

A Vision for Growth

PHIL GRIFFIN



Phil Griffin shares a plan to expand a rural Hampshire Circuit

In a Superintendents' meeting about a year ago, those present were invited to 'think creatively' about the boundaries of the circuits in my district. This was a euphemistic way of saying that there was a desire to halve the number of circuits. My own circuit is very small – only 5 churches at present, down from a peak of 12 in years gone by – and from a resource perspective, it would make some sense to throw in our lot with somewhere else. As a single minister appointment, there are also incentives for me to be part of a larger circuit. But as we were discussing it all, a thought crossed my mind: 'What if, instead of amalgamating our circuits, we believed that God might want them to grow?'

From that seed germinated two visions that I have put to my circuit. The first of these was a call to see an increase across the circuit of 100 regular worshippers. If those people chose to become members, that would be nice, but my first priority was getting more people into a relationship with God. In the year since I presented that vision, we have made a good dent in the target: at last count, we have around 40 new people attending worship, with some new growth in each of the churches. I am very happy with this progress (in truth, when I

gave the circuit the challenge, I would have been happy if 20 new people joined the churches!), so it came as something of a surprise to me when I had a second vision come to mind in the summer. More than simply enjoying growth in the current churches, suppose we broaden our vision and look to grow the number of churches?

And so, the new vision is for us to plant 3 new congregations in the Meon Valley area over the next 6 years. This may mean replanting churches in villages in which the circuit previously had a presence, or going somewhere new. I believe we ought to go where there is not currently any regular Christian worship taking place; but we are waiting on God to provide the exact locations in his time. If ecumenical partners want to join with us, so much the better – a personal mantra of mine is 'the Kingdom is bigger than the church' – but whether a Methodist venture or something broader, I am encouraging the circuit to look up and look out, and dare to believe that God might be on the move through us. We trust in the one 'who is able to do vastly more than all we can ask for or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us'.



REV PHIL GRIFFIN

Phil is Superintendent Minister of the Meon Valley Circuit. He is passionate about seeing how God is at work in rural communities.