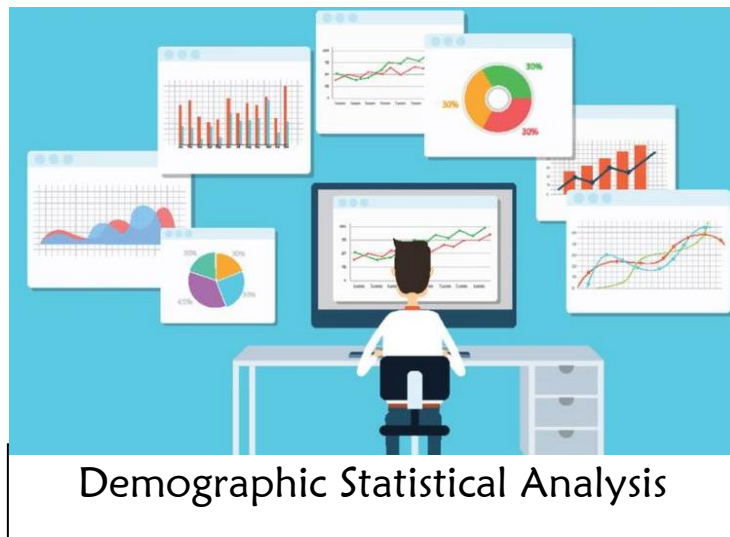




PMC
Partnership for
Congregational
Church

Congregational Discovery



Précised reports generated from the 3 studies carried out at
Holy Trinity Prestwood

July – October 2018

Anyone wishing to read the reports in their entirety please speak to Deiniol or Jean

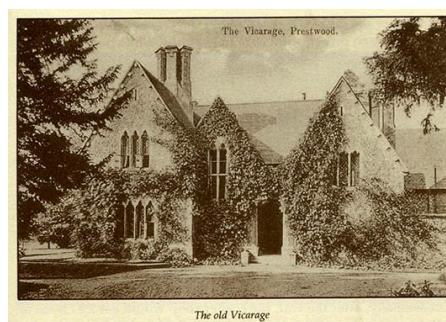
Précis of demographics report, Listening Portfolio sections 1-5

As part of the studies carried out during the summer and early autumn of 2018 the PMC steering team had to look at publicly available demographic information about Holy Trinity Prestwood. This was done under the headings of demographic and deprivation data, building use and travel, numerical growth and decline, and finance and leadership. The findings are summarised below.

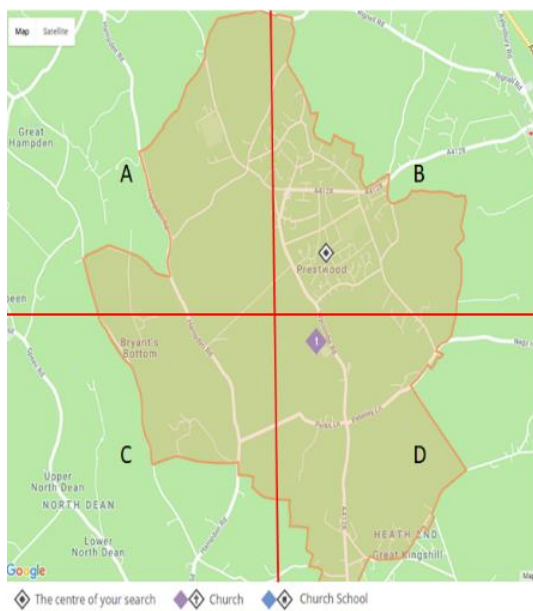
The idea of a church in Prestwood was first put forward in 1844. Money was raised, and the church built and consecrated in 1849. It became a parish church in its own right in 1852 serving Prestwood and part of Great Kingshill.



PRESTWOOD SCHOOL HOUSE C1906



The old Vicarage



Although centrally placed within the Parish the church is situated approximately 1 mile from the centre of Prestwood. Quadrants A and C on the map are largely rural. Most people live in quadrant B, with some ribbon development along the roads in D. The church is marked in the top left of quadrant D. Although the church is some distance from the main village centre many people do pass it on their way to the bus stop, Hildreth's, and the church yard.



