

CASE STUDY

The Rev Philip Lightbody (ordained 2010) has been priest in charge of St Mary's, Little Snoring-on-Edge, for two years. Philip's experience includes a curacy in a gathered church within a suburban context. Philip is beginning to build good links with other clergy in the nearby town.

The village has a population of 3000 people and although is often termed 'rural' by villagers, it is just two miles outside a large town which has many churches, a few of which are thriving.

The village enjoys excellent Infant and Junior Schools and these, coupled with the village's proximity to the nearby town and a major city some 20 miles away, attract young families. There are also many retired residents, most of whom have lived in the village many years.

The church enjoys a breadth of both traditional and contemporary services in a monthly cycle led alternately by a robed choir and a small music group. There is an average regular attendance of 50 adults, the majority retired, but with around 20 in their 40's or 50's, and nine children spread over three Sunday services.

Many of the congregation have good links with village residents and the church is generally considered to be an important part of the overall community. Philip has help from three Readers, all of whom are retired. Traditionally the church has looked exclusively to the vicar to organise and run the services and to initiate and spearhead any new initiatives or ministries within the church. The overall level of commitment to helping lead or indeed participate in church-based activities and ministries is generally very low, with a very small handful – and generally the same people – getting involved. They are generally committed and competent, although Eileen, who runs the pastoral team finds it very difficult to work with others and this has caused some issues in gaining the ideas of others.

Both churchwardens are due to stand down within the next three months, one citing ill-health and one who has been in post for three years. The latter is someone of huge energy and has almost single-handedly undertaken many of the week-to-week support functions in the running of the church, but it is proving impossible to find replacements.

Twelve months ago the PCC embarked on a vision development exercise and one key decision made by the PCC as a consequence of this was a recognition (endorsed by a majority, but not all) of the need for a much stronger culture of empowerment within the church through the formation of teams covering each of the key areas of the church's life together with the development of lay leaders. In response Philip very quickly established an outreach

team, a pastoral team, a worship and ministry team, a discipleship team and a Young People's team based on a model drawn from his previous church. Encouragingly, three of the already 'committed' church members volunteered to lead a team as did two others who despite initially expressing strong reservations, were 'persuaded'. Philip also established a separate 'team leaders' team, comprising the leaders of the individual ministry teams. His intent was that this team would be responsible for providing more practical guidance and direction in the life of the church, working under the overall vision developed by the PCC.

A year later he is concerned! There seems to be friction developing between the new 'team leaders' team and the PCC. Philip seems to have spent a lot of his time sorting out arguments between teams as to who is responsible for what.

A family service organised by the new 'worship' team was generally creative and appreciated, but it also significantly overran and one element, a testimony, was inappropriate for a family service and not well handled. Philip has decided that he will organise and plan the next family service.

On the whole, the performance of the new teams is very patchy. It has been very difficult to find people who will commit and give time, and two teams have only two members. Philip has been asked by four of the teams to attend their meetings and he now finds his diary busier than ever. Furthermore, the implementation of the new 'teams' approach had led to some sharp discussions within the PCC and tempers have flared. Outright division has been avoided as Philip has kept the peace and avoided, or skilfully side-stepped, discussions about team-related issues on PCC meeting agendas. However, the APCM is coming up and Philip is concerned.....!

Philip is also concerned that the culture within the church, still very much looks to the vicar for all decisions. as well as leading and preaching within services. Is it because of a lack of confidence within many church members to become more actively involved; or is it that people are just too busy in their day-to-day lives? Or is it a question of priorities and perhaps low-levels of discipleship? Philip is not sure.

He turns to you, a close colleague from a neighbouring parish for help. What would you advise Philip to do next? What pointers may you offer him? What does he need to address? What may the journey ahead look like? What practically could he do? What are the key risks he faces? What about timescales?