

Partnership Members' Meeting

led by ISR

At Toothill Church

Sat July 13 2013, 10am

Chaired by Sandra O Shea and Jon Doble, Chris Dobson assisted.

Attendance:	Sandra O Shea (ISR)	Rev Jon Doble (ISR)	Rev Dr Chris Dobson (SCTSB)
Gladys Flint (T)	William Bolton (T)	Ruth Kiddle (T)	David Hoar (T)
Margaret Exton (T)	Norris Kiddle (T)	Gerry Hambridge (T)	Gordon Partridge (T)
Anne Hall (T)	H Stacey (T)		
Joan Flack (W)	Rev Mike Dilly (W)	Chris Scarisbrick (W)	Julie Scarisbrick (W)
Pete Gilder (W)	Stephanie Glennie (W)	Pam Ray (W)	
Wendy Deverell (SMLT)	Rev Capt Clive Deverell (SMLT)	Lynwen Morgan (SMLT)	Jaqueline Kirwan (SMLT)
Doreen Henderson (SMLT)	Paula Roach (SMLT)	Morag Cockle (SMLT)	Janet Dugan (SMLT)
Connie Roach (SMLT)	Jean Brock (SMLT)	Joan Ruming (SMLT)	Ron Brock (SMLT)
Lesley Green (ASLM)	Andrew Bourne (ASLM)	Jill Winson (ASLM)	Ed Poole (ASLM)
Mary Poole (ASLM)	Jean Margetts (ASLM)	Nigel Margetts (ASLM)	Rev Tudor Roberts (ASLM)
Julian Wright (ASLM)	Ginnie Heads (ASLM)	Alan Bennett (ASLM)	
Val Hemmens (HTS)	Rebecca Kershaw (HTS)	Moira Webster (HTS)	Mavis McLaughlan (HTS)
Angela Mak (HTS)	Steve Kershaw (HTS)	Ian Bryon (HTS)	
Rev Jan Partridge (P'ship)			

Chris made a head count of 49...

Apologies for absence:		Rev Dr Simon Topping (ISR)	Nigel Coles (WEBA)
Mark Dowling (T)	Rachel Dowling (T)	Kath Thorpe (T)	
Beverley Belcher (ASLM)	Simon Belcher (ASLM)	Lynda Wright (ASLM)	Rev Tricia Roberts (ASLM)
Janet Clarke (HTS)	Jean Waller (HTS)	Gayle Bryon (HTS)	
Tish Vass (SMLT)	Hilary Pearson (SMLT)	Sarah Pritchard (SMLT)	
Andy Vernon (W)	Sarah Wilmott (W)	Edward Glennie (W)	

The meeting and our visitors were introduced by Chris Scarisbrick, who recalled our partnership meetings of October and December last year, and the suggestion by Swindon Churches Together Sponsoring Body that we ask ISR to review us. Chris handed over to Jon Doble.

Jon drew attention to the banners on the side walls. We seek guidance from Holy Spirit. We are on a journey moving forward. So how do we move forward in love and fellowship?

We opened in prayer.

Referring to first page of the report, Jon explained that ISR haven't attempted to get everything right; but have tried to be plain-spoken in pointing out what they see in us; and suggest some possible ways forward. ISR want the Partnership to feel in control of the process going forward. Doing nothing is not an option. However we need to stand back a bit and see the big picture. This could almost be an [Ignatian Examen](#) – where did we see the face of God in our history together? This meeting will allow us to spend time with scenarios we don't want, to help us see what we do want.

Sandra O' Shea gathered people around 6 tables, making sure each table comprised folk from multiple local churches. The groups were asked three questions for brief discussion:

- What surprised you about the report.
- What disappointed you about the report
- What do you hope and fear about the report

(Verbatim transcripts of the report sheet from each table, at Annex 1)

Plenary feedback of one selected issue from each table, perhaps the one longest discussed:-

- Surprised at difficulties with accountability (Anglican)
 - Disappointed no mention of the financial implications of pension fund closure
 - Hope that all congregations will be happy & result will glorify God
 - Fear that even if scenario is chosen, it may not address issue of clergy stress
 - Surprised no single recommendation
 - Hope this experience will help us to understand each other
-

Jon led the meeting to look at the scenarios in turn. Setting aside the desirability or otherwise of each option, imagine "what would it be like if"...

