

ST MARY'S BANBURY

SHARING AGREEMENT REVIEW

REPORT

**Written and Published by the Review Panel
Commissioned by the Anglican and URC Churches
June 2005**

	Page
SECTION 1: CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW	2
SECTION 2: NATURE, FORM AND EXTENT OF THE REVIEW	4
SECTION 3: FINDINGS	4
SECTION 4: RECOMMENDATIONS	9
SUMMARY	11

SECTION 1: CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

1 The original ‘sharing agreement’ document ¹ was drawn up in 1993. Since then there has been a change of clergy in both churches. The current Anglican incumbent was inducted as priest-in-charge in 2001. The current United Reformed Church (URC) minister was inducted in 2003.

2 In discussion with the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Elders, the clergy invited a review team (i) to look at the original sharing agreement, (ii) to investigate how this has worked out in practice, (iii) to discover whether the document needs any amendments and (iv) to make recommendations in the light of their findings.

Factual Information about the Shared Church at the Time Of The Review

Services and Membership

3 The URC currently attracts between 20 and 30 members to its main 11am Sunday service. The number of Anglican communicants has varied between 60 and 90 over the past year at the main 9.30am Eucharist. The URC has 50 members. The Anglicans have 94 on their electoral roll. (This rose to 106 in April – just after completion of the review). The Anglicans also hold a regular 8am Sunday Communion Service, attended by between 8 and 15 communicants. Both churches have been trying various patterns of 6pm Sunday evening worship, including traditional Anglican evensong, evening prayer, Iona and Taize services. The Anglican Worship Working Group currently plans these. The URC Minister has also initiated Healing Services as part of a planned joint Healing Ministry. Friday lunchtime prayers, which attract a handful of people, were set up as a joint activity some two years ago.

4 Joint services have been held for the past several years in August, alternating Anglican and URC communion rites, and on Christmas Day. Three times a year the URC congregation, Anglicans and Methodists hold joint services, each leading in turn. There have also been occasional special joint services.

Clergy

5 The minister and vicar meet weekly and involve other members of their clergy teams where feasible. A recently ordained minister, who is a member of the local congregation, works with the URC minister. The Anglican vicar is supported by a recently appointed curate and a local lay minister (LLM), who is also training to be an ordained local minister (OLM). A number of retired clergy also take or assist in Anglican services on occasion.

Committees and Working Groups

6 The Joint Church Council meets approximately six to eight times a year. It comprises equal numbers of URC and Anglican representatives. Its function is as described in the sharing agreement. It has recently developed three working groups – ‘Fabric’, ‘Furniture’ and ‘Grounds’ to improve efficiency.

7 The URC constitution is via the group of annually elected Elders, who meet regularly with the Minister to discuss, plan and review all aspects of URC church life and work. The Anglican management structure is headed by the PCC, elected annually. A number of working groups have been set up to make the PCC’s work more manageable. These include additional members of the congregation who are not PCC or JCC members. The current groups are ‘Finance’, ‘Outreach and Welcome’, ‘Social and Fundraising’, ‘Worship’ and ‘Education’.

Work with children and young people

8 Each church organises its own activities for children and young people. The URC hosts flourishing Rainbow, Brownie and Guide Groups on weeknights and runs ‘God’s Flock’ for a small number of children aged 3-13 alongside its Sunday morning service. The Anglicans hold ‘Adventurers’ – on Sundays at 9.30am (attended by between 15 and 25 children up to the age of 12); they run a youth group on Friday evenings, with some 20 9-16 year-olds attending. The CoE choir includes 12 young people aged 9-15 and the Band includes 3 children of primary school age. The URC minister has pastoral links with Harriers Ground Community Primary School and the Anglican vicar works closely with St Mary’s CE Primary School.

¹ ‘The Sharing Agreement’ – drawn up 18th October 1993 – copies available through Joint Church Council

'Babyplay' is run by the URC in St Mary's Centre and the Anglicans organise a monthly 'Toddler Praise' at St Mary's School.

