

Lechlade APCM 2018 Presentation

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Talk

Intro

The Church is never just about who gathers in a particular building for an hour or so on a Sunday. It's always been more than that. Let's remind ourselves of the very first description of the church, from Read: Acts 2:42-47 (NLT): "42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. . . . 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved."

We see quite a lot of this happening amongst us here. Though wouldn't it be wonderful to know God adding to our fellowship weekly those who were being saved? That should drive us to prayer.

As we heard earlier, it's Education Sunday, and that helps us think that part of our work in the wider community. No longer is our community just Lechlade. {image: map from ChurchSuite} We remain its Parish Church, but increasingly we are a church gathered from other places and networks of people, now including Fairford, Highworth, Clanfield, Faringdon and Burford.

At this point I'd like to mention that like any church family and community, we have lost some people in the last year, through moving away or dying. We remember with much fondness John and Marjorie Barstow, Stuart Lever, Heather Freeth, Eddie Rosser, Jonathan Poole, Adrienne Stuart and the Bunkhams from our various congregations. In our wider community we will miss big Peter, happy Ted, and Steve in the wheelchair, after their recent deaths. We've helped the family of each of these people, precious in the sight of our Lord, by honouring them in their funerals, and bringing to them the hope that only Christ can bring in the face of death. (And throughout Lechlade people are saying this week what a good job Andrew did of the most difficult of funerals, after Peter Lawny Squire killed himself.)

Directions

We can think of a healthy church as having 4 directions. We can visualise this {image of 4 directions}: UP (worship), DOWN (deepening faith), IN (fellowship and support) and OUT (sharing good news in word and deed). I'm going to use this to structure the rest of my

illustrated review. (Though some things don't neatly fit into just one area, but roll with me on this ...)

UP: Worship

{image: UP} Our first direction is all about Worship: worshipping God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. God revealed as the ever-living, ever-loving Father Son and Holy Spirit. How are we doing in our worship life together? Naturally we think of our services, and those things which we can see with our eyes and measure.

We need to give **Electoral Roll** stats (167: +4 into town, -4 died; -2 moved away; -1 became Catholic), but it isn't a particularly useful measure: it ignores children, those who've joined or come to faith recently). It certainly doesn't match with our experience that over the last year we've seen many new faces, most who now come regularly. Instead the Diocese now use a measure of the "size of (regular) **worshipping community**" instead, which we find more useful as well. Trend here is significantly upwards. 4 years ago 141 total; last year 247 (19 children, 10 youth, 218 adults). This is partly because we're now better at counting everyone, and partly because many people are now coming 2 or 3 times a month, rather than 3 or 4 times. This is at the ordinary times of the year: last Christmas we had over 700 attend the 4 services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

We've maintained our pattern of Anglican worship {Christian year 'clock'}, marking the different seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, along with all the major festivals. We've used Ordinary Time to have a few sermon series: on Joshua and Judges, and Jesus' farewell discourse, all of which the Lectionary unfortunately rather neglects.

{Photo of donkey at Palm Sunday} {Picture of first baptism to include Godparent joining in over Skype from Chile}

We do continually try to improve our times of worship together. This year we have

- introduced a new printed service book, to replace tired earlier books, with easier to read type and more resources
- introduced ways that people who are gluten intolerant or can't take alcohol can fully receive the Lord's Supper
- celebrated HC together from the Nave more frequently, which makes it noticeably quicker when we have a large congregation
- improved the hearing loop system for those with hearing aids.
- building warmer
- choir continue to occasionally support other local parishes, this year at EASTLEACH (Christmas) and SOUTHROP (Candlemas).

{images of "Spider diagram" of ministries: start with building up the obvious Sunday service teams.}

- **Thank** the large team of people that make our worship possible: Sidesmen, Prayer leaders, Readers, Communion helpers, Musicians, Singers, our Bell ringers calling us to worship, our Refreshment servers, Leaders and Preachers.

- Not to mention the Cleaners, Polishers, Flower Arrangers, Gardeners who work for us through the year. {fun pics of cleaning and gardening}
- Both here and at Eastleach and Southrop (Choir, Leaders, Preachers)

What we can't do is measure or take pictures of the **quality** of our worship: what's going on in our hearts, souls and minds? Do we leave our services thinking more about "how much did I like the hymns or the preacher or the biscuits today?" Or are we asking ourselves is this transforming me to be more like Jesus, loving mercy and bringing about justice? Are we more thankful for all the God has done for us and neighbour? Are we content to have a mix of style knowing that even if it's not my preference, it will be helpful for others in the family, so I'll go along to support them? Perhaps I'll leave that as a homework question.

