

SfM: Oswestry Deanery

Reviewing Our Deanery

Oswestry is a classic 'market town'. The population is closely balanced between Oswestry Town and Oswestry District. There are four larger villages of c. 3,000 or over; four between 1,500 and 2,000 and eight below 1,000. Oswestry is the second largest town in Shropshire and one of the most rapidly growing areas. The population of Oswestry is forecast to rise from 18,700 in 2011 to 23,200 in 2026, a rise of 24%. We are midway into the steepest part of this projected increase 2016-2026, when the population is forecast to rise by just over 4,000. The larger villages are also growing rapidly. Elsewhere there is a lot of infill growth. This growth is a major challenge for the Church.

Oswestry deanery has a population of 41,695 (2018), with a relatively lower representation of young adults (33% v 37% nationally) and higher proportion of over 65s (20% v 16%). There are around 1,100 on the electoral rolls of the parishes, with an average Sunday attendance of just over 700, of whom around 10% are children.

Oswestry parishes are a diverse group, including large and small churches, the thriving and the struggling. The main influences are traditional and evangelical, with a growing evangelical presence in Oswestry and the northern part of the Deanery. There is relatively little Anglo-Catholic expression.

The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District NHS Trust (RJAH) lies between Oswestry and Gobowen. It is one of only five specialist orthopaedic hospitals in England and has a dedicated chaplaincy team, supported by members of the deanery. The hospital specialises in orthopaedics, both adult and paediatric. The Trust includes West Midlands Centre for Spinal Injuries amongst its specialist services, along with community services inherited from the district hospital which closed over 25 years ago (maternity and care of the elderly).

The summary below represents a very small proportion of the feedback returned from the parishes to the Deanery Shaping for Mission team. All parishes submitted summary documents, though some were more detailed than others. Key numerical information is presented in tables on pages 6 & 7. Oswestry Rural Youth Church (ORYC) also completed a return and comments are integrated into the parish returns.

Our Deanery – The Place

1. Church of England presence in our Deanery

Church Schools	Kinnerley CE(C) Primary School Morda CE(C) Primary School Oswestry Holy Trinity CofE Primary Academy Pant Bryn Offa CE(C) Primary School Selattyn CE(C) Primary School Trefonen CE(C) Primary School West Felton CE(C) Primary School Whittington CE(A) Primary School
Fresh Expressions	Oswestry Rural Youth Church Messy Church x6 Supa Club (KMKMM group) Praise in the pub (Selattyn) Praise and Play (Whittington)
Chaplaincies	Oswestry Rugby Club Oswestry School North Shropshire College, Oswestry Campus Robert Jones & Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital St John Ambulance Shropshire Derwen College
Other	Pradoe church is in an Extra parochial area

2. Ecumenical partners in the Deanery.

- CTOD (Churches Together in Oswestry District) – quarterly joint services
- Schools’ Christian Worker Project
- The Food Bank
- Oswestry Christian Bookshop
- Oswestry Rural Youth Church (an Anglican initiative with temporary funding)
- North Shropshire & Borders Filling Station
- Hope Church homeless shelter
- Mothers’ Union
- Bell ringing networks
- Ride and Stride
- Girls’ Brigade in Oswestry URC
- Quinta Centre: UK HQ’s of Operation Mobilisation and Centre Ministries

Oswestry has Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, URC, and several free evangelical churches/chapels. Google Maps show at least 7 mainstream churches within 500m of the town centre with another planning to move in from a suburb. Oswestry town church members and clergy/leaders meet and collaborate. There is also joint support for Christian Aid, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, World Day of Prayer and the Food Bank. Holy Trinity Bible studies, training and youth events attract Christians from other non-Anglican churches.

New free churches have played a significant role in the development of the Christian community in the deanery with the founding of Hope Church (formerly Carreg Llywyd) in 1964 and its daughter church, Cabin Lane, in 1991. Their members have been heavily involved, with members of Anglican churches, in a series of initiatives including CTOD, the Christian Bookshop, the Schools’ Christian Worker Project and the Foodbank. Ecumenical lay Christian networks are very strong and have great potential. For example, ORYC works closely with Hope Church and the SCWP. These informal contacts have been strengthened by the

development of The Quinta since 1985 and the number of people it has brought to the churches in the area.

In village communities ecumenical relationships are often informal, based on friendship. The KMKMM group, however, work happily with the Methodists and URC locally. Gobowen works with Preshenlle URC. Whittington Church supports the local Methodists.

In areas with strong Welsh identity there is a desire for cross border partnerships and some bilingual services are provided.

Areas with less Christian presence include commercial areas, East European communities, and across the deanery there are both old and new housing estates with minimal, if any, Christian presence. Often village communities have more remote development areas, smaller satellite villages and hamlets which are less integrated into parish life. Maintaining good connections with farming life, and understanding the associated pressures, is important in rural settings.

