

**Abstract of Minutes of the Members' Meeting of Westlea Church on Sunday 8th September 2013 at
Westlea School, Langstone Way at 11.50am**

Present: 21

Apologies: 5

Pastoral Matters

(deleted)

Matters Arising From Previous Minutes

(deleted)

Finance

(deleted)

Partnership Service 29th September

(deleted)

Christmas

(deleted)

Harvest

(deleted)

Local Service Arrangements

(deleted)

Prayer Chain

(deleted)

DBS Forms

(deleted)

Partnership Future

Details of the four scenarios that have been proposed by ISR and the Leadership Team's feedback on these were circulated prior to the meeting (see Appendix). Westlea needs to provide a list of advantages and disadvantages for each scenario for Westlea Church and our order of preference for which way we should go forward.

Our feedback will be considered with the feedback provided by the four other churches in the Partnership. There is no guarantee that our preferred option will be the one that the Partnership Council proposes as the final way forward.

The scenarios in a very simplified view are as follows.

Scenario One

Westlea would go solo (so to speak) under one denomination with perhaps a loose arrangement with the other churches.

Scenario Two

The Partnership essentially remains the same but tweaked slightly to improve working processes.

Scenario Three

All Saints separates off and the other four churches stay in partnership.

Scenario Four

The Partnership is broken up with Toothill joining with Westlea.

Discussion followed and points that were raised were

- Stephanie queried the implications for members who disagreed fundamentally with the adopted policies of one or more of our parent denominations. It was suggested that this discussion was for another time and not strictly relevant to the partnership questions under discussion.
- Are All Saints adamant in their desire to leave the Partnership? The Leadership confirmed that there are definitely mixed feelings at All Saints, not everyone does want to leave the Partnership. We need to look at the options from Westlea's view rather than second guessing how the other church will vote.
- For scenario two one disadvantage suggested is that it would be difficult to get volunteers to be more involved in the running of the church, however, we do have the resources to do this, if people are willing to come forward.
- It was asked whether any of these options will deal with the issues that led to this review process taking place? Until the whole process is finished we will not know.
- The process has taken a long time but this has allowed us time to consider things fully, pray and not make any rash decisions.
- It was queried whether a feasibility study regarding the Partnership should have been carried out. This may prove useful if it is decided the Partnership should continue.

- If we opt for scenario three could we invite another (different) church to join us? Considering those churches that are geographically local it may be tricky to link with a 'new' denomination.
- During this process Clive and Tudor are meeting regularly with Mark Dowling, Sue Green and Chris Scarisbrick to work in supporting all five churches.
- Are all the other churches following the same process as us? It was confirmed that they are all considering the four scenarios and all the feedback will be considered by the Partnership Council.

There were no advantages or disadvantages that anyone wanted including in addition to those suggested by the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team had suggested our preferred order is scenario two first (with extra support from Swindon Churches Together as the sponsoring body), scenario three second, with scenarios one and four equally our least preferred. There were no objections to this. Our Partnership Reps will take this forward for us.

The Partnership Council will meet on 7th October to consider all the feedback with a view with decided on one preferred option for all five churches. There will then be an EGM on Sunday 24th November at Holy Trinity Shaw, 2.30pm where at least 75 people who are in Membership at one of the five churches must be present (a quarter of total Membership) and a two thirds majority voting in favour of the proposal will be needed for it to be passed. It's really important that as many people attend and vote as possible to ensure we are fully represented.

After the Partnership Council meeting on 7th October we should be able to move forward with decisions that need to be made about recruiting a new member of the Staff Team.

Please continue to pray for the remainder of the process and that we will be able to work together, whatever the outcome, and especially for our reps on 7th October. Anyone can attend the meeting on 7th October at Toothill Church, but only as an observer.

Meeting closed with the Grace at 1pm.

Appendix

ISR Partnership Review- Westlea Church's Responses

Scenario one

The Partnership is dissolved. Each separate church is adopted by a denomination. The Review Team suggests that All Saints, Holy Trinity and St Mary's are adopted by the Anglican Church, that Toothill is adopted by the Methodist Church and that Westlea is adopted by the United Reformed Church. Under this scenario the Review Team suggest that the separate churches consider the formation of a looser Covenant or Council of Churches.

Advantages

- We may have an improved local identity if we are affiliated to just one denomination.

Disadvantages

- No real reason for us to exist, we could join Freshbrook Evangelical Church or Gateway instead.
- We'd probably have to justify denominational viewpoint to new Christians and many others in Westlea.
- We'd struggle to afford to appoint any sort of clergy. Even if we could there is a lengthily recruitment process that we'd have to go through.
- Some of the things we do may need to change to come in line with whichever denomination we are affiliated with.
- There is a possibility of alienating folk with decision-making model they don't recognise.
- There would be no Partnership Office so the administrative functions that the Partnership Administrator carries out would fall to the church (possibly the Secretary).
- It could be the end of our involvement with Emerge and the Partnership youth work activities.
- A looser Covenant or Council of Churches seems like a half measure.

