



GROWING THE BENEFICE OF ST BOTOLPH'S & ST EDMUND'S

Focus on Families



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Preface

Evidence indicates there has been significant decline in the number of professing Christians in this country over the past decade and more. Attendance figures for our Benefice over the same period indicate that, while not as great, there has been decline in numbers attending our churches. A fundamental part of our mission is to grow our churches for the glory of God and the expansion of His kingdom. It is time to take steps actively to grow our Benefice. This is especially timely as we are faced with the largest expansion in housing the benefice has seen in its history.

To grow the Benefice of St Botolph's and St Edmund's in numbers, holiness, and commitment, will take time, effort and obedience to God, as He leads and enables us by His Spirit. As a first step, though, should we consider the appointment of a staff member to work with families? Our increasingly secular culture means that many families today know absolutely nothing of the lifechanging message of the gospel, and the consequent relationship with the living God for which they were made. Statistically whole families finding faith are more likely to stay the course and to produce future church leaders than individuals in isolation.

Background

In September 2018 we, the PCCs of St Botolph's and St Edmund's, attended a morning away at the Frontier Centre, Irthlingborough, to consider ways we might improve our efforts at growing our congregations. In advance of the meeting a document entitled "From Anecdote to Evidence"¹ was circulated to provide a basis for our discussions and set out some examples of how other churches had adapted to bring real growth in their own contexts.

Our discussions were wide-ranging, focussing on the following questions:

In light of the report:

- What do we consider we already do well?
- What do we consider we could be improve upon?
- What are we not doing that needs to be done?
- What practical steps should we take to get to where we want to be?
- How might those practical steps realistically be achieved?

Notes were taken in order to continue the discussion. This paper forms a part of that discussion.

One aspect of our benefice that does stand out is that, while the biblical teaching within the benefice is consistent across the churches, there is a difference in the way the two churches are able to operate. This is largely due to the difference in numbers attending and the age profiles of each congregation. Both affect the dynamic of services and other events. The wardens of both churches now meet regularly to ensure good communications between the two parishes. This should enable the facilities of one church to be made available to the other more readily, and vice versa. As a result, both strengths and challenges can be shared leading to a stronger, more effective, union.

There are already several ministries within the benefice that assist in growing our church. The youth and children's ministry at St Botolph's, and the Sunday school at St Edmunds being two examples,

¹ Available at www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/FromAnecdoteToEvidence1.0.pdf

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which, following considerable investment over the years, we believe we do well. However, despite a huge effort from volunteers, we are not doing so well, is that of our ministry to families of all ages. This needs to be addressed if we are to be the church God wants us to be, reaching the unchurched in our community and, under God, building His church locally for His glory. If we are to be "Good News for Barton Seagrave" and Warkton.

Families and the Bible

Ministry among Families has deep roots throughout the Bible. At the beginning, In Genesis 1, God made man and woman (v27) and the first thing he commands them is, "Be fruitful and multiply" (v28). Here, right at the start of the Bible, at the very foundation of the world, God makes families. As we progress through the Scriptures, we discover a number of, often lengthy, genealogies. Long lists of names with apparently little relevance, even in their contexts². Why are these, often skipped over, lists important? Because they show that God continues to work in families in His ongoing plan. It was very significant for a person who his father, the head of his family, was. On from Genesis 1 things did not go well for humanity and by the time we reach Genesis 6, the flood, we read that in all the world only "Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (v8). As a result, it was Noah and his family that were saved from God's judgement. Later, in Genesis 12, God calls Abram, with his wife Sarai, to leave their home country and travel to a new country God would give to them and their family. In Genesis 17 God changes Abram's name, "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations" (v5). The name *Abraham* means father of a multitude. The language is again strongly familial. God continues to work in and through families. Significant families follow through Isaac, then Jacob and his twelve sons. God changes Jacob's name to *Israel* and a nation is born, a nation that is one *family* because they share family roots.

The scope of this paper precludes an exhaustive study, but the paradigm continues throughout the Scriptures. It must be said at this point, and it must be heard very clearly, that this is not the *only* way God works out His plan, it is merely the *dominant* one. There are many single people of note in the Old Testament whom God uses greatly: Deborah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel to name a few. And, of course, Jesus Himself remained single throughout His life. Singleness is an honourable state, if not the normative one.

When we get to the New Testament the picture is the same. There are, of course, many significant single people involved in the foundation and building of the church. But there is also significant teaching about family life in many of the epistles, and particularly in the 'household codes' of 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians. And when Paul writes to Timothy it is his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, who are singled out as Timothy's prime teachers of the faith.

What does this mean for us?

