

## Changing Market Towns Impact Report (August 2024)

### Summary

This report focuses on the impact of the Changing Market Towns (CMT) project. The churches covered by the project and CMT itself were significantly affected by the Covid crisis but CMT has been and remains a valuable support to all in managing through the recovery from Covid. The project's impact include:

- Raising the profile of churches in their community and strengthened working relationships with many in the community;
- Developing new worshipping communities with significantly increased numbers in children and families work and youth work;
- Increasing or maintaining inherited church numbers in several towns in the face of aging congregations;
- Developing the faith and vocation of a large number of CMT and volunteer workers;
- Strengthening relationships in a wide variety of ways which has been invaluable in underpinning the missional aims of the project;
- Giving some valuable lessons for future projects.

### Introduction

This report is written to capture the impact to date of the Changing Market Towns ("CMT") Project. This is NOT an end-of-project impact report, but is carried out at a significant point of transition within the project. This report is explicitly not intending to comment on "value for money". Also, this report is not seeking to be a critique of the project nor to reflect on lessons learned. Those issues have been covered in John Truscott's mid-term review in 2021 and his 2024 Lessons Learned report. This report should be read in conjunction with those two Truscott reports and the Project Reset report ("Reset") prepared in November 2022.

This report will intentionally focus on both qualitative and quantitative measures in an attempt to identify the impact the project has had and continues to have. However, a comprehensive review of the 2022 reset targets is outside the scope of this report.

### Background

The aims of CMT and the project design are described in some detail in the Reset report (pages 3-10 in particular) and are not repeated here.

The project invested in eight towns in total. Initiatives in Downham Market finished in 2022 and in St Neots in 2023. At the time of writing, CMT is active in the remaining six towns (Chatteris, Huntingdon, Littleport, March, Ramsey and Wisbech), but the project ends in March at the end of August 2024.

## **Summary of impact**

The impact of the CMT project is described in this report under several headings detailed in the sections below:

1. Vocational and Personal Development;
2. Diocesan / wider church impact;
3. The impact in individual towns.

There are some common themes which we have seen in many, if not all, of the towns which have been involved in the project, including:

- In many towns there has been a significant and positive change in perception about the role of the church;
- There has been discernible transformation of many of the towns;
- High quality appointments were made across the project and many appointees have been successful in growing volunteers and helping them on their faith journeys;
- Whilst acknowledging that labelling is not always helpful, much of the numerical growth has been in what might be described as Fresh Expressions and other worshipping communities rather than in inherited church. Growth in these inevitably stalled during the pandemic, but is showing encouraging signs of recovery in many places;
- Online communication and use of media was improved significantly in towns in the project;
- The impact of Children's and Families Workers and Youth Workers has been a real success of the project. There are many examples of schools – primary and secondary – which were “unenthusiastic” about church involvement at the start of the project, but are now welcoming, supportive and actively requesting church involvement. This transformation must not be overlooked. The numbers associated with this success are included for each town in the quarterly project reports.

### **1. Vocational and Personal Development**

- The project has recruited a huge number of high quality CMT workers and Operations Managers. These colleagues have inspired others in their towns to “step up” and get involved as volunteers. Some of these volunteers have undertaken “formal training” as ALMs and all have grown in their own discipleship through their involvement in various groups etc;
- Many of those recruited have also grown in their own sense of vocation. This is illustrated (but not an exhaustive assessment) by several pursuing / completing LLM training and six of the team being ordained or in ordination training.
- For many of those employed, the project has been huge in their own personal development. I've included here, with permission, a wonderful and inspiring testimony from one of the project's Operations Managers. She writes: “This OM would like to voice her appreciation and gratitude for the opportunities the CMT

Project has provided to her, at both town and central level. When interviewed for and offered the position of Operations Manager, I was going through a very difficult divorce, following 13 years of emotional abuse and desperately hoping to escape working for my soon to be ex-husband's business. From these very first interactions (and still ongoing today), the Project leadership team and wider Diocesan staff have been nothing but supportive, patient, inspiring and empowering. The huge personal development I have seen in myself over the last six years, is due in no small part to the encouragement and opportunities provided to me through my OM roles. I have gained qualifications I never thought possible, found confidence I thought I'd lost forever, re-discovered a sense of self-worth that had long since been absent, and after so many years of being held back professionally before CMT, have begun to progress, after finally seeing I am worthy and capable of career advancement. For many years I have said that this job saved my life, and I still maintain that – Changing Market Towns has changed the life of this OM, almost beyond recognition, and I feel incredibly blessed and thankful to be an ongoing part of the project and a member of the Diocesan staff.”

