

Visitation Report

St Matthew's Westminster

Date: 20th June 2016

The Venerable Rosemary Lain-Priestley, Associate Archdeacon of London

Thank you to everybody at St Matthew's for the considerable amount of preparation which went into this visitation, and to the Incumbent, Churchwardens, PCC members and School Governors for their welcome, hospitality and willingness to share their thoughts about the work and mission of the church and school.

The church building is beautiful, orderly, clean and well kept. Works detailed in the last quinquennial are gradually being addressed including a scheme which will considerably improve the lighting of the church and ancillary spaces. This is now planned to go ahead in 2017.

The Conference Centre provides useful, well-appointed and lovely spaces and facilitates the mission of the church through the annual donation of profits (£51K in 2015) and the provision of space for meetings and events.

The lives of the primary school and church are deeply interwoven and their mutual support and encouragement enable each to flourish in a relationship which is clearly enjoyed by both communities.

Appended to this report is an action grid. Actions are prioritised 1 – 3 where 1 is for immediate urgent action, 2 is a request for action in the next few months and 3 is a desirable outcome.

Meeting with the Incumbent

The Revd Preb Philip Chester

St Matthew's has travelled a considerable distance in the time of the present incumbent from a position of financial fragility to one of *stability and sustainability*. This has been a gradual process but greatly assisted by the church making a decision in 20xx to take back the running of the Conference Centre from a managing company.

Fr Philip describes St Matthew's as *a church which is continually reinventing itself, looking at its context and asking what is its particular ministry in this place.*

In common with other central London churches *Sunday and midweek congregations are distinct* at St Matthew's.

On Sundays there are around 8 communicants at the 8am service, with approximately 47 communicants and 12 children at the 11am service.

A third to a half of the Sunday congregation is local. The rest travel from some distance, for example Queen's Park and Hammersmith. *The liturgical style and open Catholic theology* are what attract people, together with the sense of community. People come from extraordinarily different backgrounds: the powerful and the powerless; the wealthy and those living in poverty; and people of different lifestyles and sexualities. It is in the DNA of St Matthew's to be *a levelling place where people genuinely have a care for one another*.

There are *circles of commitment* with an inner core who will do anything for the church, a wider core who attend every two or three weeks, and then further, widening circles of association. Members of the Friends of St Matthew's may attend only very occasionally because they live far away or overseas, but the church is significant in their lives and a place to which they give financially.

On weekdays there is Morning Prayer and a Daily Eucharist, sometimes at lunchtime and weekly at 6pm, and it is rare that nobody but the clergy attend. Those who come tend to work locally and some consider it as their second church.

There is an *intention to grow the midweek congregation* and the possibility of doing so with the imminent appointment of a Director of Music who will have a specific remit concerning the weekday liturgies. The church is a flexible space, helpful in terms of its use for music and art. The idea is to develop *a new pattern of prayer within the liberal Catholic tradition with good liturgy and accessible music*, akin to Saint-Gervais, Paris. This liturgy will be 'something not too long but very beautiful, drawing people into a vision of heaven', designed for those who might find the leap from no experience of liturgy to a full diet of the Eucharist difficult and a bit excluding.

The current Mission Action Plan is based on Acts 2:42: 'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. A sense of awe was everywhere'. *Teaching, fellowship, bread and prayers* are the words pulled out of these verses to frame the work of the church. This builds on the previous MAP which talked about prayer, hospitality and dialogue.

A significant offer of *hospitality* is made every week during the summer, from June until August, when everybody present at the 11am Eucharist is invited to stay for lunch which is provided by different people from within the congregation on each occasion. This covers ten Sundays and the rota is always readily filled.

The *Pastoral Assistants' Scheme* is key to the ministry of St Matthew's, with two or three pastoral assistants in place at any one time. Over the past 20 years, the PCC has provided pastoral assistant posts to 37 men and women of whom 30 are now ordained! The Pastoral Assistants enjoy a diversity of experience as they work with other PAs at St Peter's Eaton Square and St Dunstan's Stepney, and at the LSE evening service at The Anchor. The Pastoral Assistants regularly spend time in the church school, which cements and develops the relationship between the two institutions.

Meeting with the School Governors

The church and its single-form entry primary school occupy two parts of an integral site, and the visitation included dropping into a meeting of the school governing body. This is chaired by Fr Philip in accordance with practice inherited on his arrival 20 years ago.

