



Setting God's People Free

Pilot Parish Project – 2018 to 2019

Findings of Congregation Surveys

Setting God's People Free (SGPF) aims to help the whole people of God to live out the Good News of Jesus and follow him with confidence in all areas of life, Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday. As Christians, lay and ordained, we are all equal partners in mission, grounded in our common baptism, with complementary gifts and vocations. Together we are called to be a living witness to others in the 95% of our time we spend outside the church. We have the privilege and opportunity to serve Christ in every task we do, in every encounter we have, and every place we find ourselves: working, resting and playing – whether we are in the factory or the sanctuary, the primary school or Sunday school, the board room or the sitting room, the coffee house or the gym – in all of life.

Churches in this pilot study used SGPF resources and ideas to help identify the places and people God has called us to be with every day. These are the places where living out our faith in what we say, pray and do makes a difference. In our worship, our discipleship and our fellowship we aim to recognise, rejoice in and resource the unique and diverse ministries each and every church member has in their varied walks of life. The two surveys conducted in this pilot study looked at how well the project met these aims.



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Churches ●

29 churches initially signed up to be Pilot Parishes of which 18 took part in the surveys. The parishes varied in size, tradition, context and familiarity with whole-life discipleship.

Responses

550 responses were returned from the initial baseline survey to establish a starting point. 265 responses were returned for a second follow up survey at the end of the one year pilot. All surveys were anonymous.

We asked: 'What words would you use to describe your church?'

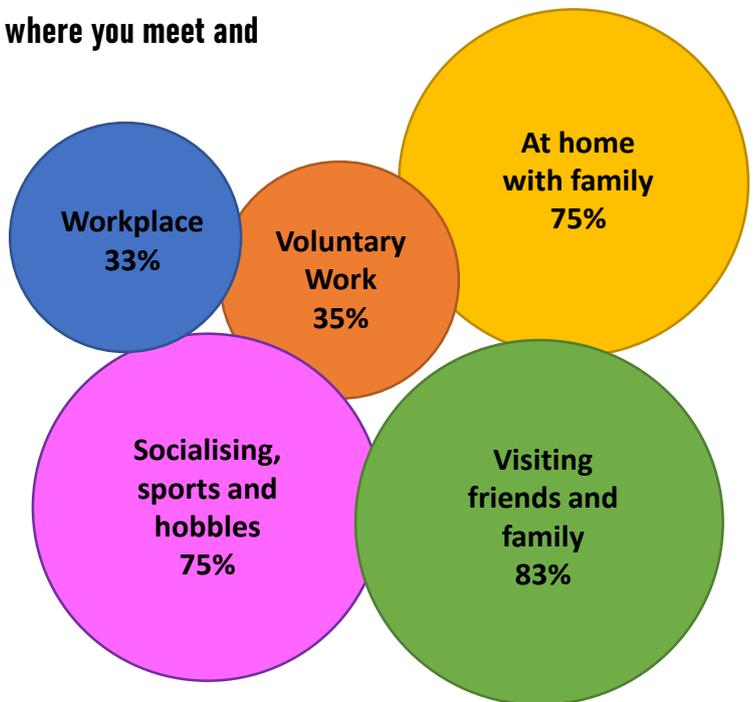
In the word cloud, the larger the word the more frequent the response. The headlines are encouraging, yet some words may need translation, for example, "old-fashioned" could mean stuck in the past or richly traditional, similarly "challenging" could mean difficult or inspirational. This question helped individual churches to reflect on their character, strengths and weaknesses.



We asked: 'Where do you find yourself everyday, where you meet and influence others around you?'

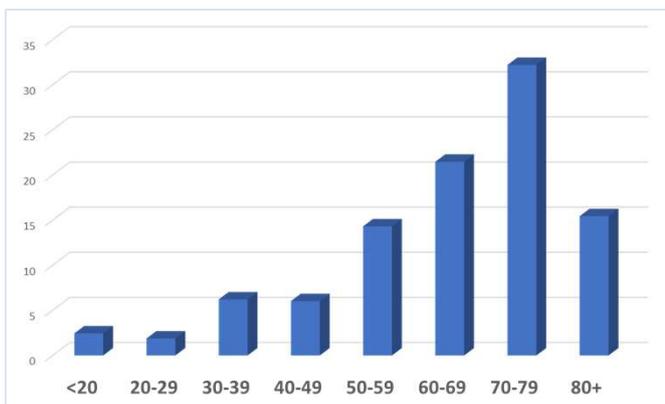
This prompted reflection from the churches, asking:

- How do we support the value of daily work in our churches, in all its forms: paid, voluntary, charity, caring?
- How do we encourage discussion, prayer, sharing God’s word and living out our faith: in the family home, round the dinner table, socialising with friends, etc.?