## 2. Diocesan / wider church impact

The project has had an impact on several areas which will be of future benefit both within the diocese and beyond. These include:

- **Training and discipleship development** – the project has funded the development of the *Open Christian Learning* (OCL) initiative. OCL is a new online learning resources platform intended to help a wide range of people grow in their discipleship. It provides a new approach to learning and is designed to be accessible in ways which prioritise the needs of learners. It is and will benefit both those in our market towns, the wider diocese and potentially beyond. More details at <https://ely.learn.anglican.org>;
- A culture of willingness to share across the wider diocese has been initiated with the opportunity to join Faith Sharing Hubs being made available beyond the towns in the project;
- **Lessons learned** - During the course of the project a significant number of lessons have been learned. These have been documented elsewhere, including the two reports written by John Truscott and the 2022 Project Reset. It is not the purpose of this report to detail those lessons, but to observe that the project's impact includes those lessons which have been learned and which can be applied both to future projects and which have already been applied within the CMT project.

## 3. The impact in individual towns

This section will include an overview of the impact of the project on a town by town basis.

In a number of towns and groups there has been significant relationship growth which has developed from a very low starting point. This growth in relationship has been key to missional gains. Sustainability is key here and a powerful reason why the project shouldn't 'end' is because in a number of cases we are only now getting to the point where discipleship may be possible.

## Attendance figures and targets for the project

The table below summarises the attendance figures across the project:

Town	Inherited Mode					FXC and other				
	Pre project Baseline	Pre-covid peak Jan 2020	Post Covid (June 2022)	Reset target for end 2025	Current (1)	Pre project Baseline	Pre-covid peak Jan 2020	Post Covid (June 2022)	Reset target for end 2025	Current (1)
Wisbech	263	142	140	165 (4)	116	0	7	0	40	93
March	228	208	151	195	193	0	0	7	50	162
Chatteris	92	77	107	115	109	12	77	35	89	23
Ramsey	141	212	141	181	130	0	52	68	88	143
Littleport	131	226	Unknown	-	90	0	0	Unknown	-	296
Huntingdon	25	35	50	100	146	0	50	60	200	286
St Neots (2)	149	132	101	112	-	0	0	0	0	-
Downham Market (3)			-	-	-	0	30	n/a	n/a	-
Totals	1,029	1,032	690	868	784	12	216	170	467	1,003

### Notes:

1. Most of the "current figures" are for Q2 2024, the latest date for which figures are available at the time of drafting this report. The exception to this is March, where the figures are for Q1 2024.
2. St Neots left the project at the end of 2023 and so no further data has been collected.
3. CMT had ethically closed here by the time of the reset in November 2022.
4. The reset target of 215 was split as 50 for Walsoken and 165 for the other churches in town.

### Comments:

- Relevant comments for each town are included in the analysis below;
- Some headline comments on the overall picture (more details up to 2022 are included in the project reset (November 2022) and are not repeated here):
  - The impact of Covid cannot be underestimated. Post-Covid (taken to be June 2022 when the reset was initiated), inherited church numbers were 30% down on the project baseline / the pre-Covid peak and numbers for

FXCs were also much lower post-Covid. Sadly, Covid effectively ended the FXC in Downham Market;

- Encouragingly, there has been growth of 14% and 490% in inherited church / FXCs in the two years since the reset;
- In some towns, the 2025 reset targets are achievable – particularly for FXCs and other worshipping communities;
- In common with new worshipping communities across the country, CMT's experience has been that it takes a considerable period of time to grow.