- What would you Hope for,
- What would you Fear ,
- What is the most important thing to do.

(Verbatim transcripts of the 3 report sheets from each table, at Annex 2)

Plenary feedback of one selected issue from each table, for each scenario considered:-

Scenario 1:

- Hope that it does not happen

- Should investigate other forms of covenant that might be appropriate
- Hope that the friendship and love stays among us
- Fear that we would lose the youth work which is part of the community – so all staff should be part of discussion & decisions
- Should make sure that congregation members who aren't from denominations can worship in their own church
- Fear – how does multiple membership work in practice.

Scenario 2:

- The changes must be made QUICKLY and agreed by all churches
- There needs to be commitment from all 5 churches, not there currently.
- Most important thing is appointment of a team leader who is respected accepted and capable of leading
- Recognise decision to stay together is a POSITIVE one and work together
- Fear this is a tweak and doesn't really represent a change underneath
- Spend more time in adult debate of this option especially Receptive Ecumenism

Scenario 3:

- All Saints have got to come to a decision and it would require an open meeting
- All the rest of the churches would be spiritually poorer without All Saints
- Fear – most disruption and hurt in the churches
- Potential to bankrupt all the churches
- Hope the youth work should then become fully integrated
- Need for strong pastoral support for all members of All Saints in not feeling torn between Partnership and All Saints

Scenario 4:

- To do – do not do this!
- Concern Emerge could become Anglican rather than multi-denominational feel
- Need to be period of healing and renewal for those who move
- Ensure still a strong link between all five churches
- Still focus on mission because it is administrative solution not mission focussed
- Hope it doesn't happen!

Chris Dobson took the “temperature” of those gathered, as we considered each suggested scenario. Each person asked to hold up a number of fingers, without consultation with others. 5 for enthusiasm, 4 for guarded support, 3 for no preference, 2 for mildly against, 1 for “over my dead body”. Scenario 2 was favoured, with scenario 3 less so, scenarios 1 and 4 were more disfavoured. These are not “results”, as the group was not necessarily representative.

Jon explained that this report is just the beginning of a process. Clearly there needs to be further digestion and probably wider discussion. When there is local discussion any outcomes should be shared with Partnership Council members.

It was proposed from the floor, that perhaps all the Anglicans should stick together and leave the partnership. Jon clarified that the 4 options presented in the report are not the only permutations available for us to consider, but they do represent clear possibilities.

At some point (TBD) Partnership Council will meet to appraise the options and make a single recommendation to the Sponsoring Body.

Meeting closed with prayer and we shared the grace at 12:10.

Annex 1

(almost) Verbatim transcripts (in no perceptible order) of report sheets from 6 table discussions:

- What surprised you about the report.
- What disappointed you about the report
- What do you hope and fear about the report

Surprises:

That one church wanted to break away
 Some had heard rumours that the whole church had wanted to leave, but the report didn't say this.

Others had no idea at all

Disappointments:

The amount of clergy stress, the things that caused it

That some congregations did not appreciate diversity of ministers preaching – that was at the root of the ecumenical basis for the partnership in the first place

Hopes & Fears:

Hope we can come to a consensus, with which all congregations are happy and which will glorify God

Fear that one of the church buildings or other properties will be sold off

Fear that we will end up “back at square 1” and nothing is resolved.

Fear that one (or more) congregation will

Surprises:

No practical advice about which way to go
 Diversity about how other churches run
 Recommendation re Westlea (Baptist in origin)

Difficulties Anglicans have in accountability

Pleased with clear options, surprised by concept of one congregation

Difficulty in understanding “ecumenism”

Opt-out scenarios

How big an issue is accountability

Disappointments:

No seeming progress along the way

Wouldn't like to see opt-out

More explanation of accountability issues between scenarios 2 and 3

Lack perception about...

Hopes & Fears:

Hope for development of more groups outside Sunday services

Hope we all have things to offer each other

Need to draw line under what's happened -> healing

Hope youth work gets greater profile

Fear we can't move forward in partnership with others who don't want to be there

Fear youth and children's work may suffer – important it continues

Surprises:

No single recommendation

Depth of information

Disappointments:

Very process, lacks mission

Shaw becomes Anglican

All Saints identified as “different”

Hopes & Fears:

Four recommendations – three split the partnership

We will finally move forward

Administration solution will drive outcome rather than mission of fellowship

Finances!