Scenario two

All five churches remain within the Partnership, but with the Partnership Council, all the local church councils and all staff members agreeing to the following structural changes and ways of working:

a) A Partnership Team Leader is appointed by the Sponsoring Body who acts as line manager to the other Partnership Team members (possibly an external Team Leader or a Team Leader who is a lay member of the Partnership), with changes to the Partnership constitution to this effect.

b) The Partnership Team Leader and the other Partnership Team members are accountable to the Partnership Council for all areas of their work which relate directly to the life of the Partnership, with changes to the Partnership constitution to this effect.

c) All churches of the Partnership promote a diversity of worship which respects and reflects the denominational and theological diversity of the Partnership, including an open policy on pulpit exchange and the use of preachers and worship leaders in good standing with their local churches, with changes to the Partnership constitution to this effect.

d) The four denominational bodies operate with the administrative flexibility necessary to accommodate the unavoidable limitations on data collection and data submission which a four denomination partnership of churches implies.

e) The Partnership Council acknowledges in its ways of working the changes in the wider

ecumenical context. In the spirit of “receptive ecumenism” each church of the Partnership should primarily focus on what it can receive from the other churches’ worship styles, theology, practice, governance, rather than what the other churches can receive from them.

f) The Partnership Council draws up an action plan for mission which identifies specific mission projects to be undertaken by the Partnership as a whole (in addition to Emerge and Messy Church).

Advantages

- Clarity - we don't need to explain any denominational view.
- We don't alienate anyone with decision making model they don't recognise.
- We retain the ecumenical input.
- No big impact on our finances.
- We retain joint resources such as the Partnership Office, Partnership Administrator, website and youth work.

Disadvantages

- Will it address the existing concerns?
- The demands of multiple denominations.
- Ministers and the Partnership Council need to agree on a delegation of roles within the Partnership to lighten their load (may be hard to 'let go' of some things).
- It's difficult to recruit Lay people to help with the running of churches and leading worship.
- The Partnership Council isn't in a position to run Lay Preacher training.
- Not sure how an external Partnership Team Leader could work.

Scenario three

All Saints withdraw from the Partnership and becomes an Anglican congregation, probably in a new parish or benefice with one or more local Anglican churches. One member of the remaining Partnership Team oversees St Marys and Shaw (and acts as Partnership Team Leader), one (new) member of the Partnership Team (possibly half time) oversees Westlea and Toothill churches, and one member of the Partnership Team oversees Emerge and associated youth work (half time). Under this scenario the same ways of working (a-f) for the Partnership are adopted as in scenario 2.

Advantages

- Clarity - we don't need to explain any denominational view.
- We don't alienate anyone with decision making model they don't recognise.

- We retain the ecumenical input.
- We retain joint resources such as the Partnership Office, Partnership Administrator, website and youth work.

Disadvantages

- It would be difficult for one member of the Partnership Team to cover Westlea, Toothill and youth work.
- There would be financial implications as almost half of the Partnership income would be gone.
- With All Saints moving out of the Partnership, we could lose valuable support from members of All Saints for activities within the Partnership which may put additional pressure on the members of Westlea to “fill the space” and so take availability from local activities.

Scenario four

All Saints withdraw from Partnership and become an Anglican congregation, probably in a new parish or benefice with one or more local Anglican churches, St. Mary’s and Shaw leave Partnership and become Anglican congregations within a new Anglican parish or benefice. Emerge becomes a project of the new St. Mary’s and Shaw Anglican parish or benefice. Toothill and Westlea churches form a new Local Ecumenical Project with a full time or half time Methodist or United Reformed Church or Baptist minister.

Advantages

- It may be better to be working with another church rather than being on our own.
- We may have an improved local identity if we are affiliated to just one denomination.

Disadvantages

- We'd struggle to afford to appoint any sort of clergy.
- Some of the things we do may need to change to come in line with whichever denomination we are affiliated with.
- There is a possibility of alienating folk with decision-making model they don't recognise.
- There would be no Partnership Office so the administrative functions that the Partnership Administrator carries out would fall to the church (possibly the Secretary).
- It could be the end of our involvement with Emerge and the Partnership youth work activities.
- We'd probably have to justify denominational viewpoint to new Christians.

- Toothill and Westlea are very different churches; it may be difficult to work as a new Local Ecumenical Project.

It was agreed that our order of preference for these scenarios was that scenario two was our first choice and scenario three was our second choice. There was much discussion regarding which order scenarios one and four should go in. It was conceded they should go joint third as we don't really want either of these options.