The RJAH chaplaincy team includes 3 stipendary staff members (chaplain (19 hr/wk), Catholic chaplain (6 hrs/wk) and Welsh free church chaplain (6 hr/wk)), along with 10 volunteers, two of whom are retired Anglican priests. The current chaplain is an Anglican priest and member of chapter, though the post is open to other denominations and is funded by the hospital. The chaplain is available to provide spiritual support to all patients and staff regardless of faith affiliation or belief.

3. Partnerships and networks

- Businesses which trade ethically and sustainably, especially those engaged in charity work.
- Public services, parish councils and cemeteries
- Charities: Lions Club; Oswestry Borderland Rotary; Oswestry Food Bank; St John Ambulance, 3 Parishes Big Local Lottery Funded initiative (St Martins, Gobowen & Weston Rhyn), Meals on Wheels, Whittington in Need, Whittington Together
- Clubs: Uniformed organisations (particularly important in villages), Women's Institute, Miners' Institute. Mothers' Union.
- Residential care homes and Hope House hospice
- Environmental organisations
- New Saints Football Club Foundation
- Quinta Conference Centre and Operation Mobilisation in Weston Rhyn (a major national and international centre of Christian influence: OM supports around 500 UK nationals worldwide and works in over 100 countries with over 100 nationalities. £m's of donations are channelled to this mission and relief work through The Quinta. The Conference Centre hosts regional and national conferences including the annual Christian student leaders' conference when about 1,500 gather to represent over 100 UK universities and colleges)

4. Institutions and organisations

Schools:

- Independent Schools: Oswestry School/Bellan House, Morton Hall, Packwood Haugh (this last is not in the deanery but helps with the West Felton Church carol service)
- North Shropshire FE college and the Derwen College
- Non-church schools use church buildings for services
- Christian Union at the Marches
- Preschool connections in many parishes
- Most Benefices support Oswestry Schools' Christian Worker Project (Indep. Charity). SCWP currently works in about 2 secondary schools, 1 all age school, 11 primary schools and 2 private schools in the area. SCWP has also worked with ORYC in North Shropshire College

Employers:

- RJAH Hospital employs 1700 staff
- BT (Whittington House)
- Industrial estates
- Retail and leisure, including supermarkets and garden centres.
- Schools
- Farming

Other:

- Whittington Castle
- Park Hall Farm

5. Gathering places and Centres

Oswestry town centre has numerous gathering points including outdoor squares and parks and indoor halls and market, along with public facilities and pubs/restaurants. Most of these are in St Oswald's parish, leaving Holy Trinity with a less defined geographic centre.

In village communities key gathering places include village halls, institutes, pubs, cafes and open spaces. Sporting activities also provide a community focus eg football, cricket, tennis, bowls. In small communities the church building may provide the only large gathering space. If there is a village shop this can be an important focal point and contact opportunity for churches, for example by stocking parish magazines and displaying posters. Village communities often show considerably loyalty to their communities, which extends to the church. Some rural churches (eg Morton) also have control of open spaces/fields. The West side of the deanery is hilly and wooded, ideal for ORYC's Church in the Woods.

6. What else is useful to note about the geographical area of the deanery?

Oswestry has a long history, with a heritage that includes the Iron Age Oswestry Hill Fort, a large Roman camp in St Martins, the Anglo Saxon Offa's and Wat's Dykes and the medieval Chirk Castle immediately adjacent to the deanery. There are numerous medieval sites and buildings, including churches and castles. Ancient routes into Wales pass through the deanery as well as the London to Holyhead and the Chester to Cardiff Roads. There is also a railway museum in the town and the Montgomery and Llangollen canals (which include the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal UNESCO World Heritage site) pass through the deanery.

The Oswestry area has been strongly shaped by large estates (Chirk and Ruthin Castle Estates, Powis Castle Estate, Bradford Estate, Harlech family/Brogyntyn Estate and The Quinta Estate).

Past coal mining and quarrying industries have left their marks both culturally and physically.

Oswestry town is on the local tourist trail and there are caravan and holiday facilities in the area. Three long distance footpaths pass through the deanery (Offa's Dyke Path, The Severn Way and The Shropshire Way). Oswestry also has important natural heritage with associated environmental projects.

The area around Oswestry is predominantly rural, with a number of larger villages with significant populations. Parishes are widely spread and public transport links are patchy.

