

A REPORT TO ST MARGARET'S CHURCH, MAPLEDURHAM  
ABOUT ITS INTERVIEWS ON  
CONGREGATIONAL MISSION AND MINISTRY  
from  
The Congregational Discovery Reading Team

**How to Use this Report**

This report gives the major findings of a self-study by members of the congregation about the character of worship, education, and general involvement of members, as well as the congregation's responses to community and congregational changes. It is based on 12 interviews, gathered in the autumn of 2015, by several members of the congregation.

We believe these findings should be taken seriously even though they are based on information from a moderate number of interviews. Leaders should consider their own reflections and use common sense about the issues raised in this report, building on strengths of St Margaret's while addressing problem areas as opportunities for further growth as a congregation.

We believe that both the interviewers and those with whom they talked have the best interests of St Margaret's at heart and gave information they hope will help the congregation.

**Our recommendations are meant as questions, not to tell the congregation what to do.** We believe that your congregation's continuing work in mission, particularly with the Partnership for Missional Church, may help it address some of the opportunities discovered in these interviews. We also believe the congregation's leadership has the wisdom and ability to best address its own situation.

All of the people who took time to answer these interview questions, and most certainly the Listening Leaders who did so many splendid interviews, should be commended for their willingness to think seriously about your congregation's members' past and present experiences of worship, learning, change, and mission. Such careful and helpful work will be of dramatic value as we all consider what God is up to in the community and what God is calling St Margaret's to do here. As we seek to build on strengths, we remember that God equips us for every good work and that we lead by the grace of God's gifts to us.

**Question 1: Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in this congregation**

*12 interviews, 20 remarks*

Community (welcoming, like-mindedness, doing things together etc) x 5

Peace/ peaceful place x 5

Unity x 3

History x 2

Beauty of church

Sermon

Music

Milestone services

Real desire to keep it going

**Recommended questions to consider**

1. You very clearly experience God's presence in church life and in the holiness and peace of the building itself. How might you use this sense of being a holy place with the rest of village community? You value visitors from all over the world. How might you create meaningful relationships with people who like and even love your church even if they only come occasionally (or even just once)?
2. We have a sense of how much there is a desire to keep the church going in Mapledurham because of the good things people gain from it – connectedness to God and tradition, unity & fellowship and meaningful rites of passage to name a few. Does everyone in Mapledurham know about what goes on? How might you communicate more of the good news you have found together?

## **Question 2: Describe an experience of profound worship you have had**

*12 interviews, 20 remarks*

High days and holiday services x 5

Music x 3

Milestone services x 2

Everything fits/ works together for a good experience x 2

Sermon x 2

Funeral – shared by the whole congregation

Atmosphere comforting

Experience from youth

Evensong

Many occasions, uplifting worship at St Margaret's

Difficult to talk about

### **Recommended questions to consider**

1. A number of people's experiences of profound worship are centred around high days and holidays. What might it be about these that enables people to connect with God? What opportunities might these present? How might what you learn about these times of worship inform what you do more regularly on 'ordinary' days?
2. Many of the experiences of worship cited take place within St Margaret's (as opposed to being memories from lots of other places) so we can conclude that God is very present with you and a deep sense of worship pervades your life together. Could you explore together why you think this is? Do people have opportunities to share their individual experiences of worship – or how might you share more deeply what is going on for each of you?

**Question 3: Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation.**

*12 interviews, 22 remarks*

**What people fight about**

No fighting x 10

Priestly role x 2

Lay-led services

Priest not sympathetic to women

Sometimes felt 'exclusion' of information only shared with a few

Risk of closing

**How people fight**

Accommodating each other x 3

Discussion

Expressing views without animosity

Everyone working together

**Recommended questions to consider:**

1. Our reading of the responses shows that you seem to handle conflict or disagreement in a very healthy and mature manner. Do you see this as a gift that you can offer to those outside of St Margaret's – perhaps to the other churches in the group?
2. One interviewee noted that new clergy had brought new life to the congregation and this was a "turning point". Could you identify what God was up to at this point, and also what it says about the healthy role of clergy in relationship to lay people? How might you build on what you have learnt since that point and continue in the same direction? What might be next?

**Question 4: Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.**

*12 interviews, 25 remarks*

**Memory that gives you anxiety**

Fewer people attending x 5

Aging congregation x 3

Few families/ young people x 2

Lack of permanent minister to keep church open

Minister

**Memory that gives you hope**

People willing to do things/ make contributions x 5

Friendliness of congregation x 2

Good to see younger families attending

Number of children who attended Christingle

On occasions church is full

Joy at every big celebration

Comments in visitor book – feeling something is being done right

New Rector

**Recommended questions to consider**

1. You give evidence of a real hope for the future while acknowledging that you are a small, ageing and dwindling congregation. One of the principles of PMC is that God has given the local church all the resources it needs to be and do what God is calling it to be and do. Can you identify the gifts you do have that can be employed in joining in what God is going amongst you and in your community? How might you be able to live with this anxiety and discover God's preferred and promised future for your congregation?
2. Clearly high-days and holidays are a great encouragement when the church is full. How might you use opportunities like these for developing deeper relationships with people and the wider community?
3. What does a good relationship with the parish clergy look like from Mapledurham?

