

Philippians 1:27; 2:5-11

Luke 10: 1-12

### The PMC Prayer of Preparation

Loving God,  
Though our destination is not yet clear,  
May we trust in Your graceful promises;  
Though we are uncertain of ourselves,  
May we be rooted in Your loving regard;  
Though our attention is inclined to wander,  
May we hear the things You are saying;  
Though we often neglect Your influence,  
May we be convicted of Your power to change,  
In Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Jane: Good morning, everyone.

Many will be aware, that we have just completed the first of three years, alongside several churches across the diocese, in the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC). The initial listening process enabled us to find facts about our church and community.

Nick: You'll remember the timeline exercise where we asked you to write down significant events that formed your view of the church. In addition, team members interviewed church and community members, analysed church records and parish census data; we noted visitors who walked past the church at different times of the week. (That sounds a bit dodgy)

This was all with a view to understanding better how the church is perceived, what's the real picture of St Brandon's and how can we be more visible and reach new people?

Jane: Last month, the PMC core group presented its findings to the PCC at an away day. Today, we would like to share this with you. Some of what we discovered will come as no surprise, some was news to us. There is a summary sheet [*Nick holds up summary sheet*], which we'll talk through briefly, then we'll spend a few minutes around our tables exchanging our thoughts on what we've learned.

Nick: Memories shared from the **Timeline Event** and the **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fire**, highlighted six common themes that have shaped congregation members' experiences of St Brandon's. These were:

- The fire

- Covid
- Shared Ministry Team
- Different priests' arrival and departures
- Energy; and
- Messy Church

Jane: The next part of the process asked eight regular members of the congregation a standard set of eight questions. The main themes to come from this were:

- The warmth, welcoming and nurturing nature of the church
- Some felt challenged about nurturing their own faith; how to pursue their own faith journey or discipleship; what their faith meant to their lives
- Was there too much emphasis perhaps on 'keeping the show on the road'?
- In response to how the church deals with conflict, answers implied we didn't have any!
- It was generally felt that all can speak their minds and challenge where they don't necessarily see eye to eye. This is healthy, we tend to see it through and don't walk away.

Nick: The next step was to involve the **wider community**. Members of community groups or organisations within the parish gave us quite a wide range of comments about the community and the church's place within it. Again, some common themes were:

- Generally positive responses, saw the church and congregation as friendly and involved in the community. In some cases being really thoughtful and caring regardless of whether people attended church or professed a Christian faith
- The newsletter which publicises a wide range of village events was appreciated
- Youth and children's work was highly valued, especially Messy Church;
- The building's history and the opportunity to attend cultural events in it, concerts, jazz nights, were appreciated;
- The close links with the community association were mentioned.

Jane: The Footfall Survey revealed few major surprises. Dog walkers, cyclists, walkers, those with historical links to the church, village or churchyard graves accounted for most visitors. Comments in the visitors' book revealed the powerful spiritual impact of the beauty of the building and its restoration.

Nick: **Data**. Don't you just love it? Parishes vary in size: some urban parishes number 20,000, the smallest rural parish in the diocese musters barely 20), we are at the lower end, around 400. Interestingly, there are fewer in the 'retired' age group than we expected, and perhaps more children and young people, though not always visible. However, we were only able to access census figures from 2011 as the most recent statistics are not yet all available.

The Deprivation Index, scoring us in the middle of the ranking scale in all parishes nationwide, was unreliable as our parish population is small and

some data may have been conflated with data from parts of Brandon and Meadowfield.

Jane: Despite deaths and departures, over the past 10 years, the Sunday church attendance numbers and electoral roll have remained reasonably steady, including the numbers of children. The Messy Church congregation contributes to this.

**Financially**, income also has been pretty constant (leaving aside specific fundraising for projects such as stonework and the circle of remembrance). There was a predictable dip during Covid with no church hire. The number of givers is similar to the number in the regular congregation at around 40, which has fallen a little, but the amount given has risen over time, and is now around £15/week/giver. This is almost double the Durham diocesan average (not surprising given the high levels of deprivation in much of our diocese). This equates to around the first and second quartiles compared with national giving figures.

Nick: Lots to take in from all of this, so now, we'll give you a few minutes to discuss what you've heard and read with those at your table – do note anything that strikes you particularly.

There will be no feedback to everyone, so we will collect any jotted thoughts at the end of the service. Thank you.

*Group exercise – check practicalities to read further information, Colin's chart*

### Adaptive challenge

Jane: Having spent a year listening to lots of different people telling us lots of different things about our church, PMC's next phase is about experimenting, doing something new. At the PCC awayday, informed by what we'd heard we sought to discern how we should experiment with a new, adaptive challenge.

We came up with these words:

Nick: **'How can we meet and connect generously with all who are newer to our village and church?'**

Jane: This will be the focus of our challenge in the coming year. Any suggestions of how we can give this a go will be warmly welcomed. Thank you for listening and contributing to what makes St Brandon's distinct.