Whilst this arrangement is currently discouraged in church schools, in the case of St Matthew's it appears in this instance to work very well and to the benefit of both communities. Connections and relationships between School and Church are many. The Headteacher, Rachel Jewitt is on the PCC, as are several of the other governors including the Local Authority representative.

A weekly Mass is held in the school at which Fr Philip is almost always the celebrant.

On this occasion the governors were celebrating the achievement of an Outstanding grade following the recent SIAMS Inspection (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). This was clearly very well-deserved and reflects the whole school commitment to, and success in, providing 'an excellent education, ensuring the academic, physical, personal, moral and spiritual enrichment of each child' (school website). The investment of time and skills which the governors make is extremely impressive and the gifts that they bring to the table were very apparent in the meeting.

The school plays a part in local community cohesion in that its pupils are drawn both from the residential population and those who commute into the area for work: a helpful approach to admissions, enabling parents to have place their children in a school accessible to their workplace.

A key strategic consideration for the governors at present is the redevelopment of neighbouring Trevelyan House and possible redevelopment of the adjacent Alec Wizard House (currently home of the St Andrew's Youth Club). The school governors, together with the PCC and the Archdeacon of London as Chair of LDBS, are actively engaged with this situation in order to ensure the best possible outcome for both school and church.

Meeting with the PCC and Churchwardens

PCC with Grace Hoskin and Simon Lello

The population of the parish is thought to be about 2000 but it is *ten times the size* when people come to work during the week. St Matthew's is also the village church of the local estates: people know that their grandparents and great-grandparents were married here so there is a sense of *continuity amidst all the flux and change. It's a stimulating place to be.*

Open evenings are held twice a year for everyone on the church's mailing list, including neighbours and neighbouring organisations. *It's fascinating who turns up, who they meet and with whom they have a conversation.*

Like the incumbent, the PCC quickly identified that what lies at the heart of life at St Matthew's is fellowship, teaching and prayer. Events encouraging the exploration of different aspects of faith have included evenings with the theologian Paula Gooder, the poet Malcolm Guite, Ann Morisy from PSALM and films on a religious theme during Lent.

The Sunday liturgy is deeply appreciated – ‘*a very beautiful experience*’ - together with the focus on all seven sacraments. The church building isn’t too big, ‘We sing very well’ and the standard of preaching is very high. There is a strong sense of being fortunate to be part of St Matthew’s.

Morning and Evening Prayer and the Weekday Mass are deeply valued and to have the church open five days a week including at the start of the day and lunchtime makes it one of the most accessible churches around and *a place where prayer is valid. A reflective mood to start the evening* is considered to be a good thing.

The PCC alluded to the plans to develop the weekday worship further with the appointment of a new organist in progress and to facilitate work on the building *to increase its openness, welcome and accessibility*. There is a sense of excitement about all of this.

There is a *fluidity of fellowship* because there are people who come week by week, those who move into the area for a while and then out again, those who visit occasionally and are still made very welcome and are very much part of the church family. Most Sundays there are visitors. They have either seen that the doors are open or somebody has told them ‘when in London you must go there’, like the American couple who recently turned up because someone in their congregation back home recommended St Matthew’s.

Guests staying in the clergy house come along and when they visit again a couple of years later they still remember conversations they had last time. This is a levelling place where *children are comfortable to be around the altar and off duty clergy come to ‘soak it up’*. There is a *relaxed informality* alongside things being done well. A large number of people come a long way to worship here and this gives it an eclectic mix. *‘It is not a private members’ club’*.

There is a niche for everyone at *different stages* in their life journey. It is *growing and prayerful* and there is a *good effort in pastoral care of one another* and a very important *healing ministry*. St Matthew’s is the kind of church people come to with *lots of questions and not many answers*. The downside of this open, inclusive and questioning culture is sometimes a lack of willingness on the part of some to commit to regular support of the tasks and structures which sustain the church. Conversely there is a very significant expression of lay involvement on the part of some.

This is *not a congregation that stands still*. It is always moving and reaching out and reflecting on what it’s doing. ‘We are very fond of our clergy and all get on really well’. It’s a happy, successful, prayerful church with a good spirit of inclusivity and not much disagreement. It is also *forward-thinking and outward-facing*, as demonstrated by its key involvement in Just Westminster, a ten day festival of art, culture and entertainment on challenging subjects to which a net contribution of £2,413 was made by the PCC. Over 640 people attended events at St Matthew’s and St Mary le Strand and over £400 was raised in aid of Iraqi Christians in Need.

A very important aspect of the church’s mission is the Junior Church and the relationship with the primary school. There is a mixture of faiths, cultures and languages in the school with eight major world faiths being represented.