## **Impact on a town-by-town basis:**

### **Wisbech**

Wisbech is in interregnum (as of 01 July 2024) and a new Rector has been appointed and will be licensed in November 2024. The impact of the project in Wisbech includes the following:

- The Church is much more visible in the community than previously, and the Church is now seen much more widely as welcoming;
- Both of the current CMT workers have discerned a call to ordination. The C&F minister became a SSM in 2021 and the Youth minister began ordination training in 2023;
- Both CMT workers have made significant progress at building trust with schools in the parish. The role of the Church has been “normalised” within the church school (real progress from where it used to be);
- Many primary school children have been engaged through assemblies and similar and have learnt that church / faith is a normal part of life;
- Weekly pastoral coffee mornings at Orchards, a nearby community centre and an after healing-mass session (attended by around 20 people). This has been augmented by pastoral sessions with Orchards school staff starting in Q3 2023 and separate bereavement / grief sessions;
- There have been several baptisms as a result of contacts through groups such as the various groups run by the C&F worker;
- Children and Families work has included about 20 children through 2023 and into 2024 including mainly weekly Fun and Faith and Thrive lunch time wellbeing sessions at Orchards School. This has been augmented by Nursery bible reading at Orchards from Q3 2023 onwards (similar numbers);
- There has been a transformation in confidence in some volunteers and attendees at the various groups. One example of this: a Fun and Faith volunteer developing from a “stay at home Mum” to being a parent governor and applying for a teaching assistant role;
- At the town's secondary school, the CMT worker has overseen a shift from a position where the school was hugely sceptical about Christian input – effectively there was “no access” to the school, to one where it has allowed and then encouraged mentoring and there is now a weekly staff prayer meeting on site. As

one person has commented, “there’s a need to acknowledge God’s movement through the Holy Spirit” in the school;

- Since 2019 the Youth Worker has seen approximately 200 students on a one-to-one basis and offers an average of 30 mentoring sessions per month. Attendees include higher risk mental health students awaiting NHS child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) referrals;
- There are numerous testimonials from staff and students alike referencing the impact the Youth Worker has made. Two, of many, examples:
  - From a Lead Teacher at TCA: [The Youth Worker] has, for a number of years, provided pastoral support for many students in the Thomas Clarkson Academy. She has also been involved in supporting some of our most vulnerable students in the inclusion unit and SEND whilst always protecting and safeguarding them. She also continues to be a valued support to staff in both their own professional and personal challenges with total discretion and confidentiality;
  - Year 11 boy (age 16) self-harm, and support with preparation for Grandad’s funeral, December 2021. ‘I feel less judgemental towards myself. I’ve learnt to create miniature safe spaces with people and be more open with them about my mental health. The things I do to cope with my mental health have improved. You’ve made me realise that I care about a lot of things.’
- There are also instances of student’s referencing suicidal ideations which have abated after speaking to the Youth Worker. (We have written testimonials, but they are not included here to protect identities.)
- The Reset plan included an increase in inherited church across the two Sunday services and the Healing Service. To date numbers have been maintained at 2022 levels, but not increased, although that represents progress. Natural losses due to an aging congregation and moves have been replaced.

## March

The impact of the CMT project has been significant and includes the following:

- The C&F Worker’s work at All Saints has been long-standing, regular and constantly increasing. This ministry has included staff / class prayers, child-led assemblies, RE Art club, Bible story sessions, school trips / pilgrimages and more. In 2023, the C&F worker had over 4,000 interactions with children and around 170 parents / teachers;
- This ministry has been valued by key stakeholders as a couple of extracts from testimonies show:
  - Headteacher: “The work [C&F Worker] has done in developing child-led collective worship in the school has been invaluable ... She is a much-valued member of our school family, supporting both children and adults to thrive and develop ...”

