

Partnership between St Paul's and St Barnabas

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How is this different to a church plant? And why aren't we considering a church plant?

Answer: This partnership with St Barnabas is intended to be just that – working together alongside each other, not one church 'taking over' another, imposing its values, agenda and programme upon another. We believe this is a much more positive approach, at least in this particular context, than a church plant. There is a healthy body of Christ at St Barnabas with its own identity and vision. We want to walk alongside them, developing into one church with two characters – gathered (St Paul's) and local (St Barnabas).

2. How will we be able to resource the work at St Bs as well as at St Ps?

Answer: We want to be clear from the outset, that this partnership will require give and take on both sides. There will be some changes that will impact the resources at St Paul's, and will also impact the dynamics at St Barnabas. We know that there will be some decisions to be made, particularly about how best to use our staff resources, which will challenge our ability to trust in the Lord. However, we also believe that this could – and should – result in new people stepping forward to resource activities and services at both centres which will help us to grow and flourish – it is a better church community when more of those who are able to can join in and play their part.

3. Does having a curate with a focus on St Bs mean that we are irretrievably committed to the partnership as described?

Answer: In short, no, it doesn't. There are a number of possible scenarios that may be available, including the curate being assigned just to St Paul's, maybe continuing to help at St Barnabas if required. If this situation arises, we will be praying for wisdom and clarity on the way forward, but it doesn't mean that we are tied into a particular course of action.

4. How can we enrich each other's ministries?

Answer: We have, of course, different strengths to share between these two communities. St Barnabas join the partnership with a genuine passion to share their faith with their neighbourhood and a background of more traditional worship, accompanied by the benefits of being physically close to the town centre, and having the opportunity to present the gospel to a much wider footfall of people – wider in the sense of numbers of people out and about and connected with Epsom as a town, and wider in the sense of demographic. St Paul's will bring its long experience of fruitful church growth, biblical and missional teaching and wealth of resources and gifting. Where St Paul's has struggled, at least in more recent times, to find effective avenues for mission, we will have opportunity to prayerfully influence a town community, which has never been an option for us (with Cheam village being in the St Dunstan's parish and the Diocese of Southwark). Where St Barnabas has struggled, at least in recent times,

to grow in Spirit-led worship and resources for outreach and discipleship within their community, they will have opportunity to make a clear statement of Christ's love, as their gathering begins to make an impact on local schools, local government and commerce, and local people.

5. How do we intend to work with other churches in Epsom? And is another church really needed in Epsom?

Answer: We are grateful for the enthusiastic encouragement from the other two Anglican churches in Epsom (St Martin of Tours, and Christ Church), whose buildings are rather removed from the centre of Epsom, and whose communities have experienced their own struggles in recent years, meaning that they don't consider themselves well-placed or well-resourced to take on a partnership with St Barnabas. Epsom Methodist Church has historically had impact in Epsom, as has Epsom Baptist Church and King's Church, Epsom (Longmead). In recent years, Epsom Vineyard (now about 30 strong and meeting, pre-CV19, in a coffee shop) and one or two other housechurch movement communities have become established in Epsom. We know that they too long for more in Epsom to discover new faith in Jesus. We will be seeking to work with these other churches whenever appropriate. However, the Church of England does still have a unique role, albeit somewhat less influentially than 50 years ago. For some members of the town, at the very least searching for a way of marking a birth, marriage or death, the Anglican church is the natural place to come. Others will have connections or affiliations with Anglican churches that make them drawn to the same again, and we believe that God has established St Paul's as an Anglican church for a purpose, even though the gospel is carried by many different channels to the population of Great Britain.

