

**Diocese of Southwark**  
**Croydon Episcopal Area**  
**CROYDON, St Matthew**

**Episcopal Visit, Monday 14 March 2005**

**Programme**

The visit was based around the following programme:

- 09.30 Visit Park Hill Junior School (tour and lead assembly)
- 10.30 Visit Park Hill Infants School
- 11.00 Visit Arthur Court (with Vicar & SPA)
- 11.45 Tour of church building
- 12.30 Lunch with guests (Lady Chapel)
- 1400 Visit Ethel
- 14.30 Ministerial Review (The Revd Penny Brown)
- 16.00 Open House (tea and talk in the Vestry – all invited)
- 1730 Tea with church officers and others (chez Carolyn Tweed)
- 18.30 Rainbow Guides
- 19.00 Brownies
- 19.30 Eucharist (Lady Chapel – Bishop to preside)
- 20.00 PCC Meeting
- 2145 Depart

**Preamble**

I am grateful to Penny Brown for arranging a stimulating, full and enjoyable day visit. Having lived in the parish for almost two years and seeing St Matthews as our home' church, it was good now to take a deeper look at the life of the church and its ministry in the Park Hill area. I am grateful to the very many people who gave me of their time and provided generous hospitality throughout the day.

This parish has had an interesting recent history, but now enjoys genuine stability. The leadership provided by the Vicar has been important in establishing this and she has also opened up new directions in which the parish has been able to develop. There is excellent lay leadership and people are clearly having their 'ministry/witness' endorsed at the same time as vocations to particular ministry (NSM, OLM, Reader, SPA) have been encouraged and nurtured.

St Matthew's is a very human and unfussy church with a clear vision for mission in the parish. Park Hill contains one shop, one church, no pub, three schools and lots of housing. The Vicar is a governor of and serves as Chaplain to Archbishop Tenison's School – a ministry that is greatly respected and extremely important both for staff and students. The church is welcoming and genuinely open to newcomers. It is doing the job' of a local parish church and I came away from my visit very encouraged by what I saw, by the people I met, and by the warmth of the welcome.

**Observations**

It is impossible to record all my impressions and observations, but several matters were identified at the PCC Meeting in the evening. In small groups the PCC identified the main priorities for the church in the next three to five years. There was great unanimity in what emerged: (a) the need to grow numerically and in depth; (b) the need to reach out effectively into the parish, seeing the church as the centre of community life in Park Hill; (c) improve welcome and assimilation of newcomers — and all this might require a review of the church's mission statement.

I had already identified from what I had read, heard and observed three priorities and these coincided exactly with those identified above. I called them: (a) discipleship growth; (b) community building; (c) leadership development. I will take each in turn;

- **Discipleship growth** Long-standing members of the church as well as new Christians need to be nurtured and taught. A real need in many churches now is for Christians to read and understand the Bible. This requires considerable thought being given to how the Bible is handled in worship and studied outside of church services. Thought needs to be given today to the telling of the 'big picture' of Christian teaching and the Christian Story', with a range of approaches being offered to different sorts of people (at different times of life). This is particularly important when we consider how we draw people not only into the life of the church community, but also how we grow them in the faith. The Alpha Course is not for everyone, but it is an example of how the Christian faith can be presented in an unthreatening way to new people – but there are lots of examples of creative ways of growing different approaches in different contexts.
- **Community building** The church is the only community building in the parish and, therefore, offers a unique place for the building of community in the area. Particular concern was expressed for the lonely and isolated people, but attention might also be given to how people might be met/addressed in their strength, not just in their weakness. However, resources are limited and the PCC will need to prioritise its work, doing a few things well rather than a lot of things 'thinly'. In an age when people do not see the church as a place where their spiritual needs might be met, this whole agenda is also important for community building: if the church does not tell the Christian Story and articulate its spirituality (as well as live it out), no one else will. The challenge is how to deepen spirituality and discipleship at the same time as reaching out in service of the local community.
- **Leadership development** Effective and sustained ministry and mission require good leaders. The identification of leaders and ministers is vital and this is an area in which the Area Mission Team should be able to help in the future. The appointment of an Adviser in Leadership Development & Evangelism will be a resource for parishes and clergy in developing better understanding of leadership models required in churches and for developing lay leadership in various areas of parish life. Good leadership enables people to explore their faith, explore their gifts and explore mission in such a way as to minimise the fear of failure and enhance the excitement about potential growth.
- **Strategic development** The temptation for any creative group of people (such as this PCC) is to grasp a variety of possibilities or enthusiasms in a way which becomes either incoherent or exhausting. The priority for the PCC must surely be to continue its excellent work (already in process following the Parish Profile work) by establishing (a) *what* its mission priorities will be and *why*, (b) *how* these are to be addressed and implemented, and (c) *by whom*, *by when* and *by what process* this will be implemented, resourced and monitored.

## Questions

1. What does the PCC consider to be the key ingredients to growth in number and depth (discipleship, theological/biblical understanding)? What are the simplest mechanisms to help toward these goals (development of small groups, for example)?

2. How can the PCC develop a strategy for outreach in Park Hill that builds on existing relationships, especially schools? How can the Parish Profile be best used to this end?
3. How can the PCC identify those whom God might be calling to leadership in the next few years? How will nascent leadership need to be nurtured and trained?
4. How can the church find a way of using its noticeboards and external premises to say something about what and whom the church is for?!

### **Concluding Remarks**

It is quite evident that this thinking is already happening and has been for some time. The PCC is already engaged in taking forward the matters arising from its Parish Profile exercise and this, in one sense, makes the observations and questions in this report somewhat redundant. However, the danger of 'incoherence' or overstretch is a real one that might be avoided by some clear strategic thinking and planning. It is vital that the Vicar is resourced in her ministry and that the whole load of leadership does not fall at her feet. The Vicars particular ministries of teaching and nurture should be encouraged and resourced in order that all people are better equipped to live Christian lives and exercise Christian ministry.

I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of this visit and came away feeling tired but refreshed. It was a privilege to be here and I am very pleased to be a parishioner as well as the Bishop! The church can be assured of my continuing strong support and prayer.

The Rt Revd Nick Baines  
Bishop of Croydon