

Felixstowe Methodist Mission Area

Vision 2021

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*'Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert'.*

Isaiah 43: 18 – 19

'A bright future lies ahead!'

Proverbs 24: 14

1.0 Reason

As individuals, communities and as God's Church we find ourselves coming out of the Covid pandemic thinking about how things have been over the past year, what our priorities are and where God is leading us. Over recent years, several individuals and congregations within our Mission Area have been wrestling, prayerfully with the question "where does our future lie?". As a result, conversations have started more widely about the broad idea of **"One Church – 4 Locations"** and this document aims to bring together some of those thoughts and aspirations. **This document is not intended to contain significant detail but more a roadmap of where we see our vision for the future, as the Felixstowe Mission Area (FMA).** The timing of this is also important as our current Minister (Rev Diane Smith) sits down in July and we start to plan for (at least) 12 months without a presbyter stationed to the FMA. In particular, we would hope that this vision would feed into the profile for the appointment of a new Circuit Minister for the FMA in 2022. It is felt that it is extremely important that a new Minister coming in is aligned with the shared vision of the FMA and can then join us on that journey.

Looking around the four churches there are some common themes and concerns, plus some issues which are relevant to a subset of the churches:

- Financial challenges
- Resources - people
- Resources - buildings
- The Environment and the part we play
- Ageing congregations

Many of these issues are ones which will be shared by any number of churches across a variety of denominations, but it is felt that this is a unique opportunity to consider the way forward and to do this from a position of relative strength, rather than wait for events to overtake us.

In addition, our response to the current climate and environmental crisis is one which cannot be delayed. We have a responsibility to act **now** in protecting God's world.

Therefore, we feel **the time is right** for us to consider God's plan for us.

2.0 Where are we?

Each of our four Churches have initiatives and activities which are working well in their own communities and, moving forward, it would be wise to look at these and to see which areas can be enhanced. It would also be wise to look at each of these areas and decide if they are sustainable, given the resources we have.

Some of the areas where the individual churches are working well are:

- Local neighbourhood outreach
- Work with children
- Ecumenical links and initiatives (for example, the commitment to partnership working with Walton Parish Nursing)
- Music in, and outside of, Worship
- Diversity of Worship
- Community events, both regular and one-off

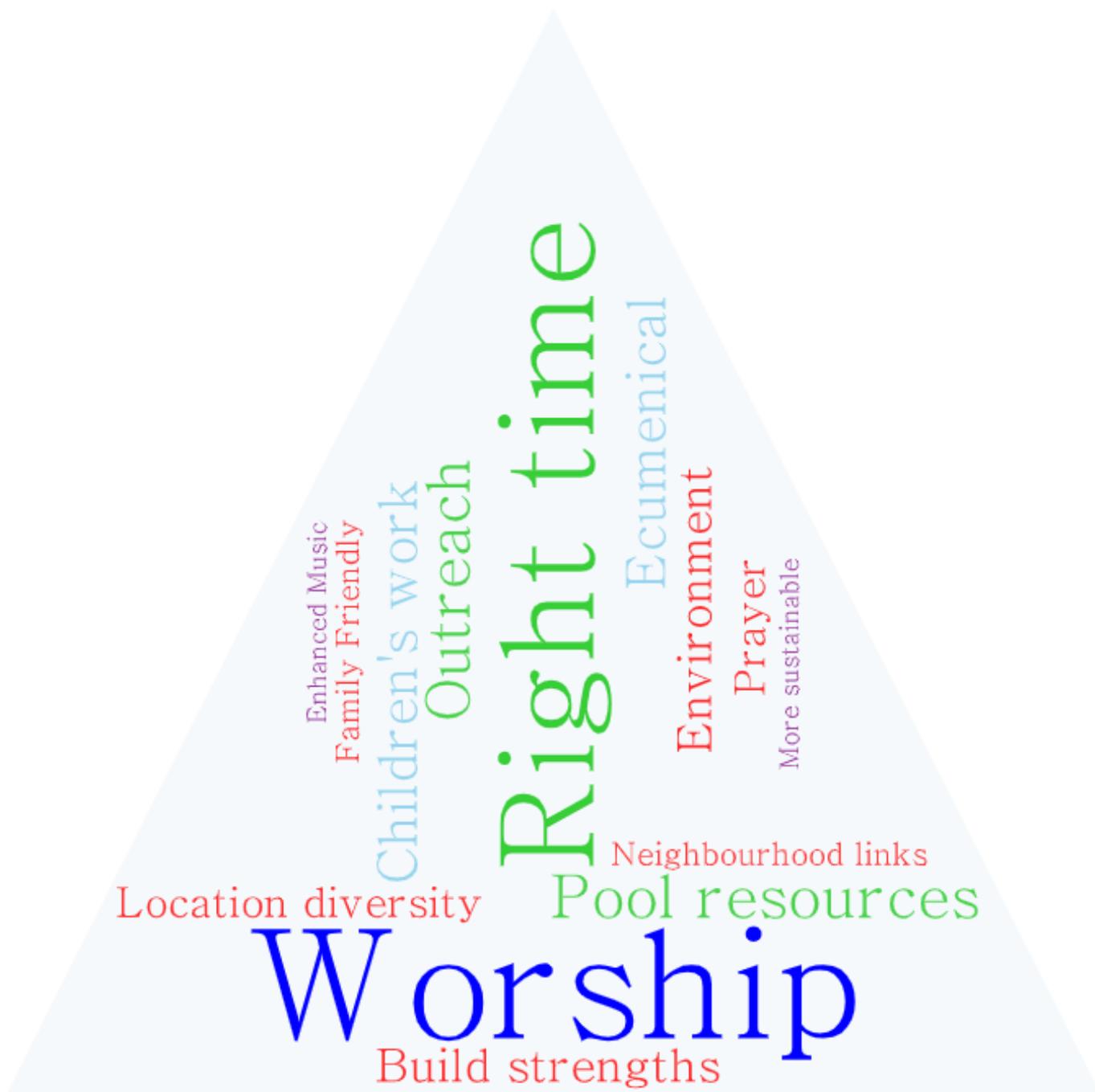
In addition, the FMA is already working together in a number of areas such as:

- Planning for the Holiday Clubs at Seaton Road and Trinity since 2010
- Annual “Remembering Service”, held at Trinity – since 2006
- Monthly Kids’ Club, held at Seaton Road – since 2010
- Working with St Mary’s Walton on weekly Messy Church
- Messy Church (3 or 4 times a year), held at Trinity
- Supporting each other across churches in the FMA
- Joint FMA services
- Holy Week Meditations (for the past 10 years)
- Shoe Box Appeal – initially individual churches – now FMA
- Mission Area Magazine

The challenges faced with the range of activities with which the FMA are involved should not be underestimated – an increasing desire to expand those activities but with decreasing resources. **Together, we can do more!**

2.0 The way ahead

From feedback received from all four Churches in the FMA the following highlights were extracted as being important to our vision (size of words/phrases reflect the number of times these are mentioned in the feedback):



Therefore, to look at these areas in terms of our vision as the Felixstowe Mission Area – “One Church – 4 Locations”:

Worship

To focus our Worship, reduce the number of services on a Sunday across the 4 locations but allow for the continued diversity of Worship styles and location. Continue with Worship and fellowship opportunities during the week.

Right time

There is a strong feeling that this is a real opportunity for change. As we come out of the Covid pandemic, there is a feeling that things cannot be allowed to “go back to how it was before”. Not that things were necessarily all negative but that this is the time for us to look carefully at the future of all the Churches in the FMA and agree a vision which comes from a point of strength.

Pool resources

Enable our resources, both material and people resources, to be brought together for the greater good of the FMA. Enable people to become involved in areas where they may not have had the opportunity before. This also covers those areas where there is duplication:

- Management of property
- Management of finance
- Church outreach opportunities
- Work with children and young people
- Ecumenical work
- Environmental concerns
- Other special interest groups

Financial implications: coming together as “One Church” will bring our financial resources and responsibilities together. In order to achieve this overall vision there will be a financial implication. However, as part of this we need to look, for example, at the buildings we have within the FMA; in particular, some preliminary discussion has already taken place about the two buildings at Seaton Road and whether there is a need for two buildings in order to maintain the witness and outreach from that location. Working with the Circuit and District, we could look at the financial implications of potentially rationalising our buildings and using some of the capital released from this exercise to support this vision into the future. It is also anticipated

that, by being “One Church”, there might be savings which could be explored. There would be no plan, within this vision, to close any of the four existing locations. The financial implications are extremely important and would need to be addressed as we move forward.