It is clear that the primary place for elementary Christian education is within the family. It is here where children should first hear about Jesus and learn to trust Him. It is here where the Scriptures should be first encountered, read, and learned (2 Timothy 3v14-15). Yet, it is here that the wider

² For example, the first ten chapters of 1 Chronicles are all genealogies.

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church has, in recent years, given little help and support in how to do this³. Churches often employ 'children' and 'youth' workers to work with young people but forget to support the families from which they come. Conversely, families so easily abdicate the God given joy and responsibility of nurturing their young ones in Jesus Christ, believing it to be the church's job, and when their children wander, the church (or, more specifically, the youth or children's worker) is blamed. In the few cases where spiritual education does happen within the family, it usually falls to mothers whereas the biblical example suggests the father should take the lead⁴. Our nation is experiencing a crisis in fatherhood in all kinds of ways, but especially in teaching children about what matters most – our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

It is no surprise that churches with a strong emphasis on mission to families are often the ones showing strong health and growth in numbers and depth. If we are to build a strong and lasting future for God's church, we must redress the imbalance and invest in families. In these days, when we are regularly told that 'families come in all shapes and sizes,' we need to restore confidence in God's plan for marriage and the family. In these days of gender, moral, family, and ethical fluidity we need to reaffirm the solid rock of Jesus Christ, as revealed in God's word.

Alongside Christian nurture, reaching out to families, especially young families, is a fruitful target for mission and evangelism. Reaching a parent, usually a mother, with the gospel is good, but we then leave that parent within potentially difficult family relationships, trying to live in a godly way with little, if any, support. Far better to aim to reach whole families for Christ, who can then learn and grow together. There are key stages in life where this is most natural, at times when eternal questions may be foremost: marriage, baptism and school gate, for example. At marriage and baptism, young couples are often asking the deep questions of life and a great deal of time investment is required to win them. We are taking advantage of these situations at present, but not nearly as much as we might. School gate mission is best done by contemporaries, (usually) mums within the church. We have already seen some fruit from this, though more training and encouragement would be a great stimulus to expand and nurture this fledgling ministry

Of course, there are other, almost unlimited, areas where ministry to families may be of real value. Bereavement, illness, struggling with teens, issues with school, aging parents, financial concerns, etc. While it would take a whole team of gifted and trained ministers to deal with them all, we should not overlook them. That said, we cannot, with the limited resources available to us, undertake all of them as well as we would like to immediately. However, as we move forward and as each of us gain in competence, and excitement, in helping our contemporaries come to know Jesus and grow in faith, we gain an army of 'trainers' able to nurture others to do the same. In God's grace the impact on our community could be vast. We simply need help to make a start.

³ Traditionally the C of E (along with many others) encouraged *catechesis*, that is, teaching basic Christian doctrine to children from the cradle upwards. You will find the *catechism* in the Book of Common Prayer, 1662. Young people were tested on it at confirmation. Subsequent liturgical revision left it out and there is now no catechism, or equivalent, in Common Worship, 2000. There has been, however, a move over the last few years among some evangelicals, particularly the Presbyterians in North America, to reintroduce catechesis to church families. *The New City Catechism* is one example of how this is being done with great effect.

⁴ In the case of Timothy above, it is likely that his father was not a Christian.

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Our Current Position

Setting aside, but not overlooking, youth ministry we currently we offer a number of ministries to children and some to their families, a number of which are listed below:

JAM Club

This is the Sunday morning 'Sunday School' for children at St Botolph's. Children from birth to 14 are catered for during the 9.15am service each Sunday morning. Four classes are on offer: Creche (pre-school), Bubbles (Infants), Extreme (Juniors) and 180 (High school up to year 9). In the past we have provided a fifth class, Splash (Lower Juniors), which, unfortunately, had to be combined with Extreme due to lack of available leaders. There is, similarly, a strong Sunday School at St Edmunds incorporating a single mixed age class currently catering to children up to the age of 10. Sunday morning "Sunday School" is an integral part of our mission to families, without the opportunity to bring along, and involve, children, many parents would not feel able to attend church at all. Both Jam club and the Sunday school at St Edmund's are run by faithful, committed leaders, giving their time freely each week. If we are to grow our church, we desperately need to augment, support and nurture our leaders, as well as encouraging our youth to take a more active role in discipling.

Family Services

Family services are conducted regularly throughout the year at the 9.15am service at St Botolph's and 11:00 at St Edmund's. On average family services are held monthly but, in reality, are organised to coincide with 'strategic' times of the year: eg. Mother's Day, Father's Day, End of Term, Remembrance Day etc. They are an integral element of our mission strategy in that they provide opportunity for the family to worship together at key times throughout the year. There is no Jam Club or Sunday school on family service Sundays. Baptisms are conducted at family services to introduce children to the whole church family⁵.