The deanery has a strong Welsh flavour, particularly in parishes which include or border Wales. However, the overall categorisation of 'Rural Deanery' is not necessarily helpful. Cultures and attitudes are far more complex with some of the larger villages now having a growing suburban commuter feel. People relate, in terms of work and leisure, across a wide geographic area from Welshpool to Wrexham and Shrewsbury to Chester. Regional alliances vary from Wales to the West Midlands and North West (Liverpool and Manchester). The deanery demographic is overwhelmingly white British (English and Welsh) with a very small BAME community. There are pockets of significant deprivation with two areas within the top 20% of most deprived areas nationally and a further 2 within the top 30%. However, 4% of the households in 2016 had an income exceeding £80k

Oswestry sees a lot of passing traffic, particularly along the A5. The Shrewsbury to Chester railway runs through the deanery, with the station at Gobowen providing an important centre and link point. Oswestry is a long way from Lichfield. Three cathedrals are closer: Chester, St Asaph and Liverpool. The journey time to Lichfield Cathedral is almost identical to those in Manchester and Birmingham. Lichfield therefore has an identity issue in our deanery which has serious implications in motivating people to raise money to support such a remote establishment when deanery staffing is already understandably paired back.

Our Deanery – The People

1. Population

Approximate population of your deanery (number of people who live in the geographical area?)	<i>See table 2</i>
Number of people who attend the deanery and when	<i>See table 1</i>

2. Formal Roles

Number of Authorised or Licensed Lay Ministers	<i>See table 1</i>
Number of people with formal lay roles (Church wardens, treasurers, PCC secretary)	<i>See table 1</i>
Number of Clergy, Stipend and NSM	<i>See table 1</i>
Any other paid roles (church administrators, youth workers etc)	<i>See table 1</i>

2. Volunteers (see either table below for key to parish identification number)

Places of Welcome	5-9, 10, 12, 13, 14
Dementia-Friendly Church	1, 2, 3, 4, 10
Eco Church	3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14
Sunday school / Sunday kids work	<i>See table 1</i>
Parent/ carer and toddler group or play group	5, 10, 15, 16, 17
Youth work	<i>See table 1</i>
Community Café	1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15
Foodbank	1, 2, 3, 4, 5-9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Pastoral provision	2, 3, 4, 5-9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21
Night shelter or other homeless provision	5-9
Money matters and debt advice	12
Breakfast / after school clubs	5, 10, 12
Mental Health support connected with the church	10, 12, 17
Support / activities for older people	2, 3, 4, 5-9, 10, 12, 17, 21

Other community activity	10, 12 Post Office in church building (14) Village youth club held in church (14) Gobowen, St Martin's and Llanymynech host clubs in their halls.
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Our Buildings and Financial Information

This section will be filled in before the template is given to the deanery team.

What buildings do we have?	<i>See table 2</i>
Share payment history (over last 5 years)	<i>See table 2</i>
Subsidies available from either low income community funding or mutual support	Funding for church yard (13,14) Funding for WiFi (17)
Summary statement about affordability based on points 1-3	<i>See table 2</i>

The Building Stock

The Deanery building stock is an 'elephant in the room'. In the last century much effort went into creating church halls and chapter houses but this was long before the call to net zero carbon emissions. In town, St Oswald's is large and expensive to heat and Holy Trinity is not necessarily well placed to serve its burgeoning population. Some small parishes have to negotiate the challenge of maintaining listed buildings with limited 21st century facilities and high maintenance costs. As an example, one of the few unlisted buildings, Weston Rhyn, is still struggling against all odds to bring its facilities up-to-date and is even trying to start on the long path to achieving net zero carbon emissions which for most is close to being an unrealistic goal.

The RJAH chaplaincy team have use of a shared sacred space which is designed to be a quiet reflective facility for patients and staff. There are elements which are more specifically designed to support Christian and Muslim worship.

Table 1: People and Ministry

	Sunday Service Congregation numbers	Midweek Services	Virtual Services	Licensed Lay Ministers	Officers	Clergy stipendiary or (non)	Other Paid Staff	Sunday Kids provision	Youth Work	Home / Prayer Groups	Clubs	Occasional Courses	
Llanyblodwel (1)	15		x	2	WWTS	1	1PT				x	X	
Llanymynech (2)	25	x	x		(W)TS				x			X	
Morton (3)	17		x		WWTS							x	X
Trefonen (4)	38		x		WWTTS				x		x	x	x
Kinnerley (5)	27				TS	1 (1)					X		
Melverley (6)	16 (monthly service)		x		WTS				ORYC	x		X	x
Knockin (7)	12				WTS							X	
Maesbrook (8)	5				WTS							X	
Maesbury (9)	16				WTS							X	
Oswestry St Oswald's (10)	165 (3 services)	x	x	3	WWWWTS	1 (4)	8 (5PT)	x	x	x	x	x	
Rhydycroesau (11)	10				WWTS								
Oswestry Holy Trinity (12)	140		x	0	5	2	3	x	x	x		x	
Saint Martin's (13)	50	x		4	WW/TS	1			ORYC		x	x	
Weston Rhyn (14)	40			1	WWTS			x				x	x
Selattyn (15)	23				WWTS	1 (2)				x			
Gobowen (16)	50	x	x	5	WWTS			1	x	x	x		x