More important than the pooling of financial resources is that of “people” resources. **By bringing together the time, energy, enthusiasm, diversity and talents of all the individuals in the four locations, we would be able to achieve so much more than we could working separately.**

Outreach and neighbourhood links

Given the diversity of the four locations, the opportunity for outreach is equally diverse: whether it be coffee mornings in the Town Centre, Community events in all our locations, Children’s work, indoor and outdoor events, organisations using our premises and many others. These events provide an excellent opportunity for mission which we would be better placed to undertake together.

Housing developments around our town and villages is planned to increase significantly and, whether we support this or not, this provides an opportunity for outreach and witness. Outreach, however, requires resources in terms of “people” and, working together will provide us with a greater resource in all these areas. Use will continue to be made of our Lay Worker in this outreach. We will be stronger together than we are separately.

Ecumenical links

In a variety of ways, we already have strong Ecumenical links and this vision does not see these diminishing but, rather, through coming together, we would be able to further strengthen the links we already have and, also, establish new ones.

Environmental

The current climate emergency should focus everyone’s mind to work together towards a solution. This includes our Church. By working as “one Church” we will rationalise, optimise and reduce our carbon impact. This may be through the management of our buildings, the way in which we organise

regular Worship and other meetings, the reduction in travel (e.g. less Ministers and Local Preachers having to travel to the Mission Area), more on-line meetings when possible and appropriate etc.

Children's work

The FMA already works together successfully on a number of initiatives in this area. The vision would be to take a fresh look at these and to see where further integration might be possible. We should also ask a number of questions, such as:

- Where are the best places to hold children's activities?
- Can we work with other denominations to avoid duplication?
- Can we, together, have a "plan" for the young people associated with our Church? This is so they don't just "drop off the radar" as they get older.

Family Friendly

Encourage families to become engaged in our Church – through weekday links and through Worship. Build on the experiences of the individual Churches in this aspect.

Enhanced Music

There is, obviously, a very strong tradition of music within Methodism and, certainly, within the FMA, we have some very talented musicians, singers etc. Coming together to allow this aspect to further flourish and grow would be a real benefit to Worship and other areas of our Church life.

Prayer

This should have started already! We need to underpin all this vision with prayer, **seeking God's direction in all this, not our own.**

3.0 Process

How do we move forward? This vision needs to be communicated with everyone within our Church community so that all are aware of the potential way forward. It should be noted that any fundamental change to the structures, within and between the Churches, would require the agreement of each of the Church Councils. Without giving exact timescales, the process could look like this:

Share this vision with our church communities and amend as required.
Hold a forum to discuss this feedback.

Set up a group to look at Worship patterns across the 4 locations.

Set up other special interest groups (as has happened with the Climate Emergency Group) to look at specific areas of our Church life. These groups should report back to each of the 4 Church Councils. *See below.

Once agreed within the FMA, share this vision with the Circuit Leadership Team and the Chair of District. This outline vision should be fed into the profile for any prospective minister for 2022.

At an appropriate time, hold a joint Church Council meeting for all four Churches to have an open and honest “where we are at” discussion.

After a period of transition, with the groups working together, and more details available from these groups as to how we can move to “One Church”, we take the steps to do this and come together, with a single Church Council.

Then, the really EXCITING work starts!

**Special Interest Groups* – these groups would look at aspects such as Worship, Climate Emergency, Outreach, Children’s work, Ecumenical links, Finance, Managing our buildings etc. It will be important that these groups do not get into too much detail too soon but start by looking at the overall direction of travel for these aspects of our Church life.

4.0 Summary points

- This is a real **OPPORTUNITY** for something radical to happen within the Felixstowe Mission Area.
- This is **THE RIGHT TIME**.
- This vision comes from a point of **STRENGTH**, not weakness. Each Church could continue (for a time) but it is better to act now, as we have the energy and enthusiasm to do so.
- **PRAYER and WORSHIP** will underpin our way forward.
- Let's take the problems and concerns as opportunities to **DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY**.
- This vision should not be seen as any one Church joining with another – we will be creating something **NEW AND EXCITING**.

Version history

Version	Date created/amended	Notes
1.0 Draft	13/03/2021	1 st Draft
1.1 Draft	13/03/2021	Grammatical corrections
1.2	08/04/2021	Updated following feedback and meeting on 07/04/2021
1.3	12/04/2021	Grammatical corrections

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29: 11