

**West Swindon and the Lydiards Church Partnership**  
**Meeting of PC with Swindon Churches Together Sponsoring Body on**  
**on Tuesday 4th Dec 2012 7:30pm**  
**at Toothill Church**

**Attendees**

Chris	Scarbrick	(Chair)	Tudor	Roberts	ASLM	David	Hoar	TH
Brenda	Hicks	(Minutes)	Mary	Poole	ASLM	Mark	Dowling	TH
David	Burch	ASLM	Jill	Winson	ASLM	Nicola	Hoar	TH
Nicky	Iddon	ASLM	Clive	Deverell	SMLT	Dick	Gray	WL
Julian	Wright	ASLM	Tish	Vass	SMLT	Jan	Partridge	TH
Ginnie	Heads	ASLM	Sue	Green	HTS	Julie	Scarbrick	WL
Nicky	Iddon	ASLM	Janet	Clarke	HTS	Mike	Dilly	WL
Sue	Jones	ASLM	Geraldine	Hambidge	TH	Peter	Gilder	WL
Michael	Johnson	SCTSB (Chair)	Chris	Dobson	SCTSB	John	Wiltshire	SCTSB
Janet	Gray	SCTSB						

**Apologies**

Gill	Ganley	ASLM	Pat	Watson	SMLT	Mike	Watson	SMLT
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**Opening Worship**

Psalm 65: Verses 1 – 13

Everyone introduced themselves. Chris welcomed our visitors from Swindon Churches Together Sponsoring Body (SCTSB)

**Ground Rules**

We have only one item on the agenda – The Future of the Partnership.

This is a public meeting and the minutes are a matter of public record. If you don't wish your remarks recorded and attributed to you, don't make those remarks here. Express them at a church meeting or a leadership team meeting and get the whole church to agree a position, then have it expressed as the church's view.

We (Partnership Council) wish to seek the mind of Christ. We try not to make decisions unless we all agree. If it is not unanimous then it is tentative. I don't expect any decisions to be made tonight.

Chris is a fan of Partnership and wants to identify the things that are wrong, and fix them.

If it becomes evident we can't do that, or, for whatever reason, we don't want to, we need to hear anyone who has an alternative vision of partnership. Then we go home and think and pray more.

MJ: Apologised for postponing the meeting and thanked the Partnership for reconvening.

## **Summary of Thoughts on Partnership**

Chris abstracted from agreed minutes of Oct 8<sup>th</sup>. (the big meeting)

### ***St Mary's Lydiard Tregoze***

Happy with the partnership as it is. Not considering other options.

### ***Westlea***

Westlea would like to continue in Partnership. Have not considered what changes might be necessary.

### ***Holy Trinity Shaw***

Needs the Partnership, Worries about the number of meetings

### ***Toothill***

The Partnership not widely understood. There was deep concern about the financial situation and the toll on our ministers. Want some sort of partnership, have not considered what sort.

### ***All Saints Lydiard Millicent***

The Partnership not widely understood. There was deep concern about the toll on our ministers. Have vision which may include partnership in some form, but not the current form.

The summaries were broadly accepted by the various churches.

Clearly the Partnership, in its current form, is not seen as the best vehicle to support the ministry of our churches in the area. So how drastic a change do we need to make to make it work?

Michael Johnson took over as Chair

He explained Swindon Churches Together Sponsoring Body is a meeting of denominational leaders. He is not a denominational leader, but here to reflect as a critical, impartial friend bringing an outside perspective. They will make:

1. Recommendations to this Partnership Council
2. Recommendations to the Sponsoring Body

## **SCTSB observations**

SCT-SB (Swindon Churches Together Sponsoring Body) have examined the outcome from the previous meeting, have identified some issues, and would like to check these out.

### ***Partnership matters***

Though its clearly not working as we want, it is important to many

One responded that response to partnership meetings and events would indicate this is not universally true. It certainly doesn't matter to all.

### ***Vision***

We wondered if there is a shared vision for what the partnership is for. We sensed people are not sure.

### ***Beneficiaries***

You are not clear about who the partnership is for, and how it works.

### ***Benefits***

You saw some benefits such as joint administrative service

### ***Complexity***

There is an issue of complexity and the numbers of meetings. What does complexity mean?

One responded there were multiple levels of meeting, local church meetings, denominational meetings and meetings as an LEP.

It was clarified that there is one sponsoring body (SCTSB) and 4 denominational parents. This clarification was seen as evidence of complexity.

### ***Islands***

We have had a tendency to deal with the complexity of relating to 4 denominations in different ways, but not relating effectively to any.