6. Might this partnership simply drain St Ps of members?

Answer: We think that this scenario is very unlikely. St Barnabas will continue to worship in a more traditional setting, at least for the foreseeable future, even whilst new ways of worshipping and reaching out to those not yet Christians are explored. The building at St Barnabas is much smaller and lends itself to more intimate gatherings, which will appeal to some but definitely not to all. The reasons why people attend one community or another will largely remain. God is unlikely to lead us into a new venture such as this partnership without a plan to grow us all. We expect that those with a particular call to outreach, an understanding of the traditions from which St Barnabas comes, and a heart for the community of Epsom are the ones most likely to get involved at the local expression of St Barnabas, rather than the gathered expression of St Paul's. We are aiming to be two communities but one church, with, we hope and trust, overlap and flux between the two communities.

7. Can we simply offer support rather than become a new Parish?

Answer: Whilst of course it is important that we get to know each other, and we explore as fully as possible what the partnership will look like on the ground, there are six reasons why a United Benefice or Parish offers the best solution in the long term:

- a) **A local Minister:** Whilst St. Barnabas do not have many red lines in the partnership, one area that the wardens of St. Barnabas see as essential, is a local minister on the ground. As a small church that has a local focus, it is imperative for them to have a local minister. The

provision of a curate is considered essential by the wardens as part of providing continual ministerial support on the ground.

- b) **Financial:** Becoming a united benefice offers the potential of significant savings in overall parish share for both St. Paul's and St. Barnabas. There is a rather complex co-efficient in the calculation of parish share - part of which is called the Relative Affluence Factor. The 'RAF' for St. Paul's parish is 1.86, and currently for St. Barnabas it is 1.36. If we become a united benefice our combined RAF will be 1.49 as there is a greater weighting to the St. Barnabas end of the new Parish. This will result in a lower proportional parish share for the united benefice than we would have if we don't unite. Not only this, but if we do not unite as single Parish - St. Barnabas would be liable for a significantly larger parish Share figure.
- c) **Governance:** In order to ensure that we operate with a unified vision we will need to have a single PCC. Without this it will cause huge difficulties in setting the direction of travel for St. Barnabas in reaching out to the local community and into Epsom.
- d) **The opportunity for growth for St. Paul's:** I believe that this offers St. Paul's the opportunity to grow as a community - but in order for us to grasp this it cannot be about just a few pioneers on the edge, but rather having the mandate to reach out to not only one of the most challenging areas of Epsom, but also to follow up the invitation to the diocese to reach out into Epsom town centre itself.
- e) **To live out our values of Connect Transform and Serve:** Similarly, I believe this partnership provides St. Paul's with the biggest single opportunity for many years to live out our values. I cannot think of any better opportunity for mission and evangelism in our locality than this. If we don't do this, I am not sure what better other opportunities St. Paul's may have to grow.
- f) **Time:** In order for us to consider this and work through how best to develop this missional opportunity, it is unrealistic to expect the existing staff team to simply 'do more', That is why a specialist curate, who has experience in a pioneering context, is vital in order to work across the two churches full time in this role. This will give us a far greater understanding of how a united benefice/parish will work.

8. **What about the vicarage? I have heard the diocese want to sell it - isn't this a land grab from the diocese? Isn't this short sighted of the diocese:**

Answer: Whilst we are in discussions with the diocese on this proposal, the archdeacon Martin Breadmore has highlighted the following points:

- a. As a United Benefice it is only possible in the Church of England to have one vicarage – it is not possible to have two – that is the point of a United Parish or Benefice.
- b. All vicarages are not the possession of the Parish, that includes our Vicarage (19 Northey and 18 NSW are in effect owned by the Parish, whilst the diocese has to be a 'trustee', their only concern is that we use them wisely). Vicarages are the responsibility of the Diocesan Property board.
- c. The structure and the governance of the diocesan property board prevents the diocese from giving vicarages or property to parishes for alternative uses. There are currently a number of schemes in the diocese that have similarities to ours, and Martin made it clear that whilst they may wish to gift property to parishes their governance and the charity commission would not permit it. (Whilst St. Paul's did donate the Ballard's Green House to St. Mary's and St. Paul's Nork we do not have the same restrictions in our governance that the diocese have written into there's)
- d. The Vicarage at St. Barnabas is the largest in the Diocese and has been earmarked for redevelopment for a significant period of time.
- e. Whilst initially it was indeed hoped that we would be able to at least have use of the vicarage – even if it was rented, those conversations mainly happened in the early