Music

9 Music for 11am URC services is provided by a regular organist and a regular pianist. A group of musicians known as 'Patchwork' accompany occasional special services. The URC minister also leads music with his guitar. The URC uses 'Rejoice and Sing', supplemented by choruses and modern songs and hymns projected onto a screen. An organist and choir provide music for 9.30am Anglican services on all but one Sunday a month. On that Sunday the choir is joined by a band of between 8 and 16 players. The Anglicans use Hymns Old and New, supplemented by occasional additional songs, hymns and versions of psalms, mainly from the Taize and Iona traditions. Each church funds its own music provision. The Anglican choir is available equally for weddings organised by either church. The two organists negotiate availability for weddings and funerals.

Support activities

10 As in all churches, an array of individuals and groups support the internal work of the two church congregations in a variety of ways. For the most part these are organised and run separately on behalf of each individual church. Some, such as flower arranging, benefit both churches. Others, such as provision of refreshment after services, are run entirely separately by each church. Members of each separate congregation are on separate rotas for leading prayers, reading lessons, welcoming and stewarding during services. Groups such as the bellringers continue to provide their services for either or both churches as required. Each church finds and allocates its own stewards for services. Church cleaning involves members of both congregations working together, as well as payment for regular cleaning of toilets and the stage.

Live Arts at St Mary's

11 Since the refurbishment in 2001/2, while retaining its distinctive nature as a church, the building has become a shared community venue. The management group promoting the use of the building as a cultural centre is known as 'Livearts@StMary's'. It reports to the JCC. Its members are currently all members of one of the two congregations. The venue holds a maximum 600, including performers and audience. 'Livearts' organises a series of concerts and events involving various sections of the local community and artistes of international repute. Events are run and staffed entirely by volunteers.

The Church Shop

12 The previous URC minister developed a shop, which is now run by volunteers, who report to a management committee set up by the JCC.

Opening the Church to visitors and the community

13 St Mary's is open to the public from 10am to 4pm daily from Monday to Saturday between Palm Sunday and the end of October. During winter months it is open on Fridays from 11am to 3pm and Saturdays from 10am to 4pm. To enable this, a rota of volunteers working in pairs on two-hour shifts staffs the church.

St Mary's Centre

14 The JCC manages the adjacent St Mary's Centre, a modern building comprising medium-sized hall (holding up to 70 people seated), kitchen, toilets, upstairs office and small meeting room. The JCC employs a secretary six hours a week to manage lettings and support the clergy with administration. The Centre is home to the Beacon Centre, a drop-in centre for the homeless, on most weekdays. A few people from the two churches, particularly the URC, are involved in managing or supporting this work. St Mary's Centre is let for regular group activities during evenings and weekends. It is used by the churches for meetings, for their youth activities and for occasional Sunday services.

Wider Context

15 St Mary's Anglican Church is part of the Deddington Deanery in the Diocese of Oxford. It is one of five Anglican Churches in Banbury (St Francis (LEP), St Hugh, St Leonard, St Mary and St Paul). Until less than a decade ago, St Mary's incumbent was Rector of the Parish of Banbury, which was a team ministry, in which each vicar, though attached to a church, had a distinctive parish-wide (i.e. town-wide) role.

16 St Mary's United Reformed Church is in the northern zone of the Wessex Synod's Reading and Oxford District, together with St Francis (LEP). The St Francis LEP at Highlands is also shared with the Methodist, Roman Catholic and Southam Road Evangelical Churches. The northern zone at present also includes Marsh Gibbon, Twyford (Bucks) and Thame.

17 Both Anglican and URC churches are in an informal ecumenical agreement with the town centre Methodist Church and are members of Banbury Christians Together, an ecumenical group comprising most of the town's Christian communities. (In 1994, signatories from the Church of England, United Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Salvation Army and Southam Road Evangelical Church drew up 'The Banbury Town Covenant', but 'Oxfordshire Churches Together' refused to ratify it and it appears it has fallen into disuse.) The Anglican Church also has close links with the local inter-faith network through the auspices of the Banbury Area Religious Education Centre.

18 At the time of this review, both the Anglican Deanery and URC District were involved in reviewing wider clergy staffing issues. The review team was asked to bear in mind the wider context while focusing on its self-initiated individual church review.