The church is readily accessible on foot, by car and by bus with the railway station in Great Missenden approximately 2 miles away. It has ample car parking and good access for people with disabilities. The congregation is not defined by the parish boundary. About 60% of the congregation come from within the parish boundary. Others travel to the church because they like the style of worship.

Since the refurbishment in 2015 the church, hall and cottage are used not only for worship but also for a vast range of activities including concerts, local meetings, parties, pre-school, table tennis, receptions, wakes and as cinema venue, band rehearsals, summer schools and keep-fit groups. This eclectic mix fits well with the mission and vision of the church of being welcoming, inclusive and supportive.

The church itself, since the re-ordering, is a very versatile space and can be arranged in many different formats to suit different styles of worship and a range of activities.



The Parish dashboard (copies available or ...

https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/WENDOVER_270793_Prestwood.pdf

shows the numbers of leavers balances with the number of new people joining the church, The congregation reflects the local community in terms of ethnicity but not in age profile. The age profile of Prestwood peaks in the 45-64 age range (31%) with 19% being over 65, but in the church the proportion of worshippers in the 70+ age range is noticeably growing (38%). The trend in the last few years is that attendance is increasing with an average Sunday morning attendance being 70 – 80 people compared to a national average of 54. Prestwood has a population of approximately 8000, 68% of whom purport to be Christian and 30% of whom either say they have no religion or did not say at all on the national census. HTP's electoral role has dropped over the years from 180 in 2007 – 2012 to 137 in 2013 – 2016, and has stayed at that level to date. All the local churches seem to be having a similar decline in attendance. The Zion Strict Baptist church closed several years ago.



A snapshot from 1851 suggests that there were 2 services on a Sunday, 1 in the morning and 1 in the afternoon, with a combined attendance of 291. In the 1990's there were 4 services on a Sunday, 3 in the morning and 1 in the evening, and now there are again only 2, both in the morning, with a combined attendance of 75 – 85. Over recent years there are more baptisms than funerals. Numbers of wedding fluctuate but have generally been in decline.



Despite the fact that the expenses of the church keep rising HTP has, over the years been able to meet its financial obligations, but with an aging congregation the church does need to be more financially sustainable in the long term. In recent years the expenditure has risen to £137,000pa due to the parish share, maintenance and repairs, office staff and children's worker. This is covered by congregational giving, lettings and occasional offices (baptisms, weddings and funerals). Mission giving has been recently been funded by specific appeals rather than from general church funds. The cost of employing a marketing manager has been matched by increased lettings income. HTP currently has funds in reserve for emergency, unplanned repairs and a legacy fund. In this HTP is luckier than many churches which in recent years have spent all their reserves and are struggling to meet costs.

Since the consecration of the church in 1849 there have been 16 incumbents whose years in post range from 2 – 26 years. The average length of service is 10.5 years. The longest serving incumbent was Rev. Sydney Smith (1952-1978).



Collective church memory goes back to the time of Rev. Arthur Collins in 1934. Significant decisions within the church are made after discussion at the PCC. There is a good relationship with the two schools in the village started in the time of Rev. Jonathan White and maintained at the current time with Rev. Deiniol Heywood regularly taking assemblies in both schools and delivering some lessons in the junior school, and a congregation member being on the governing body of the schools.

Précis of Congregational Discovery Report, July – August 2018

24 people from the congregation were chosen to answer questions about the congregational mission and ministry of Holy Trinity Prestwood. Interviewers were given a list of names for people in 3 categories based on level of participation (fully involved, regular attender and infrequent attender). Those on each list came from a wide range of ages, times of belonging to the church, gender, and experiences, both positive and negative. Interviewees were then chosen at random from those lists. The interviews were anonymised, and all the answers sent to a Diocesan based Reading Team to analyse. The questions were wide ranging.

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

More people were able to identify where they sensed God's presence (in people's behaviour and support, interaction with others, music, communion et al) than were able to identify their emotions and feelings involved. Where people did articulate how they felt God's presence their emotions and feelings were all positive (warmth, joy, love, happiness, being lifted to God amongst those expressed). A lot of the where and how people experience God is in each other. 3 people did say that they do not feel God's presence in HTP or in the congregation. We were asked to consider if people at HTP find it hard to talk about their sense of God and their personal faith journey.