**Question 5: Tell how people participate in the life of this church.**

*12 interviews, 52 remarks*

Everyone/most people participate x 9  
Refreshments/coffee x 6  
Flowers x 5  
Cleaning x 4  
Events x 4  
Bell ringers x 3  
Wardens x 3  
Gardening x 2  
Sunday school/Junior Church x 2  
Communion assistants x 2  
Drop in Centre x 2  
Christian Aid Collection x 2  
Sides people x 2  
Intercessions  
Lent groups  
Walks with St Peter's  
Reading lessons  
Taking the offering  
Pastoral care

**Recommended questions to consider:**

1. It's clear that many people in the congregation are actively involved in maintaining the life of the church (people & building) and see that as important. This is great as there is a lot of energy amongst you and the ability to participate holds people in. What do you believe about God and yourselves that places so much importance on your life together and your Sunday worship? How might this life and energy be also focused outward towards those who are not yet members?
2. A few people here and elsewhere have mentioned the drop-in centre as a place where you interact with your village. What are you learning in this initiative that helps you to make meaningful relationships with strangers who might also be 'people of peace'?

**Question 6: Describe this congregation to someone new and tell how they would be nurtured here.**

*12 interviews, 31 remarks*

Friendly x 5  
Welcoming x 5  
Small x 4  
Community/ Family x 3  
Diverse x 3  
Helpful x 2  
Get involved x 2  
Older x 2  
Beautiful country church  
Village  
Previously vicar always called on new people  
Good regular Sunday School  
Members open their homes for get togethers

**Recommended questions to consider:**

1. The welcoming, close-knit nature of your congregation described here is reflected throughout these questions. It's great that you share hospitality by opening your homes for instance. How does your relational way of being facilitate growing in faith together? How might you develop and grow this gift?
2. How would you enable someone new to the congregation and perhaps new to the Christian faith to grow in their faith, other than by just 'getting stuck in'?

**Question 7: Tell about how you and others feel about the changes in this congregation in the past three to five years.**

*12 interviews, 16 remarks*

Fewer young people x 3

Sense of loss x 3

Aging x 2

School admissions policy change x 2

Changing needs between younger and older members x 2

Shift from dedicated priest to ministerial team

Every member participating ... to keep the church open

Stronger position ... new people have joined in last few years

Drawn in via choir

**Recommended questions to consider:**

1. The reading team have noted that two respondents have commented on changes in school policy which has resulted in lower regular attendance. What might the opportunities be for the church to build a relationship with the school in this new situation? How can you utilize existing/historic links with the school to engage with school families?
2. The reading team detect a sense of sadness and loss for those who have passed on and youth/ families who no longer attend. To what extent is the congregation wrestling with its lost place and uncertain future in the world today? Would grieving and lamenting those losses enable you to move on? How might you discover God's preferred and promised future, beyond simply surviving?

**Question 8: Tell about how you and others feel about the changes in this community in the past there to five years**

*12 interviews, 14 remarks*

Very little/no change x 4  
Farming families no longer come to church x 2  
Problems around The Estate x 2  
Transience (jobs and tenants) x 2  
Transport problem  
Insular  
Demographics  
Proposed free school – will be point of dissent

**Recommended questions to consider:**

1. It seems clear to the reading team that this is no longer a traditional village. Understanding more of the relationship between the “estate” residents, the village community and those who come in from outside sounds like an important topic to us. How might you research this further and identify issues it raises? E.g. (we have no idea on this but ....) is there a Lord of the Manor still and is his/her/their influence for good or ill?  
Out of all of that where do you think God might be at work in this changing community?  
Where do you think the points of connection are between the church and the community?

**Additional Comment and question for all three churches:**

We think it would be great if each church was able to read the Congregational Discovery report of the other two churches and all three churches reflect on them together somehow. In this way you could both celebrate your common gifts and challenge each other.

What opportunities are there for the three churches to collaborate, to see themselves as somehow “one-in-three”? We think that each church has some distinctive gifts to offer to the whole and there are commonalities and issues that overlap all three (e.g. a focus on Sunday worship and perhaps a surprising desire for more of ‘the Word’ in sermons etc.). What opportunities or impact might that have – e.g. you might be much stronger together than apart?