SECTION 2: NATURE, FORM AND EXTENT OF THE REVIEW

19 The six members of the Review Team were: Tessa Kuin-Lawton (Anglican Ecumenical Adviser for the Diocese of Oxford), Richard Taylor (URC Ecumenical Officer for Oxfordshire), Jenny Jordan and Sandy Thompson, members of the URC congregation, and Geoff Cross and Fred Riches, members of the Anglican congregation. Bede Gerrard (County Ecumenical Officer), the Rev Janet Chapman (Priest-in-charge, St Mary's) and the Rev Neil Eldridge (URC Minister, St Mary's) attended one or two initial meetings to clarify and confirm the extent of the review.

20 The review took place from January to March 2005. The report was drafted during April and presented to the Clergy, Elders and PCC in May. It was published on June 1st.

21 The review team met formally on four occasions to plan ways of discovering information and views, and to share findings. Members of the team attended both URC and Anglican services, JCC, PCC and Elders' meetings. They held individual discussions with the clergy and invited all members of each congregation to submit their views either through discussion or in writing. A review document inviting written comment was given to all members of both congregations. A questionnaire was devised solely for the use of the URC congregation. A separate questionnaire was devised for the Anglican PCC.

22 In response to the general review document, 17 written submissions were received and several people shared their opinions informally. The URC questionnaire, issued to 33 people, received 15 responses. Four completed PCC questionnaires were received. These were completed either individually or in small groups.

23 At the final meeting of the review team, the evidence amassed was reviewed, recommendations were drafted and the reporting process was decided. The report represents the corporate findings and recommendations of the full review team.

SECTION 3: FINDINGS

24 **The review finds that within the terms of the original sharing agreement the JCC is functioning very effectively.** It is clearly an efficient and hardworking committee. It functions very well through alternate chairing and finds fair ways of addressing issues raised by each congregation.

25 The external reviewers were highly impressed by the sheer amount going on and by a sense of purpose apparent at all meetings attended.

26 It is not easy to be a shared church with two different congregations. As one reviewer put it, ‘Any good ecumenical endeavour has its ups and downs – that’s part of the excitement of it.’

27 Positives that have stemmed directly from the agreement include:

- The resurrection of two previously dying churches
- The whole refurbishment programme at St Mary’s
- The fact that St Mary’s Church still exists as a place of worship
- The introduction of a highly attractive cultural venue in the centre of Banbury
- The establishment of an extremely successful, close-knit committee from two previously separate churches that works for the benefit of both congregations
- The joint running of LiveArts, the Church Shop and the Midweek Stewards Rota
- Some exciting joint festival services

Areas for closer consideration:

28 The review group looked for ways to ease and improve the workings of committees. Is it possible to have fewer meetings? There is so much to cover at JCC level that it is probably not possible to cut the number of meetings. However, there is at times a sense of stress at there being so much to do, with such full agendas. This needs addressing. It is clear that people do not welcome such long meetings. The review recommends a normal maximum of two hours.

29 The review considered whether the PCC & Elders repeat discussions held at JCC. How much is necessary communication and how much is unnecessary duplication? Structures need to ensure that each committee or working group has clear authority to go ahead to avoid repetition and returning to JCC/PCC/Elders for permission. Agendas would need to be clear about which items are for communication and which items for discussion.

Wider Context

30 The Anglican congregation needs to clarify St Mary’s role in relation to other town CoE churches. To what extent is St Mary’s linked to other Banbury parishes? The current Anglican incumbent was appointed priest-in-charge rather than rector in order to give the Bishop more leeway in future staffing arrangements – including possible re-organisation/amalgamation across Banbury. The incumbent is nominally responsible for the Anglican input at St Francis, where a vacancy began in May 2005.

31 The two churches need to redefine for their congregations exactly what the Sharing Agreement is and together develop a vision for where they wish the agreement to lead over the next few years. In this context JCC, Elders, PCC and both congregations will need to look at what St Mary’s is and how it is seen in the context of Banbury.

