

Growth Strategy for St Michael & All Angels, Bishopston

April 2008

At St Michael's, we have been seeking ways to enable our church to grow, and to reach out more effectively to the local community. Since we finished a major refurbishment of our church centre in 2001, we have found ourselves wondering "Where do we go from here?" With the help of congregational meetings and the guidance of a consultant, we came to a decision in autumn 2007 to focus our strategy for growth on three areas : **Children and Families** - to launch a new Sunday service specifically for young children and young families : **Coffee Shop** - to expand the role of our Saturday morning Coffee Shop : **Youth** - to build up our youth work with the large number of young people at St Michael's and throughout the parish.

Children and Families

As we do not currently have many young families and young children in our congregation, we felt we wanted to reach out to this part of the community, particularly to the parent/carer and toddler groups ('Piglets') meeting in the building three times a week and led by our church members. So it was decided to start an Early Bird Service once a month. This is aimed specifically at young families with children aged 0 to approximately 7 years old. It will be held on the first Sunday of every month, beginning in May, and will be a short half-hour service starting at 9am, an early start which we hope will meet the needs of lively early risers and their parents. We will have singing, crafts, prayers, stories and a 'birthday of the month' birthday cake. A small team of people have volunteered to run this service, and we are hoping that this will provide a real opportunity to draw parents and children into our church family, and later into our weekly services which provide special groups for children.

Coffee shop

The Saturday morning coffee shop at St Michael's opened nine years ago with the aim of providing a warm welcome, refreshment, friendship and a listening ear to the local community. In identifying coffee shop as a potential area for growth the congregation and council recognise the opportunity to build relationships with people from inside and outside church, and to raise the local profile of the church, church centre, and services and events within the parish. A working group has been meeting regularly to support the practical management and longer term planning for growth. A detailed strategy document has been drawn up covering the next five years, which looks to

- increase the number of visitors,
- introduce a mid-week opening linking to the Piglets toddler group,
- support “way-in” events which can provide an introduction to the Christian faith and to church fellowship.

Coffee shop aims to be a place where all visitors including the young and not so young, families, single people and those with specific needs feel comfortable. Recently the provision of play equipment in the front hall has resulted in an increase in the number of families with small children visiting. The forthcoming redecoration of the serving area will provide a more welcoming environment. Plans for coffee shop will need to be integrated with those for our family and children's work and involve groups such as Piglets, Wednesday Fellowship, and other hall users.

Youth work

Youth work has been designated as the third area of St Michael's growth strategy, and has indeed been identified as a key area for action in the parish strategy. An action plan has been developed to take this forward which aligns with the overall parish mission statement 'To share the Gospel in word and deed with each other and each person in the Parish of Bishopston and St. Andrew's'. The vision for the youth work is to 'Bring youth to a personal relationship with Christ and enable them to grow into maturity'. A three stepped approach to the strategy has been agreed - to consolidate the faith of the core youth group, to reach out to fringe of the present youth known to the churches, followed by growing the youth group beyond the present known youth.

St Michael's already has a team of committed youth leaders. As we move forward with the strategy it is important that more people come forward to give their time to the youth work and to build relationships with the youth, sharing experiences and helping them find and grow in their faith and in all aspects of their lives. Attendance at the Bristol youth forum has helped us establish a network with other youth workers and understand what material is available to guide us in the work. We are in the process of looking for a youth worker to help expand our youth activities. During the past year we have had a full programme of youth activities and have set up prayer times for the leaders to give our youth work to God to guide us and lead us in the work.

The future plans are to develop good relationships with the youth and put together a programme of activities to cover their spiritual, physical and social wellbeing. We aim to provide more for the 11-14 age range and material is being looked at to take this forward if leaders can be found. It would be good to identify strong youth in Christian maturity who can join in taking key leadership roles in the youth work. It is important that the congregations in the parish dedicate plenty of time to praying for this work, and that people dedicate quality time, for it to be fruitful into the future.

Update

April 2010

Children and Families The monthly Early Bird service has continued to flourish, so much so that it is now being held twice a month, from the beginning of 2010.

Coffee Shop St Michael's felt that it was the right course of action, at the end of 2009, to discontinue the Saturday morning Coffee Shop ; this was mainly due to low numbers and the need for more volunteers.

Youth Work September 2009 saw the appointment of a youthworker; we now have several thriving groups for young people including a new 6th form housegroup and the community-based Vibe youth group run in conjunction with other local churches, which has been successfully underway since September 2009.