

Mission and Growth Reports 2016

Churches were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. *What is the state of the work of God in this church/society/meeting/activity? In particular:*

- *How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?*
- *What have we done to encourage growth?*
- *What have we done to show God's love?*
- *How have we shared the story of our faith?*
- *How are we working ecumenically in our community?*

2. *What report will we give to the Circuit Meeting in answer to these questions?*

All Saints Church

In November All Saints hosted a deanery Confirmation Service. The candidates included 3 members of the All Saints congregation who were jointly confirmed by the Bishop of Hertford and Rev Richard Byass.

September saw the introduction of a second service on a Sunday morning at 9.00am. This has given greater flexibility to our pattern of worship and it is hoped will give us further opportunities to welcome those with limited experience of church.

We have installed new external notice boards to promote our presence in the Oval and provide information to passers-by. We continue to use a TV screen and a regularly changing window display in the Community Centre foyer to promote our events and the good news of the Gospel.

All Saints had been hosting a YMCA Space weekly drop-in which worked to build the confidence and aspirations of local community members. A number of church members were helpers for this group. Unfortunately, earlier in year, the external funding for this work was withdrawn and YMCA had to end the project in Stevenage. The local host churches were invited continue the work, and so "The Welcome at All Saints" has carried on this important community support on Monday mornings.

Once again we hosted the "Christmas Journey", in co-operation with Bridge Builders Christian Trust, for Year 2 school pupils. This year we were able to tell the Christmas story to some 400 children and their teachers and adult helpers.

We also welcomed over 1000 children and parents to Christmas services in church from two local schools. We are grateful to Richard who was able to be involved in all these important events.

Our Christmas services were well attended and we were able to welcome a good number of additional people from the locality, particularly to the Carol Service and also a Crib and Christingle service on Christmas Eve.

During the eight years that Anglicans and Methodists have been a single congregation we have grown closer and closer together so that we now see ourselves as one. We share in each other's

denominational decision making through our Joint Church Council and our common officer holders. This has been particularly obvious in our recent search for a new Anglican priest, where the whole church has been involved.

We have been fortunate to have been able use the expertise of the Bishop of Hertford and also the Diocesan Director of Mission to help us in analysing the needs of our church through two congregational meetings. These meetings focussed very much on the same themes as those set out in the question for this report.

The result of these deliberations was to publish a comprehensive profile of the needs of the area to be used in seeking a new priest. This has led to the recent appointment of the Rev Peter Orton as Anglican Sacramental Pioneer Priest for Pin Green. We anticipate that he will be licenced before Easter.

Elim Pentecostal Church uses All Saints for their mid-week prayer meeting and we are pleased that this additional ecumenical link continues.

Arlesey Methodist Church

1. What is the state of the work of God in this church/society/meeting/activity? In particular:

- How have we grown as a church since our last meeting? **We have added 2 new members.**
- What have we done to encourage growth? **We find this very difficult not have a full time minister who is able to spend time in the community getting to know people.**
- What have we done to show God's love? **We have been present in activities in the local community such as being involved in providing Christmas and other celebratory teas for the senior citizens of the village and have had the pupils of our local lower school at the church when they were studying the history of the village.**
- How have we shared the story of our faith? **Some of our members have been to the local school to talk about the church.**
- How are we working ecumenically in our community? **We are strengthening our link with the Anglican Church by holding joint services, Advent and Lent Bible Studies, sharing together in Christian Aid Week events and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, running joint Craft Fayres and Christmas Faryes together. Our monthly Bible Study has grown during the year and now includes members of the Anglican Church from Arlesey and Henlow.**

2. What report will we give to the Circuit Meeting in answer to these questions? **As above, but stress that we desperately need man power to take on jobs within the church as our congregation is becoming more frail and unable to take on the responsibilities of running the church. We also feel it is important that our Methodist Minister is seen and known in the village.**

Baldock Methodist Church

Baldock Methodist Church has been very busy over the past year trying to develop and grow. We have been concentrating on establishing ourselves in the wider community of Baldock and making sure the people of Baldock know we are here and that we are a welcoming place of worship. This has been successful and we have seen an increase in our congregation. The details of what we have been doing are shown below.

Lunches

Lunches have been run for a number of years and are held the last Friday of every month for the older members of our community to come together and eat. The meals are devised by Church members and then cooked at the homes of the members before being brought to Church. There is a regular group of members that help on these days as well as a number of people who are not members but are volunteers that have 'younger legs' that help wait on the tables!

