1 listed building, as well as to provide modern facilities and flexible space for community use, when GtRC met them in Spring 2017.

GtRC matched All Saints with Stir to Action. Funded by the Friend's Provident Foundation, Stir to Action is a consultancy specialising in supporting communities to develop enterprise initiatives in church buildings, run in partnership with and benefitting the whole community. The community of North Molton are exploring the development of a community enterprise together. There are lots of ideas: a cinema, a business hub, a community energy company, a café... Once the community have identified what they would like to develop, Stir to Action will work with a project group to establish this.

The project at All Saints will take a number of years to complete. However, they have already identified the clear objectives they want to achieve. As well as conserving the heritage and improving how people learn about it, local residents will have gained skills and established an enterprise benefitting the local community, links with schools will be strengthened and the church building will become a hub within the village community.

Shirwell Mission Community: Stories on the Street with Mosaic Creative

Shirwell Mission Community is made up of seven rural parishes which cover 50 square miles northeast of Barnstaple.

The Rector, the Revd Rosie Austin, accompanied the Bishop of Exeter on his 2016 visit to our link diocese of Thikka, Kenya. There they saw the amazing fruits of a Tearfund partnership called Church and Community Mobilisation (CCMP). Rural churches in Thikka are encouraged to consider and trust that God has given them all they need to be a flourishing Christian presence in their communities.

GtRC and Shirwell Mission Community are partnering with Mosaic Creative, a Christian training organisation, and the Mother's Union, to pilot a UK version of CCMP: Stories in the Street. Representatives from all of Shirwell's churches are meeting for four workshop days, and through reflective and dramatised Bible studies and community mapping, they are

exploring how God is calling them to bless their communities with the resources they already have.

Shirwell Mission Community want the whole of their community to feel the church belongs to them. The church has already organised a Christmas meal for the whole community, where they hoped for 20 people and ended up with 60, including a large group of children who were very excited when Santa turned up! Having completed community maps of each village, they now have many plans for future opportunities for their wider village communities.

7. Developing specialisms to draw communities and parishes together

Nick Munday, Rector, Lafford South, and Developing Discipleship Advisor, Diocese of Lincoln

The parish of South Lafford has 11 rural churches, all beautiful listed buildings, and became a united benefice 40 years ago, but people are just beginning to get used to it. They are small villages with populations ranging from 650 to 5; some people commute to Sleaford, Bourne, Grantham (and from Grantham to London Kings Cross); quite a lot of retired people as homes are cheap; farming is mainly arable.

Using the individual characteristics and space (or lack of it) in each church building and the gifts of particular villagers to develop specialisms for different churches in the group. This is coupled with encouraging people to travel to churches outside their village, with the hosting church offering hospitality, welcome and Christian fellowship. This helps small communities to feel less isolated and part of the wider parish. It also allows people to worship together in larger groups. Some of the ideas have sprung from patronal festivals. There is nothing terribly original about any of these ideas – it is the variety on offer within the multi-church parish which is noteworthy and the load is shared.

It all started with the Lady Chapel at Newton, which is ideal for quiet small-group meditation. We developed a ‘Prayer and a Pint’ session – half an hour silent prayer followed by as long as you want in the Red Lion down the road. Ideal for 6.30pm on a Friday night, as Newton is something of a commuter village. We tried it at Folkingham but it didn’t work at all!

Scott Willoughby (population 5) has the smallest open church in Lincolnshire, a little gem. No water or electricity, so we use it particularly for candlelit services, especially Candlemas, when we bless a candle for each of the 11 churches of the parish.

The South Lafford Choir travels round the parish for the weekly Parish Eucharist, but rehearses and has a regular Choral Evensong in Folkingham.

St Nicholas’ Church, Walcot starts our Christmas season each year with a ‘Santa Service’ on the Sunday nearest 6 December. We have a children’s play featuring children from round the parish and there are usually presents. There is a large area at the back for toddlers to play. Walcot is a small village, but this service has proved a popular attraction – a bit different from the normal carol service (of which there are plenty round the parish). For the last couple of years, a village lunch in a local pub has been arranged which coincides with the service.

I inherited a very successful ‘Pimms and Pâté’ celebration after the main All Saints Day service at the Church of St Mary and All Saints, Swarby. Here the hospitality is always so good that it has become traditional in this church for the wake after funerals to be held in

the church. We also do a pancake day race (children and adults) around the church on the Sunday before Lent.