Annex 1

Surprises:

Suggestion that there was a lack of cooperative work between churches
 Repetition of issues which are discussed on a regular basis eg: "Communion before Confirmation"

Disappointments:

The lack of a local ecumenical officer
 Lack of a "parent body" structure given that the partnership has been in existence for more than 25 years
 Only 13 separate submissions made -> there should have been more of an attempt to invite individual submissions

Hopes & Fears:

The report gives us the focus to move on
 Fear that it will cause more disputes
 Fear that too much is being asked of too small a number of people, not just ministers but the Partnership Council as well.
 Fear of reduction in membership and loss of congregations caused by (possible) church closures -> will people feel comfortable at another (partnership) church.
 Fear that congregations change all the time -> this is only a "snap shot" dependant on staff members etc.
 Fear that church closures would result in the loss of community "focal points" – even if the community very rarely comes to church
 Hope this will help us to understand each other better
 Hope this alerts the sponsoring bodies to the fact that there needs to be some active leadership

Surprises:

No mention of concept of "membership" (all or one denom')
 All Saints want UDI (not St Mary's)
 Extent report focussed on "clergy accountability (confusion -> cost -> stress)

Disappointments:

Not clear about details of "good news" & rest of details of 5 "marks of mission".
 We need to clarify our theology & present clear biblical stuff
 Several mentions of buildings and childrens communion - not relevant.

Hopes & Fears:

That could become like Old Town Partnership
 Not enough people aware of what "ecumenical partnership" means
 Might be too long for changes to be made (eg scenario 2 an awful lot to do)
 Too much emphasis on denominations and not enough on being one in Christ
 Hope report will be read
 Fear that views coming from All Saints = not all congregation by any means
 Fear that even if we clearly chose a scenario and do it, it may well not address clergy stress issues

Surprises:

Financial question – re deficit re Baptist Pension
 No consequences re financial situation
 Disagree with comment at 5.6 (?)
 Staying in Partnership with a big "P" the only option

Disappointments:

Ditto question1,
 Scenario 2 is unworkable – too controlling

Hopes & Fears:

Fear - possibility of break-up of partnership
 Fear - with such divergence of opinions, How will we come to a conclusion
 Fear – whatever we do could lead to losing people
 Fear – centralising of all finances
 Hope – people will look imaginatively at options
 Hope – stronger at end for benefit of all

Annex 2

(almost) Verbatim transcripts (in no perceptible order) of 3 report sheets from each of 6 table discussions:

What would it be like if...for each of the 4 suggested scenarios in turn.

- What would you hope for (green sheets)
- What would you fear (blue sheets)
- What is the most important thing to do (yellow sheets)

Scenario 1:

Westlea becomes Baptist, that we would choose to partner & do things together
Toothill hope Methodists give us a minister
That we preach the gospel biblically and forthrightly
Shaw becomes Baptist
This won't be about denominations, but more about serving Christ

Scenario 2:

We can accept the recommendations
The denominational bodies look upon us with sympathy
We can all be together & share our differing ways
Have an adult debate
Hope communication between everybody improves. (Toothill not informed in time)
Young people to realise their contribution is valued and needed, and that they are used and encouraged

Scenario 3:

Hope all Saints would be happy
Keep links with our friends in All Saints

Scenario 4:

Toothill and Westlea LEP invites the SMLT and HTS Anglican church to join the LEP – so it becomes Scenario 3!
This scenario doesn't happen
All people going their own way will find a pot of money...

Scenario 1:

We can still work together but without some of the constraints that we presently have
Achieve a partnership with a small "p"
Being a single congregation does not prohibit different styles of worship

Scenario 2:

Having a Leader would help (the right leader)
That the 5 churches will adopt fully (if not will fail)

Scenario 3:

Everything All Saints does at the moment should continue to be opened to all
Administration could be easier

Scenario 4:

A better option can be found

Scenario 1:

Hope this doesn't happen

Scenario 2:

If this is the majority decision, everyone accepts it and buys into it as a complete package (not pick 'n' mix)
That by the Grace of God we can achieve it

Scenario 3:

Scenario 4:

We can all be grown up enough to find a way to work together for the benefit of all instead of behaving like children needing to be kept apart to keep the peace.