- RC ordained colleague: “I was delighted to see that [she] had helped one or more year-groups to provide illustrations of the Stations of the Cross, for use in the school chapel. These assisted the children's understanding very well ... she is indeed an invaluable resource!”
- Wild Wednesdays (similar to a forest school) at St John's was set up in January 2023. This weekly parent and child group is mainly non-faith based, although there are conversations with some parents about their faith journeys. Average attendance has grown to 50 adults and children combined. Enough leaders have been recruited from parents to allow the C&F Worker to step away from the sessions in summer 2024. The group is self-supporting and encourages many non-church families into St John's building. As one homeschool mum has said, “through WW's and [C&F Worker's] open and friendly personality, she allows our children to explore religion and make a positive connection with the church, which they would not be able to get elsewhere.”
- Messy Church at St John's has been seeing consistent numbers of between 26-40 people each month, as is the case for Junior Church we are struggling to recruit enough volunteers to help with this. There have been several opportunities where deeper faith conversations could have taken place.
- The Chat-Tea meal delivery service run through St John's would have stopped in October 2020 if the March CMT staff didn't take this on overnight. From Oct 2020 – Dec 2021, with OM overseeing 2 x CMT staff and up to 15 volunteers, the service cooked and delivered 9,269 free meals (and gifts) to those in need including the elderly, those isolating and families living on the breadline. Feedback included comments such as “Thanks to you feeding me and my family, my depression score has gone down so much. I'm forever grateful.” Chat-Tea Take-away was only possible due to extensive collaboration of CMT staff with local charities, councils, companies and volunteers many of whom provided food and donations;
- Prayer was offered to those attending and relationships built. Some have attended Messy Church and other events;
- The OM was instrumental in establishing virtual services in Covid which enabled the parish to reach beyond the “church community”;
- Online visibility / presence / communication was significantly enhanced through the work of the OM:
  - OM obtained CMT Ring-fenced grant funding for a new Team website, built this from scratch, launched it in January 2021 and still maintains it ongoing. Site has received over 14,600 visits in just the last 12 months;
  - OM took over the existing St Peter's Facebook page and also created / maintains pages for the other three churches, resulting in a total increase of 1,378 new Facebook followers across the Team;
  - 175 Mailchimp e-newsletters (sent weekly from Apr 2020 - Feb 2023, then reduced to monthly) – 171 new subscribers from May 2020, 395 in total;
  - 4 x ACNY church accounts updated and standardised (12 individual pages per account).

- OM obtained / enabled over £75,000 in grants / donations for the March Team, since June 2020:
  - £64k worth of grant funding across the March Team of churches (including Chat-Tea Meals);
  - Set up online giving accounts (June 2020) and obtained a contactless giving device for all four churches (November 2022). Combined online, contactless and QR code donations have resulted in a total gross income of £11k (including Gift Aid uplift) so far.
- Additional children's activities have been developed, such as "Pudding and Praise" and the Holiday Bible club week which engaged 16 children. Encouragingly, at least one family has come to church on occasional visits since and others have come to Praise parties;
- A range of opportunities with Neale-Wade school have been explored. Neale Wade and Westwood schools' engagement with the exhibitions and creative arts has been enthusiastic, including for international Women's Day at NW. These events do involve pupils, staff and the wider public, build trust and inspire conversations. Community Sponsorship for the International Women's Day has been generous and is seen as a way of demonstrating church interest in the wider flourishing of young people;
- There have been a number of activities for those who have made a commitment to Christ, including house groups (26 people) and two instances of the Alpha course (12 people).

## **Chatteris**

It has been suggested that the church would not have survived Covid without the CMT project and the resources this brought to the parish. The provision of online services, initially during Covid, has been facilitated by those funded through CMT.

