



New Beginnings – Progress Report Two Months On

Introduction: You will remember that we at St Mary's have been taking stock and drafting a Mission Action Plan which should help to regenerate our mission to Walberton, Fontwell and Binsted in the aftermath of COVID. The lockdowns led to some members of our church family becoming disconnected and many people are still reluctant to join gatherings. We have also become aware of how so many things have changed in society in recent years. Accordingly, a new look was needed at everything we do to further the Kingdom in our parish. It is hoped that you will find this report of interest: it represents the first results following the New Beginnings meeting on the 30 January.

The Mission Action Plan (MAP) Group has met twice since the New Beginnings meeting on 30 January; the event was attended by over 50 adults, mostly over 50 years of age, and a few children.

The whole church membership was asked to complete a questionnaire, whether or not they were present on 30 January. 42 replies were received mostly from the same age group. A notable reaction was an acknowledgement that much must change if we are not to lose touch with the younger age group – especially the times and forms of worship. Our new approaches, however, must be bedded in prayer; more prayer will help us to know what the Lord wants from us.

The task of change to meet and anticipate what is required to fulfil our Vision in the 21st century is daunting. Our resources are limited and progress, inspired by the Holy Spirit will depend on the whole church fellowship stepping forward in faith. The MAP set out priorities for immediate action and this report covers action to be taken this year.

More Open

1. Our style and pattern of service is to be reappraised. As Sunday morning is difficult for many young families, on Sunday 3rd April there will be an experimental *Families at Five*, assisted by Emmie Huxtable, (with the 1st Sunday Holy Communion service taking place in the morning). Then we will be better informed to make lasting changes. This service will be aimed at children and families rather than All Ages. Sunday school will continue at 10.30am on 2nd 3rd and 4th Sundays for now.
2. We need to listen to God, but also more to our children and the wider village community. We will need to consider how to communicate and involve young families better.

More Converted

3. New groups are being formed: Vanessa Church is leading a Listening to God Group which is founded on silent prayer. The first was a great success and reported to the Morning Praise service;
4. Julie Allday is to lead a women's Barnabas Discipleship Group starting after Easter. Tim has already started a Dads' Bible Study online group which will meet with other men as a Barnabas Discipleship group in April.

More Generous

5. There is good level of interest in training in praying with and for others, which Tim will organise next term as it becomes possible to be close up to each other.
6. We have been holding collections for Ukraine at the prayer vigils organised by Kevin Durban Jackson and have so far raised over £400 for Tearfund's appeal. Thanks to those providing Ukraine lapel colours
7. There was widespread support for having a Generous Giving Sunday each autumn as we make the churches needs clearer for the coming year.

More Engaged

8. Two EcoChurch Groups have been formed: Jean Strickland is leading a group to sign up to the A Rocha scheme which will monitor our activities for sustainability and will provide suggestions for individual good practice and inspiration to the church family.

Bernard Lane will lead another group to look at heating solutions for the church and the possibility of solar panels.

9. Alison Phillips intends to set up a monthly midweek *Little Lambs* play and pray group in the summer term based in the church.
10. Peter Allday arranging a Games Evening starting 5 April and Chris Dart is willing to set up a church cycling group – with due respect to safety issues as a way of drawing in fringe people especially men.
11. Peter Brown has offered to start a new working group to look at the range of our communications and how they can be improved and be more accessible to our target audiences

Looking ahead to a 21st Century Church

While we are looking at the times and forms of services this year, looking further ahead we do need to upgrade our facilities. Young families will be attracted by bright, enjoyable, and relevant services using modern technology. Music is a key ingredient and, to supplement our own musicians, the use of recorded backing music with live singing cannot be discounted. The installation of Broadband will be essential which Kevin and Steve Philips are looking into.

Research on these issues can start during this year, so that we know what resources will be needed. We will also be able to learn from other churches as we develop new styles of informal worship.

And Finally

Please speak to one of our churchwardens – Jean Strickland or Steve Phillips - if you would like to be involved with any of these initiatives.

Written by Peter Brown and Rev Tim Ward on behalf of the MAP group.