

In March 2015 we took decisions to sell buildings in order to resource and support specific projects.

We took the decision to sell Trinity House in order to:

- **make future provision for priestly presence in North Bushey**
- **resource and support new outreach projects**
- **maintain three ‘fit for purpose’ church buildings**

We took the decision to sell Falconer Hall in order to:

- **enhance existing youth work at St. James’s Church**
- **enable greater income generation possibilities through the provision of enhanced facilities at St. James’s in due course, thus enabling us to**
- **develop St. James’s more as a community focus for arts and crafts**

Without these two decisions there is no doubt that the alternative would be to start conversations about closing St. James’s Church, or one of the other churches. This was something I spoke about soon after my arrival to the Watford Observer

(http://www.watfordobserver.co.uk/news/9974508.Bushey_rector_warns_of_bleak_future_unless_church_lives_within_its_means/ - October 2012) Little did I know then that Canon Morgan had raised the same fears back in 1982 when he arrived in the parish and first raised the concern that Falconer Hall might have to be closed. Both Canon Philip Morgan in 1982, and myself in 2012, are on record as saying that our parish has lived beyond its means – so it’s not a problem just covering the last few years. Conversations about the interior of St. James’s have taken place over a period of many years, without any concrete decisions taking place or significant moves forward. We either need to move forward with some actions, or consign any projects to the waste bin. We’ve talked far too much!

Our material resources are available to us to minister and serve the community in new ways. We’ve been delighted to appoint a full-time Youth Worker and part-time Families Worker. We’ve seen fantastic signs of spiritual growth as well as numerical growth in all three congregations, and new and exciting relationships being built with those living in the Little Reddings area.

But there are current challenges which do have a bearing on our future and particularly where any significant “growth potential” can be found.

A year on from publishing **A Way Forward for the Parish of Bushey** (http://www.busheyparish.org/uploads/4/2/1/2/42120425/a_way_forward_for_the_parish_of_bushey_2015_-_an_overview.pdf) we need to revisit and refresh our aims and objectives, looking at the many positive aspects of growth that have been evidenced in the past year, as well as looking to the financial challenges of the future.

Challenges

Vision and Values. To many in the community around us who do not share our faith, vision and core values, we are perhaps seen as an irrelevance. People still believe that the Church of England as a national organisation gives us huge grants. Some think that we are funded by the government! The gospel message itself (with the way of life commended within) is counter-cultural.

Growing families. Young families, as they expand and grow, often have to move away from the area to find more affordable larger housing. We might build relationships with baptism families but they soon move out of the area when another child comes along.

Community Demographics. As the ten-yearly census will make clear, the potential ‘Christian’ population in Bushey is in decline. The figures from 2001 and 2011 make this clear and we ought to expect the potential ‘Christian’ numbers in 2021 to have reduced further.

Bushey Parish Population	Bushey Heath Parish Population
2001 – 15,500	2001 – 8,100
2011 – 16,100	2011 – 8,900
Proportion Christian	Proportion Christian
2001 – 65%	2001 – 49%
2011 – 52%	2011 – 39%

As we look to the future, where might our growth potential be? The level of commitment now (including financial commitment) will have some bearing on whether we are ministering with one, two or three church buildings in the next ten years or so. What we do now will affect our future viability, of that there is no doubt. **If the potential Christian population continues to decrease by (an approximate) 1% each year then by 2061 we can expect the potential Christian population to be zero.**

Stress. People experience excessive pressure and demands outside work just as much as they can at work. Stress tends to be present in many families and homes, particularly where travelling and long working hours have an impact on quality of family life. More young people are being treated for depression than ever before. So many in our parish live with personal or social stress-related issues which may include changes in financial state, or debt or money worries; experiencing prejudice or discrimination; lack of friends or support; injury or illness as well as the daily hassles of traffic jams, public transport to say nothing of mortgage payments and living with someone with an addiction of any kind. The recent small Foodbank set up (and based at St. James's) is one indication of the poverty that exists (often hidden) within such a seemingly affluent area.



How can we best serve these people?

In a church that needs to grow its numbers and its finances, how can we engage with potential new members in a way that doesn't just add to their current stress levels? In what ways are we, in the Parish of Bushey, the Good News they need in order to flourish as human beings? Is the current pattern of service times available on Sunday mornings best placed to engage with a community of people for whom Sunday morning is the only chance of having a lie-in and recharging the batteries? Is it time for us to re-think the current post-World War II service pattern in a different way, or are we happy just to have an appeal to a small section of the community? It's been really encouraging to see how the first Sunday of the month Family Service in St. James's has grown and grown, with very rarely under 100 in church. But why have the more traditional services not experienced the same volume of growth? Both Holy Trinity and St. Paul's have established Youth Clubs; should we, or should we not, expect that to impact on our Sunday worshippers?

There are lots of questions we need to grapple with – and soon!

Do you want to see St. James's, St. Paul's and Holy Trinity churches open for future generations? Are you able to contribute financially to maintain a place of worship – St. James's - of significant historic and architectural interest? Do you have dreams and hopes for the future growth of Bushey parish and the opportunities available to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ? If so, then please come and be part of the discussion!



In order to pick up some of the conversations from the past year and move forward with them, the PCC invites you to share in a

Parish Vision Day
Sunday 25th September 12.30pm – 5pm

In St. James's Church House – save the date now! More details to follow.

I feel very blessed to be Rector here, and thank God for what we have achieved together over the past four years. But I now need to turn my sights to the next four years and your response – positive or otherwise - will help to shape what our future looks like.

Fr. Neil Kelley, Pentecost 2016