32 It is likely that the two churches will, in the not too distant future, need to respond to the ecumenical discussions going on between leaders of the area churches, in particular their considerations of restructuring. This review, however, was initiated by our two churches. The scope of the review is entirely our own decision and our own responsibility. This is a big church with a lot going on. There are excellent reasons for maintaining the partnership of two ministers, Anglican and URC, and a strong clergy team. In this context, the role definition is at least as important as the number of clergy.

Clergy Roles

33 When considering joint resources, how should we use them? Are we using them to the best of our ability?

34 The sharing agreement has very little to say about clergy roles. It deals mainly with matters of management, focusing on finance and fabric. It sets out the roles of clergy in chairing the joint council and in inviting other clergy to take part in conducting worship at St Mary’s. Otherwise the practical outworking of the agreement, the extent of teamwork or partnership, is left to the clergy and their congregations.

35 The current clergy were appointed separately by their congregations with little involvement of the 'other' church. Current arrangements leave the appointed clergy needing to work together but with no specific guidance or support from a shared body as to how their roles should complement each other. The two external reviewers met with the two leading clergy and received the impression that they work reasonably well together. They gained a picture of the clergy 'upfronting' issues and being generally good at avoiding bottlenecks such as clashes of events; they have ensured that notices, posters and newsletters clarify and affirm the shared nature of the church. The review team feels that the Anglican vicar has greater autonomy and less accountability than the URC minister. While leadership and management styles depend on the individuals in post as well as on their defined roles, it is clear that the URC minister receives closer guidance and support from his congregation and is more closely accountable to his congregation (through the Eldership) than his Anglican counterpart. (In this context, the current Anglican vicar feels that she works more closely with the churchwardens than is publicly apparent.)

36 To what extent should the balance and sharing of roles be left to the clergy? To what extent should the clergy roles be decided for each by separate church committees? Is there some value in greater co-operation between the churches in future appointments, so that clergy roles are more likely to complement each other or are the two churches looking to continue running in parallel but mainly separated in the shared building?

37 In the current situation are the two clergy roles separate and therefore possibly overlapping? To what extent can roles be shared to focus on particular ministries? Are we deploying ministers in the best way? Are we organising morning and evening services in the most helpful, effective and creative ways? Do the congregations wish the clergy to explore the possibility of full mutuality of Ministry?

38 There is currently no group set up to consider such questions as these. When such issues arise, they tend to be added to the JCC brief, while also being discussed separately by Elders, the PCC and the appropriate Anglican Working Group. Such wide consultation appears necessary because of the current dearth of 'shared structures' outside the JCC. The JCC fulfils its stated role in exemplary manner. It is being asked to fulfil a much broader brief than that originally envisaged. The review panel recommends a comprehensive review of current separate and joint structures with a view to overcoming unnecessary duplication, gaining strength from mutual support and focusing thought and effort by each newly defined group within a manageable brief. Perhaps the current situation is one in which the clergy team may wish to involve a fellow professional from the URC or Anglican Church to develop current and future strategies. In particular, such a professional adviser could assist in developing the clergy's team roles and the congregation's joint support and guidance group for this and future clergy team.

Where is it best to work together and where is it best to work separately?

39 **'Two families in one house is what it feels like. This is a positive image – there isn't a sense of two families being in one family's house.'** Those who are enthusiastic for change are aware of the need to avoid pushing too fast towards working more closely. Similarly, the PCC and Elders are aware of the dangers of 'convoy management', in which the pace is set by the slowest ship. One aim should be to work towards recognition of where the two churches can establish joint working parties rather than two separate ones.

40 It is clear from the comments received that the majority of respondents feel that the two churches could and should work more closely together in areas such as study, prayer, social and fundraising activities. Where people have worked together with those from the 'other' church, as when stewarding Livearts events, for example, loose acquaintance has turned to friendship.

41 The need for a joint mission statement was recognised by a number of people from both congregations - as a commitment, pointing the way forward.

42 With regard to the most difficult area to work together, worship, the recommendation is to respect each other's forms of worship and be prepared to share. One suggestion was to plan and hold a joint service once a month. The panel felt this was not for it to recommend. Any joint worship pattern needs to be worked out. In discussions about the form of joint service, the conversations about URC identity and Anglican identity will come about. It will at times be painful. **The panel agreed that it should**

recommend setting up a working party to look at the pattern of joint worship. Possibly such a working party might elicit a greater response than the joint review survey, as it would be more tightly focused.