Whittington (17)	52 (3 services)	x	x		4	2	2	x		x		x
West Felton (18)	38				W/T/S			x				
Haughton (19)	Monthly											
Pradoe (20)												
RJAH Chaplaincy	<5	x	x			3PT						

Table 2: Fabric and Finance

	Church Building Listing Status	Additional Buildings	Population (2018)	Parish Share	Up to date with payment	Confidence in future payment
Llanyblodwel (1)	1		680	14,567	x	(x)
Llanymynech (2)	2	x	1,870	19,988	x	
Morton (3)	x		1,071	12,044	x	
Trefonen (4)	x		1,332	21,263	x	(x)
Kinnerley (5)	2*		891	12,450	x	
Melverley (6)	1		164	5,083		
Knockin (7)	2*		263	10,688	x	
Maesbrook (8)	x		294	4,855		
Maesbury (9)	x		486	12,092	x	
Oswestry St Oswald's (10)	2*	x	11,304	60,506	x	x

Rhydycroesau (11)	x		348	5,125	x	x
Oswestry Holy Trinity (12)	2		8,677	40,213		
Saint Martin's (13)	1	x	2,927	27,854	x	
Weston Rhyn (14)*	x		3,035	21,500	x	
Selattyn (15)	1		444	9,800	x	
Gobowen (16)	x	x	3,823	33,609	x	x
Whittington (17)	2		2,583	43,064		
West Felton (18)	2*		1,504	19,804	x	x
Haughton (19)	x					
Pradoe (20)	x					
RJAH Chaplaincy		x				

* St John's Weston Rhyn has a Baptismal Pool.

Our Deanery – Discipleship, Vocation and Evangelism.

Discipleship.

Themes from town churches:

The two town churches have different theologies, traditions and cultures. St Oswald's has a strong musical and choral tradition and has a greater civic role. The church is open daily with a programme of Sunday and weekday services and activities. There are regular gatherings for prayer and study. The church has fully embraced live streaming post Covid.

Holy Trinity sees the Sunday service as central to discipleship in all the dimensions listed. Preaching and theological reflection are key emphases. Home groups and prayer groups are also central, with congregation members gathering in homes across the deanery. There is a general programme of 1-2-1 encouragement between members of the congregation. There is also midweek youth work.

Themes from village churches:

In the villages church buildings are often particularly conspicuous and make natural gathering places. Many churches are left open during the day, allowing casual visits, private reflection and prayer. 90% of village churches still offer weekly services, with some collaboration within benefices. Village churches have to minister to everyone as there is less diversity of choice in the community. Some tensions are inevitable between traditional and new worship patterns, with a diversity of church backgrounds in the congregation being both a blessing and a source of misunderstanding. Small churches cannot offer the extensive programmes of support in discipleship available to town churches. Parishioners need to take initiative in their own spiritual development, which is challenging for some. Even very traditional churches are embracing the virtual world in the CV-19 era. Less traditional approaches to worship are more likely to be found in larger villages with a wider age range in their membership.

Themes from all churches:

The natural world feeds the spirituality of rural churches in particular.

Baptism and confirmation classes were not a strong theme in the deanery responses.

Over the years there has been a small but significant movement of members between different Anglican churches and between Anglican and Free Churches.

Themes from RJAH Chaplaincy:

The hospital chaplaincy team respond to discipleship questions from patients and staff. Patients coming for routine orthopaedic procedures generally leave the hospital within a couple of days, however those needing more complex interventions stay longer. Particular pastoral support is needed for those who are dealing with life changing accidents (eg Spinal Injuries) or diagnoses (eg Tumour Unit patients). Major life events often lead to a desire to reconnect with faith.

Creative examples under the main headings:

1. Worship, Prayer and personal spirituality

- Border Benefice churches have embraced digital offerings, including Facebook recording, on-line house groups and Compline on Zoom.
- Llanymynech opens for daily morning prayer on week days.
- Morton Church has an active choir.
- The Border Benefice makes extensive use of worship leaders.
- Trefonen Church operates a 'prayer chain'
- The KMKMM group hold online morning prayer on Wednesday and Friday and online services on Sunday on Facebook & Youtube. They put 3 crosses in the rectory garden as a witness during Holy Week 2020.
- Whittington Church have been doing morning and evening prayer on Zoom 3-4 days a week.
- ORYC host a weekly gathering at Weston Rhyn called Ichthus Youth for young people aged 9.5 through to 18.
- St Oswald's holds spirituality taster days and has a bi-monthly Saturday breakfast prayer retreat.
- St Oswald's hosts a local Franciscan prayer cell and a parishioner is an active member of the Community of St Chad.
- St Oswald's hosts a virtual prayer community numbering over 50 individuals.