A raffle is held at each of these meals to raise funds and these get donated to a chosen charity or church funds. In May of this year a member of our Sunday school wanted to raise funds for the 'Magic of Play Appeal' at the Lister Hospital as her brother had spent time in hospital due to a fall. This stall proved very popular and raised £80. Another stall is planned for the February Lunch in aid of Action For Children.

Sunday School

There is currently a Sunday School running at the Church, most weeks it has 3-5 children ageing from 3-9 years old. The Sunday school is run by Gill who subscribes to Roots and devises some great activities which are then shared with the congregation. The Church had its first nativity this year, all the children were included and even our newest member of our Church was persuaded to be a king!

Committee Meetings

We now have committee meetings every few months that all church members are welcome to attend. The aim of these meetings is to discuss and implement ideas on how we can grow as a Church. An email is sent to all members asking for items which they would like to be discussed. This is a very positive step as ideas are brainstormed, agreed or disagreed with. This enables everyone to be included in the decision-making process on how to grow our Church. These do not replace Church council meetings; they are just not as formal.

Tea, Cake and Play

Over the Summer holidays the Church held a Tea, Cake and Play session every Monday morning between 10-12am. This was something that had never been done before and all members of the congregation really pulled together to make this happen. These sessions proved very popular with the local community with at least 40 adults/children attending most sessions. The feedback was great with people stating how good the craft activities and outside games that were provided. It is our plan to provide these sessions over Easter and Summer holidays in 2017.

Tiny Tots Tuesdays

This is our newest venture being run by Marie Baker on behalf of our Church and follows on from the success of Tea, Cake and Play. Baldock is full of cafes but none other than Tesco that will accept

buggies. Every Tuesday the Church is open between 0915 and 1215 for the under 5's and their carers. Toys are provided as well as hot drinks and biscuits. The feedback has been very positive, people like it being open straight after school drop off and the welcoming atmosphere.

Carry The Future UK

Carry The Future supports child refugees and their families that are still in camps following the Syrian crisis. In November our Church supported the 'Warm Toes for Winter Campaign' collecting over 500 pairs of winter shoes and boots which were sorted, packed and taken to London. These boots are already on the feet of the children and their families. Our Church is in the final days of the 'Outer wear and Under wear campaign' with donations coming from the people of Baldock as well as other counties (Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire). By using our Church as a collection point the people of Baldock are coming in and seeing everything we do which we hope in turn will encourage new members to join.

Carols by Candle light

A lovely evening that was advertised and saw a few new faces, the Sunday school children performed 'Little Donkey' and the soup was lovely. We plan to build on this next year.

Notice boards/Social Media

Younger congregation member have enabled our Church to become visible on social media we now have a Facebook page and group. One of our newest members said "I often walked passed this church wondering if anything every went on" Our notice boards and Facebook pages are kept up to date ensuring we keep the community informed of what is happening and encouraging people to join us. We advertise all our events on the local Facebook sites, and have found this the best way of advertising our groups and campaigns at no cost. We even managed to sell 'vintage chairs' on eBay to get funds to purchase new comfy chairs and carpet for the upstairs room which is used by AA/CODA.

Church Space

A concerted effort has been put into getting more groups to use our Church as well as supporting those (AA/CODA) that have been using the Church for many years. We are pleased to say that the Church and/or Upstairs room is used everyday. We did look into hiring the space for children parties to maximise revenue, however after one trial party it was decided by committee that this was not a venture we wanted to continue but we tried it!!

As you can see we are really trying to grow, we have a number of plans in the pipeline going forward;

- Disabled toilets and baby change (we do not comply with legislation)
- New kitchen (To comply with Health and Safety legislation so we can cook in the kitchen)

Unfortunately these cost money but are necessary to ensure we comply with Health and Safety Legislation as we continue to grow and expand.