Annex 2

<p>Scenario 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The churches would have more independence clearer decision-making process That we would still be able to work together, and also have more interaction with their parent-body <p>Scenario 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best express the original vision of the Partnership An effective team leader who would provide good management for the Partnership More joint events and mission work The active decision to stay together will make us stronger as a partnership That Sponsoring Body and Parent Bodies will fully “buy in” and actively support and accommodate the ecumenical project <p>Scenario 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The remains of the Partnership would work more closely together That there would still be strong links with the new All Saints benefice <p>Scenario 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer people to be consulted when decisions are made

<p>Scenario 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could lead to less meetings Freedom to explore within one’s own identity People could worship in way they choose to/feel comfortable with -> could lead to growth within that church Wouldn’t need a sponsoring body – could be more support from denominations <p>Scenario 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We emerge stronger and more effective in working together Greater understanding & awareness of partnerships within our churches Better planning – calendar of running joint events – these should focus on mission as well as being social Strengthens our faith and unity Greater understanding of accountability and where it is situated Existing staff find ways of working together better -> healing <p>Scenario 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For LM to enable them to flourish under Anglican tradition Youth work is fully integrated within the 4 churches and commitment continued for children’s work <p>Scenario 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each church to grow local lay ministry

<p>Scenario 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendship and love for each other stays Covenant can focus on priorities for today Communications remains between churches Connect with more churches in area, eg Catholic (St Peters?), Bible Society (Gateway?) <p>Scenario 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideologically and ecumenically closest to what majority of members want Point “F” gets done –main purpose Continue to enjoy diversity of membership <p>Scenario 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This doesn’t happen This takes the friction away from clergy and will let them move forward <p>Scenario 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This doesn’t happen – the worst of scenarios – because it’s complex, financially unworkable, divisive.

Annex 2

Scenario 1:

Westlea isn't URC
 Would congregation members be forced to pick a denomination? What happens to members who wish to remain ecumenical?
 That congregations would divide into denominations and we would have to build churches back up from scratch

Scenario 2:

Gives the Partnership Council too much to do, which will reduce the number of people willing to be on the council
 Is the Partnership membership too small to maintain this amount of effort?
 Finding a way to make a sharing agreement work – reducing the liability of HTS, Westlea and Toothill for St Mary's and All Saints' buildings

Scenario 3:

That we will lose people with valuable skills from the Partnership
 That All Saints would struggle without a single dedicated minister

Scenario 4:

Each of the new groups would lose: Admin support, members, skills, joint youth projects and the authority of being a united community with one voice

Scenario 1:

Lose a great deal – diversity – sense of belonging to something bigger
 Lose Partnership Office – possibly & its workers
 Lose a youth work that is detached and part of the community – not if churches were willing to fund this
 Going back and failing to honour historic commitments
 Not everyone in any church would be happy belonging to a single congregation
 Some churches may grow – some not.
 Implications for deanery, re staffing

Scenario 2:

Needs **real** commitment from all 5 churches – not there currently.
 Rocky time for Partnership Council!
 Will we get enough support from Sponsoring Body
 Stay with status quo because we're not willing to deal with the issues.
 Lose our denominational identity

Scenario 3:

Lose resources provided
 Where would All Saints fit within the deanery
 People would leave All Saints

Scenario 4.:

People may be forced to move from the church family that they have been with

Scenario 1:

Financial viability of anyone?
 Would each church get their own minister? 3 Anglican churches with 2 ministers, would the ministers share the 3rd or would it close?
 Baptists would be "squeezed out"

Scenario 2:

Financially not being able to afford a team leader
 Current clergy may not be accepting of a new "incoming" team leader

Scenario 3:

That potentially this would bankrupt all, financially (and spiritually)

Scenario 4:

If emerge is attached to Shaw/St Marys it would become "Anglican Youth Group" and lose its multi-denominational appeal
 Forces Shaw to be Anglican with St Marys which will mean loss of ecumenism
 Financial implications to emerge.

