

Cover note to the report from the review team

Neil Townsend, 7th February 2009.

Above all, I want to thank the team who came, listened hard, and put the report together. I have found it a very helpful process already and I do believe that the report provides us with many important perspectives.

The report very much stands on its own and I want to invite each and every member of the church to read it, digest it, and feed back their perspectives and, indeed, prayerful thoughts on how it might be implemented.

The team's overall perspective on the church was very positive, as the first few paragraphs communicate. However, their job was to highlight how we might improve, so the report tends to focus on the areas that are most important to improve rather than the vast majority of things that they were very comfortable with. By the same token, some areas of church life aren't mentioned at all, because they weren't, in the review team's view, the key areas to address now.

Secondly, a couple of minor points are worth making, to clarify what some of the terms in the report mean:

- When the report talks of 'leaders', 'leadership', 'the core team' and so on, it is referring to the current 'eldership+' group: Townsends, Bruces, Horswells and Smiths.
- When it talks of inviting people to join a new team, that would mean either single people or married couples, not just one person from a married couple. I would particularly value your prayerful suggestions about who these people should be.

Other than that, please enjoy reading the report, I know I have! I look forward to talking through where we have got to in our response at the next family meeting, on the 12th of March.

God bless,



Report to the Elders of Wantage Community Church

We have very much enjoyed spending time over these last few days with members of the Church, getting to know people, and hearing people's stories and passions. You are an enormously blessed people, with huge resources of creativity, zeal for the Lord, and desire to see the Kingdom of God come to Wantage, Grove and the surrounding villages. Your welcome has been very warm, and people have been very honest.

We are extremely impressed with people's engagement with the Lord, with the church, and with non-christian friends. In our view, this highly committed group of about 50 adults and 30 young people are punching well above their weight, and have the potential to see huge blessing and life from God flow into these communities.

Neil and D have clearly won the hearts of leaders and people alike, and are greatly respected. They have led by example, making friends inside and outside the church, and leading with clarity, purpose and warmth. Equally, their fellow-leaders are extremely diligent and faithful, and respected for their care and hard work.

On the whole, we have only heard people talk with respect and appreciation of leaders. There have been no personal "agendas", and no negatives tinged with bitterness. There is a remarkable degree of harmony, and good will.

We see a church poised for significant growth in size and influence. We sense that the current leadership shape won't enable you to achieve this growth. Equally, we sense some issues which, if not addressed, could cause problems at a later date. We believe that clear and positive action, at this point in time, could really see the church grow healthily to the next phase, through new birth and expressing Christ's care in the community.

We want simply to express some pointers to you, the core team, and not try to give you all the answers. Our major pointers come in the realm of leadership focus and structures, but there are a number of other pointers we want to give as well.

1. Leadership

A number of comments have been expressed about leadership. Some may be more perceptions than truth, but it is worth being aware of them

- A bit "safe"
- New proposed structures too complicated?
- Leadership a bit of a "clique"
- A bit cerebral
- Too many meetings
- Insufficient communication

We want to suggest that you change the nature of the core team, so that it is less a team of “elders overseeing everything in the church”, but a team of team leaders, with elders embedded into it to influence it with their gifting, but allowing other giftings to be included. In our view, the current eldership is biased towards management and maintenance by temperament, personality and gifting (this is not wrong – we need management and maintenance!). We believe that it is vital to include within the main leadership team the following elements, to make the step change from a large family of 50 to a flourishing church twice that size :-

- Elders with wisdom and maturity
- One or two more evangelistic and prophetic ministries
- One or two younger leaders to be trained and developed
- A “communicator/administrator”

This would have the following benefits:-

- Broadening personality-types within leadership
- Bringing mission into the heart of the leadership, not just a separate team elsewhere
- Possibly bringing surrounding villages much more into the vision of the leadership team
- Developing an intergenerational approach to leadership
- Increasing prophetic and evangelistic creativity and risk-taking at leadership level
- Better connecting and affirming evangelistic enterprise and people-contact
- Reducing the need to meet quite so frequently as the current core team

We are suggesting that specific members of this team have areas of oversight – by preference, none, apart from Neil, should carry more than one main area of oversight – and be able to gather teams and encourage them

We believe that this will broaden, simplify and streamline your approach, and keep your vision focused on being a missional church, not just a management and maintenance church! We suggest it’s time for a breath of fresh air here!

