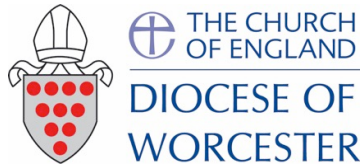


allsaintsworcester

St Peter's, Bengeworth



The Renewal of St Peter's Bengeworth

*'Making Christ Visible in
Bengeworth'*

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently in the UK, 93% of people are not part of a Christian community and less than 2% regularly attend an Anglican church. This represents both significant spiritual need and a huge opportunity for the Church in this country. In order to reach the 93% that are currently unreached, the Church of England is having to adapt and to pioneer new approaches to mission so that this generation and future generations can hear and respond to the good news of Jesus. One of these approaches comes in the form of 'resourcing churches'.

Within the Worcester Diocese, two churches have been designated by Bishop John as resourcing churches; Top Church Dudley and All Saints Worcester. Their brief is to work closely with the bishops to intentionally resource mission across an area, in three specific ways:

(i) planting new churches

(ii) bringing renewal to particular churches to release fresh life and mission

(iii) resourcing churches across the diocese

How this looks in practice for (ii) will vary somewhat, but typically a Curate from one of the resourcing churches who is at, or near the end of their curacy would move on and become the Vicar/Priest of a parish that the bishops have identified as a key strategic location in the Diocese. In addition, a team of people from the resourcing church (typically 10-20) with a sense of calling and a desire to serve, may go with the ordained minister. This injection of new people, gifts and resources along with a funding package for mission and ministry gives the receiving parish an opportunity to enter a new season of intentional renewal.

For many churches, receiving a team such as this is hugely exciting and presents a wonderful and rare opportunity to write a new chapter in the story of their community. Churches across the country that have been part of initiatives like this have seen more people coming to faith than in previous years, opportunities to explore more diverse expressions of corporate worship both on Sundays and midweek, and new life in other aspects of the parish during the week.

This approach is not simply a matter of 'getting a new Vicar'. It is a very intentional collective decision to embark on a new season of, and approach to ministry. It represents a significant step of faith for the community, requiring compromise and substantial change. It is not a 'quick fix' but rather, a sustained focus on cultural renewal with a view to securing the future of a Christian presence in that area for many years to come.

The invitation being extended to St Peter's Bengeworth is to receive such a team from All Saints Worcester as outlined above, along with financial support, so that working together with the diocese and supported by All Saints Worcester, St Peters may begin an exciting new chapter in its rich history.

The following pages cover some of the rationale for exploring such a partnership, some details of what this would look like in practice, along with an estimated timescale and next steps should the PCC agree to exploring the idea further.

2. RATIONALE

Why All Saints Worcester?

In 2001 All Saints had a small congregation with a faithful core committed to growth but was lacking in resources and not particularly engaged in local mission. It was sadly therefore, declining in numbers. Given All Saints' prominent city-centre location and the potential for growth it was felt that sending a team to resource and re-envision the congregation could help the church to thrive once again.

In 2002 the team arrived and joined the church and now, in 2020 All Saints (whilst certainly not perfect!) is a healthy, thriving church of over 350 people with vibrant children's, youth and student work, considerable local mission and a creative and welcoming culture. It has positive connections with local schools and also supports multiple mission organisations internationally, nationally and locally including establishing the Worcester Foodbank.

All Saints benefitted hugely from the support, resources and energy the team brought with it and now, as a resourcing church, it is in the position where it can 'pay forward' the kindness it received eighteen years ago by supporting other churches and enabling them to flourish.

Why St Peter's?

Firstly, St Peter's congregation has a long history of taking significant steps of faith for the sake of the kingdom (the vision for the building in the first place being one such step!). Along with this, there is ample evidence that St. Peter's has a desire to invest in projects that are not 'quick fixes' but which are intended to last (the manner in which the east window was completed being a prime example). Indeed, the PCC at St Peter's has already worked on forging a vision for the future work and witness of the church.

Secondly, the building is a wonderful asset to the church and to the local community with capacity to cater for a growing congregation, while flexible seating makes it a fantastic space for wider community use. It has also clearly been very well looked after.

Lastly, the building is in a great location near the expanding eastern edge of Evesham with good access via road for both residents of Evesham and those wishing to travel from further afield. All of these traits make St Peter's a strongly suitable candidate for exploring this opportunity.

3. WHAT WOULD THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

A full-time stipendiary Vicar/Priest

Rev Andy Smith is currently assistant curate at All Saints Worcester and would be leading the resourcing team. As such, he would be committed to St Peter's full-time, not dispersed across a benefice meaning greater investment in the parish. He would initially be licensed as Curate-in-Charge of St Peter's Bengeworth, and the PCC would request permission from Bishop John for him to chair the PCC.

Significant additional resources

As mentioned previously, a resourcing team will join Andy from All Saints. The size of the team would become clearer as time goes on with the final number dependent on who catches the vision and feels called to join in! One of the blessings of this model is that the teams bring with them a range of people of different ages and life-stages.