DOWN: Discipleship / Deepening faith

{image: DOWN} The early church in Jerusalem "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching". As we pray in our weekly Book of Common Prayer services, "To all thy people give thy heavenly grace, and specially to this congregation here present; that, with meek heart and due reverence, **they may hear, and receive thy holy Word**; truly serving thee in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life." We do this through the listening to Teachers expound God's Word in preaching, expecting it show in greater holiness and right living. But right from the start the church also included discussion in smaller groups, and in private reflections too. {Spider diagram: add Lent groups, small groups, @Ark, Thirst}

It was great to have 70+ in our Lent Bible study groups this year, as well as many involved in one of groups through the rest of the year. (Plug groups ...) So **thanks** to all who have helped us grow, by leading or hosting those groups. We also thank those who faithfully teach in our church groups for children once or twice a month: the Planets, Stars and Grid Sunday groups, and the Thirst mid-week Christian youthgroup. {Picture of London conference day} Some were fortunate to go to the RE:BOOT apologetics day.

IN: Fellowship & Support

{image: IN} {spider diagram adding Pastoral Care} Funeral care (already mentioned) – more this year – In Touch {no photos}

Wedding {pic of wedding} which just got in the day before this happened ... {pic of snowy church; snowman}.

As Christians we are adopted sons and daughters of the same Heavenly Father. Which makes us brothers and sisters. Like any other family, then, we naturally spend time together. We've had a variety of social events, normally involving food {Pic of Maundy Thursday supper}, and quizzes and afternoon tea as well {pictures of Vicarage Tea Party}. If you've not been able to be part of some of our fellowship time, why not come to something this coming year?

OUTWARD: Reaching out in love

{image: OUT} Our final direction is OUT: What about those others we reach out to? {image: welcome letters from Welcome pack} {Spider diagram: add all the mid-week things with children}

A key focus for us is naturally our C of E school. We lead Collective Worship to the whole school (~210 children) on average once a week: Open The Book (team of 5) every fortnight, and our clergy on a different day each fortnight. Our Explorers After-School club (team of 5 from here and two baptist friends) works with about 25 children a week. {pics of Explorers} This year we held Experience Pentecost here {2 pics of EP}, which all the children came to for an hour or so, interactively exploring what Pentecost was, and what it means still today. In all this we're telling stories or teaching from the Bible, having fun, and in some cases singing praise and praying. People from our church are supporting children in this and other local schools in other ways: listening to them read, helping teach craft, cooking, and outdoor skills. 7 are heavily involved as Governors, helping all aspects of their education. Our building was full twice for the recent iSingPop concerts {picture}, where the children had a great time singing a dozen new Christian pop songs that they've learned. We're continuing to use some of those in the school with them: helping the great truths about God sink in.

In all this we're thankful for the great collaboration that we have with HT Gordon Soutar, and we pray weekly for him and all the staff and volunteers at the school.

{pics of HBC} Our summer HBC had 60 different children for 4 mornings of fun, messy games, Bible teaching, dressing up, craft and refreshments. Together with our faithful band of @Ark 'Sunday School' teachers, and the Mother's Union led Little Lights pram service, there are over 40 of us supporting and teaching the children in our area.

One good sign of all this, is that each week there are some non-church children joining us in the @Ark groups. Thank you to the families that have helped these children by taking the small risk of inviting them.

{“Spider diagram” of other reaching out ministries} But it's not just children. It's whole families too, best seen {image of Christingle} at our December afternoon Christingle and Nativity services. These have been growing while the more formal evening carol services have unfortunately been declining in number.

We also lead worship every other month for the residents at St Birinus Court, and we hold 4 services at The Trout {picture from Trout service}. Our famous Heart2Heart Ladies Breakfast team draw people from wider afield, and our men have now had 2 breakfasts in the Riverside with speakers alongside their monthly Men Aloud Out nights that have drawn people from outside our worshipping community. {Picture of Ram Prasad speaking at Men's brekky} And we continue our November All Souls service where we care for many bereaved people locally, and remind them of the Christian hope.

{show logos from the various events} This last year we've put on some quality outreach events connected to the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation (remember the fantastically funny *A Knight's Tale?*, as well as talks from Andrew and others on *What did the Reformation*

do for us?, *The Life and Mission of St Patrick*, and *Are the gospels reliable?* from our recent Gospel Project. We've also had a home-based CE course, and about to have the LE course.

Thank the team of people involved in outreach.

It's also the place to mention our world church links. This year we had Mark Oxbrow come for a weekend, {picture of his talk} working with children and adults to teach and update us on Trends in World Mission.