Family services, being more informal than other services, also provide a good entry point for fringe families. Services contain significant content for children, but their emphasis is, and should be, for whole families, not children alone. The gospel teaching within such services is currently structured to provide a level of teaching to the children that will encourage them to talk about what they have heard within the service with their parents in the family setting at home. In addition to the family services we are considering whether midweek services might allow families a further access point into the church. A dedicated family worker could certainly assist within such services.

Holiday Club

Holiday Club is something of an institution. It runs for one week during the year, traditionally it was after the end of term in the summer, but recently the decision has been made to trial a move to Easter. This trial has not been running long enough to gauge whether the move is an improvement or not and the timing will be reviewed again following the 2019 event. Children are drawn from many of the local primary schools, and a large number of people from the congregation regularly help out, some taking time off work to do so. The event stresses our facilities and resources to the maximum. Long term results from the event are very difficult to quantify but there is a large amount of goodwill that results.

⁵ Church of England Canon B21 states, "It is desirable that every minister having a cure of souls shall normally administer the sacrament of Holy Baptism on Sundays at public worship when the most number of people come together, that the congregation there present may witness the receiving of them that be newly baptized into Christ's Church, and be put in remembrance of their own profession made to God in their baptism."

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Organising and co-ordinating Holiday Club has always been a major task, having a family worker who could assist with finding and training helpers, particularly from the families of young children, organising the event and publicising it would be invaluable

Make and Play

This is our regular, weekly, mother and toddler group meeting every Tuesday morning during term time. The group begins with a short time (around 15 minutes) in the church building, with some singing and a Bible story. After this there is social time, and activities for the children, in the fellowship room in Church House. This group should be a fruitful access point into the church for not only very young children, but also their parents. The leadership for this group is seriously stretched. There is a requirement for some leaders to arrive by 8am to set up the room with toys etc. Kitchen leaders are also required throughout the morning to provide refreshments, other leaders to run activities for children, others to talk to young mums, and an overall leader to make sure everything is under control. With increasing numbers of mothers returning to work after having their children, it is extremely difficult to find leaders for this group. This group, more than any other currently offered, is a logical place for a families' worker to begin.

Schools ministry

Within the Benefice we have the following schools:

- Barton Seagrave Primary School (yR-y6)
- Hayfield Cross School (yR-y6)
- Latimer Arts College (y7-y13)

We also have good links with:

- Millbrook Infants School (yR-y3)
- Millbrook Junior School (y4-y6)
- Kingsley Special Academy
- Bishop Stopford School (y7-y13)

The clergy take regular assemblies within some these schools, and there are visits made to the church building as part of RE curriculum activities. Few children from church families attend schools within the parish. At one time our primary age children almost universally attended Millbrook School, this is no longer the case with children attending schools all around the area. The large majority of secondary age children attend Bishop Stopford School.

Our schools' ministry is an area that needs addressing. We could certainly make more of it. A families' worker would be able to make valuable contacts with children and their families through work in school.

Refresh

This group is 'the new kid on the block' and grew out of school gate ministry. Young mums meet together on a Monday morning to read the Bible, pray, encourage and support each other. Help from some more 'mature' ladies within the congregation means that the group has a creche.

Wednesday Bible study

This is a group somewhat like 'Refresh' above, but generally for more mature ladies.

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Marriage Preparation

An essential part of our ministry run over a few weeks for those getting married. The material is Christian, but very practical. Couples who attend the course speak very highly of it and they build good friendships with the leaders.

Baptism Preparation

Every family requesting baptism of a child receives at least one visit in their home. The purpose is to explain the gospel and, therefore, the meaning of the promises that are to be made. Material used is usually based around 'Two Ways to Live' which gives a very clear explanation of the gospel.

Other Groups

The focus of this document is mainly on young families. There is good work, however, going on among the older generation, and there are real opportunities for ministry to the 'squeezed middle' which, currently, may be somewhat forgotten. It would be too much to expect a new resource to come into the church and work to improve all these ministries at once therefore, any appointment would initially be seen as one relating only to young families. In time, as this mission develops, it ought to be possible for the family worker's role to be expanded to incorporate at least elements of other ministries such as the seniors ministry.

The truth is we are all part of a family, most of use more than one, from cradle to grave. As such families' ministry could touch us all. If we are to consider a families' worker, we need to be clearly focussed on expectations. However, we need to shape those expectations to fit the gifts and abilities of the person, to allow time in the week for exploration of ideas, to allow a worker to work within their God given gifts and abilities. Such exploration would, of course, be under the guidance of the rector.