Describe an experience of profound worship you have had

Only 2 people did not answer this question. For most of those who did it was linked to a personal connection such as a wedding, funeral, or difficult time. They were able to talk about the experience and say how they felt. For some it happened during special services,



for a few it happened somewhere else, not at HTP. We were asked to think about how we can encourage people to talk openly about their individual experience of God, and how we might help people to find God in normal Sunday services.

Tell about ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and other people were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled

The vast majority of comments were about the reordering of the church. It certainly evoked strong feeling and was divisive amongst the congregation. Observations made about the "peace process" indicate that many people were involved in the practical work of reconciliation. We are asked to think about who our peace-makers are, what reconciliation remains to be done within and beyond the church and the role of the church leaders in the resolution of conflict and reconciliation.

Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.

There were almost the same number of memories giving anxiety as those giving hope. Anxieties include decline, closure, lack of growth, aging congregation and inability to attract younger people into the church. Interestingly, memories of the reordering gave both anxiety and hope for the future. Other hopes for the future centred on community engagement, faith activity, lay leadership and more "Good Samaritanism" Some people are anxious that there are too few families – an equal number think that there are new people and families. We are asked to think about how we can create a safe space for people to talk about their anxieties, how we can focus more on their hopes for growing numbers of families rather than on their worries that there are too few and on practical ways of making the church building a way of building stronger links with the community.

If you were to leave this congregation for 5 years, without any contact, what would you expect to see when you returned? What would you hope to see?

There was a vast difference between what people expected to see and what they hoped to see. Expectations are for no change or for negative change – dwindling numbers, congregation older. Changes people hoped to see were more numerous and positive (apparently this is unusual in churches in the UK). More family involvement, community engagement, different styles of worship, the church to be more vibrant were among some of the hopes. We are asked to think about how we can help people talk about their hopes and dreams with each other and to feel empowered to initiate and support change.

Describe this congregation to someone new and tell how they would be nurtured here.

Almost everyone was positive in their description of HTP. People seem to be happy being connected with the church and talk about their experience with new comers. Nurturing appears to be centred on getting people to join in rather than helping people to grow their faith. Again, we are asked to consider how to encourage people to talk about their own faith

Tell about how you and others feel about the changes in this congregation since 2012

Most people identified some change over the last 6 years. The changes which prompted most comment were the reordering of the church and the perceived decline in the

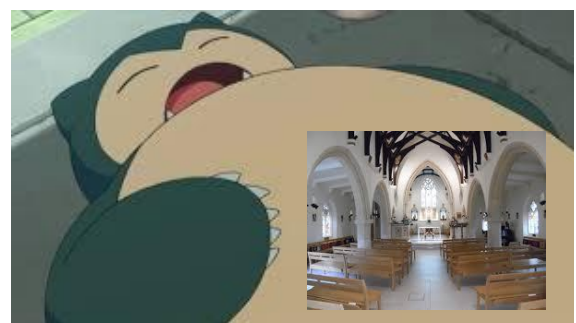
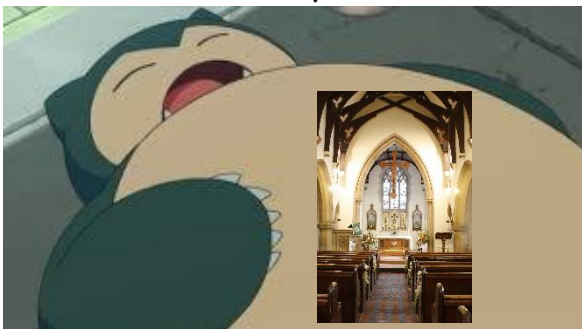
congregation especially in young families. Positive changes included additional clergy, inclusion of children and new initiatives. Many of the emotions expressed over the changes were those of loss, upset, nostalgia, anxiety although there were also some who felt pleasantly surprised and encouraged. We are asked to consider how we could create a safe space where people can express their emotions openly with each other and encourage the people connected with the church to tell positive stories about change.

Tell about how you and others feel about the changes in this community since 2012

Many thought there had been little change or were not aware of any. Among the positive changes mentioned were more young families and community activities / groups new shop, active charity shop, funding for community events. On the other hand, there was a perception of increased crime, pubs, shops and community groups closing, an aging population, less of a village atmosphere and more weekend activities leading to fewer young people in church. Again where feelings were expressed these revolved around sadness, anxiety, fear, unsafe on the one hand and nurtured, community feeling, enjoyment and safe on the other. We are asked to consider how the community might view the church refurbishment at a time when some of the village amenities are in decline, and how the church might respond to perceived changes in the village and build positively upon them.