- The Chatteris attendance figures remain steady; there is not much in the way of growth or decline in either IHC or FX / Other. A real positive though is that there was a youth Alpha course run in Q2 2024 with four regular attendees, who now want to set up a church youth club;
- The OM has applied for many grants (including several during Covid to keep the church running), successfully winning 10, plus five CMT Growth Fund applications, with a combined total of just over £20,000. OM has recently applied to the National Lottery Fund for £330,000 for a new 5-year Community Pantry initiative in the town, which includes paid salaries for four workers, and could enable the continuation of OM and WB Missioner's roles past the end of their contracts in March 2025. The result of this is expected in September 2024 and is hugely significant in ensuring the sustainability of CMT activity in Chatteris;
- Similarly, the development of the church's website and e-newsletters has enabled the church to communicate across a wide base. OM created a business plan for the Church Hall, including hire price packages, creating a dedicated Facebook page and designing the branding / logo, to encourage bookings and



increase income. OM has worked extensively on church administration, logos, website, and online presence for all events and functions, as well as QR codes to encourage giving, overseeing the CollecTin Giving machine, and providing technical support for the church's fundraising events;

- The employment of a CMT funded Well-Being Missioner in April 2023 has given her and the church opportunities to grow beyond the ministry that she was involved in as a volunteer. A new monthly Healing Service was begun in June 2023 and includes sung worship and opportunities for personal prayer and laying on of hands;
- There have been reports of powerful healing improvements to both mental and physical health; one individual, with heart concerns, said "I haven't had a single palpitation since November's healing service." Another wrote in a testimony: "I suffered a stroke in May of last year ... during the wonderful monthly Healing Services, I felt deeply comforted by God's presence with me as Chimezie played and sang. I was overwhelmed and humbled by all the love that surrounded me as I reflected on my life. I realized that through every challenge, God had always been there with me."
- A weekly Wellness Café was set up in July 2023. Due to the success of this group's first year, Cambs ACRE wants the café to become a *Community Living Room*. The success of this café includes half a dozen men who have made a friendship group as a result of meeting at the café and now provide regular support to each other. There is also a steady group of volunteers to lead the sessions and attendance has increased from 11 people per session in August 2023, to 19 in August 2024. The local GP surgery is advertising the café and the healing service to its patients;
- The WB Missioner is involved in three separate working groups (including dementia care, as there was previously no provision for this in Chatteris) to help with social action / community;
- Social prescribers recommend people for a yearly Bereavement Journey Course piloted in 2023, and a regular support group has now established from this. Members are invited to the Wellbeing Café and Healing service;
- Chatteris employed a CMT worker dedicated to Music and Arts outreach in early 2019 who continues to establish a valuable legacy in the town:
  - Established an 'Arts with God' Facebook group during Covid, to share artwork inspired by spending time with God; has 173 members. Set up an art workshop in a local café in February 2022 – the sessions have since changed to a non-working day for the M&A Worker, but the café still supports a regular art community that meets on a bi-weekly basis. Took over running the Sing for Fun choir with an average attendance of 20 – this moved online during Covid;
  - Led sung worship at various events and services. Recorded numerous online worship videos during Covid (still used currently as part of Sunday worship). Organised an alternative 'modern' carol service in 2019 including a full worship band mentored by M&A Worker, with 148 attendees;
  - Assisted weekly with a primary school choir as well as musical assemblies at least once per term in three schools (online during Covid);

- New Wellness Café Arts endeavour (since May 2024) sees M&A Worker run an art table at the weekly Wellness Café run by WB Missioner. This provides opportunities for faith conversations, some of which have been particularly impactful. Recently, a very reserved client who has severe mental health struggles, voluntarily stated to M&A Worker that he ‘doesn’t believe in religion because it’s all about control’. This led to a long conversation about religion, faith, God, Heaven and Hell, forgiveness, and the love and peace of Christ. M&A Worker provides a calm and safe space to discuss such topics, allowing people to move along their faith journeys comfortably at their own pace.

## Ramsey

The impact of the CMT project has been significant and includes the following:

- The overall growth targets are supported by the parish strategy (2023-27) which includes the aim to “double the number of people exploring discipleship by 2026”;
- There has been continuing and significant growth in both inherited church and FXCs / other forms of expression. Current inherited church attendance is already very close to the target set for the end of 2025 in the reset and the reset target for FXCs has already been exceeded. Fresh targets have been set and further sustainable growth is anticipated;
- There is now a recognition in the community that the church cares about the town;
- The initial CMT worker discerned a call to ordination and left the project and was ordained in the summer of 2023;
- Prior to the appointment of a C&F Worker through CMT, the parish had found it very difficult to “get into” local schools. The CMT worker is now working with four primary schools and a secondary school (the latter with the support of CROPS) in a range of ways, including mentoring and after school clubs. A “Well Being Room” has been established at Abbey College and is a joint project between the church and the school. Over 20 students regularly attended during 2023;
- Inherited church has been developed to welcome new families and parents have been helped with parenting in church with pew bags and a “chill out area”;
- Other expressions of church have been initiated including Fen Church (a forest church) which has attracted new families and regularly sees over 20 people attending – most of whom were not regular churchgoers. Perhaps surprisingly, a majority of attendees are adults;
- A Lego café was established in late 2023 which gives the opportunity to engage with children as they create and has been another way to engage with new families;
- A weekly toddler group typically attracts 20-30 children / adults;
- Weekly After School clubs at two primary schools (30-40 children and parents). In addition, mentoring 1:1 sessions are held at one or more primary schools;

- “Easter Unwrapped” events were held at Ramsey Infants, Ashbeach and Upwood attracting 20 Adults and 120 children, similar numbers to the Christmas Unwrapped events last quarter and following on from “Easier Craic” (2023, 80). There were also Easter (2023, 25) and Summer (40) holiday clubs, plus hot chocolate (in place of Halloween) and pancake events;
- There are regular, church-led full school assemblies at the primary schools;
- The C&F ministry has been successful in recruiting volunteers who are inspired by the vision of the ministry;
- Wednesday Night Live worship initiated by the CMT Communities worker was a great success with several baptisms amongst their congregation. Despite the departure of the CMT worker to pursue ordination, the activity continued;
- The parish produced a wider strategic re-set, post-pandemic which was adopted in late 2022. This plan centres on a 5-year goal to double the numbers of disciples who are walking with Christ through various St Thomas’ activities. Key workstreams include mission to children and young people (harnessing the funded worker, also the new assistant curate’s background in youth work), mission to new housing estates, eco-church, a new outdoor congregation, meeting social need, and fit-for-purpose premises. Despite an interregnum from January to August 2024, the parish is progressing well with this plan.

## **Littleport**

At the time of the 2022 reset Littleport had an interim Priest-in-Charge whose term of office was drawing to an end. Accordingly, no targets etc were set for Littleport in the reset. It was acknowledged that targets would need to be set once a new incumbent was in post. This remains under discussion through the quarterly review meetings.

As shown in the figures above, attendance at inherited church has increased significantly since the appointment of a new incumbent in March 2023.

A C&F Minister was appointed in late 2018 and remained in post until she left the project to be ordained in summer 2023. Despite many challenges including the resignation of the incumbent in mid-2020, the C&F minister made a significant impact in Littleport. Some of the main successes included:

- Running an ecumenical Messy Church in a local school;
- Launching a “Pop-up Church” at East Cambs Academy;
- Significant detached youth work, including faith conversations and signposting people (of all ages) to additional support, including mental health support;
- Co-hosting several Circle of Security Parenting courses at a local primary (Millfield).

A Sport and Well Being Youth Minister was appointed in April 2024 partly to build on relationships developed by the previous C&F minister. At this stage, it is too early to assess the impact of that appointment.

## Huntingdon

As described more fully in the reset report, parish church attendance had declined significantly in the years to 2018 and there was minimal lay involvement, absence of churchwardens, no functioning PCC and both administrative and financial disarray. Following the appointment of a new Town Lead in late 2018 under the auspices of CMT, considerable resource was devoted to rebuilding and addressing the various issues, including empowering and encouraging the laity. CMT input was initially focussed on building relationships (sowing). Whilst this focus remains, opportunities to move into reaping and indeed to keeping have arisen from the successful relationship building. These opportunities are being actively explored and developed and attendance has recovered and is currently significantly ahead of pre-pandemic levels. The ongoing outworking of missional plans is leading to a younger and more diverse church community. It is fair to say that the transformation of the parish and the church's reputation in the town is all "CMT impact".