It was pointed out that often denominations don't understand or relate well to LEPs

### ***Toll on Ministers***

The toll on leadership has certainly been heavy. Does this have a knock-on effect on lay people?

Several responded not.

One suggested its not so much complexity as lack of fulfilment that's a problem  
One suggested it's a lack of leadership and vision.

Several suggested a structure set up in 1970s may not be entirely appropriate now. There are other relationships that have been made between churches, which demonstrate different models of partnership. It seems how we relate to one another is a big issue.

It became clear that the details of partnership structure and denominational labels mean most to leadership and little to "those in the pew".

There are those with fondly held denominational backgrounds, conversely many who have none. Eg: Youth work and Messy Church are carried out as a Partnership activity and those who come are unaware of denominations. This is very relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Finance***

For some this is a matter of tension, and some question the fairness of the contributions and what they are paying for. MJ picked up from the October minutes the questions about the sustainability and how the Partnership is structured around finance.

Church leaderships are concerned about meeting the commitments they have. This is somewhat universal in churches.

Ministry is expensive, a minister has just left and we could only consider a half time appointment in the near future. With Dick planning to retire, we are concerned about the future.

There are tensions around a joint purse – as the partnership is widely spread and diverse, we don't always understand the ministry needs other than locally.

As there is a lack of knowledge about how the shares are calculated, there is a temptation to think this is unfair.

### ***Growth***

The whole issue of sustainability, will the current shape and structure of the Partnership enable churches to grow, or not?

One pointed out it doesn't matter where growth occurs, at any one church; people can move to worship at other churches. We don't need to talk just about individual churches.

### **Church positions**

Michael Johnson asked the churches to outline their concerns, issues and opportunities as they see them now..

#### ***Holy Trinity Shaw***

are used to sharing as they have done for a number of years in the past and are used to the flexibility of ministers from different denominations. Has a very small leadership team but is ticking along, mission does happen but do not go out apart from schools. New members do come along more because they are local and are not ready to be drawn into taking on roles.

When asked if they would be inclined to give up, HTS pointed out they were a family and did not want to dissolve.

#### ***Toothill***

need to identify what in the system takes the toll on the ministers. We enjoy and embrace different styles of worship it is just what happens to the ministers and the rest of us who are overburdened. Partnership needs a slightly different structure and won't be able to stay the same.

#### ***Westlea***

Partnership provides resources of ministers in the worship rota which we would not be able to organise ourselves. We support the Partnership.

#### ***All Saints Lydiard Millicent***

echoed TH concerning toll on ministers and do not intend to be party to that in the future. Not speaking exclusively from an Anglican point of view, the church as a whole values what the free church does with us.

Having been asked by the Diocese to delay taking any decisions, but in the light of this meeting and actions by other partnership churches, we wish to make the following statement:

'All Saints Church does not believe that any church within this Partnership of West Swindon & The Lydiards will grow and fulfil its mission until the existing Partnership is dissolved because:-

- The Partnership has no overall mission
- The Partnership is too large and too diverse denominationally to manage, despite every effort
- This Partnership has been putting too much strain on its ministers, both historically and currently.

All Saints Church is happy to look afresh at how we can work together.

This statement has been prepared by the Leadership Team of All Saints, but we believe it reflects the majority view of our full membership, based on responses to the questions posed by the Partnership Council.'

### ***St Mary's Lydiard Tregoze***

believes they can go forward with the Partnership. We recognise there are issues with deployment of ministers, but all Anglican appointment now are multi-church. We effectively use occasional offices, our building and the park

A short discussion followed on the issues that would result if we decide to dissolve the partnership. Chris Dobson said they would have to seek legal advice on the sharing agreements. The biggest hurdle would seem to be nailing down the vision for what structure is desired.

Tudor pointed out he was responsible to the Anglican authorities rather than multiple denominations.

Many others expressed their denominational roots, but stated they were willing and keen to work across denominations.

Chris Dobson pointed out this tendency – to put Christianity in front of denominations can cause a slight difficulty for denominations.

Tudor said his main concern was the structures, management and leadership rather than denomination

Julian Wright said that All Saints does not suggest dissolving the Partnership lightly. He was moved by Anne's statement and part of the reason she left was that she felt that God wanted something to happen here. We need to keep this in mind.

### **Closing**

Michael Johnson advised we cannot come to any solution tonight. SCTSB will respond back on what has been heard. The reflection may contain a way forward. We have a genuine desire to enable mission to happen the best possible way.

All Shared in the Grace