Overall Observation from the Diocesan Reading Team

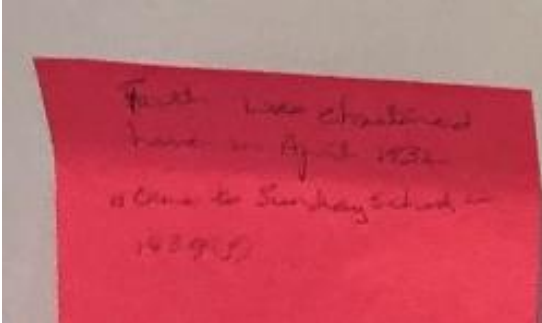
They suggest “playing” with a picture of Holy Trinity as a “Sleeping Giant” who is waking up! Sleeping Giant because of the “huge and hidden faith” you have contained within the church, and waking up as you have put on a new set of clothes (albeit somewhat controversial) in the refurbishment and maybe to start “moving and shaking” within Prestwood.



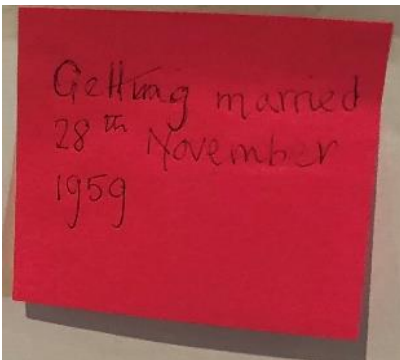
PRÉCIS OF TIMELINE INFORMATION

The timeline event was part of our “discovery”, and took place in church on Sunday 30th September 2018, during the 9:30am service. Members of the congregation were asked to think about three separate concepts, a Red Letter Day, which was something to celebrate in or around church for the individual, a Blue Day, which is something the individual would wish to erase from their church memory, and a Green Day, which gives hope for the future of our church.

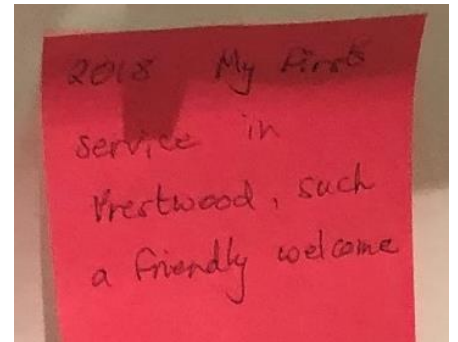
RED LETTER DAYS



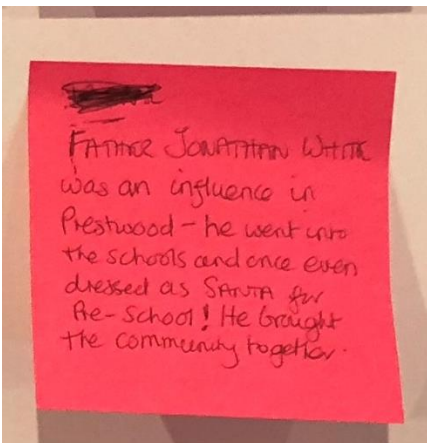
The earliest Red Letter day recorded dates back to 1934, and marks the baptism of an individual.



The vast bulk of comments come from 1978 onwards. Personal events figured highly, with marriage of self or others mentioned 15 times, Christenings / Births mentioned 6 times, Confirmation mentioned 4 times, and Ordination / Licensing mentioned twice. First attendance at church was mentioned twice.