43 One suggestion was that we would perhaps be doing a better job if we were seen to be managing all the youth work jointly. This would not mean changing the current range of provision, but would entail someone having an overview and the establishment of some links between the leaders.

44 Similarly, the opportunities for working together on music, successfully explored in the two very successful joint services held in 2004 ('Jesus this is your life' and 'Christingle') could be further developed.

45 Whilst investigating possible patterns of worship and exploring ways of studying, praying, sharing in supporting causes and fundraising together, some structures for praying together need to be introduced as soon as possible. As one reviewer put it, 'the very least clergy teams should do is pray together; this is the very least the congregations should do'.

Sunday Worship

46 Experiences of attending Sunday worship with the 'other' congregation varied. The URC panel members stressed the similarities they found in the Anglican worship. They didn't feel out of place. The main difference was the form of communion, the single cup and going to the altar. They also felt that 'Anglicans stand up more!'

47 The Anglican panel members attended a URC service that turned out to be quite different from the URC norm, including a quite demanding congregational meeting that considered several difficult issues. Their experience of attending other URC services also left them focusing on differences rather than similarities. They missed the known liturgical pattern and felt that services were very reliant on the minister, with the congregation dependent rather than participative. While they preferred the Anglican form of communion, they found positives in the URC rite, with everyone consuming bread and wine in a shared act of remembrance. (It should be noted that the URC minister found the comment about reliance on the minister strange, as the Anglican focus on the 'Priest' entails as significant a reliance as any part played by a URC minister.)

48 Some of the most cogent written comments received stressed the individuality of worship patterns and the importance of retaining these. Such comments were mainly from Anglicans, who wrestle with the need to show Christian love through a sense of unity, but hold dear the experience of communion with God that their form of worship brings. Perhaps the following quotation from one of them puts it best:

'How do we love one another? How do we acknowledge that we worship the same Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer? Does it mean that we have to abandon our differences and share everything or can we be one in love and yet separate? For me it is important to acknowledge and welcome diversity. People are diverse, thank God; we are different to look at and we are different in the way we think and we are different in our emotional responses. But we are all created in the image of God and we are all acceptable to God.'

49 Worship is perhaps the most important area in which to plan together, but it is clear that 'unity in diversity' needs to be a key concept in planning. Both congregations have positive and negative experiences of sharing in joint services.

50 The URC congregational survey produced an even spread of responses, from which one conclusion was that the majority of people aren't against change. The URC review team members felt strongly that the only way to go forward in the present building is to get closer together in worship – notwithstanding the problems that will arise. *'The more often we meet in an organised way the better.....We'll begin to understand why people take a strong stand on specifics.....All the hard work on fundraising etc is very good, but these are fringe activities.....The main thing is worshipping together.....Stop thinking of them and us'*.

51 Among the most positive experiences of worshipping together were those where joint planning by members of the congregation, working together with the clergy, have created individual forms of worship

that have been meaningful to all who attended, from any tradition. A prime example would be the 'Jesus, this is your life' service held on Palm Sunday 2004. Another successful joint service, led by the URC, but involving Anglicans during the planning stage, was the Christingle service in December 2004.

52 Negative experiences include the August 10am shared services following alternate URC and Anglican communion rites. These may be a sensible approach for the main holiday month, but have unfortunately tended to come across as an arrangement planned solely for expediency, resulting in members of the 'other church' not attending when it's not 'their week'. Another unfortunately negative joint worship experience was on Christmas Morning 2004, where insufficient joint planning resulted in an unacceptably long service for families. A further negative experience for some URC members and their minister is the apparent exclusivity of some Anglican services, for example 'Midnight Mass' on Christmas Eve, which has apparently been ruled out as an opportunity for joint worship.