What we could do initially

- Midweek services for families who, for whatever reason, are unable to attend on Sundays
- Parenting Courses
- Sourcing and Providing material for families to use in 'family' times
- Develop support groups for those struggling with aging parents
- Encourage prayer groups, triplets etc. for family issues
- Establish midweek children's clubs
- Run occasional events for children
- Organise Family events
- Organise Dads' and children events
- Consider 'Fresh expressions' ideas
- And more ...

Where do we go from here?

There are real opportunities which we are either missing completely, or simply not making the most of. Those involved in the ministries above are stretched to the limit and it is extremely hard to recruit more volunteers beyond maintaining the *status quo*. New mothers nearly always return to work soon after their baby arrives, and grandparents are often (very willingly) recruited for babysitting services during the week. Along with this school aged children today do a welter of activities outside school meaning parents act as taxi services much of the time. Pressure on children in school is greater than

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ever, and parents are frequently being asked to work more hours than ever before in their employment. The result is, the 'voluntary' economy, of which we may be seen as part, is struggling. Given this pressure on the "voluntary economy," and the obvious need to augment our existing resources, it is clear that, if we really want to grow our church, then we need to seek to recruit additional resources from non-voluntary sources.

Looking Forward

Personnel

To reach out and grow our church both spiritually numerically there is a clear need to increase personnel. If we are to enhance ministry among families, we have two main options:

1. Increase lay involvement

- 'poach' from other ministries. This would be difficult, particularly taking into account that in most areas we are already under severe pressure to find leaders.
- Sell the vision harder in the hope that volunteers will emerge. This is a current strategy but shows little success, however, this is the most likely area in which we can hope to find additional resources and we must find ways of encouraging people to give of their talents both at St Botolph's and St Edmund's.
- Encourage sacrificial service. Encourage people working full-time to consider reducing to part time in order to serve God in church. This is a long-term strategy, it is unlikely that many families can take a sudden cut in their income. Long term financial planning is required.

2. Additional employed staff

- Intern(s) could be recruited. However, the post of 'intern' is a learning position rather than extra hands. In reality, while we may not pay them very much, the cost can be relatively high when training and supervision costs are factored in.
- 'Junior' team member(s) could be recruited. A reasonable solution, but one requiring an initial high level of supervision, support, and training.
- A 'senior,' experienced team member could be recruited. Clearly the highest cost of all the options here. However, we could expect such a team member to take initiatives and deliver productive work from the off. Such a person should also require significantly less supervision than a junior member.

Conclusion

In order to improve our ministry to families and children we first need to encourage the laity within our benefice to come forward and assist in the day to day running of our benefice. This is often seen as a chore, in reality it is part of our Christian service, and incredibly rewarding. This is the backbone of Christian Ministry, and essential if we are to grow our church community.

However, in order to provide and sustain new growth, a dedicated families' worker who can oversee all the various "family type" ministries, identify areas where we are weak, and take initiatives in developing, as well as starting new, ministry, would be a huge asset. Such a worker would, ideally, be employed on a full-time basis but, should finances not permit, then we may need to consider a part time worker.

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Employing a Families Worker

The Role

We would be looking to appoint an inspiring and enthusiastic person ready to pioneer work that we are currently not doing as well as we could be, to enable families to encounter the love of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ and to become part of our church as a more inclusive, all-age community of faith.

We already have good contacts with many young children and families through our Benefice ministry. However, we have, in the past, tended to focus on children, men, women, and seniors as independent groups requiring discreet ministry. We want this to develop, to focus on families in addition to what we are already doing. We recognise that this would require us to commit significant resources to this purpose, and also we have to recognise that this will be long term work, with no easy solutions and many challenges ahead.

We also want to grow our ministry with families *outside* the benefice family; for the church to be good news for families in our community. We want to be committed to enabling whole families to find, life-changing faith in Jesus Christ.

In order to achieve our vision, it is essential that we start from small beginnings and develop our ministry as we advance under God. In time we would hope to include other areas, such as the seniors ministry, as and when resources enable. All this will take time and require our lay leaders and volunteers to work closely alongside, supporting, and encouraging our new family worker.

The Purpose of the role

The overall purpose of the Families Worker will be: to pioneer, develop and grow our ministry to families, building on the many existing links we have with both families and children to enable families to find a home in the life and worship of our Benefice.

