

Church Wigan News

#LightInTheDarkness



Planning for a sustainable future

Neil Cook considers how we, as God's missionary people, must respond to the covid crisis and the financial reality that faces us.

Christ's light of hope has shone brightly during this year of pandemic as Church Wigan has responded creatively and courageously to the crisis.

Our food ministry has served hundreds of families in need, and informal pastoral networks such as 'telephone trees' have sprung up in many places, keeping our most vulnerable members and neighbours connected.

A new unity and fellowship has grown across old parish lines as many have gathered together, often for the first time, to worship and pray via Facebook, Zoom calls and dial-in services. Where it is practically safe to do so and there are enough volunteers, worship has recommenced in church as well as baptisms, weddings and funerals. So there is much to give thanks for.

However the financial impact of the covid crisis has been as severe for the church as it has been for individuals, families, businesses and the nation at large. We can no longer continue to keep things 'as they are' and hope to keep the show on the road. Decisive action will be necessary to ensure we continue to proclaim the gospel afresh to each generation.



Planning for a sustainable future

Church Wigan team leader considers our response to the effects of pandemic



Wigan Next Generation

Meet the new team investing in the lives of young people



Light in the darkness

Bringing comfort and joy in the dark months of winter

Acknowledging the financial crisis

The financial peril facing the church cannot be overstated. The situation has deteriorated over a number years (income from giving and fees has fallen by 10% in just 3 years) so that three quarters of all our worship communities in the deanery have operating deficits - that is, each year they spend more money than they receive.

The situation is even starker when looking at 'unrestricted' funds, that is, money that isn't donated for particular items eg. the organ fund or flowers, but which the PCC can use to pay for clergy (through so-called 'deanery share'), heating bills or mission activities. Taking the deanery as a whole, we have been running at an unrestricted deficit of £200,000 *per year*! In many places historic reserves have been used to balance the books - but these are now almost spent. Indeed, nine of our parish churches are already insolvent.

All this was happening before covid struck, and the restrictions have made things much, much worse. With our churches being closed for months, fees for funerals and weddings have been significantly reduced. Also the financial offerings of church members have declined precipitously, with some only giving if they can attend worship. In all, the income this year is only 60% of what we expected to receive - and that is on top of the deficit we already carry.

'Over recent years we have been effectively selling the family silver to keep our parishes running and the cupboard is almost empty. The pandemic has made the position worse, but also presents opportunities for us to build on the changes we have been making over the past year to the way we manage our finances.'

Andrew Thurston, Finance Change Manager

Some expect a bale-out from the Diocese, but as it has negligible reserves itself and is thus reliant on contributions from the deaneries, it is in the same position as we are. The national church is offering as much as it can to make up the shortfall from 2020, but ultimately we alone must take the responsibility of ensuring a future that is financially sustainable.

The new Church Wigan structure has helped; already significant cost savings have been made by collective purchasing and those worship communities that would have had to close their doors for good can be supported by the wider parish. But we have to go further.

How should we respond?

As sobering as the financial picture is, we must remember Christ's words that the gates of hades will not overcome the church (Matthew 16.18). In many places around the world, amongst many people groups, Christ's loving, peace-filled rule and reign is advancing. Here in Wigan he is doing extraordinary things - but often they are on the margins of, or even beyond, what we currently call church.

Clearly there is no future in attempting to maintain the status quo - we simply cannot afford it any longer. Yet neither can we ignore the very mission Christ has given us: to reach out to the many, many people around us who desperately need to know God's love and grace. Therefore we need to re-think how we spend our money and what resources are most vital to help us continue being good news to the people of Wigan and the surrounding communities. One area we must review is the costly and sensitive question of our buildings.

The 'Right Buildings 2030' plan

The Joint Council and PCCs have commissioned a process to ensure Church Wigan will have an affordable stock of only the right buildings with the right facilities in the right places by 2030.

The 'Right Buildings 2030' plan will examine future population trends, mission requirements and the 'Big Five' priorities we believe God has called us to.

The heart of the plan is a five month period of consultation starting in 2021 where you can contribute to the discernment process.