Benington Methodist Church

1. **Benington Methodist Church** is embedded in the local community. The members are well known in the village, especially those living in Benington and those with close connections to Benington. As such, they bear witness to their faith through their sustained loyalty to their church.
2. Through a formal Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP), the church has close connections with other churches in Benington and in Walkern, which is about 5 miles away. These include in **Benington**, St Peter's Anglican Church and in **Walkern**, St Mary's Anglican Church, and Walkern & Sandon United Reformed Church.
3. The three congregations know one another well and often share services and preachers, as well as jointly participate in special events. Collectively they form a community of Christian witness and worship in the two villages and connecting area.
4. Opportunities are taken to reach out to the local community. These include displaying office holders and advertising services and special events in the Parish Magazine, which is widely distributed to households monthly. The church has a stall at the July annual summer Benington Fair. Notices are delivered to households and businesses in the neighbourhood of the church, advising them of special services and events such as the Christmas Carol Service. These, together with the external notice board, are worded to remind them of their local neighbourhood church. In addition, our minister regularly visits the local primary school to speak with the children.
5. The regular congregation takes great care to make especially welcome visiting preachers, newcomers and irregular worshippers. A nominated Pastoral Officer keeps in touch with the concerns of all members and regular visitors, especially during times of personal difficulty. Routinely we maintain email contact with all willing to receive news and information about services and special events.
6. At a time of a general decline in church attendance, Benington Methodist Church has continued to support both its regular members and its occasional worshippers. Our own congregation worships at our LEP churches, especially St Peter's. Partnership churches are often represented at ours, especially on special occasions. This further strengthens the links, friendships and relationships across the various churches, with wider community benefits.
7. For a small fee, the church hall is made available to the local neighbourhood for social and indoor sporting activities. An agreement has been made with a local business over the use of the church car park during the working week. This provides a useful additional income. By offering such facilities to the local community, connections are made and awareness is raised with the local neighbourhood.
8. Although running a small annual deficit, the church remains financially viable and is meeting its assessment obligations. This is being achieved largely through the voluntary contributions of its regular worshippers, an indication of their interest and continuing commitment.

Progress since February 2016

9. There has been no increase in our regular congregation over the past year. The additional numbers reported last year have continued to support the church. We have a regular “core” congregation of 12 (7 living in Benington) and a current membership of 11.

10. We continue to host united services once a month with LEP churches in Benington and Walkern. Ahead of such services, we include members of partner churches in the weekly emailed notice, giving details of times, preachers and other information. In the planning of united services, we make a point of inviting visitors from partner churches to read and find they are very willing to do so.

11. Two special occasions are worthy of note.

a. The **harvest festival service** in October was followed by a full hot lunch, freely prepared by our members and served in the church hall. This was well attended (about 30) by the families and children of our regular congregation and also by members from our partner churches.

b. The **carol service** in December was a great success, although not as well attended as last year. The congregation included the families and children from our regular worshippers and a family of friends from Stevenage. Richard Byass’s daughter led the opening carol, which included a children’s candle procession. Other children took part in the service, including taking the lead in one of the carols. There were some at the carol service attending this church for the first time.

All of our regular congregation play a valuable part in preparing for and making such occasions a success. For example, at the Carol Service everyone played an important part in various ways; setting up and decorating the tree, bringing and preparing food and hot drinks, helping and encouraging the children, reading the lessons, welcoming visitors, clearing up afterwards and generally creating a warm and enjoyable afternoon with their smiles and friendship.

Central Methodist Church, Letchworth

How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

Using the time of our recently employed outreach worker we have worked with our younger families to identify their needs. This has resulted in experimenting with a new form of worship, which will be continued, and extra social activity in the form of country walks together.

We have now established a practice of sharing lunch at church once a month, which allows a further occasion for fellowship. This is usually attended by about 30 members and raises worthwhile amounts for our charities.

What have we done to encourage growth?

One of our members led a study group on prayer as part of our commitment to intentional faith development, one of the “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations” which we studied last year. Others run Bible Study and Prayer Groups. Five of our members completed a Disciple course this year, which was led by two of our local preachers.

We again hosted a well-supported series of Lent meditations and lunches, and at Advent we introduced a “labyrinth” exploration of the Christmas story.

What have we done to show God’s love?

Our members are regularly involved in outreach activity with the groups that visit the church, notably brigades, toddler group and drop in group.

Following a recent enforced change of Pastoral Secretary, we have thoroughly reviewed and reinforced our pastoral care arrangements, ensuring that the housebound are regularly visited and prayed for.

How have we shared the story of our faith?

We have done our best to take opportunities to share our faith with visitors at special services. The brigade services on Fridays are attended by several non-church families. This year we substantially revised our Christmas Carol service, including in it a modern nativity drama.

Central Methodist shares in the activities of Churches Together in Letchworth which promotes several acts of witness each year – Good Friday, a summer picnic, and carol singing in the town centre, where this year we gave out angels knitted by our members and leaflets promoting the message of Christmas.

Christchurch Methodist URC Church

- How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

Reflecting on the growth of Christchurch in terms of numbers, the membership has remained more or less the same at 268 (270 in 2015). 6 new members, most of whom have transferred from other churches, were welcomed during the year. According to the October census attendance at Sunday worship has remained constant at 235 (178 adults and 57 youth & children, including a church parade; in 2015 it was 236 including 200 adults and 36 youth & children).

