

MOVING ON WITH THE COMMUNITY

A Joint Presentation from the Core Team engaged in the Diocesan Project "Partnership for Missional Church"

1. Introduction - Jane Stout

St Brandon's has been involved in the Partnership for Missional Church training since October 2022. This Diocese-led journey has involved a Core Team initially **Listening**, in Phase 1 (finding facts and hearing about our Church and Community); Phase 2 was **Experimenting** with ideas and Phase 3 of this project involves **Focusing** on our Missional Challenge:

How can we meet and connect generously with all who are newer to our village and Church?

You have been involved in this too through interviews, Café Church (building up the Timeline) and Dwelling in the Word where we shared our thoughts over Bible passages. There have been updates in the Newsletter and a display at the back about our progress.

Throughout the process we have been learning six spiritual practices or new "habits" which we will develop further within the congregation. We have started using **Dwelling in the Word**; we are currently exploring **Belonging in our Communities** and through Spiritual Discernment or **Finding God's Way Together** trying to find out how the Holy Spirit is working within and guiding us at St Brandon's. **Hospitality**, both giving and receiving, is a strength we will continue to develop. The final two spiritual practices or "habits" are **Announcing the Kingdom** and **Focus for Missional Action** and they will involve us all as we grow together.

This new way of working helps us to think and reflect together and discern God's preferred way forward not as an isolated Church but rooted in our local community.

2. Like a Waterwheel - Alison Moore

At the training days were often asked to take a picture or an object to describe where we are now - without using words! We decided that a good picture for us is a wheel - and old-fashioned wheel with spokes. St Brandon's is not the hub of this wheel. It is one spoke, in partnership with the other spokes, which are the many different groups

in the village and the parish. However, this wheel is not static - it is definitely on the move. In fact we decided it is a water wheel. Even a gentle flow of the Holy Spirit gets it moving. And Nick Brooker made us an actual working model. . .

And with Fiona Eltringham pouring the water, the model wheel turned purposefully, if not entirely smoothly!

We'd like to ask you a question: What have you noticed, in St Brandon's or beyond, that is "on the move" or has changed for the better?

If you would like to, please turn to someone nearby, share your noticing, and listen to what they have noticed.

3. Engagement with the Community - Sue Morgan

The meeting on Wed 18th September

The "Give it a Go" side of Partnership for Missional Church have been looking at ways to engage generously with the village community, especially those who have recently arrived.

As one spoke of the community wheel, we met with representatives of some of the other spokes in June to talk about things that are going well for each group, our common concerns and ways we might improve communication with newcomers to make them feel welcome.

We then asked a smaller group of villagers representing the Brancepeth Community Association, Parish Council, Men's Group, Castle and Church to talk further about the themes that came out of that meeting. The two that emerged were the Newsletter and Calendar of village events.

Newsletter

Do people read the newsletter? For us, it's the main form of communication in the village but do some people ignore it because they think it's just about church rotas? Can we do better?

It was gratifying to hear from the group that they value the newsletter, they think people do read it and agree that the church is justified in putting its own stuff in it. But perhaps if we subtly change the emphasis from St Brandon's Brancepeth, to Brancepeth Parish Newsletter does the change of name suggest we are being more generously inclusive?

If we change the order of things, putting village articles first and rotas at the back sometimes, will more people think it's for them or will we just irritate people looking for their list? We'll give it a go!

We now have a number of new people delivering the newsletter each month. These are not all regular church goers. This feels like a positive connection with what Partnership for Missional Church call our "people of peace" – good links with our wider community.

Often, our deliverers are able to meet and greet people soon after they move into the village. How can we engage well with these newcomers as they move in?

Calendar clashes

There was a concern raised at the meeting in June that village events often suffer from calendar clashes. Can we avoid these?

The meeting on Wednesday convened the five main event managers in the village who could only think of three significant clashes since Covid and only one had resulted in dissatisfaction from a hirer.

Probably one of the best outcomes of the meeting was for the Church, BCA and Castle events coordinators to get to know each other. They agreed that the easiest way to avoid clashes in the future was to remember to check out other websites before confirming significant bookings. No one wanted an extra layer of calendar filling.

Moving on

- In November the Archives Group is putting on an Exhibition and book launch to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Village Hall. We suggested it might be a good opportunity for village groups to showcase their activities to people visiting the exhibition. As a church we will have a table that offers a welcome to those who aren't already familiar with the church.
- Many of us are part of a variety of groups in the village already. Often there is an opportunity to highlight a church connection and keep our profile high. Edward's churchyard team won Gold at the Northumbria in Bloom Awards. The church is at the centre of this amazing village initiative.
- The churchyard was also open for the village National Gardens Open Day bringing many newcomers into the building as well as the churchyard.
- The village choir is a mix of churchgoers and non-churchgoers but all are happy to take part in our Special Festivals.

Involvement in other groups' initiatives ensures the church is perceived as a positive and integral part of the community.

As we move beyond the formal structure of Partnership for Missional Church next year and we develop our own future path, we hope to encourage a more outward-reaching

mindset. Can we engage with our local community cooperatively and look for ways to embrace their ideas and hospitality rather than expecting newcomers just to arrive at the church door?

4. Concluding Sermon “PMC & Angels” by Alison Hobbs

Genesis 28:10-17, John 1:47-end

Today is the feast of Michael and All Angels, and we have heard how the angels are seen in Jacob’s vision to be running up and down a ladder that rests between earth and heaven. The Angels are the messengers, the means of communication between God and humanity.

The concept of angels as messengers and protectors has spread into folk spirituality well beyond those who would say they are church-goers or even believers. That’s good, it is a comfortable meeting point, holding true for all parties.

Experience, and scripture tell stories of strangers that we name angels, that seem to appear from nowhere to give practical assistance, or say something that helps us in times of need. So we should not be surprised if God uses our wider community when he wants to send us assistance and messages; we should be ready to hear what those outside the church have to contribute to our Christian understanding.

Just as in Revelations, the Angel of a specific church tells the church a few truths about itself that may be more or less flattering but always aimed at pointing them towards a truer way of being worshipping Christians.

Then we heard the story about Jesus, out and about in his local area, when he encounters Nathaniel.

Traditionally, the fig tree symbolised the place where one studies the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, so when Jesus says he “saw” him under the fig tree, Nathaniel realises Jesus can sense/divine Nathaniel’s belief and devotion to the Torah as the authority that Nathaniel is “under”. “Wow!” says Nathaniel, “You are *it!*”

Jesus retorts that he is both more, and less. He is the ladder itself that stretches between earth and heaven. He will be the conduit by which God will communicate with humanity, and humanity with God. He is the Gate, the gate of heaven. Watch this space!

An encounter in the community; an enriching conversation with both sides learning new, sharing bigger pictures and hope; each respecting the gifts and potential of the other, each listening for God in the other. May God help each one of us to go and do likewise. *Amen.*