

St Mary's Local - Richard's Reflection September 2023

MAKING A DIFFERENCE LOCALLY – A BIT OF OUR STORY

St Mary's has always had a vision to be a blessing to our local community, to make a difference locally and to share the gospel with our community. We are compelled to respond to need as followers of Jesus and to show love in his name as well as proclaim the good news.

Over the years we have responded in numerous ways, and currently all kinds of groups and activities run at the church centre such as a carer support group, a bereavement support group, a dementia café, a thriving parent and toddler café, groups for older people, and youth and children's work. We host many other community groups that hire our space.

As a church family we are keen to support local charities and agencies such as the local foodbanks and debt advice centre, CAB, Samaritans, Stripey Stork, Renewed Hope, Loveworks, Surrey Care Trust, Be Me Project, B@titude, Safe Families, Welcare, and the Victoria Alms Houses. Many give financially, and by volunteering, to these local charities.

In the last few years, we have also been very involved in supporting families from Ukraine and have set up a hosting support service for over 30 host families and over 60 Ukrainians.

Other local relationships are strong. We have excellent relationships with the neighbouring Parish School where 50% of school places are reserved for children attending church and a majority of places on the Board of Governors are reserved for PCC appointments. St Mary's also has strong relationships with the neighbouring Preparatory School and Grammar School, and with St Bede's, a large local ecumenical Christian Secondary School where many of our children attend. Ali Foulkes, an ex-staff member, has is the Anglican Chaplain at St Bede's and Rev Phil Jackson, also an ex-staff member, is the chaplain at the Grammar. We also have a significant group of teachers in our church family.

In addition, we also support local schools through our engagement with SparkFish, a local Christian schools-work charity, working across Reigate, Redhill and Merstham, in around 20 primary and secondary schools. SparkFish aims to support children and young people during the school day through engaging children in RE, giving students the opportunity to explore prayer and reflection for themselves, and by caring for children's emotional well-being through group work as well as one-to-one mentoring.

REVIEWING AND DEVELOPING OUR APPROACH AND VISION

Over the last year we have been reviewing the **values** and **principles** that we want to underpin our **approach** and **vision** for local mission, evangelism, and social transformation. Recognising that the goals of evangelism and social transformation are different, while overlapping, a group has been reflecting on models of best practice from around the world. This has been such a valuable process and through it all we have learned so much.

Here is a summary of what I believe we have learned together:

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

1. CHARITY HAS RISKS

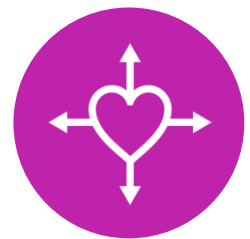
We have learned that good intentions are not enough. Charity can be damaging when:

- it is paternalistic
- we do *to* others or *for* others instead of *alongside* others
- it leads to pride in the charity provider
- it treats the symptoms but leaves the causes of poverty unaddressed
- a project is more important than the people it serves
- the needs of the providers become more important than those of the one in need

2. BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS AND BROKEN ECOSYSTEMS LIE AT THE ROOT OF THE ISSUES

We have learned that the underlying **cause** of poverty is the result of **relationships that are broken** in four different ways

- **CREATION** - how we connect with the world around us and the resources it provides
- **OURSELVES** - how we view, relate to and look after ourselves
- **OTHERS** - how we relate to & interact with other people around us (family | friends | community)
- **GOD** - how we connect with our Creator



3. REIGATE IS REIGATE

We have learned that while the needs in Merstham, Redhill, Woodhatch, and South Park are easier to see, identify and understand, Reigate is a more difficult community to connect with and the needs are often hidden. However, in this town, which we are called to serve and bless, we have noted the following social indicators:

- Isolation & Loneliness
- Time Poverty and Stress
- Stretched Families dealing with children with special needs and poor mental health.
- High Divorce Rates
- Debt and Financial Insecurity

We have also recognised that there is another need in our area – the longing for **meaning and purpose**. Resource rich and keen to find a way to have a meaningful life, there are many in our community who, in their spare time, or retirements, are seeking fulfilment and purpose through serving and volunteering. This need seeks resolution through meaningful occupation in responding to the needs of others.