Looking back, it has been a turbulent year. A statement from the whole Leadership Group at the November 2015 AGM sought to explain the challenge of the last few years. Working relationships within the Leadership Group, and between Stewards and the Minister, whose regular meetings together ceased for a period early in 2016, were strained. The Leadership Group entered a period of mediation to help us all both work together and move forward. This has ended but there are still signs of tension. How have we grown through this experience? We are learning to talk more openly and to listen to each other. We are trying to ensure that together we fill in any gaps in areas of activity. However, some key leadership roles remain vacant. One area we are working on is trustee governance, to which end we are changing how we work and capturing this in a new handbook to guide all members. This work is ongoing and will need to be ratified by both denominations.

In terms of our understanding of 'being church', we have discerned that we do many good things but these activities are fragmented and lacking a sense of an over-arching purpose and that we need to become more connected as a Fellowship and as the body of Christ. We agreed in September to seek a vision and long term strategy for the future and have embarked on this. A group is prayerfully considering on the best process for Christchurch and will guide the whole church through this. So far we have looked at our heritage and our history to see how God has worked with us so far and have identified the foundations of our Fellowship in terms of unity, working in the community and being led by the Spirit. Church members 'started the conversation' at our AGM in November, and we will continue to engage with this as a whole church for at least 3-4 months, possibly longer, with the aim to dream 'big ideas' that reflect God's call on us at this time.

In the last 2 years many other groups have or still are discerning a vision for particular areas – notably the Stewards in preparation for a possible new paid worker, the Reachout group for mission, a worship focus group for whole life worship, whole life discipleship, the area for youth & children. Clearly the Spirit is bubbling up and in time we expect that these will join together.

- What have we done to encourage growth?

We had originally planned to encourage the increased giving of "Time and Talents", following last year's TRIO campaign which had a financial focus. We offered a preaching series 'Live by the Spirit – Fruit & Gifts' as a starting point. Further engagement will continue under our new vision work – Being Christ's church.

Our focus on family ministry has continued with further Experience events, "Coffee+" and the Film Club, and developed further with two Messy church events that both 'sold out' one at ~100 attendees, and the other at ~65. Local young families are welcoming the opportunity for both social and spiritual encounters.

In Lent we joined with Churches Together in Hitchin and followed a common study material, with some small groups welcoming members from other churches, and others joining ecumenical groups set up especially. Out of 15 groups in the town, five were Christchurch based groups. During October, our dozen or so small groups that cover about 100 people, again opened their doors to any who wished to give this experience a try, and 2 or 3 have since joined a group.

We hosted a 'Walk Through the Bible' day to help people understand and remember the overview of the New Testament (40 attendees). We have also arranged open evenings at Letchworth Christian Bookshop to showcase some of the excellent support materials on offer. In Advent, we prepared our own Christchurch set of daily Bible readings, chosen as meaningful glimpses of Christ by church people. In August we encouraged the reading of a book, such as Psalms or Acts during the comparatively less busy month of August.

Alpha forms the mainstay of our offering to the wider community to share and explain the faith. We ran a successful course this year, which attracted four, with 3 unconnected to Christchurch. We continue to support six of those who attended Alpha this year or last year, and plan to run further Alpha courses.

- What have we done to show God's love?

We have begun to partner with other groups under the leadership of our Reachout team. We hosted a visit by Pastor Jan from a church in Manila where as individuals or as church groups we are

sponsoring 25 children in their community through the “Compassion” charity. Pastor Jan was himself sponsored as a child by a Christchurch member who is now leading this initiative.

We continue to offer practical ongoing care to our local elderly through the weekly Lunch Club, and weekday Open Church. “Art Space” continues to offer an opportunity to all, particularly those “on the fringe”, to discover their creativity in a quiet and welcoming environment. Daisychains” meets weekly at Christchurch and continues to support families with children with special needs, with Christchurch volunteers.

Home communion has become a much needed ministry and regularly taken to those who are unable to attend church and who would value it. We have taken the lead in forming a group to explore what a Dementia Friendly Church looks like and how we can enable worship to reach those living with Dementia and their carers.

- How have we shared the story of our faith?

"Experience Advent" and “Experience Easter”, replaced our main morning service with sessions throughout the building, in a format designed to make it easy to invite friends along. Participants could move around and take part in whatever they chose. We offered crafts, Bible study, prayer, all-morning coffee, a quiet space, and the chance to have a family photograph in nativity costume (for Advent). We also held an “Experience Christchurch” event at our Anniversary sharing our many ministries with those who came in who are connected with Christchurch. Some have even begun offering their talents to us e.g. flower arranging by a mum and her 2 children who are part of our uniformed organisations.

