

Church planting 26.11.15

St Mary's is a town centre church in the middle of Maidenhead. It is the Borough Church. It has a great position in the middle of the town with good facilities and a garden and Car Parks nearby. It is a small parish geographically but with new developments, the residential population is growing. I have been vicar there since 2003. My initial aim was to develop as many viable and healthy congregations as we could on the church site in Maidenhead; and then from that base see if we could resource / promote church plants in surrounding areas

In the first 8 or 9 years under God we were able to grow from 3 congregations on a Sunday to 5 congregations: 8am HC, 9:15am, 11am, 4pm, 6:30pm with 3 of the congregations having a children's work.

Having done that we began to look for people we could partner with to help resource and establish Anglican evangelical churches in the surrounding area.

1 **Partnership with St Mary's White Waltham**. St Mary's WW is a small village, in a strategic position on the South West corner of Maidenhead. And in 2011 I approached David Andrew who is the vicar there to see if we could work together. St Mary's WW has had evangelical ministers but being a village setting has maintained a middle-of-the-road style but with clear, faithful preaching.

St Mary's WW was recognised as being unsustainable as a single parish. The church wasn't large enough to cover the costs of its ministry with a stipendiary minister. An attempt had been made to join it with a next door parish but for complex reasons that had not worked out.

One of the problems that St Mary's WW has is that it had no suitable rooms for children's work and so families would come but wouldn't stick. David Andrew has been at St Mary's WW for 17 years and for all that time has been trying to get a suitable building built in the church yard, in the face of strong opposition from a very, wealthy local landowner, who could throw money at lawyers. When I formally started to talk to David in 2011 about establishing a gospel partnership with St Mary's WW, permissions had at last been given but with the proviso that the building was completed within three years. The cost of this new building was going to be £0.5million; £350,000 had been raised by the church with a regular Sunday worshipping community of about 40 adults but £100,000 of that had already been spent on archaeological surveys and legal fees fighting the case in a Consistory Court instigated by the local landowners.

David was keen to see evangelical ministry preserved in his parish for the long term. St Mary's Maidenhead was looking for new opportunities to establish gospel growth.

So we at St Mary's Maidenhead pledged to give St Mary's White Waltham £250,000 so that they could start their building work, with no conditions attached except a written recognition by the bishop of this partnership with an undertaking that St Mary's Maidenhead would have an input into any future decision made about the future of White Waltham.

Anyway to cut a long story short the outcome of all this is that the partnership with St Mary's WW and St Mary's Maidenhead has now been formally recognised by the diocese and moves are in place to make the two parishes into a United Benefice which will come into operation only when David Andrew decides to move on. At that point a clergyperson from St Mary's Maidenhead will move to St Mary's WW hopefully taking some people with him to bolster the congregation there, while still leading the 4pm congregation at St Mary's Maidenhead.

By the way the St Mary's WW building is being officially opened this Sunday!

Key things to learn:

[a] The power of gospel partnership, between people who trust each other and have common gospel convictions.

[b] The need to take calculated gospel risks. We had no guarantee that the United Benefice would be the outcome when we gave the £250,000 to St Mary's WW

[c] Be creative and look for opportunities: our two parishes are not next door to each other.

2 Partnership with evangelical lay people in Windsor

For many years there has been a recognition that there was no evangelical Anglican church in Windsor. However, we at St Mary's were not in a position to do anything as we had only a very few people who came to us from Windsor and none of them were leaders. Then around 3 years ago God brought a couple to us [Curt and Janice Hopkins] with their two teenage children who had lived in Windsor for a number of years. I thought "here are my leaders" and we started talking. They mentioned that there were a number of folk who lived in Windsor who went to evangelical churches in the surrounding area: namely us, St John's Egham and Christchurch Virginia Water.

I suggested to them that if they got the people together and led something, we at St Mary's would do what we could to support an Anglican evangelical gospel initiative, eg providing advice, preachers and prayer support.

The Hopkins family have lived in Windsor for over 10 years and are well connected. They gathered some friends together and we started meeting in their home monthly on Friday nights from January 2014.

Right from the beginning in all this we consulted and worked with Frog Orr Ewing at Latimer Minster and established this group as a 'missional community' which had the potential, in time, to become a full blown congregation. Also right from the beginning I let the bishop know what we were doing

We met in the Hopkins home for 6 months and the meetings were appreciated and grew and so it was decided to move to meeting weekly on Sunday afternoons at 4pm. That way we weren't directly competing with any other churches and folk could come to the Windsor Fellowship, while still attending other churches. But by meeting weekly we were increasing [a] the commitment to the Windsor Fellowship by its members and [b] the opportunity for outreach.

There have been concerns raised by some of the local churches and inevitably unfair and misleading things have been said about the Windsor Fellowship. But by the grace of God it is still going strong. This autumn it moved out of the Hopkins' house into a Youth and Community centre in the centre of Windsor and I preached at it on Sunday and there were over 50 people at it.

The Fellowship is now in the process of seeking full long-term congregational status with its own dedicated leadership team and clergy .

Key things to learn:

[a] Give good lay leaders their head and support them with good accountability.

[b] Be willing to start small. This also helps to get an initiative off the ground because there is less to lose.

[c] Inform everybody {local clergy, bishop etc} of what you are doing but don't necessarily wait for permissions to act. If we had nothing would have happened. Fear often prevents people from being supportive of new gospel initiatives in their area.