53 Other than the August arrangements, the thrice yearly combined Anglican/Methodist/URC services and the Christmas morning service, there has been no joint worship other than the occasional special festival. It appears that there is no group with a brief to look at issues such as this. The initiative appears to be left to the clergy, with the Elders and PCC agreeing or disagreeing with clergy proposals. This appears a weakness in the current joint management structure. The review panel recommends that the two churches set up a joint working group to look at patterns of worship, to discover what it is that defines our identities and how we can take that into account in planning joint and separate worship patterns. The group might ask: 'What defines our congregations? If we had to have one service, what is it that defines the URC/Anglican ways of worship? What is it that is important? What if we tried using one service? How acceptable would that be?'

54 Everyone in both churches is aware of the stressful nature of the Sunday morning changeover. This was crystallised for one of our external reviewers when arriving by car and unable to park! The 9.30am Anglican Eucharist continues to finish at nearer 10.45 than 10.30am. The Anglicans have been aware for some time that the URC congregation is beginning to assemble at the West Door by 10.40, yet seem unable to complete the service within the allotted hour or so. What is the reason for this? Is it a lack of concern or effort on the part of the Anglican congregation? Is it impossible to conduct a Common Worship Parish Communion within the allotted time? Whatever it is, it must be addressed.

55 If both congregations continue to meet separately, there has to be a longer period for changeover. Our suggestion is that CoE starts at 9.15am and URC at 11.15am. This gives an additional half-hour interval. If such time changes are not acceptable, the Anglicans must find a way of trimming the length of their service. Each congregation needs peace to begin and end, rather than a sense of rush and bustle, as if the first shift is finishing and the next shift starting with no time to lose.

Pastoral Care

56 The Anglican representatives on the panel were impressed by the level of pastoral concern shared by the whole URC congregation and by the sense of everyone knowing each other and working together well, apparent at the Elders' Meeting attended. The panel discussed how such elements as 'family news' and liturgy can go together, whatever size the church. 'News' keeps everyone in touch. The panel noted that the PCC gave time to discussing pastoral issues, but the Anglican members felt that the URC's structure for pastoral work was a clear strength, whereas the Anglican congregation has grappled with structures for some years without developing a successful strategy. There may be lessons to learn from each of us working together in this field.

Finance

57 The sharing document vests responsibility for decisions on raising common funds and deciding on appropriate proportions of giving through each church. It is self-evident that the financial situation needs tight control and regular review.

58 The success of the fundraising process and the refurbishment of the church are a testament to the effort and energy expended by the JCC and all involved in the fundraising strategies.

59 Structures are in place to ensure that a budget is set and monitored. During the review, meetings of both churches raised concerns about their financial situations. While each church clearly needs to run its

own finances, the future of the two churches is so closely intertwined that closer liaison among those working on finance and presenting the position to the appropriate committees and congregations can only be of benefit.

60 The original sharing agreement states the principle of both churches being equally responsible for meeting the cost of management, but is clear that the proportion in which they are responsible for cost need not necessarily be the same. The current position is one of parity. This has been reached following a gradual development from varying proportions. The common costs of management are detailed in the agreement. Following completion of the internal refurbishment and external building works associated with the highly successful Appeal of the late 1990s, a few final details remain to be clarified before the exact financial position becomes clear. Further maintenance costs are already surfacing and all parties involved in co-ordinating, setting and managing the various budgets need to share a common overview of the whole financial picture. The Anglicans with responsibility for finance need to be appraised of the URC position and vice versa. Those with responsibility for finance in the JCC need to be aware of both church situations and to share the joint overview with the separate URC and Anglican finance groups.

Ecumenical Work

61 Both URC and Anglican churches are members of 'Banbury Christians Together'. They also share in an informal town centre agreement with Marlborough Road Methodist Church. The strength of ecumenical links appears to depend currently too much on the clergy. Both the shared church situation and the informal town centre agreement appear to give St Mary's congregations an opportunity to work effectively in a developing ecumenical setting. However, little responsibility in this area appears to have been delegated to the laity. During the review, at both Anglican and URC meetings, particular plans for the two individual churches took precedence over consideration of the wider Christian picture in the town. The pressing needs of the individual churches appeared to outweigh the need to work together. There is clearly scope for further thought and action in this field. The review panel suggests that the JCC should take the initiative in setting up a working group to look at closer co-operation on ecumenical initiatives.