4. LEARNING ABOUT OURSELVES | TAKING STOCK OF OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Seeking God for his calling on our church life and how we might respond we have begun to see the following issues in play:

- We have a strong desire to help and serve but we are unaware of, or not reflective enough about, our own motivations for wanting to help
- We have significant resources, human and financial, that can make a real difference, but we have struggled to see how best to release these
- We value offering practical support and help but struggle meeting more complex needs and we still have much to learn about how best to respond to need and avoid pitfalls
- We have an amazing resource in the Church Centre, but we sense a frustration that the needs we see around us in Reigate (for example around old age or special needs within families), are not easy to address through simple centre-based projects
- We have a heart for connecting and community, but we lack confidence in evangelism as part of our mission and are uncertain of how practical help, transformation, and the gospel fit together.
- We recognise that while it is easy to miss the needs of people and families around us in Reigate as they are often hidden by relative wealth, we can also see these needs within our own church family
- We are drawn to respond to more obvious needs in neighbouring areas, but we can neglect responding to those closest to us
- We can see that our volunteer base includes many retired people, but we know that while willing and resourced, we lack skills in certain areas
- We can see the need for mentoring and individualised support, but we are not sure how we could realistically develop these appropriately
- We have strengths in facilitation and leadership, but we need to work out how to release these locally
- We have been learning from other cities and regions where the church has responded in very strategic and collaborative ways, and we recognise the importance of joined up thinking and close partnerships in all that we might do going forward.
- We have noted the impact we can have when we apply this learning well, such as in our response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees and we can see how, as a resourceful church, we have something to offer, not just practically, but also in leading and holding a strategic approach.

Summary

All of the above expresses both St Mary's Reigate's commitment to making a positive impact on its local community and also highlights key learnings from our recent review of values and principles for local mission, evangelism, and social transformation:

1. **CHARITY EVALUATION:** We have come to see that well-intentioned charity efforts can have negative consequences when they become paternalistic, disconnected from the people they serve, or prioritise projects over individuals' needs.
2. **ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY:** The church is learning that poverty results from broken relationships in four areas: with the environment, oneself, others, and God.
3. **THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF REIGATE:** While the church serves various nearby communities, we acknowledge that Reigate has unique, hidden social needs, including isolation, stress, family challenges, divorce rates, and a quest for meaning and purpose among its residents.
4. **SELF-REFLECTION AND RESOURCES:** It is excellent that St Mary's is in the process of reflecting on our motivations for helping and how best to use our significant resources, both human and financial, to address local needs effectively.
5. **CHALLENGES AND CONFIDENCE:** While we can recognise our strengths in practical support and community building, we acknowledge the challenge we face in addressing more complex needs and of interweaving evangelism and transformation together. It is important to build confidence in these areas.
6. **RESPONDING TO OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD:** It is clear that we are already mindful of the needs within our own church family and of the importance of responding to those closest to us, and so it makes sense to build on where are already active.
7. **SKILL DEVELOPMENT:** We can see a need for skill development in certain areas, such as mentoring and individualised support.
8. **COLLABORATION AND STRATEGIC THINKING:** We have learned from other regions about the importance of strategic collaboration and partnerships, which emphasise the need for joined up thinking in their initiatives.
9. **RESOURCEFUL CHURCH:** We recognise our potential to be a resourceful church, not just in practical assistance but also in leading and implementing a strategic approach to community engagement.

In summary, St Mary's Reigate is committed to serving its local community while being mindful of the complexities and challenges involved in charity work. Moving forward we ought to emphasise the importance of addressing root causes, self-reflection, and collaboration to make a meaningful impact.

