

Church Buildings Support Network

Meeting Notes

Date of Meeting: 9th October 2024

Focus: Community Engagement

Presentation

These are additional notes to accompany the presentation slides.

Samuel Pedlar, Church and Community Support Advisor introduced and his role which he started in January 2024. He explained how he mainly focuses on the people side of church buildings: helping PCCs, Friends Groups etc. to engage and consult with their communities to build up support bases in order to support projects and build organisational sustainability.

He used two examples to describe his typical day to day work:

Abbots Ripton

- Amazing Churchwarden, but elderly and has run out of energy.
- The church is on the Heritage at Risk Register and requires major repairs.
- Campaign to start a Friends Group. Samuel spoke to members of the local community and the PCC. Sent a survey/leaflet around the village to explain the situation and put out a call for support. This will culminate in an event in November with the aim of getting people to sign-up to join a Friends Group.

Keyston

- Church rarely used partly due to a huge bat problem.
- Samuel talked with bat experts about how to safely open and use the space and is working with the church to get more people involved and widen the use of the space.

Samuel then introduced a few other projects he is working on, including an app for church tourism and a pilot looking at support for routine maintenance.

More Detailed Case Studies

Old Weston

- Closed since 2019 due to problems with the building. On the Heritage at Risk Register.
- Village of around 200 people but the church is separate from the village, due to the fact that it was a plague village, and the population moved away.

Samuel liaised with various experts and stakeholders to come up with a plan for the church. He created a village survey and leaflet. There is now potential to form a new PCC and Friends Group. A key part of the success is that, despite the building being closed, the church still existed and continued to engage with the local community. Pet services took place in the village hall, an annual report is still sent to the Parish Council etc. Small things but they kept the church in the minds of local residents. This meant there were people interested and ready to work with Samuel.

Newton-in the Isle

- Tiny congregation, small PCC

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- Church on the Heritage at Risk Register with major repairs needed
- PCC decided to formally close the church in 2023

Samuel built connections with Parish Council local groups and used the local press used, leaflet sent out to villager. He attended lots of local meetings. There are signs that a Friends Group may be set-up.

A Friend Groups is not always the best solution for a church, but looking outside your church to engage with new people can help.

Wicken

- Small, elderly PCC
- No incumbent
- Need approx. £70,000 for roof repairs

Samuel engaged with PCC and encouraged them to ask questions, challenge the norm, explore new options. They were inspired to ask Samuel to produce a leaflet to promote the church. This has been placed in a *Sunday Teas Recipe Booklet*, containing cake recipes from a programme of Sunday Teas during the summer. The PCC put one of these booklets containing the leaflet through every door in the village.

Stuntney

- 300 residents. Small congregation and PCC.
- Local businessman approached church with a wedding business idea
- Partnership with village hall to offer budget weddings
- Samuel helped to explore legalities etc.
- Church is lucky as it has a Bishop's Order meaning anyone living in Ely can marry in Stuntney church.
- Church has already explored partnerships on small sale with harvest and Christmas lunches.

Spaldwick

- Currently undergoing massive reordering being driven by a community project.
- The chancel will be retained as the worshipping space, whilst the nave will be use a s village hall.
- Samuel is helping to engage with the local community and consult on plans.
- Key to succeed with be the pursuit of partnership, working with existing groups to use the space

Woodston

- Closed church in a very poor condition
- Working with various experts and local stakeholders to find a new use.
- It is an example of a what can happen to a church when a PCC isn't widely supported.

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Friends Groups – one governance route is to set-up a separate charity, it could appeal to people not interested in the religious side of the church, but who are interested in the building. What are your thoughts on setting up a separate charity?

The Diocese would generally suggest that a Friends Group is set-up as a subcommittee of the PCC. The charitable route can become quite complicated and can put people off. Very bureaucratic and can complicate some things, such as finances. If a Friends Group develops and starts to raise in excess of about £5000 annually, becoming a separate charity may be an option.

A sub-committee keeps things simple.

- The Friends Group would fall under the charitable status of the PCC.
- It ensures that the PCC remains some control and doesn't delegate everything, including responsibility for the building to the Friends Group which can cause issues.
- The Friends Group can have a separate bank account, but the PCC Treasurer would remain as signatory. This makes transferring funds easier.
- The Friends should have a separate constitution and clear terms of reference. Very important to define the role of the PCC and Friends Group.
- It can help to foster the spirit of partnership and avoid issues that can sometimes arise when separate groups feel like they have competing interests.
- Included in support offered by the Diocese - a separate Friends Group may fall under the radar of the Diocese.
- It can help when applying for major funding.