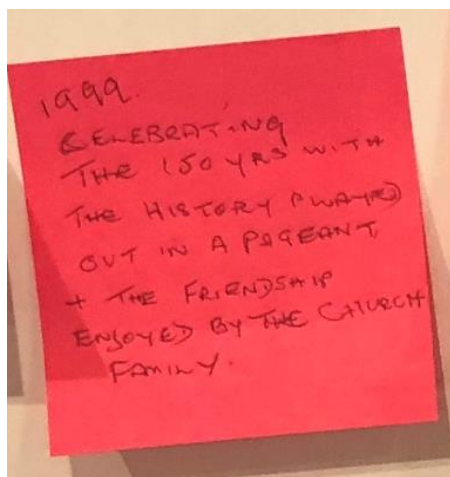
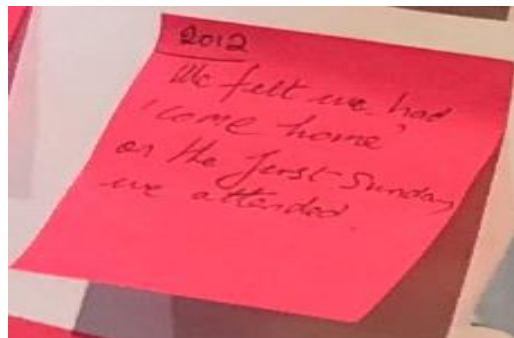


Rev Robert Wright was mentioned twice with his activity in the community and the attraction of young families.

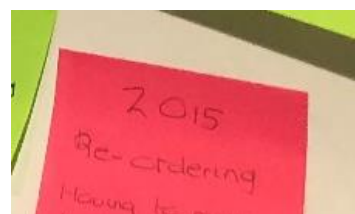


Rev Jonathan White was mentioned four times, in the context of being active in the community / bringing the community together, and also his sensitivity / inclusivity.

Friendship / support / welcome from the church family was mentioned 8 times.

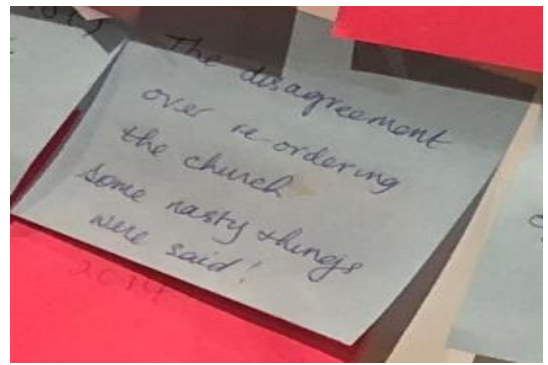
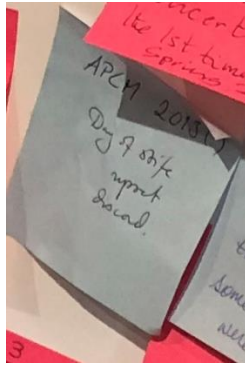
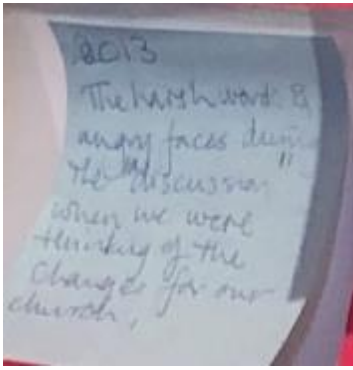


Particular events that were noted included the 150th Anniversary celebrations (mentioned 4 times) and the Reconsecration / Enjoyment of the new church space, which was mentioned 6 times.

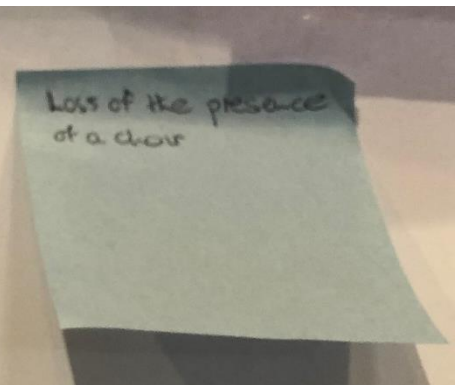
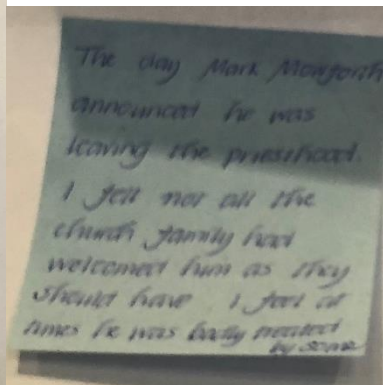
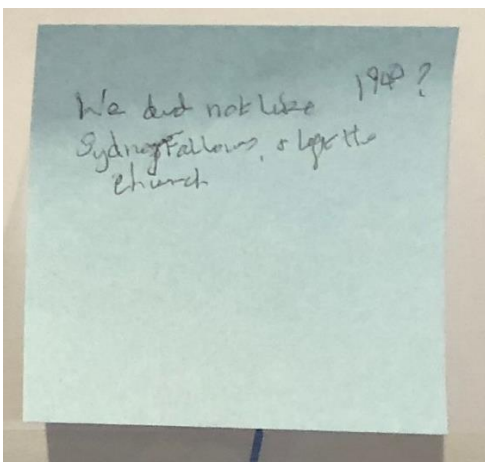