2. **Study and theological reflection**

- St Oswald's offers the Bishop's Certificate course.
- The Border Benefice produces Advent and Lent study material.
- Selattyn, Gobowen, St Martins, Weston Rhyn and Holy Trinity share a joint venture to encourage and train lay preachers and those involved with all age bible teaching.
- Whittington Church has offered a number of on-line courses.

3. **Nurturing new disciples**

- Morton church keeps contact with families who have attended for occasional offices.
- St Martins & Weston Rhyn have used Alpha and Christianity Explored courses.
- Selattyn and Gobowen have run Christianity Explored in the village pub.

4. **Spiritual direction and mentoring**

- The rector of the KMKMM group is a Diocesan Vocations Adviser.
- Weston Rhyn has encouraged young people to go on short term missions.
- Several parishioners at St Oswald's offer spiritual direction/ accompaniment.

5. **Stewardship**

- St Oswald's has planned charitable giving, as does Trefonen.
- Support for Christian Aid is strong in Llanymynech, including doorstep collections.
- Weston Rhyn church sets aside 7.5% of income for charities, missions and causes.
- Holy Trinity does not fundraise.

6. **Diversity, inclusivity and community**

- Trefonen church members have constructed a Reflection garden for use by the wider community.

- St Martin's church offers its chapter house to local groups for use.
- Weston Rhyn church building is fully accessible and available for community use within policy guidelines.
- Whittington has also made adaptations to the building.
- Selattyn's Praise in the Pub has taken worship into the community and proved very successful.
- Gobowen is seeking to make stronger links with the Derwen College.
- Whittington Church is seeking to deepen connection with the castle.
- The RJAH chaplaincy service works in an ecumenical and interfaith context.

7. Relating to the wider church

- Churches in the deanery support Christian Aid, CMS, USPG, Mercy ships, Open Doors, OM, The Red Cross, Kiwoko Hospital Uganda, Medic Malawi, Childrens' Society.
- Holy Trinity holds joint PCC days with other parishes.
- Holy Trinity has enabled full-time ministry at Selattyn and Gobowen by sending members and a previous curate.
- The diocesan conference in Shrewsbury is popular.
- Weston Rhyn church has a particularly strong association with Centre Ministries and Operation Mobilisation.

Vocation

Most of the deanery's churches involve lay participation in services, with opportunities to volunteer for committees, service and activities.

Themes from town churches:

St Oswald's has extensive involvement of lay people in worship and also has a range of opportunities for volunteers. Church members are very active in local charities, community groups, civic societies and local government. The culture is encouraging of initiative and exploration, with training provided as appropriate.

Holy Trinity has a strong emphasis on preaching and training, with many roles supported by formal training. Preaching ministry and home groups support vocational development. Mentoring is also 1-2-1. Lay people take a full part in leading Sunday worship and young people are also encouraged to exercise leadership.

Themes from village churches:

Many village churches have small congregations, meaning active members have lots to do and fill a number of different roles. Many are overstretched. Training is much more limited, with travel and age restrictions on formal training being cited as barriers. Many rural churches have volunteers who help with wider parish activities even when they don't attend worship. As congregation members are mostly retired links to secular workplaces and working vocations is restricted. Again, this picture doesn't fit all village churches and some parishes in North Oswestry eg Gobowen and Weston Rhyn are more active in vocation development.

Themes from RJAH Chaplaincy:

The hospital chaplains encounter similar vocational questions to those arising in parish ministry and support staff and patient exploring membership and ministry in their local churches. The hospital has a strong sense of collective vocation and chaplains help staff members to relate their faith to their work in healthcare. Patients who have experienced life changing injuries or diagnoses may ask for support in understanding their future life expectations and roles.

Creative examples under the main headings:

1. Exploring and nurturing everyone's vocation

- At Holy Trinity young people are encouraged to take assistant leadership roles of younger children from age 12 upwards.
- At Holy Trinity the holiday club has been a rich breeding ground for service by all generations.
- Selattyn and Gobowen's Lay Preachers' group is a stepping stone for those considering licenced or ordained ministry.
- Gobowen employs a ministry trainee.
- Whittington church have a worship committee, ministry support group and pastoral committee.
- ORYC have held a young leaders' course for young people (14+) who have felt called to a leadership positions in their church.
- Weston Rhyn has seen 4 members go into ordained ministry in last 30 years.
- St Oswald's is currently working with 2 young adults who have expressed a calling to an authorised ministry.