SUPPORT to ministry

Little of all of this is possible without behind-the-scenes **support**. Perhaps we could say having "good foundations". These include buildings, finance and administration and leadership. Our key people here are Richard, Annabel and Paul {two of whom are pictured in their working attire}.

Buildings

BUt also **thank** the Church Watch, and key holders Mike and John, for keeping our buildings open. To Richard and Mary for managing our heating, so we can be warm as well (done very well this winter — though we've not yet seen the heating bills!) And a huge thanks to Richard, Brian and Paul for doing much small maintenance themselves, and arranging for many other trips by plumbers, electricians, audio experts etc.

{Spider diagram: key holders, church watch, heating, maintenance}

This year we've made some improvements:

- Eco: new floodlighting bulbs
- {picture} new Eco approach to graveyard
- flexible wireless heating controllers
- applied for permission to install a proper projection screen, rather than our current less than satisfactory arrangement of tables, trailing wires, which takes Andrew and I spend at least an hour a week setting up and dismantling.

I'm sure we're all aware that it's getting urgent to do something about some parts of our building. Medieval buildings are lovely to visit and can be lovely to worship in, but they take a lot of work and money, and can constrain what a church does. Particularly in a relatively rare parish like ours that doesn't have a separate church hall. We have to strike the right balance between sympathetically **restoring** and maintaining the building in our generation, and helping it serve us. It's sometimes hard to remember that the small drinks preparation area at the back, which is so helpful to our fellowship together, is only a few years old. How quickly it feels like it's always been there! We're not the only generation to need to make changes: all generations have done this. Adding pews, adding balcony, adding memorials, adding organs, taking away balconies, never taking away memorials! Here are a few pictures of how the generations before us have changed the fabric of this building. {picture: no rood screen and no royal crest, and some chairs} {picture: different pews}

{Various pics of problems with tiles, walls, decoration, door} You may not be aware that we've had to do a lot of patching up of the electrics and plumbing and lighting in the building over the last year. The PCC has recently started to consider how to make longer-lasting **restoration** improvements to heating, flooring, lighting, and overall flexibility. There are no plans or even fixed ideas at all, but the Fabric Committee are taking advice from our Diocese, architects, and other professionals in ancient church buildings. They have visited other churches in Bourton on the Water and Burford, to see what sympathetic work they've undertaken to improve the welcome and usability of their worship spaces, whilst retaining their essential character as houses of worship.

This is where the Restoration Committee really comes into play. Their hard work over many years, netting many £10,000s, is the key to being able to take our responsibility to sympathetically improve the building for our generation, and sustain it for the generations to come. **Thank you**, Restoration Committee!

Finance

{image from Giving in Grace campaign} Reminder of Giving in Grace campaign (planned, regular, sacrificial, tax efficient). Great that more of us are now following that, and giving through the {PGS slide} Planned Giving Scheme.

Thanks to Paul and the others who support him, in the necessary work of ensuring our finances are in order, and that we can better plan our budgets for the year ahead.

Administration

Big **thanks** to Annabel Graves who does so much for us behind the scenes, handling much administration, bookings, and publicity, freeing up the Clergy and CWs. It's great that this year we've been able to increase her hours from 12 to 15 each week. This is now possible as the PCCs of Southrop and Eastleach now contribute to the costs of administration that she covers for all 3 parishes.

In the last year we've:

- kept on top of safeguarding, with new people being DBS checked, and trained in how to work appropriately with children and vulnerable adults
- started to use ChurchSuite as our all-important contact database (also for Southrop and Eastleach)
- which she, Andrew, myself and some other ministry leaders are using to email ministry groups, or our now regular and much-appreciated news updates to the whole congregation.
- kept our website up-to-date and secure, and with help from Paul Jones we've helped other local churches with their web presence too
- been reviewing our data and its protection, ready for the introduction next month of the tighter "GDPR" European regulations.

Leadership

And finally thanks to your PCC {picture of last PCC away day}, and **Huge thanks** to CWs.

Enormous thanks to our Vicar, Andrew. I've been so fortunate and blessed to have a wise, godly, prayerful trainer, guide and mentor. I arrived at quite a low ebb, but I've been so built up by him and Kate. Of course, no-one's perfect – we haven't always seen eye to eye – after all this time I've still not been able to persuade him of the superiority of coffee over tea!

PRAYER

Now I've missed something out. Have you worked out what that might be? {image: Spider diagram – now covered over with prayer} Prayer. It's Last but certainly not Least. In fact it is what needs to underpin everything else. So thank you to those who come to pray