

AVON STOUR PASTORAL AREA

Fordingbridge Ringwood Highcliffe,
Southbourne Christchurch Iford



Richard Martin: Director of Lay Formation

Summary and evaluation of job to date: Oct 2015- July 2017

(3-year contract ends 17th Oct 2018)

A: BACKGROUND

B: WHAT HAS HAPPENED? *(with accompanying documents)*

C: EVALUATION

D: THE WAY FORWARD

A. BACKGROUND

My role:

Aim: To enable the formation of intentional missionary disciples across the Pastoral Area

Key objectives:

- promote understanding and acceptance that all baptised people are called to be missionary disciples
- help the Pastoral Area to develop and implement a cohesive strategy for the ongoing formation of intentional missionary disciples, covering all ages and all stages of the faith journey

Vision: My long-term vision is of our Pastoral Area as **a community of growing, vibrant parish communities of missionary disciples, rooted in the Father's love, focused on and in relationship with Jesus, and on fire with the Holy Spirit, united in bringing the love of God to our neighbourhoods through prayer, service and witness.**

I believe that our mission as Christians, both as individuals and as a Parish or Pastoral Area community, can be summarised as follows:

"Love God - Love Others - Make Disciples" (see Matt 22:34-40 & Matt 28:16-20)

and that in order to reach out to others effectively, we must first "evangelise ourselves" – deepen our own relationship with Jesus Christ, understand the essential Christian message and ensure our communities are vibrant, welcoming places where any newcomer will experience the presence and love of Jesus in and through us.

Principles and Key Approaches

- everything rooted in prayer
- God's work, not ours – co-operation with the Holy Spirit
- not about me 'doing for' people/parishes, but enthusing, enabling, supporting and building capacity
- not asking for volunteers, but praying, discerning and calling personally
- opportunities for Taster Sessions before committing to course

B. WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

Introductory phase (Autumn Term 2015): meeting lots of parishioners from every parish - priests and people alike - to find out something of what God is already doing across our Pastoral Area, to listen to people's views about the strengths, needs and current thinking in each community. Also sharing mission/vision through talks at masses and own *Road to Emmaus* publication.

Communications & Connections:

- *Pastoral Area*: Regular Line Management and Clergy meetings, EST (Evangelisation Strategy Team), my own *Road to Emmaus* updates, PA magazine *The Link*, Facebook Groups (Avon Stour and Ringwood/Fordingbridge), PA website dedicated pages, regular items in parish newsletters, talks at masses (by myself and others)
- *Diocese*: E-News items, Called & Gifted Facebook Group, Fr Mark Hogan links/meetings, links with the Formation For Mission team, interest from elsewhere (e.g. invited to meet with West Berkshire Pastoral Area EST to help plan their Alpha launch, linking Isle of Wight deacon with Alpha in Prisons specialist)
- *Other*: Alpha connections (Holy Trinity Brompton, Leadership Conference, Alpha Global Catholic Gathering, Bournemouth Anglican church planted from HTB); Guest speaker at Westminster Diocese All Saints Pastoral Ministry Association event to talk about *Becoming a Community of Missionary Disciples*; interviewed by *Billy Graham Evangelistic Association*.

Called & Gifted process:

- Taster Sessions: October 2015 in two locations
- Introductory Weekend: 6-7 November 2015 (about 50 people) in Christchurch
- One-to-One Discernment Conversations Nov - Dec 2015
- Small Discernment Groups (about 40 people involved):
Launch 19 Jan, Groups Jan-Apr, Take Stock Meeting 12 Apr 2016
- Calling/inviting people to specific roles in our Pastoral Area activities (e.g. *Alpha*, *Welcome to Worship*) according to their charisms (confirmed or being discerned)

Network Events:

Purpose: An ongoing process to draw together all those from each of our six churches who are involved in the same ministry or activity to meet, pray and reflect together, share and discuss good practice, experience, resources, difficulties and ideas, clarify understanding of the role, see where cross-parish links and joint working/pooling of resources may be possible and identify and plan for formation/training needs

Network Events held so far:

- Local Pastoral Councils: Feb 2016 and Nov 2016 (to be an annual event)
- Children's Liturgy of the Word Teams: Feb 2016
- First Holy Communion & Reconciliation: Apr 2016
- Music Ministry: Jun 2016 (very popular – about 50 people)
- Welcoming & Hospitality: Oct 2016 (2 locations)
- Alpha Hosts/Helpers: Jul 2017

Network Event in the pipeline:

- Liturgy of the Word: date to be arranged (late 2017/early 2018)

Welcome to Worship events (approx. one per term): gatherings to sing, reflect on Scripture and respond in prayer: worship band to lead singing, Bible readings, short talk, choice of ways to respond quietly in prayer and reflection (prayer stations, prayer ministry), followed by refreshments. These draw people from all six PA churches as well as from other Catholic and other Christian churches in the local area.

