

Kingswood & South Gloucester Deanery - impact of the Diocesan Growth strategy

In 2005 the Diocese of Bristol launched a growth programme to encourage parishes to grow across four key areas. These were Partnership, Influence, Numbers and Commitment. In 2011 figures were published by the Church of England to show that the Bristol Diocese was growing numerically. The dissertation aimed to review the programme itself to see if it was missional or maintenance in its impact and to identify if any of the churches in the deanery were growing numerically and also to identify any common themes or factors which were present in these five churches and their leaders.

The research was conducted by looking at the statistics common to all Anglican churches in the deanery. In addition each church leader was asked to complete a questionnaire which was aimed at identifying common growth factors that the literature review had suggested might well be present. Finally five church leaders were interviewed, the common factor being that the churches they lead had shown numerical growth over the period of the growth programme.

The research discovered that overall the deanery had declined numerically over the period of the growth programme. However the five leaders who lead growing churches had a number of areas or factors in common. They were intentional in their leadership with clear vision and purpose; they encouraged whole life discipleship; they encourage lay leadership; they encouraged hospitality and generosity in their congregations. It was also apparent from the research that many of the factors identified in the literature were present in the declining churches as much as the growing ones. I also concluded that the growth programme encouraged neither a missional or maintenance mindset. However it had enabled a cultural change within the deanery which made conversations regarding growth a normal part of church life.

I believe this work will help churches to have a better understanding of the factors that can lead to growth, which are much more about attitudes than about programmes and activities. I also believe the research offers a model by which other deaneries can assess their own growth and the factors underlining it. Finally it should encourage church leaders to seek out their own solutions and strategies rather than looking to strategies and practices that have worked elsewhere.

Growth or decline 2006 to 2010

- Electoral Roll fell from 3132 in April 2006 to 2777 in April 2010 a fall of almost 11% K&SG
- Electoral Roll fell from 2933 in April 2003 to 2638 in April 2011 a fall of 10% Swindon
- usual Sunday attendance fell in the deanery from 2061 people in 2005 to 1939 people in 2010 approx 6% K&SG
- usual Sunday attendance fell in the deanery from 2194 people in 2003 to 1872 people in 2011 a fall of almost 15% Swindon

Figures for 2011 in K&SG showed a standstill figure at 2715 for Electoral Roll and with 3/4 of the figures available for 2012 there may be an overall increase in Electoral Roll or at the very least very little change from 2011.

Factors Leading to Growth according to Bob Jackson in 'The Road to Growth'.

- Process Evangelism courses
- Welcome & Integration
- Relaxed or informal worship
- Provision for children and young people
- Small groups for discipleship and or pastoral care
- Age, sex and Length of stay of incumbent

In K&SG deanery

- 15 out of 30 churches have no regular process evangelism courses
- 23 churches have small groups of some description
- 15 churches have regular activities for children and young people.
- 7 churches have no children's activities at all and 8 offer Sunday only provision

Worship style

- 18 churches offer mostly formal worship
- 8 offer mostly informal or relaxed worship
- 14 parishes are primarily Eucharistic
- 8 parishes offer primarily non Eucharistic worship
- 8 offer a balance between styles
- 14 churches have robed choirs
- 14 predominantly sing only hymns

Welcome

- 50% of churches in the deanery have no policy for welcome and integration of newcomers
- Yet Robert Warren (Healthy Churches Handbook) has identified this as a major factor in growing the church: ... *finally there are the churches that incorporate*

newcomers. This is a costly task for it means making others part of our life allowing the warmth of friendship we enjoy to be taken, broken open, blessed and given to others. ... These churches are also willing to let others participate in the life of the church...

Some churches in the deanery were growing.

- Interviews carried out with 5 clergy in churches that were growing. Five common factors emerged.
- Intentionality - growth is planned not accidental
- Hospitality
- Generosity
- Use of small groups
- Every member ministry is encouraged and practised.