stages of lockdown in the Spring. Since then, the diocese has had to take on a significant loan and is already around £2m in debt, I believe. The diocese needs to liquidise assets in order to ensure that it does not become insolvent. Whilst in normal years the diocese expects to receive around 98% of Parish share, this year it is closer to 80%. Our diocese unfortunately does not have any historic reserves and so we need to remember that any long-term shortfall will likely lead to a significant increase in Parish Share, or possibly other consequences, such as other parishes being denied paid clergy, just when they need them most.

- f. Whilst I had estimated that the rent on the vicarage site would have been around £1500 a month – the archdeacon indicated that they would expect actually a far higher figure. As the diocesan property team have examined it their reflection is that it is a cheaper option to rent a suitable local property for Harry, rather than the current vicarage.
- g. The reality is that it won't probably come up for redevelopment for some time yet. Although the diocese has just employed a new head of property who has experience of property redevelopment, there are other properties to examine, so the archdeacon is unsure what the time scale will be.
- h. The archdeacon however really did welcome the request to work together in the development plan. He indicated that it might be possible to consider a number of alternative options going forward, including the potential of a property on the site for a future minister. Again, though, he did emphasise that under current arrangements any such property would need to be rented from the diocese or other suitable financial arrangements made.
- i. The archdeacon did resent the critique that the diocese was only interested in 'asset stripping' to line its own pockets. He reminded me that the diocese has backed the partnership significantly. Not only have they invested by providing a curate for the new united parish – over and above what they would normally have allocated, but they have 're-written' the rule book in enabling myself to be a 'training incumbent'. We may not see that as a very big deal, but it is very significant for the diocese to act in such a way. Whilst it is true that the outstanding loan (from a previous building project) has probably been written off, the diocese is also willing to write off the Parish Share debt. Whilst of course that would not be recoverable if the church were to close, in looking for ministry to continue from that church building, there is an outstanding debt which will not be recovered – the diocese has had to come up with a process by which it can make this happen as normally any outstanding parish share has to be settled.

9. What are the 'red lines' for St. Barnabas?

Answer: Having met with the PCC of St. Barnabas on Monday 23rd November, I was able to ask this question to them and also ask them what their fears are. As you can imagine there was a variety of views and it wasn't a discussion as such - more a collection of views, however there were a number of themes:

- a. The over-riding biggest 'fear' is being taken over and becoming a 'mini St. Paul's' and not having a voice in the united parish. They understood the principles of one PCC and welcomed it, but alongside that I will need to think through how a local leadership team could work - not a management team, but rather a team to work alongside Harry to ensure appropriate decisions are made.
- b. They value most their ministry among the most vulnerable, most especially those with mental health struggles, disabilities and learning difficulties. They used the language of inclusion, that in the main referred to those on the edge of society, but for one person it did also refer to those who were same sex attracted. Like us, there

was a range of views on this within the PCC, and I emphasised that any direction of travel would be decided by the PCC, which they totally agreed with and understood. The only red line for them, however, was the need to prioritise Epsom Mental Health Week.

- c. The largest single voice on the PCC, echoed by at least half of the members, was that they did not, on principle, want *any* red lines. If they had red lines 'how can we be open to where the Lord is leading us?' was the overriding narrative that came across. There was a genuine desire to be open to wherever and whatever may come, even if that could be challenging for them. They recognised that they would need to change and that would be difficult, but nevertheless they wanted to be open. They wanted to highlight that they hoped we too would be open to learn and grow together, rather than it be a one-way street.
- d. What became really clear was the importance of my role going forward; of standing between St. Paul's, St Barnabas and the Diocese as well. To be an advocate. My unique position as having spent really significant time with the wardens of St. Barnabas, having been part of the Clergy team at St. Paul's for the last 8 years, and having a great deal of experience working within the Church of England enables me to work with all parties to ensure that all flourish.