St Denys' Church, Aswarby has a link with Australia. George Bass, the explorer who discovered the straits between the mainland and Tasmania, was born and baptised here; and his father's tomb is in the churchyard. As a result, our local school, Osbournby Primary has developed a link with Bass Primary in Victoria. This has been helpful in getting us a Heritage Lottery Grant of nearly £250,000 for the repair of the spire.

St Thomas of Canterbury, Aunsby has a children's Remembrance Day service – we plant some beautiful home-made poppies in the churchyard. St Lucia's, Dembleby, celebrates St Lucia's Day with a procession. St Peter and St Paul's Church, Osbournby, has a regular and moving Healing Eucharist. St Peter ad Vincula, Threkingham, is planning an informal café church in the large space at the back of the church. The wall paintings in St Andrew's, Pickworth, has led to a strong historical focus.

These ideas have helped develop the confidence of individual villagers and a sense that they are contributing to the whole parish. Small villages have an opportunity to have a service with a large parish-wide congregation, with good music and singing. A good sense of fellowship has resulted. Occasional church-goers have been encouraged. And we have had a lot of fun, as well as some deep spiritual experiences.

The best ideas are ones that have come from the villagers themselves – they know what they can do best, and the special interests of the locals.

8. *Orison* prayer

Sue Rodd, Team Vicar Whitton Team Benefice, Diocese of Salisbury

The Whitton Team comprises six villages within easy reach of several towns in Wiltshire, with four schools – three of which are Voluntary Aided.

The idea for the initiative was to provide an immersive experience of different ways to pray, using sensory, tactile and contemplative aids. Entitled *Orison* – an old word for prayer – we took over a fairly large church for a week, and set up a series of prayer stations. We made use of everything we had to hand, including gazebos, screens and imaginative lighting to help separate out the different experiences of prayer. The primary audience was older primary school children, but we noticed that the adults that came too also participated deeply. Local congregation members and clergy acted as guides and supporters, as well as providing a shuttle transport service from the schools to the church. It was an intensely moving experience for many and a great way of helping children and adults pray and experience a wider variety of ways to pray.⁴

⁴ Prayer Spaces in Schools has a wide range of resources to help support similar initiatives: www.prayerspacesinschools.com

9. Making use of location, gifts and inspiration

**Candice Marcus, Team Vicar Whitton Team, Mission and Development Officer
Marlborough Deanery, Diocese of Salisbury**

Marlborough Deanery is a combination of small Wiltshire villages and the medium-sized town of Marlborough. In December 2017 the deanery got together in the village of Aldbourne to tell the real story of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The living nativity was intended to be an interactive way of conveying the true meaning of Christmas, speaking something of the reality of the circumstances in which it happened and putting the commercialization of Christmas in its right place. We wanted people to be part of the journey, to be able to ask questions, listen, look, smell and experience the story – bringing it to life in a memorable way. In the dark, they followed the star to four scenes of the nativity around the village green.

- The Annunciation and the prophets in the Memorial Hall
- The angels and shepherds on the west part of the green
- Herod and the Kings in St Michael's Church
- The Nativity with Mary, Joseph and Jesus, on the east side of the Green in a marquee

Over 300 people attended, and each scene ended with the opportunity for the audience to ask questions of the actors portraying each character. Programmes were available that contained the Christmas story and questions to think about and discuss at home. The whole event was fuelled by prayer along with the involvement of the whole community and very careful planning.

For a comprehensive write up of how this event was put on, including logistics, insurance and management of people, see this document's annexe: **'Telling the real story of Christmas'**.

Annexe to Learning from Creative Thinking and Planning for Rural Mission and Growth

Telling the real story of Christmas

**Candice Marcus, Team Vicar Whitton Team, Mission and Development Officer
Marlborough Deanery, Diocese of Salisbury**

Follow the Star: A Living Nativity

Candice Marcus, Team Vicar Whitton Team, Mission and Development Officer Marlborough Deanery, Diocese of Salisbury

The deanery is a combination of small rural Wiltshire villages and one medium sized town, Marlborough. It combines farming, horse racing stables, commuters for London, Bristol, Bath, Swindon and Reading and local businesses including pubs, hairdressers, doctors etc.

This was an interactive way of conveying the true meaning of Christmas, speaking something of the reality of the circumstances in which it happened and putting the commercialization of Christmas in its right place. We wanted people to be part of the journey, to be able to ask questions, listen, look, smell and experience the story bringing it to life in a memorable way. In the dark they followed the star to four scenes of the nativity.