Some of the details of the significant CMT impact include:

- The parish is on target to achieve the reset's targets for the end of 2025 of 100 people attending inherited church (from a 2018 base of 25) and 200 people attending FXCs or other worshipping communities (2018 base was minimal);
- There is a functioning PCC and a churchwarden in post;
- All CMT workers (and others) have actively encouraged volunteers. There are now over 30 volunteers in a wide variety of roles (base in 2018 was 4);
- From being seen as "judgmental and unapproachable" the church is now heavily involved with providing support to various secular groups, including Town, District and County Council initiatives many of which are providing transformational support to families;
- Without CMT, no C&F or Youth ministry would exist;
- Messy Church has been launched and regularly has 60+ attendees from a worshipping community of around 100. This has recently and intentionally become sacramental with a baptism and Communion is planned for the autumn;
- A growing (numerically and spiritually) Young Church on Sunday mornings is playing a key role in discipleship of the children, their parents and the wider congregation as well as helping the church grow younger;
- Groups such as Footsteps (parents / toddlers) are increasingly proving "gateways" to people starting and moving along their journeys of faith. Groups such as Oasis and Alpha are being run to capture these opportunities;
- A community school asked the parish to host a weekly parent drop in on school premises. This is helping those parents with self-esteem and providing a gentle opening to exploration of faith;
- Parents are being offered support with "Parenting for Faith";
- Thrive Youth Work which operates on a truly ecumenical basis is actively engaged in mentoring and more in both secondary schools in Huntingdon and have helped to create what one YP has described as a "pocket of air" within their school day;
- Weekly Youth Cafes are run and have, on several occasions this year, had to

- close the doors because the church was full;
- Building on these relationships with hundreds of young people, the team has run *Thrive Collectives* which provide an opportunity to explore faith;
- In late 2023 a Sunday Evening Youth Church was commenced and works with and invites YPs from a neighbouring parish;
- *Chatty Café* frequently has an attendance of over 60 people per session – many of whom are regulars. Attendees are drawn from a wide demographic. The café provides a safe and warm space, hospitality and opportunity for outreach with the Gospel. The café has also generated a significant number of volunteers, some of whom have gone on to explore faith. There have been several baptisms from people who were first connected with the church through *Chatty*;
- The number of regular givers has increased by 1400% (from a low base of 1!!);
- Monthly services have been held in several care homes;
- A daily online Morning Prayer group which began in Covid has continued and is attended both by those who regularly attend church and those who are now unable to attend in person;
- Several Connect Groups or similar have been initiated and has helped people on their journeys of faith.

## **St Neots**

The project finished in St Neots at the end of 2023 when the funding for the Operations Manager was exhausted and the Youth Minister resigned. Funding had been allocated for the employment of a Children's and Families minister. However, after four attempts to recruit had been unsuccessful the decision was taken to reallocate funds elsewhere.

The impact of the project included:

- The Youth Minister was an important part of the growth of the ecumenical Loves Farm Community Church – a church which has established a positive reputation for caring for the community;
- The Youth Minister was also involved in ecumenical youth groups and co-led Alpha and similar courses;
- The Operations Manager was fully integrated into the town team and supported all aspects of the parish, including helping a new incumbent to settle into the parish. The role included substantial networking to re-establish the parish's role (both its buildings and organisation) as a significant contributor to the wider community, streamlining operational resources in the newly created single parish, as well as necessarily handling certain matters left uncovered by vacancies for churchwardens.

## Downham Market

Covid dealt a huge blow to a very young church and then the lay pioneer who established this church left the project in the summer of 2022 to pursue her call to ordination. Nonetheless, there is some lasting impact here, including:

- Some members of *Table* moved on to worship at other churches within the Deanery;
- *Dice & Decks* (Table's key mission initiative) was continued by two members;
- The impact of the pioneer ministry within the town is not to be underestimated. It included school governorship, chairing Churches Together and volunteering with a local charity for the deaf – all helping to demonstrate the Church's care for the community.

This report was compiled by **Jon Randall**, CMT Project Leader September 2021-August 2024, with input from Project Team members and Project Workers employed in the market towns.

August 2024