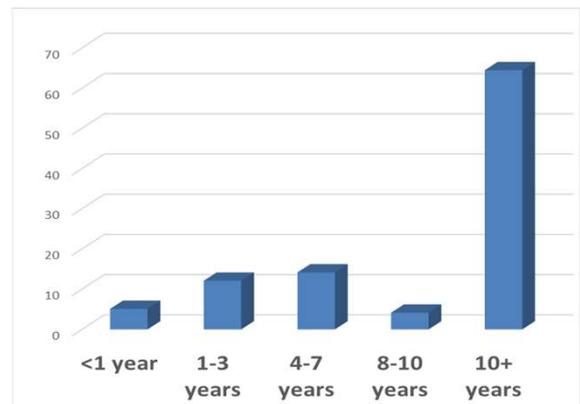


Who took part in the survey?

It was mainly older and established members who answered the first survey, reflecting perhaps those who felt more empowered and confident to speak out on issues regarding the church’s ministry and worship and in a paper based survey.

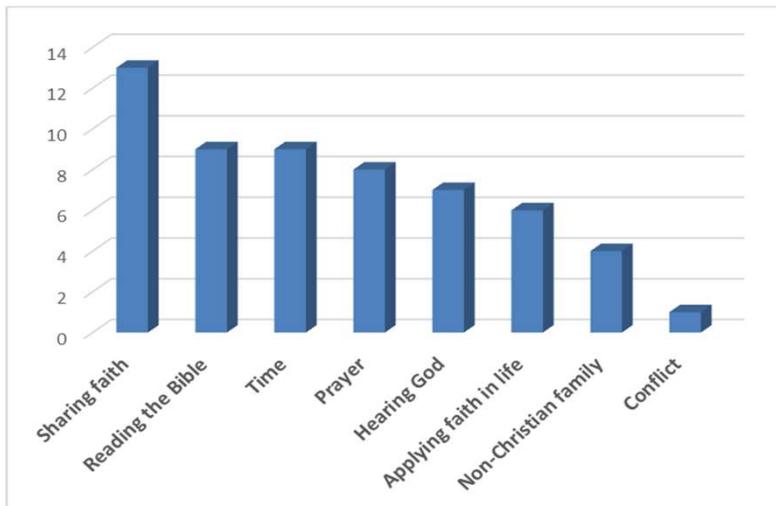


Ages of participants (%)



How long participants had been members of their church (%)

**At the start of the Pilot Project we asked:
‘What challenges have you faced as a Christian in the last year?’**



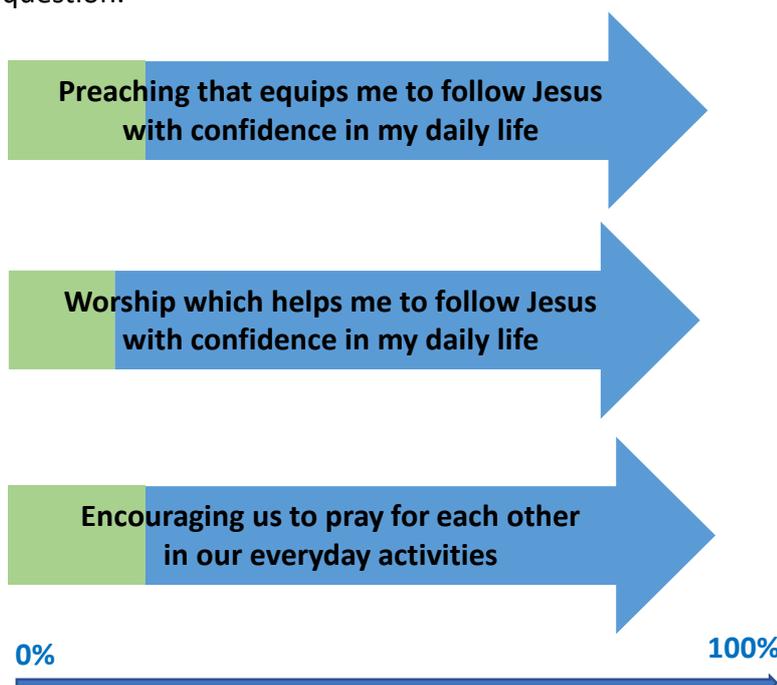
The top 3 answers from each church were collated in this chart. The most frequent response was “Sharing Faith”, prompting some churches to explore what this meant for their congregation, including helping them to recognise ‘whole-life witness’, in sharing their individual faith stories with others and being Jesus-focused in all they do.

Interestingly in our increasingly busy lives, lacking sufficient “time” was a common answer. Yet SGPF is not about ‘doing more’ but recognising and resourcing what we are already doing, in the places we already find ourselves and with the people we already meet.