Some concern was raised about a PCC which is rather stuck in its way, retaining control of the Friends Group, as it may undermine attempts to inject new life into the church.

- The PCC retain control in the sense of their legal obligations towards the church, but that doesn't mean they control the Friends Group. There should be at least 1 person from the PCC in the Friends Groups, but it would be separate to the PCC in terms of focus, function etc. There to support the PCC in looking after and celebrating the history and heritage of the building, not to be controlled by the PCC.
- A subcommittee is a good way to bridge the gap between secular and religious interests - different groups and interests but under one charitable organisation.

In a very small village, is it worth setting up a village Friends Group on behalf of a number of charities/groups, rather than a Friends Group just for the church? The same people tend to do everything in the village and one group may be a better way to help local groups work together.

- Not aware of this happening in Ely Diocese, but has happened in others.
- It is definitely something that is possible.
- You can try these things out unofficially, just make sure you have something that defines the roles.
- Could potentially create a subcommittee of the PCC and a subcommittee of the Parish Council, which come together to make up the Friends Group.
- In a very small village, a Friends Group just for the church could look a bit separatist.

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- A church/PCC doesn't have to do everything itself, it can utilise existing opportunities - post on a village Facebook Group rather than setting-up a church Facebook page; have a stall at existing village events etc.

Some Examples of Engagement Highlighted

Cambridge South and North Deaneries produced a city centre leaflet, targeted at hotels for tourists.

Parish Magazine – importance of this highlighted. Great way to provide the ongoing engagement, but also can be utilised to consult people on specific matters. Trumpington magazine was used as an example, called *The Trumpet*, sent out every 2 months, features news from the church and a range of community groups.

Festival Churches

Samuel briefly introduced the concept of Festival Churches, using a presentation from the conference held on Monday 30th September at St Mary's Ely.

What is a Festival Church?

- Holds a minimum of 6 services a year, along with some community events/activities, usually set around Festivals. These could include traditional occasions such as Harvest, Christmas, Easter and Remembrance Day but could also be locally imagined festivals such as pet services, a summer fete, snowdrop festival, pub church etc.
- You could have 6 small morning services during the year and then focus attention on community events.
- It's about doing less but doing it well.
- It enables more people to be actively involved in the management of the church. Festival Churches are often supported by an Action Group, a bit like Friends Group, but generally focused on the maintenance of the building and delivering events.
- It is a positive choice. It is NOT the first step to closing a church. It is about recognising what you are doing well and focusing on delivering that.
- Remains open for all life events.

How to become a Festival Church

It is your choice. No-one can force a church to become a Festival Church.

- Discuss with your PCC and Archdeacon
- Consult with the community
- Pass a PCC Resolution
- Inform the Bishop and/or DAC
- Celebrate, implement change and be creative!

The Association of Festival Churches has been established to:

- Promote the Festival Church Model
- Produce resources and case studies
- Provide direct support
- Organise and deliver training

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It now has a dedicated Development Officer, Nigel Mills.

There is just one 'official' Festival Church in the Diocese of Ely, All Saints in Rampton, but probably lots of 'unofficial' ones.

Contacts

- Samuel Pedlar, Church and Community Support Advisor
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- Grants – Holly Robinson, Historic Church Buildings Support Officer
Holly.Robinson@elydiocese.org 07948 350211
- Nigel Mills, Festival Churches Development Officer
nigel.mills@festivalchurches.org.uk 0740 5919376
- Consent and DAC matters - all queries please use the main email in the first instance
DAC@elydiocese.org or contact Sam Reeder on 01353 652718

Further Information

See the [REACH resources](#) (under the Church in Action heading on the website) for advice on Friends Groups, Festival Churches, Village Welcome Booklet and Church Guidebook.

Association of Festival Churches - <https://www.festivalchurches.org.uk/>

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 20th November, 7pm – 8:30pm

Theme: Support in 2025

Ask whatever questions you have in an open Q&A session.

Discuss what training and support you would like to see next year, and how/if this new support network should be developed.

Please contact Holly for the link to join the online meeting.

Topics for Future Meetings

Please send your suggestions to Holly. The current list is:

- Handrails and Ramps
- Clocks
- Heating
- Grants and Fundraising