

The Parish Churches of
Chiddingly
East Hoathly
&
Saint Thomas à Becket
Framfield
Mission Action Plan
Easter 2024





Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them;

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Matthew 28:16–20 (NRSV)



Introduction: This picture is one of the many that I took during my German pilgrimage walk from Köln to Marburg in the spring of 2022. The inscription on this welcome bench, outside a tiny church, in the middle of nowhere, translates as;

'Give your feet rest (or peace), but also your heart.' I share this picture, because it was during my solitary pilgrimage that I really began to hear and feel the call to rural ministry, and ultimately come to serve you all in these very special villages of Chiddingly, East Hoathly and Framfield. Our recent three PCC's away day to the beautiful Ashburnham place, allowed us to give rest to *our* hearts, as together, we sought to discern God's will for our three churches and the communities that we serve. Our day together resulted in this Mission Action Plan (MAP), which I commend to you.

Yours in Christ. Fr. James. (Holy Week 2024)



Our Strengths.



- We are delighted to be the stewards of three beautiful and historic Sussex churches and take our care of these important buildings very seriously.
- We share in a mature grounded faith firmly rooted in Christ for many centuries.
- Chiddingly & East Hoathly have already been working together as a United Benefice (but with two PCCs) since 1978
- Our communities are host to many long-established societies, clubs, organisations and groups.
- Our parishes are home to four Primary Schools: East Hoathly, Blackboys and Framfield being Church of England Schools, and Chiddingly, a Community School.



Our Strengths. *cont.*



- We serve established rural communities and are supported by local shops, five thriving public houses, and a number of independent businesses and services (including a residential care home).
- Our churches attract reasonably healthy Sunday congregations, and we have good and stable links with the three C of E schools in particular.
- All three churches have fine organs, (although East Hoathly's organ is in need of some major restorative work)
- Since my appointment as Priest in Charge in the June of 2023, we have become accustomed to worshipping together on some Sundays and have appreciated the joys of a full church on those occasions.



Our Strengths. *cont.*



- All three churches are attractive venues for weddings.
- East Hoathly, and particularly Chiddingly, have a renowned ring of bells.
- Framfield Church has a fine church hall with accessible facilities.
- We recognise that we serve three relatively affluent communities.
- We have established a good relationship with the care Home in East Hoathly, including a monthly Eucharist.
- Father James is an experienced Training Incumbent and we were very pleased to welcome Janice, our part time SSM Assistant Curate, to our parishes as she continues her training with us.



Our Weaknesses.



- Ageing congregations in all three churches and virtually no children or young people.
- Lack of onsite toilet and catering facilities at both Chiddingly & East Hoathly. (East Hoathly does have an outside toilet, but it is in need of some refurbishment.)
- There is a perceived 'disconnect' between Church and Village, and between the churches and the farming community.
- We are three churches resourced by only one full time stipendiary priest. Without SSM and PTO retired assistance it *would not be possible* to sustain the current service provision.
- We have fallen into the habit of offering largely the same service at the same time in all three of our churches.



Our Opportunities.



- There is a genuine desire to strengthen community life, and for the churches to play their part in that life.
- New housing developments in and around our parishes, resulting in something like 500 new villagers!
- There are huge opportunities for mission and outreach to the four schools in the parishes.
- East Hoathly School uses the church building every day for collective worship.
- Framfield church is regularly used for significant services by Framfield and Blackboys schools.
- Children from the three C of E schools are comfortable and at home in our church buildings.
- Members of the church family lead 'open the book' sessions in East Hoathly Church.



Our Opportunities. *cont.*



- Our three parishes offer an exciting, challenging and varied opportunity for an assistant curate called to rural ministry, and we would be very supportive of any decision to place a full time Stipendiary Assistant Curate with us for their Initial Ministerial Education (IME). Framfield's Rectory could be put to good use for this.
- There are children & young people in all three parishes, they just don't attend church on a Sunday!
- Social media is widely used in the community, but the church's social media presence is somewhat lacking.
- There is an opportunity to provide a greater variety of services not necessarily led by the clergy.



Threats to our Mission.