Scenario 1:

A church being all Anglican – members will leave and vice versa
 We want outreach but become focussed on our own church

Scenario 2:

No change? Just a tweak. Will this address current stress on ministers, eg: Time, admin above "regular" job

Scenario 3:

Most disruption and hurt -> for a long time
 Greatest churn of ministers

Scenario 4:

There is no mission here
 This is a functional solution, not a vision for the church in West Swindon

Annex 2

Scenario 1:

That we wouldn't be able to continue
 For Toothill, Westlea – that we wouldn't be
 able to fund ourselves, minister
 That the reality of ecumenism would
 disappear
 Anglican church would find its (?) more
 difficult (n.b. current Deanery Strategy)
 Quite a few people might leave the
 Partnership

Scenario 2:

That the denominational bodies will not look
 on these scenarios with sympathy
 Will take too long to address
 recommendations – at the expense of
 healthy church life
 Some people may feel that they have not
 had a chance to have their say – may not
 feel valued and listened to.

Scenario 3:

Fear for Toothill – Anglican “paperwork” still
 involved!!!
 Would be too easy!! Therefore not unified
 Christian voice
 We would be spiritually poorer without All
 Saints
 Would seriously threaten the concept of a
 common purse for those remaining

Scenario 4:.

This progressively isolates the Anglicans
 from Deanery and Diocese vision of
 collaborative mission
 Not a good pastoral move – fewer
 opportunities for fellowship and support
 Not a good missional move
 That Westlea & Toothill might not be
 financially viable
 Emerge (youth work) only at Shaw/Millicent

Scenario 1:

Could we exist as individual churches
 Finances
 Does not answer all the questions in the
 report – eg how does the multiple
 membership work + communion (how
 taken)
 Shaw would likely split

Scenario 2:

This is signing up to something that is not
 specific
 Changes may not be for the better
 Fear of the unknown (Sponsoring Body)
 Would churches lose identity?
 If not implemented correctly will quickly fall
 apart

Scenario 3:

One of the remaining churches that after a
 short period they would wish to move out
 Financial re the remaining churches

Scenario 4:.

Does not settle anything – Westlea and
 Toothill could not survive financially.

Annex 2

Scenario 1:

Each church will need to check with Sponsoring Body if OK

Scenario 2:

Changes must be made quickly & fully embraced by all the churches, otherwise pressure on the ministers will stay the same

Scenario 3:

All Saints have not yet discussed fully or come to a decision themselves & this could not be done without an open meeting

Scenario 4:

Is NOT to do

Scenario 1:

Investigate other forms of covenant that might be followed

Lots of reassurance to our members
(Go away for weekend together)

Put Gospel/Missional approach FIRST

Scenario 2:

Include pastoral care for all church staff

Lots of reassurance to our members

Spend more time in adult debate of this option and especially the (7.2e) Receptive Ecumenism

Some didn't have enough time to work through this report, to date

Figure out what kind of team leadership is relevant to our set up and acceptable to team

Scenario 3:

Reassurance for all members especially All Saints
Hope it doesn't happen

Scenario 4:

Reassurance for all members in all the churches
Build a sound/solid understanding of this scenario so that any decision is fully informed
Gain commitment from all members
Safety net for those feeling excluded

Scenario 1:

If this scenario was put into place it would be IMPERATIVE that communication and links between all are maintained, with a new covenant drawn up

Scenario 2:

There is a Team Leader appointed (not necessarily clergy) certainly not current clergy – Who is accepted, respected, capable of leading

Scenario 3:

New partnership team member must have terms of reference clearly stating the TEAM and their position as part of it. Anyone not willing to work in that way need not apply.

Scenario 4:

Scenario 1:

Pray

Scenario 2:

Needs strong leadership from team leader
Deliver mission

Scenario 3:

Is this what All Saints want?

Scenario 4:

Is this what Shaw want?
Need to define mission

Scenario 1:

Maintain joint mission and outreach in W Swindon
Make sure the congregation members who aren't from the denominations who adopt the churches, still feel able to worship in their own church

Scenario 2:

Recognise the decision to stay together as a positive one
Work more closely together

Scenario 3:

Assess the amount of work that will be required of each team member before deciding who has what responsibility
Ensure that there was strong pastoral support for the members of All Saints through the transition period

Scenario 4:

Ensure that there is still a strong link between all 5 churches

Scenario 1:

This would take a lot of time and work. Need to honour all historical commitments
Include all staff members in this process

Scenario 2:

Get all churches to reach unanimous agreement
Go on listening to each other
Establish an accountable leadership

Scenario 3:

Support for members of All Saints if they did leave the partnership, for those members who would leave the church

Scenario 4:

If everyone buys into the scenario then there will need to be a period of healing and renewal with support from the church family