We ran a summer children’s holiday club for more than 80 children - "Globetrotters" written by Tom Lewis with a theme of travelling the world and the impact Christians have made to places around the world. We held our usual prayer station alongside festivals, with members out on the street inviting passers-by to make prayer requests – about 40 are made each time. At Christmas we held our street carol singing.

- How are we working ecumenically in our community?

Our minister and Pastoral Coordinator met with ministers and pastoral teams from other large churches (Leighton Buzzard and Aylesbury Methodist Churches) in the district who were interested in our pastoral system. We shared how this was implemented and how we care for our members and community and they took away some helpful ideas to implement back in their churches. Many of our members work alongside those of other churches in initiatives serving the community, such as Meeting Needs, Foodbank, Street Angels etc.

High Street Methodist Church

Key areas of church life:

- Children's work - HMS Discipleship! Thriving group and a group of youngsters who are growing in faith. Super leadership bringing energy and enthusiasm to planning and delivery of sessions.
- Toddlers - An area of growth in the wider life of the church, especially 'Little Lunchers' (Thursdays in term time) where we are regularly seeing 40+ families (and cooking for them!).
- Eating together - as a church family we try to eat together, not just at our monthly breakfasts (second Sundays 9:15am), but also at quarterly bring and share lunches. This establishes our fellowship and our church as a place of hospitality and welcome and grows the relationships we have with each other too. It is a joy to see the variety of offerings from Caribbean to West African to Southern Indian to more traditional British and European food (often all on one plate - the minister's!).
- Engagement with the community - There is significant and ongoing use of the building for diverse community groups as well as other Christian fellowships (SDA* and Oak Church**). We also have good relationship with the childrens centre, ecumenical friends and the SOTBCP***. A great example of this is in annual seasonal events. This year the Christmas lights switch on messy church had over 400 people attending the two host churches of which we were one! We also occasionally get accosted on the High Street to be told we are "such a friendly church", and we celebrate the building of that reputation.
- Numerical growth - this last year has seen our membership rise again and we have several likely candidates for confirmation and membership in the coming months too.

Challenges:

- Property (and responding to the Quinquennial). Having grown and settled things after a difficult patch we have now got to do some work on the premises but are finding regular maintenance historically, or those with previous/longer experience in this role to draw on, is lacking. As we work on this, that is sometimes quite demanding for our volunteers.
- People power! We need more people to join the life of the church (we've been blessed with volunteers for a range of 'offices' - we just need a few more bodies!).

Hopes:

- New Project: Fun From 3 - A quarterly Saturday afternoon play, eat and praise session for families of 3yo's and up... our first one is in Jan 2017, please pray that it will do really well.
- That the new minister and his family settle in quickly and well and that with his wealth of experience he brings us new direction and energy for our ongoing mission and ministry as a church and community. We look forward to supporting and working with him as his time with us goes forwards.
- Develop and build on all innovation in discipleship and worship that has been established over the last few years.
- Youth provision - possibility of taking a new piece of work forward with our older children and into the wider community too, maybe in partnership with another local church

*Seventh Day Adventists.

**A church plant in Stevenage supported by the Church of England/St Albans Diocese and by Soul Survivor.

***Stevenage Old Town Business and Community Partnership.

Norton Methodist Church

How have we grown as a church since our last meeting? We have grown spiritually: we have two Bible Study groups – one led by Malcolm and one led by Sue Covington from Christchurch.

What have we done to encourage growth? We have continued faithfully with our outreach programmes, i.e. Mums and Babies groups; Bread of Life Lunch; The Meeting Place; Messy Church.

What have we done to show God's love? We have continued to show God's love in the way in which we conduct our regular activities.

How have we shared the story of our faith? We share our faith in our daily relationships with one another and with other people.

How are we working ecumenically in our community? We work ecumenically, 'though not in a formal way. We are part of Churches Together.

What do we do well; what could we do better? Mums and Babies groups excellent, as is Messy Church – 'though a tad disappointing as numbers were down at the summer one. Hospitality, friendship and support is ever present, and of a high standard, and we are welcoming to all – as is seen in the success of Bread of Life Lunch once a month. (For the second part of this question, see Outreach Worker's report).

Pirton Methodist Church

Membership and Methodism:

The Church has 13 Members. Between 9 and 20 people gather for worship most weeks.

The church continues to benefit from the variety of worship planned by the North Herts Methodist Circuit.