62 Integral to this is the need for the two churches to define what makes them distinctive and to phrase that distinctiveness in such a way that they can proclaim a common mission. There is no defined difference between a shared church and a Local Ecumenical Project. One panellist expressed the view that 'it's about identities'. In a number of situations around the country sharing agreements have led to the setting up of an LEP, but this is an evolving thing. There is a range of types of sharing agreement and a similar range of types of LEP. The way that some sharing agreements function results in closer working together than in some LEPs.

Inter-Faith Activities

63 Both churches are members of the Banbury Religious Education Centre, which is currently the main vehicle promoting inter-faith dialogue in the town. The Anglican congregation has strong representation here, but the URC has not been so closely involved. This is perhaps another area where the two churches might develop a more united approach.

SECTION 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

64 Within the above findings are a number of areas that should rightly be acclaimed as huge successes. The sheer range of activities in which the two churches are involved, as a direct result of the successful work by clergy and laity, with huge support from the Appeal Committee, over the past twelve years is impressive. The energy and time given by those involved in managing the various aspects of life and work at St Mary's must be recognised. It is in the light of this recognition of a highly successful sharing agreement that the review panel has selected a few areas as priorities for action. The points listed are seen as the most helpful points for focus. Amidst the findings are a number of other comments that may give pointers for the future.

65 Amid the comments made in the report, stemming from the evidence gathered, there is only one notable criticism. The two churches have failed to address the problems created by the timing of their current main Sunday services. This appears to be the only bone of contention and needs urgent attention. All other recommendations stem from the considered view of the whole panel and represent a general consensus coming across from the views gathered.

66 The recommendations are not directions. They are offered as helpful pointers. It is not for the panel to direct. It is for the JCC, Elders and PCC to digest the findings, agree the priorities, and then to set time scales for action from the recommendations given.

67 The main recommendations to the JCC, PCC and Elders are that they:

- Work towards a Joint Mission Statement
- Set up an interim Joint Working Group to look at ‘the life and work of the churches’ and current working group structures (with a view to setting up joint working groups where practical) – in particular review patterns of joint/separate worship and explore opportunities for joint study, prayer and social action
- Set up a working group to implement the St Mary’s joint mission statement by promoting further ecumenical sharing in Banbury
- Set up a six-monthly joint JCC/PCC/Elders Meeting
- Add Standing Orders to the Sharing Agreement²
- Address the current unacceptable situation with regard to the timing of Sunday morning services

² The wording of the Sharing Agreement should stand. However, two points in Schedule 2 and the lack of reference to/guidance for involving the ‘other’ congregation’ in the process for appointing a new Vicar or Minister need attention. The meeting felt it would be worth Chairs of PCC & Elders highlighting these points in agendas for their meetings in order that the JCC could set up standing orders dealing with them. The two areas in Schedule 2 that need clarification are: Item 3(a) on URC clergy representation and Item 8 – on the Chair’s casting vote. We suggest that the phrase ‘These standing orders may be changed by 75% majority vote of the current JCC’ is inserted.

SUMMARY REPORT

FINDINGS

(i) **The review finds that within the terms of the original sharing agreement the JCC is functioning very effectively. It is clearly an efficient and hardworking committee. It functions very well through alternate chairing and finds fair ways of addressing issues raised by each congregation. The external reviewers were highly impressed by the sheer amount going on and by a sense of purpose apparent at all meetings attended.**

(ii) Positives that have stemmed directly from the agreement include:

- The resurrection of two previously dying churches
- The whole refurbishment programme at St Mary's
- The fact that St Mary's Church still exists as a place of worship
- The introduction of a highly attractive cultural venue in the centre of Banbury
- The establishment of an extremely successful, close-knit committee from two previously separate churches that works for the benefit of both congregations
- The joint running of LiveArts, the Church Shop and the Midweek Stewards Rota
- Some exciting joint festival services

(iii) The Joint Church Council, Elders, Parochial Church Council and both congregations will need to look at what St Mary's is and how it is seen in the context of Banbury. The role definition of clergy is important. Are the churches using the clergy to the best of their ability? To what extent can roles be shared to focus on particular ministries? Are morning and evening services organised in the most helpful, effective and creative ways? There is currently no group set up to consider such questions as these. **'Two families in one house is what it feels like. This is a positive image – there's no sense of two families being in one family's house.'** One aim should be to work towards recognition of where the two churches can establish joint working parties rather than two separate ones. It is clear from the comments received that the majority of respondents feel that the two churches could and should work more closely together in areas such as study, prayer, social and fundraising activities. The need for a joint mission statement was recognised by a number of people from both congregations.