The Pastoral Assistants’ Scheme is very valuable both for those who given a great training and the way that they enrich the life of the church.

The PCC described St Matthew's as having come from being a 'small, ragged congregation with hair-raising finances and visible weaknesses' to where it is now. The PCC has had to grow up, have robust discussions about finance and work towards financial health from a position of having to borrow money. A significant stage on this journey was the decision to take the management of the Conference Centre back in house, achieving. The clergy and PCC are continually asking: Are we using the plant to the best advantage that we can? Should we be thinking about the purpose of the conference centre beyond the income generating potential? It is part of our expression of hospitality and if so to what extent?

The Church Safeguarding Officer expresses concerns about only being able to observe what happens on a Sunday and not during the week. Some work on how the safeguarding policy and processes are consistently implemented would be helpful to embed the reality that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

St Matthew's has embraced the arrangement with St Mary le Strand and has been able to support this relationship because of the number and quality of the clergy team and by upgrading the provision of support staff. There is some concern, however, that this is not sustainable in the long-term without holding back the developing mission of St Matthew's itself.

Following the meeting with the PCC and Churchwardens the registers, inventory, log book, policies etc were checked with the Grace and Simon, revealing an impressive attention to detail and meticulous organisation. There are only a very few issues outstanding against the checklist and these are listed in the schedule below.

Meeting with the Assistant Priest

The Revd Peter Hanaway

Peter comments that *no two days at St Matthew's are the same*. It's a church which punches above its weight in terms of the range of activities in relation to the size of the core congregation. The PCC and people who are closely involved in St Matthew's are *capable and competent, lively and well-informed*. The area is transient with a turnover of around 20% a year. The congregation is gathered and mixed. The residential parish is largely Peabody Estates with some empty housing. There are many *vulnerable people* locally and women's hostels, together with homeless people, and people struggling with drug and alcohol addiction. There is a whole ministry out on the streets in conversation with these people. New Scotland Yard is moving out and *the face of the community is changing* with the relocation of people in social housing out of central London. All of this has an effect with businesses on Strutton Ground closing and takeaways and coffee shops not surviving.

The coffee wagon in the churchyard *breaks down the barrier between the church and the street* and is a very good thing, as well as turning over a good profit and being number one or two on a London coffee app! Peter trained at the London Centre for Spirituality as a spiritual director and is an examining chaplain and therefore well placed to *mentor and supervise* the Pastoral Assistants at St Matthew's. There is a concern that St Matthew's wants to enable the growth of St Mary le Strand but how this is to be achieved is not straightforward.

Conclusion

St Matthew's offers a distinctive liturgical and theological style which is greatly appreciated by both its local attenders and its widely gathered congregation. The plans to develop the mid-week offer of worship are very exciting.

Inclusive hospitality is key to the church's mission and is lived out through the congregational life and the frequent use of St Matthew's House by a variety of visitors to central London. The conference centre is key to the church's financial stability and a great example of the wise stewardship of resources. It also has the potential to express more broadly the church's commitment to hospitality. The relationship with the school is deeply and mutually appreciated and is highly fruitful. The Pastoral Assistants' Scheme is thriving.

St Matthew's will face challenges as the local demographic changes and will need to continue to respond creatively to this context. The clergy, PCC and church officers are well equipped to do this and it was a great encouragement to spend time with them during the visitation.

Visitation To Do List

Task	Urgency	By Whom to be done (parish to decide unless otherwise indicated)	Followed up	Completed	Notes
Continue to address the recommendations of the Quinquennial	2	Churchwardens and PCC			
Various queries were raised by the Church Safeguarding Officer regarding statutory duties. Session to be arranged with a member of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to ensure confidence and compliance.	1	Archdeacon will facilitate via the Diocesan Safeguarding Team			
Action needed to ensure all recommendations of the Fire Risk Assessment are implemented. Review date appears to be 31/10/13.	1	Churchwardens and PCC			
PCC's Health and Safety Policy Risk Assessment to be annotated with 'owners' for the fire risk,	2	Churchwardens and PCC			

electricity, gas boilers and equipment sections and the necessary actions need completing if this has not already happened					
Risk assessment to be undertaken in relation to all PCC controlled premises and activities (visitation questionnaire 4f and 4g)	2	Churchwardens and PCC			
Consideration to be given to keeping an electronic version of the inventory	3	Churchwardens			
Consideration to be given to establishing a legacy policy	3	PCC			