

NCD Survey, April 2023 – Implications

Arden Marches Benefice – Studley, Mappleborough Green, Oldberrow & Morton Bagot

We know that it has been a profoundly challenging time since the previous NCD surveys in the Benefice in 2019. Across the Dioceseⁱ church attendance is similar to other Dioceses, seeing a drop from 2019 to 27% in 2020, 60% in 2021 and still at 82% of 2019 levels in 2022. Alcester Deanery saw somewhat greater drops in 2020 (22%) and 2021 (47%), before climbing above the Diocesan average to 87% in 2022. But whereas smaller churches like Oldberrow & Morton Bagot have reached 100% (compared to 2019) and some across the Diocese even higher in 2022, larger congregations have struggled more, with Studley showed a significantly bigger initial drop to 8% in 2020, then 31% and 69% in 2021 and 2022.

Arguably, given this context, it has been courageous to do a survey in the Spring of 2023 and I think the benefits may actually be considerable if the findings are handled with wisdom and patience.

Studley shows that of the 8EQs *Inspiring Worship Services* (31.2, cf. 44.2 in 2019) is still its lowest score, or Minimum Factor. This includes response to sermons, and enjoyment of worship. The average across all the 8EQsⁱⁱ is 40.8 (cf. 50.8 in 2019). *Needs-Oriented Evangelism* is the highest, the Maximum, at 44.8, which is still below average; and includes a desire to pray for friends.

Mappleborough Green – the Minimum Factor, as in its previous three BCD surveys, is *Passionate Spirituality* (37.6). The weakest aspect of this (scores as low as 21) seems to be the enjoyment and practice of bible reading. The average across all the 8EQs is 51.1 (cf. 60.0 in 2019). The Maximum is *Gift Based Ministry* (a creditable 68.4), with people feeling their gifts are valued and can be used.

Oldberrow & Morton Bagot – the Minimum Factor is *Needs Oriented Evangelism* (38.7), while its Maximum, as in 2019 is *Loving Relationships* (59.5). The average across all the 8EQs is 49.6 (cf. 50.9 in 2019).

Effective Structures, is a lower score across the Benefice (36 at Studley; 45 at Mappleborough Green; 42 at Oldberrow and Morton Bagot. We think this may benefit from a closer look, too.

There are many other metrics within the NCD survey results specific to the individual and combined parishes. Broadly speaking the Benefice is encouraged by the NCD advice to ‘*Open the Front Door*’ (to increase the possibility of newcomers joining) and also ‘*Breathe In*’ in terms of drawing closer to God in worship, prayer and bible study.

The **NCD Story Guides** (one of 4 types of report for each Parish) map out some really interesting comparisons between the three surveys.

Growing churches, I have found, typically rank very highly on Affirmation and Releasing. This is true of Oldberrow & Morton Bagot (the potential is already there); but there are lower rankings on Releasing for both Studley and Mappleborough Green. The latter ranks Affirmation at #1, which is very encouraging, but for Studley this is only mid-ranked.

Prayer and self-awareness come more naturally at Studley and Mappleborough Green, but are much lower at Oldberrow and Morton Bagot. **Welcoming and inspiration** is more natural at Oldberrow and Morton Bagot, but less so in the other two churches based on the survey responses, with inspiration, in particular among the least natural aspects of church life relative to other things.

Our inclination is to make the central findings in this summary the basis for conversations and activities on 10th June, as followed

- **Sermon style, creativity in worship and ways of learning together, specific to Studley**
- **Finding greater value in the bible, and reimagining leadership patterns, focus for Mappleborough Green**
- **Refreshing community links and using gifts (within and beyond the church) in outreach, at Oldberrow and Morton Bagot**

And across the Benefice as a whole, developing fresh ideas for Invitation and Welcome, understanding what Affirmation and Releasing (offering churches greater potential to grow) might look like, and (perhaps above all) some fresh Inspiration to aid the journey beyond the impact of the pandemic. And so, it is hoped that we might discover together some new ways to help the churches in the Benefice flourish.

ⁱ Attendance at services across October 2022 (including school services)

ⁱⁱ The NCD movement considers 50 to be ‘average’, and I argue that 65-70 average can be associated with churches that are growing numerically.