The Key Aspects of the Role

Working as part of the current staff team, the primary role would include, in no particular order of priority:

- To work with our existing Benefice leaders to help us to become a more “multi-generational” Christian community.
- to encourage all families whether newly churched or committed Christians in their own spiritual development. This ministry is by nature both evangelistic and nurturing.
- to find, make available, and encourage the use of resources and to provide training in their delivery.
- to befriend all families but, in the first instance, particularly the young and newly married families, and help them in their spiritual journey.
- to initiate new areas of ministry, in consultation with the rector, to reach and nurture families.
- to be aware of, and able to assess the value of, national developments and initiatives in family ministry within the wider church.
- to ‘sell the vision’ of families ministry competently to our congregations.

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- to provide the point of contact with the staff team for family pastoral concerns.
- to train potential future leaders in families' ministry.
- to lead, develop, and implement a vision for young families to grow as Christians, helping them find a place and play their full part in the life of the local church.
- to encourage visiting families, their children and those non-churchgoers who come to our regular activities through make and play, baptisms, school contacts etc., to become regular members of the church family.

Much of the ministry would be alongside existing ministries eg. children, youth, marriage preparation, baptism preparation, young mums, etc. It is essential that any ministry is in full sympathy with what is already happening, close liaison with existing leaders is, therefore, a top priority.

Facilities

Office space is available in church house.

Management

- Any role is ultimately accountable to the Rector who would be the direct line manager supervising the role but who would be assisted as necessary by the wardens.
- The appointee would have delegated responsibility for the families ministry and volunteers.
- We need to be clear in our HR Services, our past experiences have shown this. To do this we shall have to review our current systems and ensure that all staff and volunteers are properly supported and not overburdened with paperwork. Ultimately the Rector, as chairman of the PCC, would be responsible, but it is envisaged that the Warden's should also have a role to play as part of their duties in supporting the Incumbent.
- In order to ensure that we have consistency in our gospel teaching, particularly to the younger members of our congregation, there will be a need for close working with the Youth Minister. We must recognise the years of experience our current youth minister has and make proper use of him. The proper delivery of a consistent, challenging and encouraging message, is essential across the entire congregation. It ought to start in the family.
- Ideas for new ministries would be developed with, and agreed by the Rector, and, where appropriate, the Associate minister. The wider staff team should, where necessary, also be included in final discussions before implementation.
- The place of work will nominally be church house. However, it is acknowledged that it will be necessary to spend time away from the office visiting families, schools etc. This will be acceptable with prior notification and agreement.
- Given the constraint on our resources any appointment would initially be for 1 year, with an initial probation period, followed by a more permanent appointment if the appointee suits the role. However, it was also suggested at the away day that we should consider a yearly, rolling contract in order that, should funds be withdrawn or money no longer available, the contract may be terminated.

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Finance

Money will need to be made available for the following:

- Salary would depend largely on experience but is likely to be around £25,000. To this employer's National Insurance (13.8%) and Pension contributions (3%) must be added that would lift the "salary cost" to approximately £29,200.
- Housing. Depending on age and stage of life, assistance with accommodation may be required. This is a cost that would be open to negotiation as required.
- Expenses. c.£2k pa.
- Computer and office equipment. c.£1.5k as a one off expense. Specific funds have been set aside to help with resources for our ministries and this should cover at least any immediate requirements.
- Training. Various conferences and courses are available from organisations such as Church Society. Training would need to be tailored to the individual. c. £1k pa.

How might money be raised?

This is a key area and one that must be considered carefully since it is imperative that sufficient funds are guaranteed/committed prior to any appointment being made. The possibility of setting up a separate trust fund, independent from either PCC accounts, has been raised. This would enable the following:

- Independent funds from the day-to-day running of each church. This would enable the role to be linked more clearly with the benefice rather than one or other of our congregations.
- People are more likely to commit money to an independent trust than to a PCC which, they perceive, gives large amounts away to the diocese.
- An independent trust is more able to seek funding from outside sources and grant awarding bodies than a PCC. Indeed, many grant awarding bodies specifically exclude making grants to PCCs.

Special care would need to be taken with the wording of the trust deed and the appointment of trustees in order to secure control in the future. Advice is available from churches who have already taken this step.

Other funding options may include:

- Application to grant awarding charities. The charities that could be available to us would be increased if we could demonstrate that by providing a family worker we are benefiting not only the church but also the wider community. It would assist if we could find somebody within the Benefice who could assist the process by seeking out charities that would be likely to assist us.
- Appeal to the faithful. Our congregations already give generously but we shall have to appeal to them again to review their regular "biblical" giving to help with this drive to grow our church.
- Reduce current outgoings. There are few areas within our joint expenditure that we can consider reducing without such reductions having a detrimental impact of the way that we run our Benefice. That said we must explore all avenues and see if we can reduce our day to day recurring expenditure within the Benefice.