Some of the team would have children (who are always a blessing to any church!), but this can also have the added benefit of helping the church gain momentum in growing its ministry to children. Among the team there will also inevitably be a mix of skills, gifts and passions that can enrich and complement the existing congregation and build on the work already begun on "Making Christ Visible" in Bengeworth.

One of the most significant challenges facing churches that wish to grow, develop and reach out to their communities is always that of funding. As a resourcing church All Saints has a specific fund dedicated to backing renewal projects such as the one being proposed. This is not a long-term funding plan but rather a one-off £50,000 'mission and ministries package' to support the church so that lack of funds doesn't greatly inhibit some of the initial changes required to gain momentum.

A new service plan for Sundays

The most visible and significant change from very early on would be *the addition* of an informal worship gathering in a charismatic evangelical style at a time which works well for families with children. In order to accommodate this new gathering at a time which works for the majority of families, the current Sunday service programme would need to be revised. The timing of the current parish communion service would be the only significant change, with Andy wanting to honour that expression of worship for those who wish to continue attending that service. We hope that this service would also flourish and be a source of growth.

Please note: This is ***not instead of***, but ***in addition to*** a service/services in the current style. The intention is to work in collaboration, looking to achieve organic growth of the church, which will sustain it into a continuing future.

Although there is no style of service that is inherently superior to another (as the quality of worship is judged by God according to what is going on in the heart), *from a missional*

standpoint, having a variety of service styles allows a church to 'connect' with a much wider range of people. In short, the intention would be, ultimately to have a range of services which 'speak a variety of languages' that people understand and which they recognise as familiar and safe.

In practice, the *new gathering* would have:

- an informal, less obviously liturgical service structure using screens and not hymn books for songs.
- a mixture of hymns and modern worship songs led on guitar or keyboard with no organ or traditional choir.
- an emphasis on preaching and teaching from the scriptures.
- a monthly eucharist
- no robing/vestments

Re-evaluating the vision together

St Peter's has done some outstanding work casting the vision 'Making Christ Visible in Bengeworth'. This is clearly not just words, but something which has brought a clarity of focus to the mission and ministry of the Church, with the raising up of Pastoral Assistants and the launch of the 'Music, Story, Play' group being obvious fruit of this vision.

Whilst desiring to honour both the past and the present, we must accept that with a changing and growing community, the vision will need to be reviewed at an appropriate stage to ensure it adequately reflects the diversity, hopes and dreams of an evolving community. This would not represent an 'un-doing' of the current vision but rather taking stock to see what else God has in store for St Peter's!

Expansion and development in evangelism and mission

As mentioned earlier, if the Church in the UK is going to reach the 93% who are not currently part of a Christian worshipping community it will require sustained and focussed investment in the area of mission and evangelism. This will be based on developing current practice and using the experience, gifts and expertise of all involved.

This would mean:

- missional engagement with schools and colleges, local businesses such as gyms, bars and retail establishments.
- training for the church in witness, evangelism and apologetics
- regular evangelistic courses such as Alpha and/or Pilgrim would need to be a core part of the activity of the church with social events and other outreach ministries 'feeding into it' and creating additional links with the church family.

A realistic approach to fabric repairs and building maintenance

As with any church that is at least reasonably old, St. Peter's has maintenance and repair needs associated with the building. Of particular concern, at this point, is the condition of the spire which may require significant work if surveys show that there is continued

movement and/or it is deemed not safe. The PCC has a watching brief when it comes to this and will work with Andy to take necessary action as the way ahead becomes clear.

Issues such as these clearly don't resolve themselves, but it is hoped that that they may be dealt with in a way which does not take excessive energy away from the immediate need to build up the *people* of God. All Saints currently has a dedicated buildings project manager who is well placed to advise in this regard and would be a valuable source of wisdom and expertise.

4. TIMESCALE

In light of the current pandemic, any timeline set must be held lightly but the general wisdom when it comes to the timing of beginning a venture such as this is that September/October is ideal. This is the time of year where its easiest to build 'missional momentum' as there are great opportunities to invite people to Christmas events and services with another opportunity later as Easter approaches. For this reason, September 2021, although ambitious, seems like an achievable goal and a good strategic aim.

5. NEXT STEPS

- Once a final version of this document has been agreed upon by all parties, it can then go to St Peter's and All Saints PCCs for formal approval/adoption
- Announcement of appointment will then come from Bishop John's office to be communicated in both St Peter's and All Saints on the same Sunday
- The PCC also need to write to Bishop John asking for permission for Andy to Chair their PCC once instituted as Curate in Charge.
- Service of licensing in September 2021 (date to be agreed). The initial funding for Andy's post will be 3.5 years from his start date.
- A commissioning service to mark the start of this new chapter in the story of St Peter's will then follow later in 2021
- The PCC at St Peter's will review progress regularly, with a fuller review after one year.
- The Renewal Project will be reviewed through the Bishop of Dudley 3 years after this start date, with future options explored and clarified at that point.