(iv) With regard to the most difficult area to work together, worship, the recommendation is to respect each other's forms of worship and be prepared to share. **The panel agreed that it should recommend setting up a working party to look at the pattern of joint worship.** Whilst investigating possible patterns of worship and exploring ways of studying, praying, sharing in supporting causes and fundraising together, some structures for praying together need to be introduced as soon as possible. As one reviewer put it, 'the very least clergy teams should do is pray together; this is the very least the congregations should do'.

(v) **Some of the most cogent written comments received stressed the individuality of worship patterns and the importance of retaining these.** Such comments were mainly from Anglicans, who wrestle with the need to show Christian love through a sense of unity, but hold dear the experience of communion with God that their form of worship brings. Worship is perhaps the most important area in which to plan together, but it is clear that 'unity in diversity' needs to be a key concept in planning. Both congregations have positive and negative experiences of sharing in joint services.

(vi) One conclusion from the URC congregational survey was that the majority of people aren't against change. Among the most positive experiences of joint worship are those where joint planning by members of the congregation, working together with the clergy, have created individual forms of worship that have

been meaningful to all. Negative experiences include the August 10am shared services following alternate URC and Anglican communion rites. These may be a sensible approach for the main holiday month, but have unfortunately tended to come across as an arrangement planned solely for expediency, resulting in members of the 'other church' not attending when it's not 'their week'. **It appears that there is no group with a brief to look at joint worship. Initiative appears to be left to the clergy. This appears a weakness in the current joint management structure. The review panel recommends that the two churches set up a joint working group to look at patterns of worship, to discover what it is that defines our identities and how we can take that into account in planning joint and separate worship patterns. Everyone in both churches is aware of the stressful nature of the Sunday morning changeover. If both congregations continue to meet separately, there has to be a longer period for changeover.**

(vii) The Anglican representatives on the panel were impressed by the level of pastoral concern shared by whole URC congregation. There may be lessons to learn from working together in this field.

(viii) The success of the fundraising process and the refurbishment of the church are a testament to the effort and energy expended by the JCC and all involved in the fundraising strategies. Further maintenance costs are already surfacing and all parties involved in co-ordinating, setting and managing the various budgets need to share a common overview of the whole financial picture. The Anglicans with responsibility for finance need to be appraised of the URC position and vice versa. Those with responsibility for JCC finance need to be aware of both church situations and to share the joint overview with the separate URC and Anglican finance groups.

(ix) The strength of ecumenical links appears to depend currently too much on the clergy. Both the shared church situation and the informal town centre agreement with the Methodist Church appear to give St Mary's congregations an opportunity to work effectively in a developing ecumenical setting. Little responsibility in this area appears to have been delegated to the laity. The two churches need to define what makes them distinctive and in what ways they can proclaim a common mission. The two churches might also develop a more united approach to inter-faith activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(x) In the light of the panel's recognition of a highly successful outworking of the sharing agreement over the past twelve years, it has selected a few areas as priorities for action. The points listed are seen as the most helpful points for focus. Amidst the findings are a number of other comments that may give pointers for the future. The main recommendations are:

- **Work towards a Joint Mission Statement**
- **Set up interim Joint Working Group to look at 'the life and work of the churches' and current working group structures (with a view to setting up joint working groups where practical) – in particular review patterns of joint/separate worship and explore opportunities for joint study, prayer and social action**
- **Set up a working group to implement the St Mary's joint mission statement by promoting further ecumenical sharing in Banbury**
- **Set up six-monthly joint JCC/PCC/Elders Meeting**
- **Add Standing Orders to the Sharing Agreement (see full report for details)**
- **Address the current unacceptable situation with regard to the timing of Sunday morning services**