BLUE DAYS

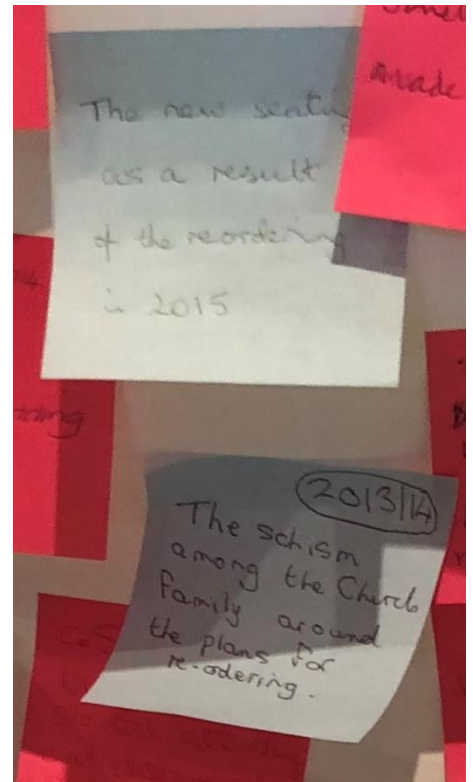
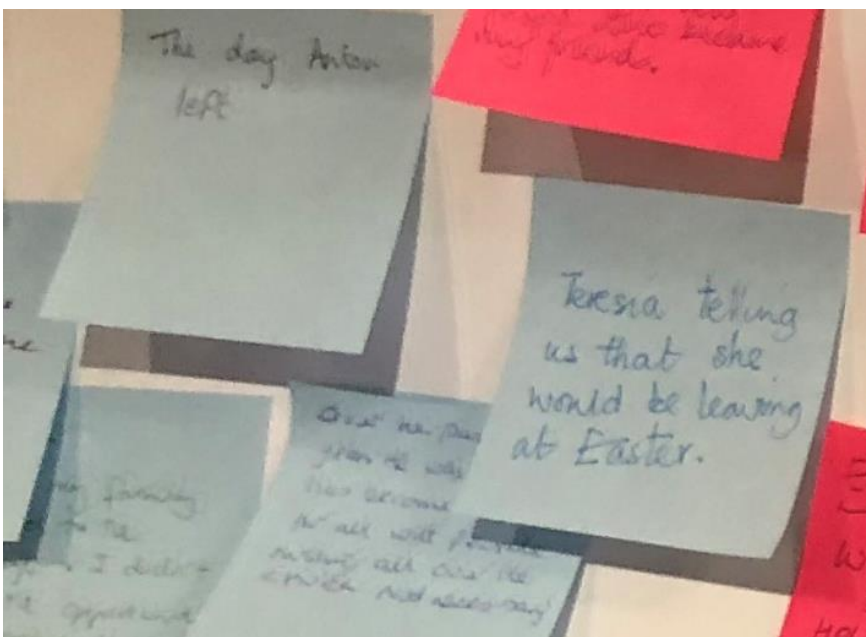
The re-ordering process and the hurt it caused seems to have been the most contentious part of our history and was mentioned 15 times.



The sadness at the departure of past clergy / lay readers was mentioned 8 times. Dislike of certain clergy was mentioned 6 times and pertained to incumbents who were in post from 1939 to 1978. The loss of the choir was mentioned 6 times.