The Pilot Project has strengthened the church’s support for everyday discipleship
At the end of the Pilot Project, we asked: ‘How well is your church doing?’ in a number of areas.

At the start of the Pilot Project there was quite a mixed response to the question of whether the church’s *worship* helped members to follow Jesus with confidence in their daily life? However, the second survey revealed that the three sources of greatest support in everyday discipleship had been in *preaching*, *worship* and *encouraging church members to pray for one another*.

The following shows the percentage of respondents who answered ‘Started’ or ‘Now do regularly’ rather than ‘Not done’, with a small percentage (<5%) not answering each question.



The Pilot Parishes made use of a number of resources to support and encourage SGPF. These included: materials from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity such as “Fruitfulness on the Frontline”; initiatives in prayer such as “This Time Tomorrow”; preaching series; small group studies; and liturgical resources for different services and church contexts that enabled a focus on our everyday life beyond Sunday. These will be shared more widely following the Pilot Project.

The Pilot Project has strengthened weaker areas of church support for everyday discipleship

We reviewed progress on four areas ranked lowest in terms of church support at the start of the Pilot Project.

The following shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'Started' ■ and 'Now do regularly' ■ rather than 'Not done' with <11% not answering each question.



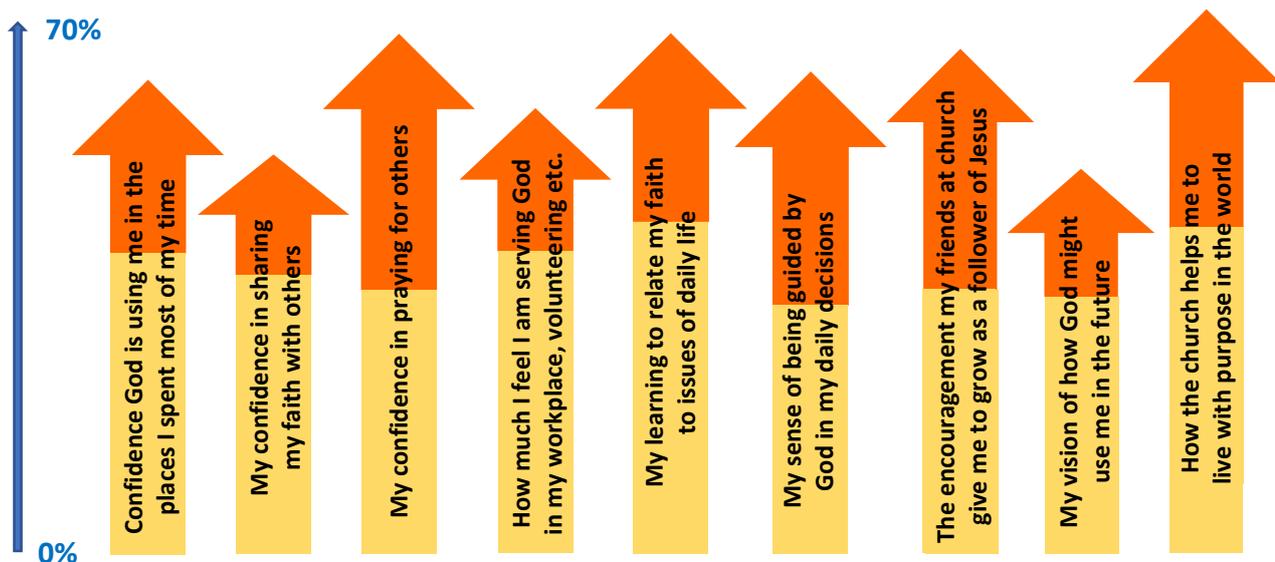
Clear progress has been made in all these areas with upwards of three quarters of all respondents reporting their church had 'started' or were 'regularly' helping them in the areas outlined opposite, that were previously identified as aspects for improvement.

In addition 82% reported their church was equipping them life's major challenges (e.g. parenting, singleness, marriage, sickness & bereavement) and 71% that small groups were equipping them to follow Jesus with confidence in everyday life.

The Pilot Project has given participants more confidence to live as everyday disciples

At the end of the Pilot Project, we asked: 'How do the following aspects reflect your experience of everyday life, compared to a year ago?'

The following shows the percentage of respondents marking statements 'More' ■ or 'Much more' ■ as opposed to 'About the same', with <7% not answering each question.



Conclusion The SGPF Pilot Project has allowed churches to take stock of and then develop the means to encourage and resource everyday faith and discipleship, such that church members feel more empowered to live out their faith, and make a difference as a Christian, in their own contexts and with the people they meet every day. Under the banner of "Everyday Faith" Chester Diocese will now share the learning and resources from the Pilot Project more widely with other churches.