

PROPERTY, RESOURCES & AUDIT GROUP REPORT
(January 2020)

(N.B. Emmanuel is not specifically referred to, due to limited data provided & their position as an LEP.)

MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

- As a circuit, 57% of our members are over 70 and 77% are over 60. Only 8% of our members are 40 or under.
- In two churches (Harpole & Towcester Rd) well over 70% of members are over 70 years of age. In two other churches (Park Avenue & Roade) over 60% are over 70, and in four more (Great Billing, Kingsley Park, Kingsthorpe & St Andrew's) the figure is over 50%. For Astcote & Queensgrove, the percentages are much lower (17% and 34% over 70 respectively), although these figures increase once the over 60s are included: Astcote = 58%; Queensgrove = 57%).
- With this age-demographic in mind, project ahead 10 years..... The impacts are already felt in the lack of people able to take on roles within churches & circuit.
- The total membership of the circuit is currently 540, but, given the age-demographic, is likely to drop over the next few years unless there is a big influx of new members. As ministers are stationed on the basis of one minister per 300 members, it could be argued that we are only entitled to be staffed by two ministers. Two ministers cannot effectively staff a circuit with 10 churches.
- In all the village churches (except Roade), plus Kingsley Park, worship attendance and membership numbers are very similar – attendance often exceeding membership. Is there a need to focus on encouraging non-member worshippers to become members?
- In other churches, except Towcester Rd, worship attendance is 60% or less of membership numbers. Can we encourage churches to explore the reasons behind this?
- Caveat: the data does not reveal what percentage of attendees are members. Do churches know what percentage of regular worshippers are non-members?
- Membership across the circuit has dropped by 23% in 10 years.
- The 2018-2019 membership numbers of all the village churches (except Roade), plus Queensgrove & St Andrew's, are very similar to what they were in 2013-2014, (90% or more) although there has been some fluctuation in the intervening years.
- All other churches are showing a steady decline in membership numbers, losing between 15% and 20% of their members between 2013 and 2019.
- A number of churches (Kingsley Park, Kingsthorpe, Park Avenue, St Andrew's, Great Billing) showed a major drop in attendance between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. This may well have been due to a change in the way Statistics for Mission was recorded at that time.
- Worship attendance at Kingsthorpe, Park Avenue & Great Billing has stabilised since 2015.
- Worship attendance at Astcote remains stable.
- Queensgrove's & St Andrew's attendance fluctuates wildly – no conclusion can be drawn!
- In the other churches (Harpole, Kingsley Park, Roade, Towcester Road), there is a steady decline in attendance.

- Of course, this analysis is based on the 'snapshot' of the October count – a more realistic picture would be obtained if numbers were recorded across the year.
- Given the age demographic, and decrease in membership & worship attendance in many churches across the circuit difficult decisions may need to be made sooner rather than later.....

KEY PERSONNEL VACANCIES

- What is clear is that, across the circuit, many people are working incredibly hard to keep their churches going.
- The major issue identified is that a majority of churches (Harpole, Kingsley Park, Kingsthorpe, Park Avenue, Queensgrove, St Andrew's, Towcester Rd) need more people to work with assorted youth-based groups, especially Brigades. Could lay personnel be employed to support this across the circuit?
- The other issue is a shortage of stewards of various kinds (church, property, worship, communion)

SUCCESSION PLANNING

- The lack of succession planning is identified by a number of churches, but little is being done to address this. In a number of churches there are people who wish to relinquish the office they hold, but there is no one willing to take it on.

CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

- Property issues cannot be considered in isolation, as they impact hugely on all areas of church life & mission, so elements of this section are drawn from elsewhere in the data.
- The 2019 quinquennial reports for Astcote, Great Billing, Harpole, Roade & Towcester Rd have not yet been received, but feedback indicates few major issues have been found. St Andrew's is dealing with the few issues it has. Kingsthorpe – enough said!!
- The 2018 quinquennial reports for the town centre churches identified a large number of issues, with a significant cost factor, especially for Kingsley Park & Queensgrove, so the focus of this section of the report is on these.
 - All town centre church buildings have certain constraints upon them, due to location or structure (Kingsley Park – listed building – stairs; Park Avenue – conservation area – front facade; Queensgrove – boot & shoe heritage area).
 - Lack of parking is an issue for all three churches: there is no off-street parking for Queensgrove or Kingsley Park, and only very limited off-street parking for Park Avenue. On-street parking is also difficult, particularly for Queensgrove.
 - Park Avenue & Queensgrove have a significant number of people travelling sometimes long distances to attend worship.
 - The back & upstairs premises of Queensgrove present a particular issue, as they are of little use to the church at the moment (used only by Boys' Brigade).
 - Kingsley Park spent almost £6000 on repairs & maintenance last year, over the last two years expenditure has exceeded income by almost £16,000.
 - Park Avenue's location is recognised as not a strategic location within the community.
- There was some discussion about possible ways forward:
 - Would the Hope Centre be interested in leasing Queensgrove's building? Or could it be developed for residential use? Queensgrove indicated a willingness to consider moving out of the current premises, and there are numerous other churches already in that locality.
 - Park Avenue suggested alternative sites to better fulfil mission, e.g. site of Greyfriar's bus station, Pearce's shoe factory on Wellingborough Road.
 - Given the age profile of Kingsley Park & Park Avenue, and looking ahead 10 years, can three

large church buildings, with a number of building problems, located no more than a mile apart, be sustained?