A number of the congregation took part in the Circuit Celebration which was held at Knebworth in May.

Ecumenism:

The Pirton Methodist/St. Mary's Liaison Group continues to meet to foster good relationships and promote joint activities by the two village churches.

The two churches join together to celebrate Covenant Sunday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Worship on the Bury- this year this was a “Pet Service“, Harvest, Remembrance Sunday and Advent. In addition Anglican Readers from St Mary’s lead worship at the chapel at least once a quarter. During Lent members were involved in the “House Groups” which met weekly and joined with members of St Mary’s and others from outside the village.

The two churches collaborate in outreach by sending joint Christmas and Easter cards.

There is an ‘informal covenant’ signed by members of both churches.

Earlier this year we were invited to visit the Congregational Chapel in Shillington; those who were able to go thoroughly enjoyed the visit and some members from Shillington came to a Pirton service.

Participation in Village Life:

The chapel is represented at all major village events including May Day celebrations, Open Gardens, Pumpkin Show and monthly Farmers’ Market. As well as building friendships, funds have been raised for the development of the chapel premises.

The Minister is on the rota to lead assemblies at Pirton School and also assists with RE lessons.

The Village Carol Service held at the chapel continues to draw many people. Chapel Preserves (sales of jam and chutney) reaches people in the village and brings in additional funds for premises development.

The children in the Pre-School came over after Harvest Festival to see the chapel decorated and they learned about where all the food and produce went.

The monthly chapel coffee mornings continue to attract a large number of people who enjoy the opportunity for friendship and fellowship. Bric-a-Brac left over from the coffee mornings is taken to Keech Cottage and other village organisations are invited to hold cake stalls to help with their own fundraising.

Julie Dawson, previously a Teaching Assistant at Pirton School, uses the chapel each Thursday morning to rehearse her children’s choir. This thriving group sang at the joint Harvest Festival Service in October and we look forward to hearing them at the Village Carol Service.

We have been grateful to Thomas Rowe and Clifton Hughes for playing the organ on occasion which allows Vera a well deserved break and opportunity to sit in the service.

The Chapel is also used by various groups such as “The Bury Trust” and “Neighbourhood Plan” Group for their meetings.

The chapel hosts the village “Book Swap” venture set up following the demise of the mobile library service. This meets twice a month on a Wednesday, once during the coffee morning and once from 2 till 4 in the afternoon. A number of volunteers in the village make sure that this runs smoothly.

There was a very successful “Afternoon Tea Concert” on October 14th . The performance was given by members of “Felici” a musical group led by Margaret Johnson and all profits were for the chapel. In total we raised £138 and it was a lovely afternoon thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attended

We are hoping to refurbish the Sunday School Hall to provide facilities for young people in the village. A management group has been formed and plans have been drawn up.

St. Faith’s Church, Hitchin

What is the state of the work of God in this church? In particular:

How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

We have grown in numbers by three new attendees and we have had six confirmations.

What have we done to encourage growth?

Small Talk (Mothers and Toddlers) group continues to grow.
Bible Study after the midweek service on weekly Wednesday mornings.
Launching new Bible Study group on Thursday evening during Advent.

What have we done to show God's love?

The church continues to be a focus for the community in Walsworth.
Harvest Thanksgiving service with uniform organizations was able to send a substantial collection of food to the North Herts Sanctuary in Hitchin.
Saturday coffee mornings – attracts a regular clientele, not all of whom are regular Sunday worshippers

How have we shared the story of our faith?

Remembrance Sunday service, attended by all the uniform organizations, and wreath laying on the Walsworth War Memorial (erected in 1917 in the church grounds).
Funerals and ministerial bereavement visiting beyond just members of the Church.
Ministerial visits to the three junior schools of the community.
All these enable the Church to share our faith as well as sharing the faith story.

How are we working ecumenically in our community?

St. Faith's is a member of Churches Together in Hitchin, and also being an LEP does have a number Church of England members in congregation!

St Hugh & St John's Church

What is the state of the work of god in this church since our last meeting? In particular: How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

- Over the last year we have seen more people in church and a growth in regular attendance.
- We have put on a range of different services, incorporating different worship styles; enabling our regular congregation to try something new and also attract a few new faces.
- We have also hosted community events, and tried to be more welcoming and open to newcomers.
- Allison has started the Worship leaders course with a view to becoming a local preacher

What have we done to encourage growth?