- Lack of onsite and accessible facilities in two of our churches make it difficult to attract weddings, or provide activities and services for young children.
- The erroneous belief that the church is wealthy, and doesn't require any further support.
- We are three small rural churches and as such have difficulty being seen and heard.
- Reliance on self-supporting and retired clergy to maintain current Sunday service provision.
- The 'living' is currently suspended, and we now have a Priest-in-Charge licenced to our three parishes.
- An ageing congregation has resulted in a depletion of lay volunteers.

What we are going to do. Upward – Our Worship



We will: **Evaluate our Church Services** and look to:

- Expand our musical repertoire, occasionally combine our choirs, and encourage new members to sing or play at our services.
- Increase the variety of our services.
- Offer a pattern of worship that, while varied, is sustainable and practical, being ever mindful our finite human resources.

What we are going to do.
Upward – Our Worship. *cont.*



- Use the current 2nd and 5th Sunday combined services to explore new ways of worshipping together.

This could include:

- Healing Services
- Contemplative Worship e.g. Taizé, Celtic, etc.
- Messy Church on a Sunday (But we need the children first!)
- Pet / Animal / Rogation Services
- Outdoor Services / Public witness.

What we are going to do.
Upward – Our Worship. *cont.*



- Encourage and build up lay led non-Eucharistic services.
- Ensure that Major Festivals are celebrated in all the churches.
- Obtain an idea of the cost of refurbishing East Hoathly's organ, or replacing it if that is more cost effective.

What we are going to do. Outward – Our Mission



We will: **Grow our ministry to Children & Young People** by:

- Taking part proactively in the life of the four schools in our Parishes. (particularly the three C of E Schools)
- Creating a dedicated in church space for Children & Young People, beginning with East Hoathly.
- Provide a Bible based after school club. Once we have such a group up and running, we will develop a core group of children that can then be invited to other church activities / Sunday worship.

What we are going to do.
Outward – Our Mission. *cont.*



We will: **Reach out to our communities** by:

- Producing and distributing welcome packs to new residents of our village.
- Engaging more fully and productively with local social media groups.
- Strengthening links with local community groups and organisations.
- Offering a discipleship course (Alpha or Emmaus) across our three churches.

What we are going to do.
Outward – Our Mission. *cont.*



- Exploring and costing major works in our Churches...
 - Installing a 'ringing floor' in East Hoathly's tower, with facilities beneath.
 - Refurbishing the outside toilets at East Hoathly
 - Providing an onsite toilet at Chiddingly.
- Making all three of our churches as attractive as possible for occasional offices, and as community venues for other activities. We especially need to de-clutter East Hoathly.

What we are going to do. Inward – Our Own Christian Formation



We will: ensure our own Christian Formation and safeguard the long-term future of our three churches by:

- Providing opportunities for Bible Study throughout the year.
- Structured Lent & Advent courses
- Increasing House Group Membership, using Framfield's example as our model.
- Firming up our pastoral support networks.

What we are going to do!
Inward – Our Own Christian Formation. *cont.*



- Praying *together* as often as possible.
- Setting up online 'Zoom' prayer times.
- Sharing a common prayer intention diary.
- Engaging with national and international prayer events.
- **Joining together as one new United Benefice of three Parish Churches. Sharing one common mission; to know, love and follow Jesus Christ.**



The next step: If we truly feel that this is the path that God is leading us on, then we will need

to put our shared vision into action. To move this process forward, we will need to seek the guidance of our Archdeacon and start a scheme of pastoral reorganisation. This would lead to the formation of **The Wealdway Benefice**, with me being inducted as the first Incumbent, (Vicar or Rector).

The Wealdway Benefice would encompass our three existing parish churches, and would comprise of one, two or three parishes *within* that Benefice. There could be one, two or three PCCs; one, two or three sets of church officers; four, eight or twelve PCC meetings a year; and one, two or three APCMs. My preferred option would be for there to be one or two parishes within the Benefice, but this is something for the three current PCC's and the Diocese of Chichester to agree upon. I really do believe that we have an exciting future ahead of us! Please continue to pray, and seek the wisdom and guidance of God's Holy Spirit, as we write the next chapter of our life together, bringing rest to the hearts of all who walk the Wealdway with us. Amen.