- Apr 2016: "Follow me" (Christchurch) (about 60 people)
- Nov 2016: "I stand at the door and knock" (Iford) (about 20 people)
- Jun 2017: "Seek first the kingdom" (Christchurch) (about 100 people)

The Sacraments DVD series:

- CaFE 4-week DVD series exploring the sacraments in general and Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in particular
- Run four times in three locations across Pastoral Area (about 80 people overall):
 - Christchurch Lent 2016 Tuesday evenings
 - Southbourne Lent 2016 Thursday afternoons (with lunch)
 - Fordingbridge May-Jun 2016 Wed evenings and Thu mornings

We Are Family gatherings: Held June 2016 in four locations across the Pastoral Area (about 60 people overall) – Highcliffe (morning), Fordingbridge (evening), Southbourne (morning), Christchurch (evening) – to address the questions:

- As a Parish/Pastoral Area family, how can we best support and encourage the families within our community – those who come to church and those who do not (or only rarely)?
- What do parents of young families (children and teenagers) need from us as a Christian community?
- How can we ALL play our part in helping parents in their crucial role by offering support in various forms – practical help, advice, affirmation, encouragement, childminding, sense of belonging, mentoring, faith formation, welcome, support in bringing children up to know Jesus in and through the Church?

Alpha course:

- Planning Team formed (8 people)
- Initial Information Evening for invited potential Group Hosts/Helpers
- 4-week full Alpha 'pilot' course for potential Hosts/Helpers (30 people)
- Publicity/Invitations from Christmas 2016
- Training for 26 Hosts/Helpers
- Talks at all masses across PA Jan/Feb 2017
- Taster Session & Sign-Up Feb 2017
- Full course Lent-Pentecost 2017, with 60 guests, 26 Hosts/Helpers, about 120 people involved in total, from regular churchgoers through to agnostics
- Celebration Evening, including personal testimonies June 2017

Prayer Ministry: This important ministry is being developed as a mainstream offering especially through people's introduction to it on *Alpha*, building on some individuals' existing experience at *Celebrate* and similar charismatic events, and now being adopted by two parishes, at the instigation of the parish priests, as regular monthly provision after Sunday mass, with other parishes interested. So far I have trained 25 people in Prayer Ministry, and there are others already trained.

Come to the Feast (initial planning): in preparation for implementation Autumn 2017.
Come to the Feast is a 5-week whole-PA focus on improving our understanding and deepening our experience of the Mass (*see separate document*).
[*New website added Aug 2017: <https://rmartin236.wixsite.com/feast>]

Accompanying documents to illustrate and give more detail:

- Known Fruits of *Called & Gifted*
- God changing lives through *Alpha*
- *Why Alpha in a Catholic Context?*
- *Road to Emmaus* update July 2017
- *Come to the Feast* information sheet
- Ideas for Welcoming (used to promote discussion and planning by EST, LPCs, *Welcoming & Hospitality* Network and *We Are Family* events)
- *We Are Family* ideas for reaching out: belonging, faith, practical

C. EVALUATION

Everything implemented above has been part of a strategy agreed with my Line Manager Fr Tom and the Pastoral Area clergy, focused on moving towards the vision described earlier. Good progress has been made with the key objectives at this stage of the contract.

• **Strategy**

I have worked closely with my Line Manager, Pastoral Area clergy, Evangelisation Strategy Team and Local Pastoral Councils to raise awareness of, understanding of and develop a local strategy for moving our parishes from a 'maintenance' to a 'mission' culture, drawing on and sharing ideas from Sherry Weddell's book *Forming Intentional Disciples* and Fr James Mallon's book *Divine Renovation*, as well as other books, articles and resources. I have established positive and fruitful links with Fr Mark Hogan, Episcopal Vicar for Evangelisation, the Diocese Formation for Mission Team, the national Alpha Team and others to ensure our strategy is in line with and drawing on the latest developments in evangelisation, especially within a Catholic context.

Our focus has very much been on the need for improving Welcome and Hospitality as a priority, evangelising our existing communities, beginning to reach out more boldly to those on the fringes of our communities or having no church attachment, and building capacity for lay leadership.

• **Building Leadership Capacity**

The main strategy for building leadership capacity is by calling people to leadership roles for specific activities taking place and providing adequate training/support and follow-up opportunities. The idea of 'calling' is important: we have not generally asked for volunteers, but have prayed for guidance and tried to discern those people who should be called. These are invited to find out more and are then given time to think and pray before deciding if it is what they feel God is calling them to at this time. No pressure is applied.

A parallel strategy is supporting and nurturing those already in leadership roles, for example through Network Events and prayer/retreat times.

Key groups identified are the EST, LPC members and Alpha Team.