2. **Collaboration between lay and ordained in leading worship, prayer and study**
 - Morton church, though small, has 5 trained worship leaders, as does Trefonen.
3. **Encouraging and caring for volunteers**
 - Holy Trinity generally asks people to serve in particular ways rather than asking for volunteers.
 - The KMKMM group write to volunteers and thank them each year, as well as expressing gratitude through the magazine and website.
 - The RJAH chaplaincy trains lay volunteers as assistant chaplains.
4. **Supporting whole-life vocation, Monday – Sunday**
 - Holy Trinity found The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICCC) resources useful, as did St Martin's and Weston Rhyn.
 - The KMKMM group have used 'Setting God's People Free' and 'This Time Tomorrow'.
5. **Care and loving service in the wider community**
 - Many of the deanery churches and individual members support the Oswestry Food Bank and other local support schemes.
6. **Working for justice and peace**
 - Holy Trinity takes part in the Neighbourly project which redistributes food which would otherwise go to waste.
 - Morton Church highlighted the importance of Remembrance events to the community.
 - One Trefonen housegroup used the Church Action on Poverty material in their meetings and ran a linked service.
 - The KMKMM group are active in 'Save Our Severn' to support their communities subject to flooding.
 - St Martin's church works hard to raise awareness of the persecuted church.
 - Selattyn, Gobowen and Weston Rhyn are Fairtrade churches.
7. **Care for creation**
 - St Oswald's revealed an appetite for exploration through Lent groups and were early participants in Oswestry Community Solar Energy Partnership. A rewilding project in the churchyard is currently on hold.
 - Morton Church has silver status for its Eco-friendly values.
 - Trefonen church listed several local environmental groups with strong church membership involvement. This also comes across in the KMKMM group response.
 - The KMKMM group aims to make churchyards wildlife friendly.
 - Weston Rhyn is developing a strategy to work towards net zero carbon emissions
8. **Encouraging specific vocations and ministries**
 - Holy Trinity runs a ministry trainee programme for 1-2 years full time for those post A levels or degree.

Evangelism

Themes from town churches:

St Oswalds' church reaches out in love and service, through an open welcoming approach and through the parish magazine. There isn't an established culture of mission and evangelism amongst the wider congregation and people are reticent to talk about their faith. Expectation to see God at work is low. The church (and membership) has a wide network of connections into the community and attracts significant numbers to major events and festivals. The church has built its digital outreach during the pandemic.

Holy Trinity encourages and expects personal evangelism from its members. It also arranges outreach events, some social, some topical and others more obviously for explorers (Christianity Explored or Essentials). Outreach through personal connection, invitation and hospitality is found to be the most effective. The 1-2-1 programme is used by members of the congregation in evangelism as they engage with their personal frontline.

Themes from village churches:

Parishioners in rural churches are known to their communities – it's hard to hide! Church buildings provide a strong, visible and sometimes audible (bell ringing) presence. They are valued and owned by the community, and residents will often volunteer to help even if they are not interested in attending services, beyond major events, such as harvest suppers and festivals. There remains a wide demand for occasional offices. Common outreach strategies include general neighbourliness, magazine distribution and welcome packs for new residents. Digital outreach is also growing.

Village churches often don't have the attractive offering available in larger communities, especially for families with children. Rural church buildings may lack key facilities for catering, toilets etc. The traditional ways are valued by some church members and communities but may not be very accessible to newcomers.

As in previous sections the larger parishes, particularly to the North of Oswestry, are trying to be more actively engaged in evangelism through conscious outreach and training and enquirers' groups but there is a long way to go.

Themes from RJAH Chaplaincy:

The nature of chaplaincy means that any witness needs to be responsive rather than proactive, within a context based on universal care and support. The visible presence of the chaplains does provide a channel for enquiry, leading to opportunities for exploration of discipleship.

Creative examples under the main headings:

1. Understanding of God's holistic mission

- Members of village churches in particular tend to lead lives very integrated into their local communities.

2. Developing approaches to evangelism that are sensitive to different traditions in the church and society

- Trefonen church highlighted the need to accommodate a range of church backgrounds in corporate worship styles.