2. Atmosphere and style of leadership

This hardly merits a separate heading, but we believe there needs to be not just a change of *structure* in how the team operates, but also in *atmosphere* of how the team operates.

We are suggesting that at the moment, the core team is seen as “positionally over” the whole church, making decisions and overseeing. This is definitely part of the eldership role. But “parenting” requires active “connection” and “relationship”. It cannot be done apart from encouraging your kids, talking with them, affirming them,

being with them in their activities, etc etc. We suggest you reflect on this together. Perhaps because of pressure, it is possible to end up having leadership meetings thinking about the fellowship, but not being actively amongst the people, seeing what they are doing, and encouraging and helping them in their spheres of involvement.

We are suggesting that you should cultivate a change of atmosphere whereby you are seeking to enable, encourage, provoke from an engagement alongside people, rather than an oversight “over” them.

(Before coming last Saturday, one of our team had a picture of a tin of sardines, all squashed together in a tin. It was time to open the tin, and take out the sardines. We were unclear whether that was about the whole church, but definitely suggest that it applies to the leaders! Time to let the air blow through, make some space between you for others, and be spread out in order to bring your nourishment to others etc.)

3. Building

We believe that it is time to start praying about a building, to release more ministry into the community, and to raise profile for you as a family of God’s people. It will obviously take time to clarify what you might want; and there will need to be envisioning along the way, and a generous timescale allowed to enable resources to be gathered.

4. Worship

We believe that, just as you need to “open up” the can of your leadership team, you need to “open up” the can of your worship. We suggest that it is good, solid, if a bit safe and predictable, and could limit the release of the gifting in many of God’s people. We suggest that you ensure regular “family” worship once a month, with adults and children all encouraged to participate wholeheartedly. We also suggest a monthly “youth worship band” to be developed. You may well trade excellence for involvement and creativity, but in our view this is a very worthwhile trade to make, in order, again, to release the whole body to full stature.

5. Communication

This is a vital area of church life, which is not satisfactory at the moment. We suggest that you consider whether someone should be released to take charge of this responsibility in many aspects. This needs to be someone with a commitment to serve Neil and D, with an ability to think strategically about how communication needs to be handled, and will need to be someone sitting with the leadership team, so that they understand the heart and vision of the team.

6. Mission

We have been delighted to discover how many people are engaged in mission locally. However, it is not clear what nations are being supported or prayed for, and even whether France is just Neil's "thing", or something the whole church needs to get hold of. We suggest the leaders bring some clarity in this arena!

7. Social / relational life

We had many comments that the social and relational life of the church is not really strong. This may be a surprise when you think you know one another well! But the feedback is that life is very meeting orientated, and not really encouraging of friendship and social activity. We are sure that much of this will naturally improve as there are fewer meetings, and more time becomes available!

8. Discipleship

We believe that the leaders need to consider aspects of discipleship further. During our interviews, we encountered a number of people who were not in any personal pastoring relationship. In addition, housegroups have been renamed D-groups, but just renaming them doesn't necessarily give them a new nature! We suspect that most of your groups are pastoral groups, not discipleship groups; pastoral groups may be good, but may not be effective as a medium for discipleship. More work to be done in due course here, we believe.

9. Timing, and review of the review

- We would be very happy to return as a review team in six months or so, just to see what progress has been made since the review. This will obviously help you in setting goals for implementing some of the recommendations! Indeed, we would be happy to return, individually or together, if there are further aspects that we can help you with.
- In implementing recommendations, especially regarding fresh people to be included in the leadership team, it might help you to put a time frame of review of new arrangements you put in place, in order to be able to continue to monitor how well things are going.

*Hazel Marchment, Rick and Liz Thomas, Steve Thomas, Dan Whitehead.
January 2009.*