Planning

The event was intended to be a faithful re-enactment of the nativity story produced to a professional standard via a series of four evolving tableaux around the small and picturesque Wiltshire village of Aldbourne, centred on the green. We also wanted to give the audience the opportunity to ask questions of the cast at each venue.

There were five, ticketed, staggered but concurrent cycles of performances beginning at 3.30pm and ending at about 6.30pm. With sunset being at 4.00pm, most of the performances and moving between scenes took place after dark. Tickets were free with donations to two children's charities, and a professionally produced programme.

Planning began in November 2016, 13 months prior to the performance, with one representative from each benefice in the deanery, including from the local Methodist circuit. Meeting initially monthly to write the script and, closer to the event, weekly. We sought advice from others who had held similar events and after drawing up an initial budget, we began to apply for funding. We applied to Tesco Bags of Help (www.groundwork.org.uk), Co-Op (<https://mycommunity.org.uk>), and the Jerusalem Trust. The list on the www.parishresources.org.uk website was very helpful. We applied to and received a significant grant (just under two thirds of all funds raised) from the Salisbury Diocesan Mission Fund.

As part of our funding applications we produced a PowerPoint presentation including a timeline and checklist for the countdown to the event. In the end, this evolved into a valuable planning and communications tool containing useful maps showing the layout of parking, performance venues, First Aid etc.

Each benefice took responsibility for one scene in its entirety including costumes, props etc. As hosts, Whitton provided sound and lighting for all scenes:

1. The Annunciation and the Prophets in the Memorial Hall (Ridgeway benefice)
2. The Angels and Shepherds on the west part of the Green (Marlborough benefice)
3. Herod and the Wise Men in St Michael's Church (Upper Kennet benefice)
4. The Nativity with Mary, Joseph and Jesus, on the east side of the Green in a marquee (Whitton benefice).

Logistics

We had to consider how many people might visit and take part in the Living Nativity, in the end we had over 300 people. We had contingency plans in place if much larger numbers arrived, as had happened with a local passion play. Contingency planning also included chains of command and decision-making, including what criteria would trigger event closure and/or evacuation (e.g. a village-wide power-cut or major incident) and who would be responsible making such a decision.

1. At the advice of the Police we contacted the County Council who co-ordinate such events with all interested agencies (of which the Police are one), including the emergency services and highways. They also provided invaluable advice about statutory requirements and recommendations for public events.
2. We contacted the Parish Council to get their permission to perform the event on Parish Council land. We attended a Council meeting to explain the event and discuss our needs for overflow parking and traffic management as well as use of the Village Green and the area around the Village Pond.
3. We sought advice from the local Carnival Committee who run the annual Aldbourne Carnival and from the village Emergency Response Team. We discovered that one of the most important factors in staging a successful event was developing successful relationship with the wider community rather than just keeping it within the church. These we fostered and grew.
4. Statutory requirements for public events include the designation of two responsible persons the Event Organiser and a deputy (the Event Manager) whose contact details needed clear communication to all. A further requirement is for unrestricted emergency service access along predefined and cleared 'Blue Routes' through the event site before, throughout and after the event. This had to be clearly and widely communicated to marshals and the public (especially residents). Other issues included insurances, health and safety (including a risk assessment), safeguarding, first aid, parking, disabled access and parking, programmes, ticketing, publicity, fund raising, refreshments, and signage

(both site and directional), correct fire safety extinguishers (for the three marquees). We also needed to create Policy Documents as well as Briefing Documents and handy quick reference summaries for a variety of these issues.

5. We needed to manage traffic and people flow during the event in the village. We walked and timed the routes using a partially able person to give realistic timings. Then we engaged with our adviser from the Carnival Committee regarding possible problem points and what we needed to pay attention to.
6. We communicated with those living around the main performance areas by putting a letter through their doors and informing them of our plans and how it might affect them, explaining Blue Routes, apologising for any disruption and asking for their co-operation and forbearance. We included our contact numbers for questions or worries so they felt reassured we would take them into account.
7. We recruited approximately 30 marshals [in florescent jackets] to guide the public.
8. We provided a marquee for first aid, lost children and tickets. We created a safe area in the lost and found tent, staffed by DBS checked volunteers. This was at the centre of the village but away from the scenes themselves. We had a box office team.
9. We hired suitably powerful two-way radios for every point we thought necessary with a central base station in the event control area so communication flowed and we were kept up to date with the numbers at each session and where each guided group was going.
10. We ensured that we bought in lighting and tape to make sure all paths and potential hazards were visible.
11. Each marshal and team leader was supplied with a checklist of names and phone numbers for who was going to be where at what time.
12. We organised a series of briefing meetings for all the volunteers and especially the marshals where we explained their duties and our expectations of them. We provided them with a list of their duties and what to do in case of an emergency.
13. We organised a back-up generator in case of power cuts as well as battery-operated emergency lights at each venue.
14. Weather-proof lighting had to be sourced and supplied for the car park entrance and church. Rechargeable, battery-powered LED site floodlights worked really well and lasted quite well.
15. We hired four portaloos including one disabled one to supplement the village's limited public provision.
16. St John Ambulance supplied valuable advice and two first aiders.
17. We organised a litter pick the morning after the event (with equipment and rubbish bags freely borrowed from the County Council) for the morning after the event.