ESTABLISHING KEY PRINCIPLES TOGETHER

Learning from others, and after much reflection, the following **4 principles** have become important to us:

1. WE WANT TO SEE **GOD** CHANGE LIVES

- We believe **God** is calling us into mission, evangelism, and social action
- Change is a work of the **Holy Spirit**
- We want to share the good news of **Jesus** in meaningful and sensitive ways

2. WE WILL **LISTEN DEEPLY TO GOD TO PEOPLE** to properly understand the need, and starting where people are at.

- We must always begin by **listening** deeply and understanding before acting
- We want to be explicit about what **stage of transformation** we are working at: Relief | Rehabilitation | Development
- We want to adopt a posture of **humility**
 - Acknowledging our own brokenness
 - Expecting to be changed in the process of walking with others

3. WE SEEK TO ADDRESS THE **CAUSES OF POVERTY** or need not the symptoms

- When addressing poverty or need, we will use our understanding of the **relational causes of poverty** as a framework for action - Broken relationships with God / Self / Others / Creation

4. WE WILL RESPOND WITH A **STRENGTHS-BASED** APPROACH

- We embrace an **asset-based, strength/based approach** – building on existing strengths, capacities, and skills rather than addressing lack
- We want to develop teams of people who are great at working **developmentally** with others
 - We want to help people who are **ready to change**
 - We will walk with people as they become ready to change
 - We believe that the journey is as important as the destination
- We want to emphasise participation – working **with** others, **not doing to** or **for** them
 - We want to **avoid paternalism** looking avoiding doing anything for others that they can do for themselves
 - We want to **increase dignity** and empowerment
- We want to work in **partnership** with others in our community
 - We see ourselves as **just one part** of much bigger picture in someone's life and the wider community – We are not the solution
 - **Mapping social networks** and supportive community is vital
 - We acknowledge the existing institutions that already exist in our community and want to add to them, collaborate with them, or increase accessibility to them, while **avoiding duplication**

From all this, a good summary of these 4 principles to guide our approach to mission, evangelism, and social action might be:

- **CHANGE THROUGH GOD**

We are committed to seeing God transform lives through our mission and social action efforts. We want to emphasise the role of the Holy Spirit and aim to share the message of Jesus sensitively and meaningfully.

- **DEEP LISTENING AND HUMILITY**

We have come to see the vital importance of deep listening and of understanding people's needs before taking action. We will respond in different stages of relief, rehabilitation, and development, adopting a humble posture and acknowledging our own imperfections.

- **ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES**

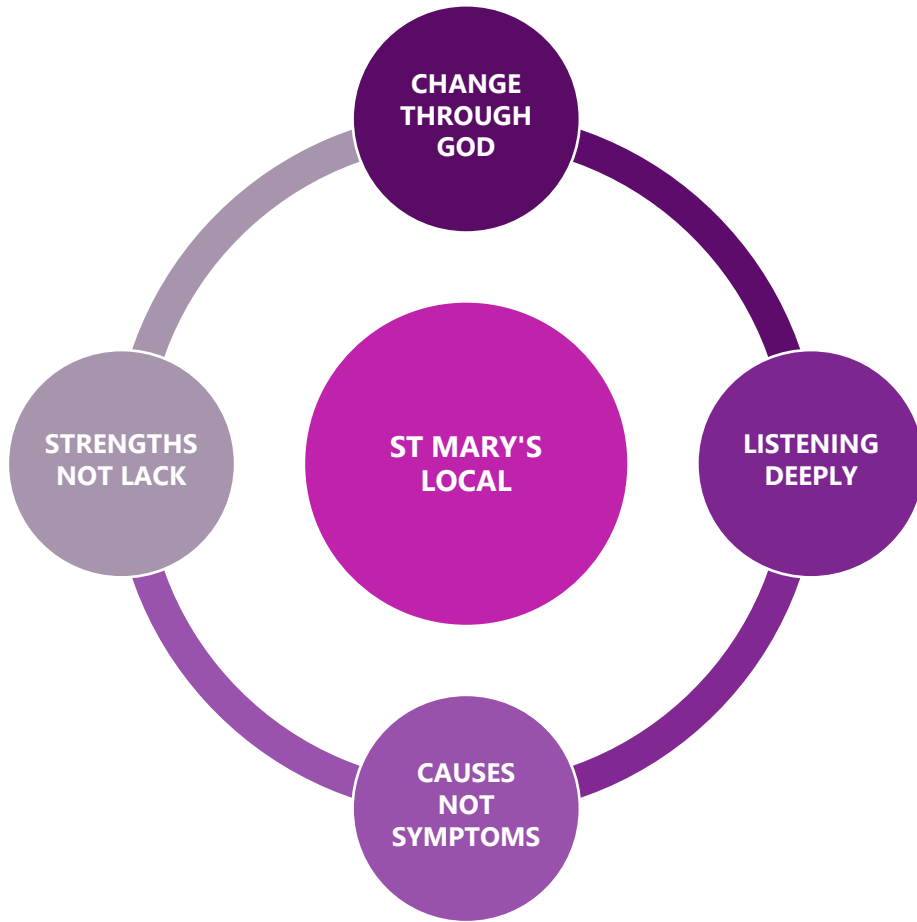
Our approach will be based on addressing the root causes of poverty and need, guided by our understanding of the relational causes of poverty, which encompass broken relationships with God, self, others, and creation.