- **Forming Intentional Disciples**

In *Forming Intentional Disciples* (p188), Weddell describes four key steps for a parish beginning to be serious about making disciples, and all of these have been included in the strategy so far:

1. "Break the silence" – the need to talk openly about personal relationship and following Jesus, and to tell the "Great Story of Jesus", i.e. the Kerygma. These have been addressed specifically in the themes of *Welcome to Worship*, through *Alpha*, *Sycamore/Journey in Faith* and Network Events, in Facebook posts, website posts, written communications, meetings with clergy and other lay groups and with individuals.
2. "Offer multiple, overlapping opportunities for...people to personally encounter Jesus in the midst of his Church". We have provided a range of vehicles for this, some specifically through events initiated and organised by myself (e.g. *Welcome to Worship*, *Alpha*) and others through work on the EST, Liturgy Group and organised within separate parishes (e.g. *Taizé*)
3. "Expect conversion. Plan for conversion". The idea of expecting the Holy Spirit to do great things has been key in setting high expectations, e.g. in anticipating and planning for large numbers for *Alpha* and training an appropriately large number of team members. So far, the Holy Spirit has not let us down!
4. "Lay the spiritual foundation through organised and sustained intercessory prayer". From the outset, parishioners have been urged to pray for these initiatives, and certain individuals and groups have been asked to keep them as a focus for their prayer, including the Diocese Intercessory Prayer Team formed as one of the fruits of *Called & Gifted*, existing prayer groups and the Dominican Sisters at Sway.

There is already evidence of an increased openness to a personal relationship with Jesus, as demonstrated, for example, in the *Alpha* feedback, both written and verbal.

- **Developing Missionary Disciples**

The theme of *Maintenance to Mission* has been prevalent throughout my conversations with clergy, EST and parishioners and I have promoted *Divine Renovation* resources, (including the book, *Guidebook*, podcasts, website and talks) and ideas widely and intentionally to clergy, EST, Local Pastoral Councils, *Alpha* Team members and others. I organised a small group of five key lay people from our Pastoral Area to hear Fr Mallon speaking in Windsor following the Clergy Convocation in June.

Being part of the Pastoral Area EST has been an important and motivating part of my role.

I have also stepped out of my own comfort zone to lead by example and gain valuable first-hand experience through taking part in our *Ashes on the Street* initiatives, offering to pray for people in everyday situations and inviting everyone in my road to sing carols at my house at Christmas.

As we get new clergy members in the Pastoral Area shortly who have experienced and been encouraged by the Clergy Convocation on *Divine Renovation*, I am confident that a new impetus and more cohesive approach to this aspect will be developed in the near future. One suggestion arising from the EST is that we might hold our own *Divine Renovation* conference in 2018 focused on LPC members and key leaders.

- **Building Community at Parish and Pastoral Area Levels**

A secondary, but very important and exciting, outcome of this work has been the development among parishioners of a real sense of being part of a Pastoral Area community, as well as building community within parishes. This has been through bringing people together in meaningful ways from across and within parishes for specific purposes and with a common interest. Every Pastoral Area activity organised has intentionally promoted this building of community as an integral element.

- *Alpha:* Those in leadership, service and guest roles were drawn from across all six communities, as well as others from outside or on the fringes. Teams and small groups built genuine communities mutually supporting and encouraging each other. Several small groups are continuing to meet now that the Alpha course is over. The meal each session was also a key element in this, and an emphasis from the very beginning of the Taster Session on welcome, hospitality, respect and love.
- *Network Events:* The prime purpose of these was to draw people together from across all six communities, and they have been very successful in doing so and building relationships through sharing good practice, experiences and prayer.
- *Facebook Groups:* Fr Tom and I set up the Avon Stour Pastoral Area Facebook Group to encourage an online community to grow, sharing information and ideas. We now have 87 members from across all six communities and this is growing. People engage and share in a number of different and appropriate ways. I am also a member of the separate *Loaves & Fishes* Facebook Group already established within Ringwood & Fordingbridge parishes, where I am able to be a Pastoral Area presence.
- *Pastoral Area website:* I have my own page and also set up and manage the Alpha pages to ensure content is current and useful.
- *Praise, Worship & Prayer:* As well as the very successful *Welcome to Worship* events, practically every event I organise includes a time of prayer, praise and worship, which also helps to build a real sense of Christian community.
- *Called & Gifted:* As well as the initial weekend event drawing people together from all six communities, the small groups also tended to be multi-community, and some groups continued to meet after the official process had ended. In Ringwood I ran a small group specifically for Ringwood parishioners to make access easier, and this also helped to build community locally, as well as helping them get to know me.
- *The Sacraments DVDs:* The two series run in Christchurch and Southbourne brought together people from several communities to learn and discuss together, while two groups also ran in Fordingbridge, building local community within that parish.
- *Evangelisation Strategy Team:* The EST has been another great vehicle for bringing together the separate parishes, especially as we share with and learn from each other, working as one united team for a common purpose. The annual retreats and meals have also been very important in uniting us as an inter-parish team.

D. THE WAY FORWARD

Due to the excellent Diocesan guidance of Bishop Philip and the local inspiring leadership of Fr Tom, and with the local developments in leadership and community and the initial emergence of a slowly growing group of intentional disciples, all in the broader context of *Divine Renovation, Forming Intentional Disciples* and *Evangelii Gaudium* and the arrival of new enthusiastic priests, I believe our Pastoral Area is in a wonderfully exciting position, poised for a significant move forward in building the kingdom locally and spreading the Good News to many more people in the area and beyond.