Personnel

1. We had a central team of nine including the Event Organiser (in overall charge) and the Event Manager (second in command). They met regularly with two others, the

Performance Manager and the Event Support Manager. We identified major task groups and appointed Team Leaders to lead each one e.g. site set-up and break down, parking and overflow management, box office etc..

2. We had some 30 marshals at road crossings, car parks and various points where the public needed guidance or monitoring, including each performance venue. Marshals were supplied with official name badges, fluorescent jackets (all same colour), torches and a two-way radio for each location. The Event Organiser and the Event (or Logistics) Manager had differently coloured jackets to rapidly distinguish them in an emergency. They were also supplied with 2-way radios, as were the Team Leaders.
3. We organised someone to create the signage and erect it and take it down.
4. As our car parks were on the outskirts of the village, we were lent a mini bus and driver which operated a Park & Ride scheme.
5. The Event Control kept the incident log and the volunteer marshal duty log and was in charge of the radio communication base station for the event.
6. We ensured a recognisable cleric was at every scene in case the questions got difficult, as it was the actors who were providing the answers.
7. We hired and bought in some of the technical things we needed for lighting and sound and it was important that it was centrally controlled.

Advertising

We advertised in all the local church and village/town magazines. We produced banners to go to each village and two in the town. We produced a professionally designed and printed programme, selling some advertising space in it. There was a good guide about each scene and venue, with a double-page location map in the centre of what was where and we charged £1 for it.

Insurance

We organised the event to be under St Michael's Church (Aldbourn) umbrella for insurance, having first fully and openly liaised with the insurers regarding our requirements. Also, we had an Emergency Plan and procedure in place in case of a major incident.

Food and Catering

We liaised with local providers: two pubs, a cafe and a take away to provide food to be purchased by those attending. We also organised for a mobile coffee/tea unit to come. The Forge a working blacksmith, provided mince pies, mulled wine and drinks. The Scouts had a barbeque too.

We provided a place where the cast and crew could find refreshments including drinks, sandwiches and rest during the event when they weren't needed and afterwards. We organised someone with flasks of Hot Chocolate to visit far-flung marshals!

Carparking

We identified and signed three sites (including two overflow areas) where people could park, and the Parish Council agreed to the use of a recreation field and a couple of farmers agreed to the use of their large hard standing area. We had printed, as part of the signage, displayed in the car parks and at the Box Office, a large version of the map from the programme.

Timetable for the actual event

We had a rolling staggered timetable for each scene

	<i>Memorial Hall</i> Annunciation & Wise Men Ridgeway	<i>West side of</i> <i>Green</i> Shepherds & Angels singing Marlborough	<i>St. Michael's</i> Herod & Wise Men Upper Kennet	<i>East side of Green</i> Marquee with Stable <i>South side of Green</i> Whitton
15.30	1			
15.50	2	1		
16.10	3	2	1	
16.30	4	3	2	1
16.50	5	4	3	2
17.10		5	4	3
17.30			5	4
17.50				5
18.10				

Difficulties that occurred

- The time of year for an outdoor event! The weather was cold (but it stayed dry) and it got dark early.
- We needed an area near the marquee for first aid, lost children and box office so we could site the toilets nearby. Keeping it clear of parked cars was not easy.

- Organising the rota for 30 marshals, (many of whom were only be available at specific times) was a major headache, solved only by the brilliance and diplomacy of the volunteer marshal manager (with not a little prayer).
- We discovered on the morning of the event, that the Hunt was in the village that day and they had almost filled the hard standing designated for our parking with horse boxes, trailers and cars.

