

HITCHIN DEANERY

What would 'fantastic' look like?

“A goal without a plan is just a wish”

...so when Hitchin Deanery's twenty-four churches found it was time to renew their mission planning, Rural Dean, Revd Dr Jane Mainwaring, knew that a plan was essential. Aware of the pitfalls, she was: "keen that our plan didn't become a weighty document which just sat in a drawer, with everyone so exhausted by the process of arriving at it, that there was no energy or enthusiasm left for the implementation stage!"

Adopting a different approach, the deanery was invited to embark on an exercise in dreaming. To make the exercise more manageable, the deanery was divided into three groupings: Hitchin town, Letchworth and Stotfold (two adjacent towns) and the villages of the area.

The question was simple: 'What would 'fantastic' look like?' There were just a few conditions to be rigidly adhered to: no anecdotes and (at this stage) no practical objections. Just dreams. "The goal was to believe in the power of God, who can make us the very best

we can be," says Jane.

If that was the goal, the next stage in the process turned it into a plan. After Readers and clergy met and dreamed, Churchwardens did the same.

Jane says: "We got off to a great start. The villages' clergy and Readers met and they just got it. Churchwardens were glad to be talking about something other than buildings and new alliances were formed, around what could be possible.

A plan crystallised when Deanery Synod met in a facilitated meeting to bring the dreams together into a three-fold vision. Parishes then personalised the vision, looking at what they were already doing and to answer three questions:



The Red Lion Pub, Preston where the villages did their dreaming

1. Which areas of the shared vision are you well on the way to?
2. Which areas of the vision are aligned with your parish or benefice MAP?
3. Which areas of the vision would you like to explore in the next few years?

That way, every church would own areas that they could celebrate, focus on the areas which were a current priority for their particular church, and ask honestly what might next need attention.

Extracts from the three visions - villages, towns and market town

Unsurprisingly, the three visions contain some common themes - but all are expressed in ways that the different communities feel best express their hopes and dreams. Common to all three are themes of inclusivity, outreach to the wider community and confidence in speaking about faith. Unique to the Letchworth and Stotfold vision was a vision for youth work and care for creation. Extracts below:

VILLAGES

We will value and respect the variety of worship in our villages and the worship will be the best we can offer, being creative and flexible in style, timing and venue.

Our life together will be marked by the gifts of the Spirit, love, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, healing, and by a courageous, outward looking attitude that draws people into the love of God.

HITCHIN

Our worship will be 'accessible' i.e. at a time which works for those it needs to work for; it will be inspiring, including meeting the need of those seeking quiet and simplicity.

We will have accessible buildings which are spiritual, 'porous', and healing places and inclusive communities where activities and worship extend beyond Sundays.

LETCHWORTH AND STOTFOLD

We will be experimental with a variety of different cross parish worshipping styles, doing it well and enabling people from across our towns and wider deanery to experience something new.

We will build relationships through weddings, baptisms and funerals, moving people to a place of faith and keeping contact.