- **STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH**

We are convinced of the need for an asset-based, strengths-based approach, building on existing strengths, capacities, and skills rather than focusing on deficiencies. Moving forward we want to work with individuals and communities to empower them, emphasise participation, collaborate with existing institutions, and be part of a broader support network rather than considering ourselves the sole solution.

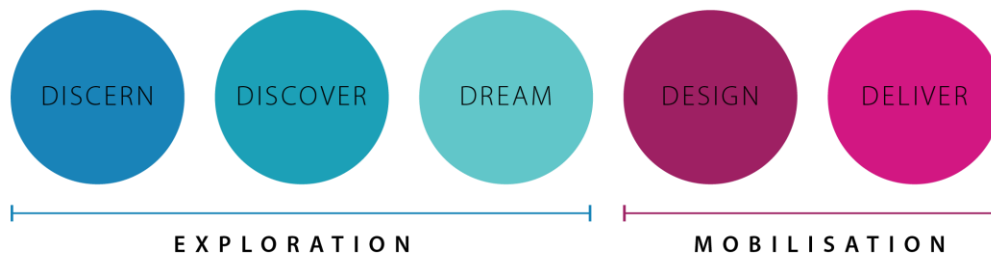
In summary, we want to be guided by these principles, which emphasise the importance of spiritual transformation, deep listening, addressing root causes, and a strengths-based, collaborative approach in our mission and social action endeavours.

1. **CHANGE THROUGH GOD**
2. **LISTENING DEEPLY**
3. **CAUSES NOT SYMPTOMS**
4. **STRENGTHS NOT LACK**



EMBRACING A PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

As part of our learning, we have also seen how helpful it is, when seeking to develop a new project or response to follow the **5Ds of community transformation**. This enables us to avoid the pitfall of jumping from idea to solution, without proper listening and discerning on the way.



- DISCERN:** Understanding the needs, assets and role of the church
- DISCOVER:** Exploring your community from different perspectives
- DREAM:** Prayerfully imagining what could be
- DESIGN:** Creating an action plan
- DELIVER:** Launching, staying on track and honest reflections

At this moment we are perhaps in the **Discover and Dream stages** in preparation of the last two stages of **Design and Delivering**.

EXPLORATION			MOBILISATION	
DISCERN	DISCOVER	DREAM	DESIGN	DELIVER
A. The Needs of the Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broken relationships Broken ecosystems 	A. Mapping your Community to Discover Areas of Need and how the Church can Help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Layers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the community the assets the needs your passions & priorities the Light 	A. Finding the Edge Pieces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What to look for - common themes, corroborating themes, curve ball themes Dreaming for our Community 	A. People Centred, not Project Centred <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People for projects Projects for people The importance of partnership 	A. Launching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch types – under the radar, soft launch, hard launch Thinking backwards
B. The Assets in our Hands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 8 key asset types Recognising your assets Reflecting on your journey so far 	B. Gathering Information based on the Five Perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whose perspectives can we gain? What will you ask them? How will you gather their perspectives? 7 Research Tips Attitudes and bias 	B. Seeking God's Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does God speak? God's Dream 	B. Building your Team and Creating Your Proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your team Who should be in the task group? Team basics Your project proposal 	B. Staying on Track <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring – quantitative and qualitative feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are we measuring? Evaluation Preparation Meeting Output Tools 10 Tips for Staying on Track
C. The Role of the Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The River Analogy Essential Qualities Motivations (GO, IF) 	C. Taking a Holistic Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Problem Tree The mindset of Jesus 	C. Dreaming of Solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is already out there? What do we already have? How can we empower people? What scale of response is sustainable? What ideas do we have? Integral mission 	C. Creating an Action Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aims and objectives The need for the project Project resourcing Project timeline Risk analysis Stakeholder analysis Monitoring and evaluating References 	C. Honest Reflections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 6th D? The end of the road?
		D. Testing Your Dreams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present your dream Pilot your dream Practise your dream 	D. Getting Ready for Launch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before you take flight Gather your assets 	