What might we do differently

1. We would appointment someone sooner on the logistics front and would have a better understanding of all that goes on to put on a large event such as the one we did.
2. We would appoint a photographer to record the event – we found ourselves with very few!
3. We would advertise more and much more widely. With hindsight, we should have appointed (and would have benefited enormously from) a dedicated publicity / marketing manager with overall control of this crucial area and begun an organised, systematic campaign including social media much earlier than we did.
4. We set up a page on Facebook with a JustGiving crowdfunding link when we thought we were not going to have enough funds, but we should have done that much sooner raising both awareness and funds.
5. We would organise the marshal briefing sessions to be a month or so ahead of the event and handed out less paper to them. Although marshals needed to know policy and procedure, they did not need those full docs, a better thought-through quick reference guide would have been sufficient and more easily digested.
6. Budgeting was collective. A single finance / procurement manager (in conjunction with a fundraising manager) would make more sense. We raised almost £3,500 and, although a surplus was not expected, we were able to give away just over £200.
7. We might have shaved £500 off our spend with more careful and less hurried procurement.

What worked well

- Prayer! Soaking the entire event in prayer helped prevent any catastrophe, ensured the first aiders were really bored, the Hunt was cleaned up really well afterwards and that all went really well with God graciously covering all our shortcomings!
- Prayer also helped with 'ask and it will be given to you...' in so many cases, including the weather!
- Getting the whole village community involved was a major step forward. We could not have managed without them and their willingness to help.
- Having two babies playing Jesus to do alternate performances and using sleeping bags to keep them warm in between was sensible.
- Battery powered LED-illuminated stars for the guiding angels to carry like tour guides worked really well, especially after dark.

- Laminated A4 quick reference guides including event and blue route map, emergency procedures, mobile contacts, radio call signs, etc. for the marshals and other volunteers.
- An equipment check and sign out list meant we could (mostly) identify who had what and when (essential for both borrowed and expensive equipment like two-way radios).
- An Asset Register of all stuff enabled most to be tracked throughout the Deanery.
- We organised a series of “thank you” cards (featuring the picture below) and bottles of wine for those we felt had gone above and beyond in their helpfulness – of whom there were many!

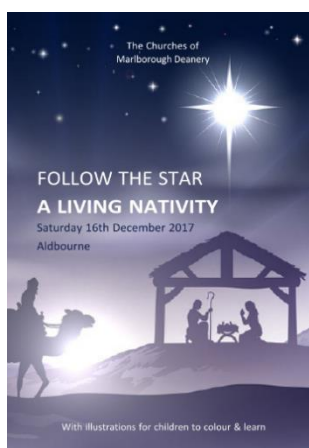
What has happened as a result?

Over 300 people came and there have been requests to do it again. The relationships between the church and the community grew and the working together to achieve something spectacular was wonderful. Those who came went away with a programme that contained the story and questions to think about and discuss.

What important points you would want others to know in order to adopt this idea?

It is a big undertaking but it was a wonderful way to tell the story of Christmas to those who know and those who don't, to those who have forgotten the reason for the season.

Programme (an extract from it)



Scene Two – On the Green

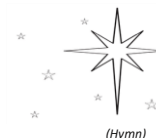
THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS

And so Jesus is born in a stable in Bethlehem. Now we hear of some shepherds, living in the hills outside Bethlehem, who were guarding their sheep during the night. Suddenly a bright light appears and they are terrified, but then they see an angel who has been sent by God to tell them about the birth of a special baby, a Saviour - the promised Messiah who will save all people from the wrong, stupid things we all do.

The sky is full of light and there are many angels singing and praising God. Can you imagine what that must have been like for the shepherds, and the sheep! The Shepherds decide they must go to Bethlehem to see this special child for themselves.

Questions you may like to ask the actors:

- 1 Who told the Shepherds that Mary had given birth to the baby Jesus?
- 2 How do you think the Shepherds felt when angels filled the sky singing beautiful songs?
(You could go and ask one of them or come up with your own answer).
- 3 Where did the Shepherds go when they heard the news that a special new baby had been born?



(Hymn)

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,
an angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.

“Fear not,” said he for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind
“glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind.

“To you, in David’s town, this day is born of David’s line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord; and this shall be the sign:
“The heavenly babe you there shall find to human view displayed,
all simply wrapped in swaddling clothes and in a manger laid.”

Thus spoke the angel. Suddenly appeared a shining throng of angels praising God, who thus addressed their joyful song:
“All glory be to God on high, and to the earth be peace; to those on Whom his favour rests goodwill shall never cease.”



Shepherds and Kings come to the Manger