It's vital that we all participate. In the past we haven't succeeded in having good dialogue in a way that everyone feels heard. We simply must get it right this time and talk together, because the question of church buildings is so emotive.

We all care deeply about our church buildings, not just church members but the community as well. They are part of the 'furniture of our lives' and have for many (especially in the past but less so now) been the places where key life moments take place, whether christenings, weddings or funerals. But in a future where we won't be able to afford to keep all our buildings, we must *together* find the best way forward.

I sincerely hope we will agree that the basis for our decision-making must be Christ's command to love not just God but also our neighbours, practically as well as spiritually, especially the most marginalised. But even if our faith and reason agree with this, we must acknowledge that our hearts will break if we can no longer worship in buildings we love and have cared for.

Church Wigan is a family. We may have different opinions and have at times fallen out with each other. But for such as time as this we must come together to discern the Lord's guidance on what our common future looks like.

Neil Cook is Team Rector of Church Wigan

Join the 'Parish Giving Scheme'

This national Direct Debit scheme benefits your church by reclaiming Gift Aid and means you can make your offering even when you can't get to church. **Call the Church Wigan hotline to find out how to join up.**

What is Christ asking of Church Wigan?

Archbishop Rowan Williams memorably said 'mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in.' We believe the best way to join in what God is already doing here in and around Wigan is to

help our people, our communities, flourish practically and spiritually.

It's about helping people learn to live like Jesus and help others to live likewise, so that Wigan and the communities we serve are transformed by God's love.

Our Big Five priorities

The following are not the only things we'll do as Church Wigan, but they must guide how we invest our resources.

1 Pray

it's the powerhouse

2 Grow

recognisable followers of Jesus

3 Serve

the poor and marginalised

4 Reach

the next generation

5 Proclaim

the gospel, online and beyond

Wigan Next Generation



Earlier this year Church Wigan was awarded funding from the national church to create the Wigan Next Generation team whose purpose is 'to accompany young people on their transformative journey of faith' and plant new worship communities amongst those aged 11 to 29.

The team is led by Lisa Holt who is based at The Deanery CE High School. Alongside Lisa are three pioneer chaplains: Juliette Coletta based at Byrchall High School in Ashton, John Williams at Hindley High School, and Paul Sohi at Wigan & Leigh College; Hannah Archer who continues to lead the Brighter School of Discipleship, and Pais apprentices Leoni Durchleuchter and Chiara Boreck.

It's been a crazy start for the team who in these difficult days of covid are providing invaluable pastoral support to scores of young people struggling with conditions such as anxiety, as well as staff. Please pray for Lisa and the team.

The light shines in the darkness #lightinthedarkness

This winter Church Wigan wants to put a smile on people's faces and help their light to shine in the darkness.

During the season of long nights we'll be inviting people to tell us 'This is how my light shines in the darkness.' Taking in the community events of Halloween, Remembrance and Christmas, you can share pictures or clips on social media, make lovely window displays, and get involved in a range of activities to brighten up our streets and bring a little bit of joy to ourselves and our neighbours. More information about what you can do will follow shortly.

Keep praying, urges Fr Philip

Before Philip Anderson, our Area Dean, steps into his new post as Canon Precentor at Liverpool Cathedral, he has exhorted us to remain faithful in prayer. 'I was inspired by Sr Dorothy Stella, a nun from Kitt Green and Prioress of Whitby, who attended the commissioning of the Wigan Order of Prayer in 2016, a group committed to daily intercession for the town. Her wise comment was, 'If they do it, it'll be very good.'

'When *Transforming Wigan* began it was clear that disciplined, expectant prayer must be at its heart. Many of us have felt the blessing of the rhythm of morning and night prayer, which we do together every day, online and at home. God goes before us, and the Church of England of the future is being shaped by what we are learning in Wigan. Therefore let us continue to serve God and our neighbours in faithful prayer.'

Church Wigan hotline

For general enquiries call 01942 410910

For food support or pastoral care call the above number or email

foodprovision@churchwigan.org

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