

‘Big’ and ‘Little’ – a timely partnership...

When a little parish on the fringe of the big city needed to jump into deep waters in order to reach the shoreline of progress, little did it foresee the bigness of the challenge, nor the bigness of the ensuing blessings. Holy Nativity, Chapel House, in Outer West Newcastle, is ecclesial small fry with a big heart. It wanted to make a difference, it needed to regenerate, it had the needs, the people and the passion but too small an income to buy a boat.

“Let’s apply to the lottery”, they all cried... and a small group was commissioned to get on with it.

What was the big hope? To regenerate our much loved community centred church to become a more versatile, welcoming and sustainable resource for the next 30 years. Adequate support facilities (a telephone would be a good start!) are needed and meeting rooms to accommodate community groups for social, recreational, educational and spiritual activities.

We knew the issues facing older people and carers. We knew the need for facilities to support those unable to drive or travel far from home – even the bus trip to town an exceptionally rare treat for many. We knew the church was potentially a great resource for many people and activities. The question was – how to enable it to happen?

The faithful old church hall was past redemption and sitting on land which the local doctors desperately needed for surgery space to save them moving out of the community. We introduced ourselves to the Primary Care Trust and catalysed a steady reaction amongst community groups that led eventually to a big brave Integrated Health and Community Project.

Unexpected people turned up out of the blue to facilitate each step. A visitor came to a TRIO service. She worked for a developer. The doctors were looking for a developer. The developer (Ashley House plc) joined the big swim. A big time carer joined the congregation. She introduced us to Dementia Care Partnership. The meeting seeded an operational partnership. The church has sold some land for DCP to build a day care unit. DCP and Holy Nativity intend to share facilities and work together to meet some community needs.

Lottery application guidelines – a total of 94 pages of very little print – are enough to make the boldest of venturers give up the will to live. In comes Alnmouth Friary – a sanctuary of peace and stillness - where the documents were first read, absorbed and a primordial business plan took shape, blessed by the faithful presence of the brothers who ministered to the anxious scribes. This was early in 2006, when Holy Nativity ‘Outside In’ Community Project was launched. Even then, little did the steering group know of the immense efforts ahead.

While we tackled the two stage lottery application process, doggedly unravelling audits, spread sheets, gantt charts, and all manner of new competencies (like e-mails and power points), we sought help from anyone who would stand still long enough to listen. We cannot possibly offer enough thanks to the many people locally and regionally who have helped us in our journey. Angels of all dimensions and traditions blessed us with advice, practical help and funding, including the local primary schools, ward councillors and committees, other faith communities, our patrons and partners, and the diocesan archangel of community action, PICA (Partners In Community Action). In a ‘whisper which roars’ PICA is supporting this parish vision with a generous grant.

The ‘Outside In’ Community Project has grown out of the experiences of people in Chapel House, who know the challenges and pain of loss, bereavement, guilt, fear, and care-giving. They have felt the healing grace of God received through others, helping them to shape new ways of living and they have experienced how difficulties can present new opportunities. Through ‘Outside In’, they

hope to assist local people to work together creatively and inclusively, to value one another, to value the world and its resources, to find meaning in our experiences, to respect and understand the experiences of others, to encourage one another and so to shape our community life.

News of a Big Lottery development grant came in January 2008, along with an invitation to apply for a capital grant. This was a Big encouragement! Local partnerships developed in the shaping of the project, and friendships grew along with the corporate will to make things happen. Some other trusts generously supported us including the Co-operative Fund, Church and Community Fund, Winchester Diocese, Hedley Denton Trust and Sherburn Trust. Big setbacks have also happened, many times, but always something came in their wake to spur us on.

Then came the news that Holy Nativity 'Outside In' Community Project was to receive a maximum capital grant of £500,000. And so it came to pass that 'Big' and 'Little' became partners in a big project. We still have a way to go in order to claim this grant – we need to raise about £80,000 in the next 6 months, so our work is cut out, but our hopes are greatly encouraged. If anyone reading this is looking for a good cause, please call.

Throughout the challenging lottery application process, 'Little' received exemplary guidance and friendly support from 'Big' and we would like to thank them for their help and for the many new skills the process has taught us. Do we deserve it? Probably no more than many unsuccessful applicants, but we humbly ask your prayers that we may justify Big and PICA's decision to support this little project, in the midst of the current recession, to become a 'whisper that roars'.

Article in 'The Link' :
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Anne Marr, Holy Nativity, Chapel House



A hopeful congregation blesses the stage 2 application!
Holy Nativity August 2008