- We have invested in new signage, and become more inviting and welcoming as a church.
- We changed the layout within the church to incorporate a cosy corner for families with very young children; this, allows parents to feel part of the service whilst seeing to the needs of their children.
- Our children and young people take on many roles during the summer, from helping leading the services by taking part in the liturgy to taking the collection, welcoming, ringing the bell. This was much enjoyed by the children and really drew them into the body of the church family; many people comment on how confident our children and young people are.
- We saw Martin and Dan confirmed this year.

- We have instigated joint services with Lauchpad
- We have several Bible study groups which are growing in number, and a faith exploration group which continue to explore deeper theological issues together. We have a new youth group for the 16+ age group, enabling them to explore Christianity and their own faith.
- Strawberry teas, Open air service, Pet service, Camp fire

What have we done to show God's love?

- We continue to put on an afternoon tea every 6 weeks to which we invite 40+ people who are on their own, as well as our funeral families.
- We also host a Steward and Wardens's lunch every few months to which we invite members of the congregation so that they may get to know each other and us a little better.
- Our food bank box continues to be filled most weeks.
- Our Hungry for justice group have regular retiring collections for a variety of causes, and also host coffee mornings to raise funds and awareness for various charities; there is also the harvest appeal and toy service.

How have we shared the story of our faith?

- Over the past year we have enjoyed hearing from different members of our congregation, who have shared their faith during our morning worship.
- During Holy Week, some of our members did a walk of witness through the community, carrying the cross and praying as they went; we also dropped letters into all the shops and industrial units with these words: "During Holy Week, (the week before Easter), we have been praying that God would bless Chells and Chells Manor with mercy, peace, purity and virtue. Today we prayed for all who live, work and visit The Glebe and the Industrial area Jesus said: Blessed are the merciful. Matthew 5. 7 Blessed are the peacemakers. Matthew 5. 9 Blessed are the pure in heart. Matthew 5. 8 Blessed are the righteous. Matthew 5. 10"
- This Christmas we will sing carols at the local shops. We plan to make better connections with local businesses as part of our Mission Action Plan.

How are we working ecumenically in our community?

- We hosted CTIS Praying in Unity.
- We also joined with High Street to provide a summer holiday club.
- We also continue to be a thriving LEP.
- Confirmation candidates were prepared jointly with All Saint's.

St Paul's Methodist Church

How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

- An increased sense of being a congregation in good heart, with consistent regular attendance and a reinvigorated sense of identity (encouraged by the adoption of a mission statement).
- One new member (by transfer).
- Two new stewards.
- New regular Bible Study sessions led by the minister.

- New regular special services for Good Friday and Christmas Eve, with good attendance at both.
- Celebrated our first wedding in eight years.

What have we done to encourage growth?

- Adopted a mission statement: *The mission of St Paul's Methodist Church is to be a witness to God's loving and transforming presence in the Broadwater community, and to respond to that presence through worship, care, and growing Christian discipleship. We exercise this mission in partnership with our fellow Christians across Stevenage and the North Hertfordshire Methodist Circuit.*
- Continued to show real friendship towards those who come new to the church.
- Consistently demonstrated a warm and natural welcome to all who come into contact with the church.
- Bible study actively promoted and facilitated by offering a range of different session times.

What have we done to show God's love?

- Monthly coffee morning continues in good heart.
- Continued to show hospitality (through very generous hire rates) to various regular therapeutic groups (AA, NA, etc) and ad hoc community hirers.
- Joined together in a celebratory meal on two occasions: to bid farewell to a much loved adherent who moved home to Mexico, and for an Epiphany celebration (paid for by generous gift of our departed Mexican friend).
- Shown a generous and genuine welcome to occasional visitors at worship (for example at Christmas services).

How have we shared the story of our faith?

- Continued to bring the presence of the church in this community to the attention of many:
 - through providing the base for Bridge Builders who have many visitors from across Stevenage;
 - through providing very competitive rates for people requiring occasional hall-hire;
 - through use of the church as a local Polling Station.
- Celebrated the wedding of a local couple (an infrequent occurrence at St Paul's), and shared the message of Christian love with their sizeable congregation.

How are we working ecumenically in our community?

- Continued regular (roughly quarterly) sharing in worship with Stevenage URC, as an expression of solidarity with them while they are without a minister.
 - Continued regular leading of local school assemblies by our minister in partnership with Bridge Builders, increasing the profile of the church within the school community.
 - Consistent representation of the church in the activities of Churches Together in Stevenage, including hosting church leaders' meetings, and through the appointment of our minister as chairperson of CTiS.
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Stotfold Methodist Church

What is the state of the work of God in this church/society/meeting/activity? :

How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

The five people who joined us last year still attend services and we hope this will lead to increased membership.