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

Taking all this together, and also reflecting on Lynwen and Paul's comments, I wonder if it is helpful to highlight the following next steps:

- **ACTIVELY PROMOTE VOLUNTEERING**
So many are already involved and doing much great work. Let's shine a light on this and highlight and signpost the many different volunteering opportunities there are available locally and celebrate what people are already doing.

- **INTENTIONALLY DEVELOP WHAT WE ARE ALREADY DOING TOGETHER (INSIDE OUT)**
Let's focus on actively developing and strengthening the groups and projects we already have up and running focusing on:
 - Elderly provision
 - Children and families
 - Special needs support

- **CONTINUE LISTENING AND DISCERNING**
Let's believe that God has been in all this learning and struggle and maintain an open posture ready to respond as God leads us forward. Let's continue listening, watching, and learning together, with hearts open to being broken for what breaks God's heart here in Reigate.

- **CLEARLY COMMUNICATE A VISION FOR GOSPEL ENGAGEMENT**
Taking hold of the latent desire and energy within the church family, let's repeatedly communicate a clear and well thought out vision for gospel engagement and transformation that has a stronger element of evangelism within it, and which understands the root causes of poverty.

- **PURPOSELY MAINTAIN A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP**
Recognising the recent appointments of new children's and youth ministers, a new head of community life, and a new head of leadership development and discipleship growth, let's not lose sight that God has been leading us together to focus on the key task of strengthening the church family in discipleship, mission, fellowship, and worship, at this stage of our story together.

APPENDIX 1 | LYNWEN'S REFLECTIONS

- **TAKING NOTE OF THE NEEDS RIGHT IN FRONT OF US**

Our research has shown that we don't need to look for needs outside the Church as the needs identified (such as loneliness, isolation, families over stretched, young family needs, special needs and mental health for children) exist within our large church family as well as in our community

- **MAKING THE MOST OF WHAT WE ARE ALREADY DOING**

We are already 'doing' so much 'internally' (as St Mary's) and these are good platforms to get behind and invite others (non-Christians / our neighbours) to join in with us

- **APPRECIATING OUR USP**

OUR USP IS GOD! 😊 Our local outreach, our pastoral support (for all ages), and our evangelism cannot be separated

- **STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL VOLUNTEERING**

Many of our Church family are already doing outreach into the local community, through voluntary work and service. Let's acknowledge, bless, and support them, with the intention of scaling this up and sharing the stories among ourselves

- **ADDRESSING SYMPTOMS IS NOT ENOUGH**

All our responses to need should be underpinned by our understanding of how poverty has its roots in relationship problems (with God, creation, others and ourselves) and therefore we need to develop relational approaches and foster the appropriate skills sets within our church family to do this work.

APPENDIX 2 | PAUL'S REFLECTIONS

Key words – discipleship, asset-based, relational, facilitate, collaborate, local and resource church

St Mary's Reigate is a large and well-resourced church, located centrally in a relatively prosperous town in south-east England, that also has significant pockets of deprivation. Over recent years, the church community has prayerfully supported major physical building projects by building a new community church centre, reordering seating in the church and refurbishing the organ.

