

'Whither the Church?' A question for Frome

In 2015, the Bishop of London commented, following a service in Euston Church: 'This is the best example I've been in of a **post denominational church, where we're all heading**. This observation is intriguing in relation to the future of the church in Frome.

One of the most interesting initiatives being currently undertaken in the church nationally is the Transforming Wigan Challenge in the Diocese of Liverpool. The Diocese of Liverpool is one of only 3 Dioceses in the country that has grown in mission and financial strength in past 5 years. TWC is a 7 year, £1.2m project to turn around the local church. It aims to: **renew** spiritual heart of church; **re-orientate** church; **revive** the spiritual heart of life in Wigan.

The project is not about something new that sits apart or acts in isolation from our existing structures but works to re-imagine and reinvent what we are doing in order to improve.

The goal is quite simply to establish a 'Bigger church to make a bigger difference.'

The Transforming Wigan Challenge

"It is clear to all involved in the shaping of the Transforming Wigan project that the church as has been in Wigan will not be sustainable. The congregational demographic is skewed; buildings are a problem; growth is at best patchy. It is also clear that it won't simply be a pattern of gentle decline; in 10 years' time numbers and money will fall off a cliff.

That said there remains a richness and vibrancy about the local and church communities of Wigan. There is a pride and generosity of spirit among the congregations that continues to manifest itself in giving of time, talents and treasure – a testimony to the faithfulness of generations of Christians. The key will be to unlock this latent spirit where it isn't sufficiently strong, give greater licence to those where there is vision and desire and to set a new tone and a new missional ambition."

What the project will involve

Transforming Wigan will be led by a Director, a person with the qualities and equivalent status of an Archdeacon, combining those strengths with an entrepreneurial mind set and the ability to deliver real change. This person will work in a variety of areas. They will need to look at some core aspects from the basic infrastructure of the area; church planting, missional leadership and dealing with change.

Infrastructure

The bid is clear that "if we are to re-imagine church in Wigan we will need to address fundamental infrastructure issues". The project will be looking at how we rationalise church - there is a strong belief that the area is over churching.

A core aim is to establish new church presences. We cannot rely simply on improving our existing church, new forms are vital.

A bold project to Transform Wigan

This is big project, a complex project, a bold project. Get it right and we will create a new model of church, a new way of being God's presence in the communities. We will learn many lessons which will be valuable for the growth of the church in Wigan Deanery, across our diocese and for the Church of England as a whole.

Each of these observations re. the church in Wigan can be applied to the church in Frome.

FIRST STEP: To gather passionate disciples of Jesus Christ together to pray and to seek God's way forward.