What have we done to encourage growth?

We actively invite people to come and offer a warm welcome to all attending our services. More of our current adherents are becoming involved with our activities

What have we done to show God's love?

Our Pastoral Care team are very active in ensuring that everyone is shown love and care particularly during periods of ill health and bereavement. Where possible members of Monday Club are also included, most of whom do not attend our services.

We filled thirty shoeboxes for Samaritans Purse and because of volunteering to be a drop off point in the area, 325 boxes were collected from our church in October.

Proceeds from our Christmas Day collection were combined with those from an evening of Christmas Music by the Stotfold Christian Choir and shared equally between Keech Cottage Hospice and the North Herts Sanctuary.

Our monthly Coffee Mornings continue to be successful. We have many regulars who enjoy the warm friendly atmosphere and take the opportunity to share their problems/joys or just have a good chat. We have been encouraged recently to see new faces and young families.

How have we shared the story of our faith?

We take part in the ecumenical "Open the Book" in schools and other events through Churches Together. The Toddlers Group are involved in acts of worship at Christmas and Easter. There is a weekly "Pause for Thought" and prayer at Monday Club and at Easter, Harvest and Christmas this takes place in the Worship Area.

Trinity Church

How have we grown as a church since our last meeting?

- Two baptisms (one infant and one 9-year-old).
- One trainee Local Preacher making good progress.
- Continuing increase of participation by children in worship, including sharing in Holy Communion.
- New regular Bible Study sessions led by the minister, with around 20% of the congregation participating.

- Increasing use of “prayer ministry”, which is available after alternate Sunday evening services.
- Appointed three new Elders (stewards) who significantly strengthen the representation of younger members, families, and persons with disability in the leadership of the church.
- A few new regular attenders at worship.
- New prayer initiatives in connection with Sunday worship (see below).
- Nine children and young people participated in 3generate.

What have we done to encourage growth?

- Taken proactive steps to enable children and their families to feel completely at home in the church, including provision of children’s activities during after-service coffee in the same space as the rest of the congregation, and discouraging a sense of children and their families needing to segregate themselves away from the rest of the adults.
- Children sharing in the liturgy of holy communion, by presenting the elements.
- Continued to engage systematically as a church with Robert Schnase’s *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*.
- Bible study actively promoted and facilitated by offering a range of different session times.
- Engaged the whole congregation in a review of the ways we show hospitality, and encouraged increased awareness of how we present ourselves as a church to those who come to us for the first time.
- Two church members and the minister accompanied a group of children and young people to 3generate.

What have we done to show God’s love?

- New practice of systematic prayer, week by week, for our congregation during Sunday worship (similar to the model at Christchurch).
- A new prayer book for people to write in their particular concerns, which are then included in intercessions during worship.
- Preparations for a scheme of praying systematically for the streets in our neighbourhood, and delivering letters to residents to let them know, and inviting them to submit concerns to be included in the church’s prayers.
- Reviewed and given better organisation to our door welcome for Sunday worship, including greater participation in this by children.
- Continuing quarterly “Social Sundays”, which are an act of hospitality to children, in the form of well-advertised occasions when children come to play games and have fun, and share in a few minutes of worship, on a Sunday morning.
- Continuing very effective team-based pastoral care support system, together with a weekly prayer list.

How have we shared the story of our faith?

- Annual message of hope by our minister to parents attending the Knebworth Preschool nativity play.
- Participated in ecumenical Christmas carol singing around Knebworth.
- Continuing bi-monthly ‘Café’ Sundays: an evangelistic initiative by which worship’s threshold of accessibility is made as low as possible, while also seeking to be as engaging as possible,

from the perspective of people entering church for the first time (particularly younger adults).

- Demonstrated the commitment of the junior church (Sunday Club) to the Christian imperative to support global development and the relief of people in need, through the hosting and promotion of a successful and lucrative cake sale, shortly before Christmas, to raise funds for the work of All We Can.

How are we working ecumenically in our community?

- Fully active participants in the Knebworth Family of Churches, in the wide range of KFC activities in the local community – including the very well-subscribed “Good Egg Club” children’s holiday club, Lent study groups and Good Friday walk of witness.
- Participated ecumenically in providing two days of “Soul Space” (as part of the *Prayer Spaces in Schools* initiative) in the local primary school.
- Increased engagement with Churches Together in Stevenage (including hosting their AGM, and a Churches Together in Hertfordshire event in January 2017), encouraged by the appointment of our minister as CTIS’s chairperson.