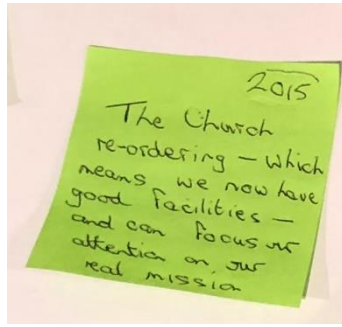


Bereavements and illnesses were mentioned 3 times, as were personal hurts arising from unkind words from others. The loss of Evensong was mentioned once, and there was one mention each of the election of Donald Trump and the relaxation of Sunday trading laws.

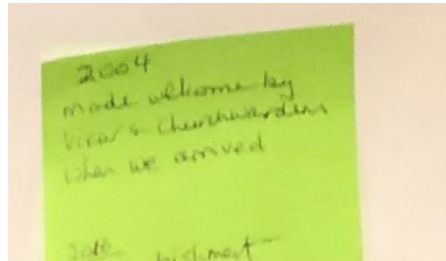
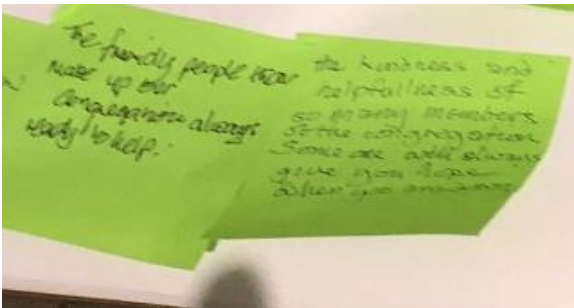


GREEN DAYS

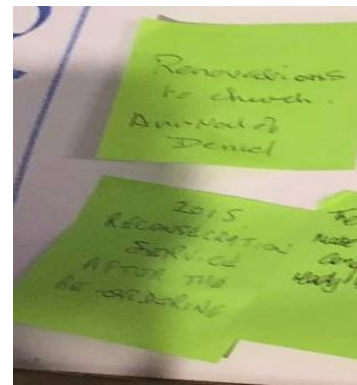
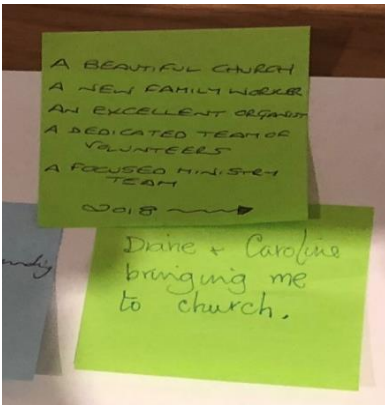
Much of our hope for the future has been expressed as our hope surrounding the renovation / reordering of the church and the flexibility of the space created. This was mentioned 15 times.



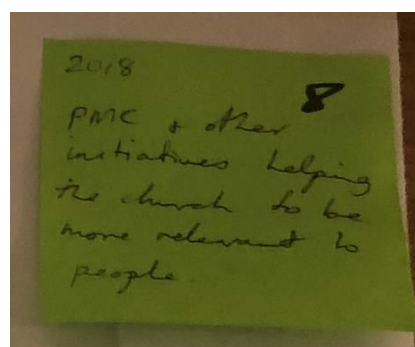
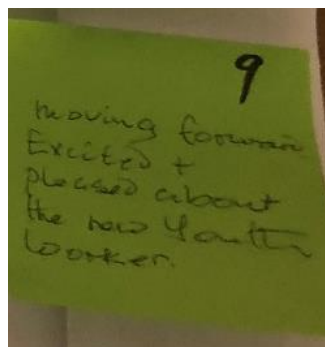
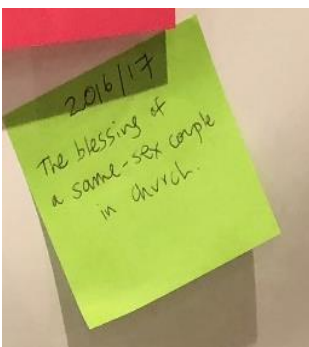
The welcome / support / close friendship of the congregation is also very important and was also mentioned 15 times.



The arrival of Rev Deiniol Heywood, and his positive influence in shaping our recent history, together with the current "HTP team" was mentioned 7 times.



The positivity surrounding the church being inclusive was mentioned 3 times, and the ordination of women was mentioned twice. Several people expressed positive hopes for the future of the church, including the appointment of a new family support worker, and the PMC process and how it will make HTP more relevant going forward.



One person expressed the hope that a choir will be reformed.