Our focus is now on growing our discipleship as a church. A glimpse of the St Mary's weekly bulletin illustrates our continual activity. The church provides an exceptional, even by national standards, contribution to children's ministry, reflected in helping to launch Satellites Youth Festival in 2022 and supporting it again in 2023. We have initiated many successful initiatives from Holiday at Home to the Homes for Ukraine project, as just two of many examples. Just recently, we have contributed in a significant way to the church graft at All Saints, Merstham.

The challenge with St Mary's Local is not to become busier still. We are already exceptionally active! This is not the way to reach our potential for discipleship and community. Our challenge is to become stronger at **becoming prayerfully reflective**. This is to create space and develop systems to enable us to pray, listen and develop intentionally as a church. We can learn from others – e.g., from Alive Church, Lincoln, by deliberately adopting a slower purposeful journey (e.g., centred on the 'Church and Community Transformation' methodology). This is to identify how and where the church may best serve in the city and work alongside others (e.g., other churches).

In the light of this, these are key steps to take going forward.

1. **BUILD-UP OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP**

We need to strengthen in building St Mary's church community and discipleship [draw from Ben's role and objectives] – this will give us greater capacity to be effective as a church.

2. **BE PRAYERFULLY REFLECTIVE TOGETHER AS A CHURCH**

An important lesson from other successful models is that we should spend more time prayerfully listening and reflecting before doing, to enable us to become more intentional and effective (a key lesson from Alive Church, Lincoln and from Tearfund's CCT model).

3. **WHEN WE ACT, WE SHOULD TAKE SERIOUSLY BROKEN RELATIONSHIP**

We grasped the significance of the four broken relationships and how they underpin poverty of all kinds. And, how in turn relational poverty encompasses both material and spiritual poverty.

4. WE NEED TO EVALUATE OUR ASSETS AS A CHURCH COMMUNITY, TO BETTER APPRECIATE THE ASSETS OF OTHERS

In order to adopt an asset-based approach centred on relationships we need to reflect on our core strengths individually and collectively, within our church community and then how we might apply them.

5. RECOGNISE AND ADDRESS KEY GAPS IN OUR PROVISION

For example, facilitation and mentoring skills are often critical requirements in local work – to make connections, avoid duplication and make things join=up. How might we develop these skills at St Mary's?

6. LOCALLY, BUILD FROM THE 'INSIDE OUT' ON THE BASIS OF WHAT WE ALREADY DO WELL

St Mary's is a very 'busy' church. Many of the things we do, we do well (e.g., children's work, holiday at home, mums & babies group etc.). As we look at our immediate vicinity (e.g., within Parish boundary), we find that much of what we are doing is relevant to the core needs that we identified through our consultation exercises (i.e., loneliness, isolation, families over-stretched and breakdowns, children's needs etc.). We need to reflect on when and how it is appropriate to build from the 'inside out' to serve our local community in these areas?

7. WE NEED TO CAREFULLY ANALYSE ANY NEW CHALLENGE BEFORE TAKING IT ON

Before we start something new, we need to assess against some basic criteria e.g., a) what is the need, the assets, and the root problem; b) does it fit with our assets, skills, and values; c) how best to organise to respond; d) what will success look like?

8. AS WE ENGAGE OUTWARDS, JOIN UP WITH OTHERS

We recognise that there are lots of resources already out there to generate productive communities (e.g., individuals, local groups, neighbourhood institutions, physical assets, positive stories etc.) within Reigate, Redhill, Woodhatch, and Merstham. For example, is there more we can do by sharing with other churches? Can we make more of the many connections that our church members have with local organisations? We can engage with the local authority and all the other groups that are active in our area, to help avoid duplication of effort.

9. EVEN THOUGH WE ARE A 'LOCAL CHURCH', WE OFFER POTENTIAL AS A 'RESOURCE CHURCH'

We live in an urban area with a complex geography. Many of the challenges that people face in their daily lives spatially extend beyond our immediate area. To be effective as a 'light on the hill' for Christ, we don't just have a care for those within our local congregation. As a relatively resource rich church, we have an obligation to collaborate beyond our immediate space to enable the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed, alongside church communities and other partners across our 'city'.