- Is it the best use of resources and the best way to achieve our mission, to spend large amounts of money on old buildings which are no longer fit for purpose?

GROUPS – CHURCH LED & COMMUNITY

- As far as church groups across the circuit are concerned, the data is as follows:

<u>Number of activities</u>	<u>Mission & Outreach</u>	<u>Discipleship</u>	<u>Social</u>
Weekly	16 (13 involving young people)	1	7
Fortnightly / Monthly	5	8	11
Less frequently	1	3	7
<u>TOTAL</u>	22	12	25

- Church groups are predominantly focused on mission & outreach (mainly weekly) or are social groups (majority fortnightly / monthly).
- Over 80% of Mission & Outreach is targeted at young people (Brigades, Junior Church, etc). How could churches develop Mission & Outreach targeting adults?
- There are many church social activities. Could these be developed further as a first step in encouraging non-church people to become involved in the Christian faith?
- There are relatively few groups focusing on discipleship, and these mainly meet monthly. Few churches have regular Bible Studies/House Groups. Take up of Circuit Bible Studies is patchy. Yet one of the obligations of membership of the Methodist Church is *'learning and caring, through Bible study and meeting for fellowship, so that I may grow in faith and support others in their discipleship'*. Encourage churches to explore reasons for the lack of involvement and possible ways forward. (NB Kingsthorpe did this some months ago, and has a model for research which other churches are welcome to use / adapt).
- Apart from Kingsthorpe (for obvious reasons), Towcester Rd & Queensgrove, our church buildings are hosting a large number of community groups. These are good for raising money, but are also missed opportunities. In some churches, community use is greater than church use.

NOW AND NEXT FIVE YEARS

- COMMUNITY NEEDS
 - Churches are already engaged in meeting the needs of their local community in a number of ways, and also had a range of ideas for the future, although for two churches (Roade & Great Billing) there was little scope as they felt local provision was already considerable and all-embracing.
 - Having said that, do churches actually know what the needs of their community are? How do they know? Are churches providing what is needed, or are they missing things they could do? The main issue is needing people to volunteer. Kingsthorpe has done a Community Needs Analysis of their local area, and could share the process with other churches. Churches are encouraged to look at the information in the Local Demographic & Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data and consider to what extent what they offer as a church reflects the needs of the local community, particularly when planning for the future.
 - Would it be helpful to get together and share what is already happening in churches?

- FINANCE

- Overall, the Circuit has been slightly ‘in the red’ over the last few years, having spent reserves.
- Most churches remain ‘in the black’, at the end of each financial year, albeit with occasional ‘blips’. It is recognised that for many there is a fragile income stream, and the loss of one ‘provider’ may well have a huge impact. Queensgrove, for example, has had to make huge efforts this year to mitigate the loss of the dance school income, and will need to continue to do so. Recent conversations indicate that Park Avenue is likely to lose £8000 p.a. as the university will no longer be using the premises for exams, and this income will need to be replaced.
- Room/premises hire remains a major source of income, and churches are encouraged to be more pro-active in promoting this. However, this is a limited option for Towcester Rd, because of a huge amount of local provision, and for Queensgrove, because of the restrictions of the building, specifically upstairs access. And Kingsthorpe has no premises to rent out, thus income is solely from free-will offerings.
- Kingsley Park is of concern, as there has been an income shortfall of almost £16,000 over the last two years, and the church has high building maintenance needs. Queensgrove may struggle in the near future, again due to high building maintenance costs with no current major income from renting out the premises.

- DOWNSIZING

- This was not seriously considered as a real possibility by most churches. However, the suggestion was interpreted as just making current churches smaller in some way.
- ‘Downsizing’ can also be considered more widely, i.e. across the Circuit. Given the issues highlighted in this report, should we be looking at ‘downsizing’ in provision across the Circuit?

- BENEFITS OF WORKING MORE CLOSELY WITH OTHER CIRCUIT CHURCHES

- There was some recognition of ways that churches could benefit, specifically:
 - Sharing resources (including people) & expertise;
 - Improved communication;
 - Mutual encouragement;
 - Greater recognition & understanding that we are a circuit;
 - Joint events, developing friendships & support (especially young people).
- However, is this borne out in what actually happens across the Circuit? To what extent do churches see themselves as part of a Circuit?

IN THE FUTURE (LONGER TERM)

- It was interesting that, apart from Great Billing, no church referred to their Mission Statement / Action Plan / Growth Plan in discussing this (or any) section. Maybe we should have mentioned using this as a starting point in the pre-briefing?
- Many of the ideas for future mission & outreach were a continuation or development of what is already happening or had happened.
- The need for willing, able personnel committed to the work was highlighted, along with appropriate money, resources, training, and leadership from CLT or elsewhere.
- It was felt that this section of the discussion with churches was the least productive. There were some ideas, but as a whole, churches lack a clear vision for the future, and have not perhaps engaged with the reality of the next ten years given their current starting point.