

BENEFICE REVIEW 2021

Summary of responses and proposals for the next steps

The Churn Benefice review has been designed to lead towards a plan which will guide the development and direction of the six Churn parishes over the period to 2030. The first stage of the review was to circulate a discussion document in April which invited responses to ten questions on some key issues which the benefice needs to consider in drawing up the plan.

Over 40 responses to this document have been received so far, from individuals, families, PCCs and other church groups, representing around 100 people in total. Many thanks to all for your time and thought.

The responses have provided a wide range of opinions, all of which will be taken into account during the process of creating the '2030 Plan'. This document summarises some of the major themes that have emerged and provides an indication of how these (plus all the other points that have been raised which cannot be included in such a brief summary) will help to direct Benefice Plan to be published later this year.

Responses to the questions

Q.1. What do you think should be to the main priorities for our Benefice?

This question generated a very wide range of responses. Important themes included:

- Provide an active Christian presence in all villages
- The church should embrace and be part of the wider community in each village
- Priority should be given to families and younger church members

Q.2. How do we want the Benefice to develop in the period up until 2030?

Again, a wide variety of responses were received.

These included:

- A greater variety of worship/liturgy, particularly to encourage new people to our churches
- More involvement of lay people in the life of the church in preaching, administration and leadership
- Improve links between churches and the communities in which they are located
- Develop a Benefice 'hub' providing support and expertise for the parishes

Q.3. What strategies might we adopt to increase church membership?

Some clear themes emerged in responses to this question, leading on from the previous two:

- Improve outreach into village communities to integrate church and village life
- Introduce strategies to encourage greater involvement of families and younger people
- Introduce a range of services to appeal to a wider variety of people
- Links with local schools
- A feeling that 'hard sell' evangelism would not be effective

Q.4 How might we encourage more participation in church roles?

- Ask for help in specific roles, taking advantage of peoples' particular gifts
- Ensure the workload of volunteers was manageable
- Offer training
- Demystify!

Q.5 Should we work towards more joined-up collaboration across the Benefice rather than maintaining a full range of activities in every church?

- Strong support was expressed for greater collaboration to support and benefit individual parishes.
- Many acknowledged that a full range of activities in each parish was not feasible
- However, each village has its own strengths and character which must be recognised and encouraged in the development plan

Q.6. Do you think it is feasible to raise more funds, so that we can maintain and/or expand our activities as a Benefice, or is it more realistic to plan for a reducing income and plan to do less?

- Most respondents thought it feasible to raise more funds, especially if there was a plan which clearly identified why funds were needed.
- This should be coupled with a policy to contain costs where possible

Q.7. Would you favour dropping the House for Duty Post or trying to maintain it? If we keep the post, what might be a good job description for the post?

- Most respondents felt strongly that an additional priest was needed following John Clarke's retirement, given the demands on a very small clergy team

- Finding and retaining the right person is of key importance
- Requirements: an emphasis on skills with young people and families, outreach

Q.8 What pattern of weekly services should we seek to resource across the Benefice?

- Some wished to retain weekly services in all village churches, others acknowledged that current resources could make this difficult
- Emphasis on accessibility and a greater variety of service types. Regular (monthly?) all age/family services
- Mixed views on Benefice or shared services – would people be prepared to travel, importance of local community gatherings

Q.9 Should we aim to maintain some virtual activities using the internet? If so what might we do and how could that be blended with other actual activities?

- A majority would like to see some form of on-line activity continue, though significant numbers were not in favour
- Many of those in favour suggested live-streaming of regular services held in churches

- Variety of views on format – several suggested on-line services should be shorter

Q.10. Should we be doing more to promote church weddings, baptisms, confirmations and funerals in our communities, or just accept that the demand will drop as society changes?

- On the whole, respondents were not in favour of actively promoting these events
- Successful growth and integration with communities should encourage more people to hold these events in their local church
- They bring in people who may not usually come to church – opportunity for outreach.

Next stages

- If you haven't yet responded please feel free to do so – every one has something to contribute, and every voice is important
- We are looking forward to having conversations with PCCs during July and August to discuss the responses to the Benefice Review, and to think about how we might move forward with the key points which have been raised so far. These conversations might include a wider group of people, if that was felt to be helpful.

- We look forward to having a completed Benefice Plan 2030 in place by Autumn of this year, which will help us to take forward work in some important areas, which might include:
 - Encouraging more lay involvement in the work of the Benefice both in terms of leading new activities and services and coordinating and expending our pastoral support provision.
 - Developing initiatives to encourage involvement from younger people, families and others who currently do not engage with our Benefice activities
 - Encouraging closer links between village churches and their communities
 - Moving forward the appointment of a new House for Duty team member to expand our leadership capacity and help to implement elements of the Benefice Plan.

Father Jason and the Benefice Review Steering Group

25th June 2021