- Weston Rhyn church has a particularly diverse congregation in terms of church background, with particular awareness of international churches through OM.
 - Whittington's Praise and Play reaches out in friendship to young families.
- 3. A culture of invitation and relationship building with those on the fringes of church**
- Holy Trinity plans a school-based community hub.
 - Trefonen use welcome packs to reach out to new residents in the parish.
 - Café Blodwel provides a useful social community focal point and opportunity to reach out with invitations to services.
 - The KMKMM group stay in touch with baptismal families and make use of questionnaires. Whittington church also work to continue relationships through Messy Church, Praise and Play and birthday cards.
 - The KMKMM group have provided Christingle kits and treasure hunts, and also taken worship outdoors during the pandemic.
 - Areas with strong heritage/visitor footfall (eg Oswestry, Llanymynech) can reach out to those visiting for other purposes.
 - Church buildings can host choirs, concerts, festivals to reach out to their communities.
 - Weston Rhyn church held a 'Praying for the Patch' initiative in 2019, where prayer supported local leafleting and open the church to the community for 'SJ Coffee & Co' which now coincides with opening of the village Post Office in the church..
 - St Martins also opens for coffee.
 - Whittington and Llanymynech Churches reach out to bereaved families around the All Saints festival.
 - ORYC has been successful in making relationships with families on the fringes of church helping them to strengthen their relationship with God.
 - St Oswald's runs a weekly 'Place of Welcome' in its Parish Centre and maintains contact with baptismal families and the bereaved.
- 4. Building personal relationships in the wider community that can lead to faith**
- Trefonen is very active in the village's Hill Walk Weekend.
 - The KMKMM group highlight the importance of visible presence, including a visit from the rector.
 - Selattyn's Praise in the Pub aims to break down barriers.
- 5. Creating confidence in sharing personal faith**
- The KMKMM group use opportunities arising through shared practical tasks such as gardening or painting.
 - Gobowen church sees preaching as key to this, along with the development of personal testimony.
- 6. Creating a missionary presence through digital media**
- Parishes across the deanery are developing a digital presence through live streaming, Facebook, Youtube... Websites are also becoming increasingly important.
 - ORYC has a great presence on both Facebook and Instagram.
- 7. Creating spaces to deepen relationships and explore questions of life and faith**
- Trefonen church highlighted the usefulness of Lent Lunches.

- The rector of the KMKMM group has encouraged people to meet him in the pub.
- 8. Discovering and releasing those called to be evangelists.**
- Holy Trinity encourages the development of future evangelists in the ministry trainee programme and through encouraging participation in missions and summer camps.
 - Weston Rhyn and St Martin's churches have taken steps to facilitate this.
- 9. Sharing good practice across the deanery**
- Resources and training in evangelism are shared between Holy Trinity, Weston Rhyn, Gobowen and Selattyn.
- 10. Planting fresh expressions of Church**
- As Hope Church leaves the Carreg estate there is a new opportunity for Holy Trinity to extend activities in the area.
 - Some parishes (identified by Llanymynech as a possibility) may need to restructure unsustainable parish life into a more informal form.
- 11. Other**
- St Oswald's has a fine historical building which could be a powerful evangelistic resource. This is true of other landmark church buildings in the deanery, such as Llanyblodwel and Molverley.

Drawing some Conclusions

Looking at the information you have gathered for the review, make notes in the following areas:

1. What themes, issues or even words came up repeatedly?

- 1.1. There is a huge diversity of church expression, theology and experience.
- 1.2. Parishioners have difficulty describing and expressing their faith. There may be several reasons for this including a lack of confidence in themselves, a dissociation between faith and life and difficulty in finding the right language. There may also be a lack of confidence in God. Even those who can express their faith are concerned about the reaction they might receive and how to respond to questions they might be asked. This is true for everyone, but particularly difficult for the young.
- 1.3. There are concerns about future viability including difficulty finding office holders.
- 1.4. Many congregations are very elderly.
- 1.5. There are difficulties developing lay vocations.

2. What are some of the main strengths of the deanery?

- 2.1. There is experience of some churches working with neighbouring parishes.
- 2.2. Networks, communication links and partnerships are strong in the town (perhaps less so out into the villages).

- 2.3. The deanery is very diverse so there are huge opportunities for mutual learning.
- 2.4. There is a good range of authentic Christian worship, representing a variety of Christian traditions.
- 2.5. see also question 4 below.

3. What are some of the areas of weakness?

- 3.1. Some parishes are already barely viable and struggling to survive. Financial concerns are especially significant for them but also for those on and around the margins of viability.
- 3.2. In multi-parish benefices the relatively small share of the incumbent's time each parish receives is further put under pressure by the challenge of balancing community facing roles (eg occasional offices) with responsibilities in the church community (eg discipleship and training of members).
- 3.3. Benefice and parish boundaries can make artificial divides between social groups and adjacent church communities. They also do not always recognise changes created by 19th, 20th and 21st century developments such as railways, main roads, bypasses and housing and industrial developments.
- 3.4. ORYC struggles to support the whole deanery with one postholder.
- 3.5. The majority of parishes have an older age profile, meaning even churches which are currently thriving are likely to experience difficulties in future years as key members become increasingly frail. In some churches the purpose of outreach is presented as a need to fill key roles as postholders step down due to age.
- 3.6. Many of our churches fail to engage younger age groups.
- 3.7. Some of the parishes are just too small to provide all that is needed to nurture the faith of their members or offer a diversity of approaches to Christian formation.
- 3.8. It will be difficult to establish a culture of outreach whilst many church goers struggle to understand or explain their own faith experience.
- 3.9. There are not widespread spiritual disciplines beyond prayer and Bible study in most churches eg contemplation, silence, retreat, traditional spiritual direction, though this is an area of activity that St Oswald's (see above) and Whittington have run courses to support.
- 3.10. The geographic location of the deanery, at the far limit of the diocese, means few church members have a natural relationship or familiarity with Lichfield. This creates both a perceptual and a practical barrier. A lack of ownership and belonging means central diocesan initiatives don't resonate locally. Travel distances prevent church members from accessing central resources and training.

4. Where is good collaboration and partnership happening?

- 4.1. The recent success of Gobowen & Selattyn being supported by Holy Trinity with a sacrificial 'church graft' provides a potential model for the future.
- 4.2. Children and youth work is done well through collaboration (eg ORYC in number of parishes) and there is potential for this to cover the whole area. It already has an ecumenical element perhaps laying foundations for the future?

- 4.3. There is an extensive lay ecumenical network of communication and practical Christian witness.
- 4.4. The lay training partnership between Holy Trinity, Selattyn & Gobowen, St Martin's & Weston Rhyn works well.
- 4.5. Churches co-operate readily and ecumenically in initiatives such as the food bank and youth and children's work. The deanery SfM project also has the potential to enhance partnership working.

5. Where is energy being absorbed?

- 5.1. The administrative and management processes associated with parish life, whilst important and helpful, are complex and often perceived to be overcomplicated and time consuming by the lay people charged with managing them. There is an inevitable tension in the use of finite resources of skill and time and priorities sometimes conflict. In smaller churches this can be particularly difficult.
- 5.2. Not everyone agrees that spending time and money on their historic church buildings is a good use of resources.
- 5.3. Volunteers have to cover multiple roles, with the practical and administrative often drowning out the spiritual.
- 5.4. Endless fund raising is a drain on resources and morale, as is worrying about money.
- 5.5. Applying for faculties and other diocesan administrative processes is time consuming work.
- 5.6. Being very involved in social community activities, whilst important, requires significant effort and time.
- 5.7. There is substantial waste by default by the underuse of lay people in ministry of all kinds.

6. What are some of the key challenges the deanery faces?

- 6.1. Church members need to be encouraged to take their personal spiritual growth seriously.
- 6.2. Parish boundaries are inevitably fluid, leading to Christians commuting between parishes. The general flow is from the villages into town on Sundays, leaving the village churches less well supported. Town church house groups which take place in villages have the potential to form more local connections. There is a tension between ministry to communities and ministry to networks.
- 6.3. The pandemic has liberated many local Christians, releasing them to establish new relationships and worship patterns. Their new-found independence may not promote ready acceptance of centralised initiatives and strategies!
- 6.4. Church communities need to be able to make the gospel visible in their corporate life and worship.
- 6.5. Differences in historic relationships, leadership, tradition and approach may need to be made explicit. If left unspoken they may cause difficulties with the SfM process going forward.
- 6.6. A positive, effective role for synod and chapter needs to be developed, which reflects the partnership working required between clergy and laity.

- 6.7. There will be a need to engage imaginatively with the community to respond to the likely unemployment and financial hardship in the aftermath of the pandemic
- 6.8. Identifying and encouraging vocations is required, including new ones which reflect current need rather than traditional models.
- 6.9. Struggling parishes may require significant time and imaginative input to survive, input which goes beyond what is available in the parish/benefice.
- 6.10. Parishes can struggle to make their ancient buildings work well for their twenty first century needs.
- 6.11. The current climate and culture is not well informed or curious about the Christian faith.
- 6.12. There are barriers to overcome if existing resources are to be shared. These include a) licensing issues; b) unawareness of what resources could be called upon; c) reluctance to ask; d) suspicion about what you might get!

7. What is unique about this deanery?

- 7.1. The Oswestry deanery has several dual identities – English/Welsh, Town/Village, Urban/Rural. It is border country which has its own identity beyond the obvious divides.
- 7.2. Oswestry town is a hub. Typical of market towns it has surrounding satellite communities but these are particularly diverse in culture and identity. The rural location means connections spread well beyond the deanery itself.
- 7.3. The recent example of a town church (Holy Trinity) resourcing a local village church (Gobowen) is unusual and has proved very effective.
- 7.4. The deanery has strong Welsh connections (we have bilingual services) and a relatively loose association with Lichfield, due to its location.
- 7.5. The ORYC initiative (and other inter church co-operation) cuts across parish boundaries and works on the margins of church influence.

8. Looking at all of your responses, what do you think is the vocation of this deanery?

- 8.1. The deanery is diverse and there does not appear to be a strong deanery identity amongst the churches. The deanery will need to decide whether to try to create a united vision, or to provide more background support to locally discerned vocation.
- 8.2. The deanery as a whole needs to discover how to motivate and manage its members in mission both along the lines of the 'personal frontline' concept in much of the LICC material and in corporate witness.