



CHRISTIAN RESEARCH
Consultancy

ODS 14.2

LIVING FAITH



RESEARCH SUMMARY



DIOCESE OF OXFORD
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire



BACKGROUND

The Living faith initiative, launched in 2009, aims to bring Oxford diocese together under one vision, set of values, purpose and set of priorities. The five priorities of Living Faith are:

- **Sustaining the sacred centre**
- **Making disciples**
- **Making a difference in the world**
- **Creating vibrant Christian Community**
- **Shaping confident collaborative leadership.**

A wide variety of communications and resources have been developed by the diocese including course guides, leaflets, prayer guides, mission guidance and DVDs. Research was needed to help the diocese understand how effective the Living Faith initiative has been and provide guidance on further development.

RESEARCH METHOD

Three web-based surveys were conducted with the following groups:

1. Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers
2. PCC Secretaries/Church Wardens
3. Members of church congregations

The first two surveys were by email invite only, the third was an open invite to members of church congregations. The fieldwork took place June to August 2013

CLERGY/LLM SAMPLE

296 Clergy and LLMs completed the questionnaire, giving a 31% response rate. 64% were male and 36% female. 64% were aged 54 to 64. Around half served in rural locations. 56% had been in the current role for less than five years. 70% had more than one church in their parish or benefice. The breakdown by role was as follows:

- 33% Rector/Vicar
- 19% Curate in training
- 18% LLM
- 17% Associate clergy
- 6% Team vicar
- 4% Priest in charge

PCC SECRETARY/CHURCH WARDEN SAMPLE

383 completed the questionnaire, giving a 19% response rate. 68% were Church Wardens and 30% PCC Secretaries. 77% were aged over 54. 54% had been in their role for less than five years. Over 70% were based in rural areas.

CHURCH CONGREGATION SAMPLE

Only 106 church members responded to the survey. Due to the relatively low response, findings have only been analysed qualitatively, as the sample is not robust enough for a quantitative analysis.

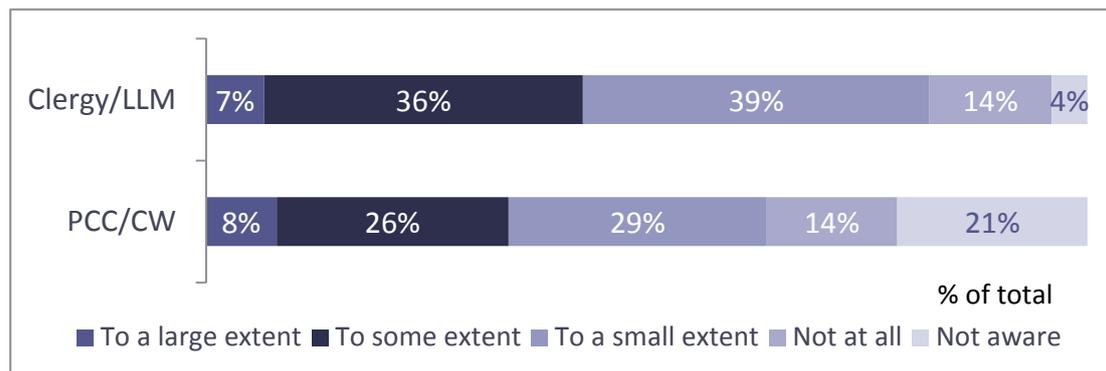


AWARENESS OF LIVING FAITH & LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Awareness of Living Faith was high with 95% of Clergy/LLMs and 76% of PCC/CWs aware.

Those aware of Living Faith were asked to what extent they had engaged with it. The majority had engaged to either 'some extent' or a 'small extent': 75% of clergy/LLMs and 55% of PCC/CWs.

EXTENT OF ENGAGEMENT



THOSE ENGAGING TO A LARGE EXTENT

7/8% of respondents claimed to have engaged 'to a large extent'. The clergy/LLMs more likely to engage to a large extent were female, catholic, liberal, aged over 45. In addition, PCC/CW respondents who were more likely to engage to a large extent were found in churches that were larger, growing, urban, liberal.

Those that had engaged to a 'large extent' commented that Living Faith had become integral to the vision, strategy or life of the church. Here are a few examples of what was written:

We have built it into our vision document, used the graphic in our branding, and run regular courses linked to its themes – Clergy/LLM

We have built our parish strategy (and now our Mission Action Plan) around it. We have used the 'living faith' phrase in parish communications: website, on sweatshirt, pewsheets etc. – Clergy/LLM

When we drew up a 5 year Vision Document (effectively a Mission Action Plan) in 2011 we used the headings and format of 'Living Faith' as our model. – Clergy/LLM

We are working through a five year plan based on Living Faith. The plan has been published by the PCCs of the two churches in the Benefice in a booklet entitled 'Living Faith 2011-2015' available to the congregation and generally... - PCC/CW

Everything that we do is reviewed in the context of the five strands of the Living Faith and these run through our future plans. - PCC/CW



THOSE NOT ENGAGING AT ALL

14% were aware of Living Faith but had not engaged with it at all. The clergy/LLMs less likely to engage were male, serving churches in cities/large towns, evangelical, aged under 45. There were a range of reasons for not engaging at all with Living Faith. One of the main issues was to do with the church being at a time of change. Other reasons included: Lack of relevance due to church being too small, elderly, rural, part of LEP, etc; Little awareness of Living Faith; Churches taking no action other than making literature available; Negative attitudes. Here are some examples.

Messy time in the Parish (involving a previous Vicar who didn't play nicely with others and pastoral reorganisation) which meant that they've just done what they could and not worried too much about the rest. – Clergy/LLM

It is far too Church of England focused. An increasing number in our church have had enough of the poor advice (or total lack of it) received from the diocese so they won't engage with something which feels as though it has been dictated to us from on high. – Clergy/LLM

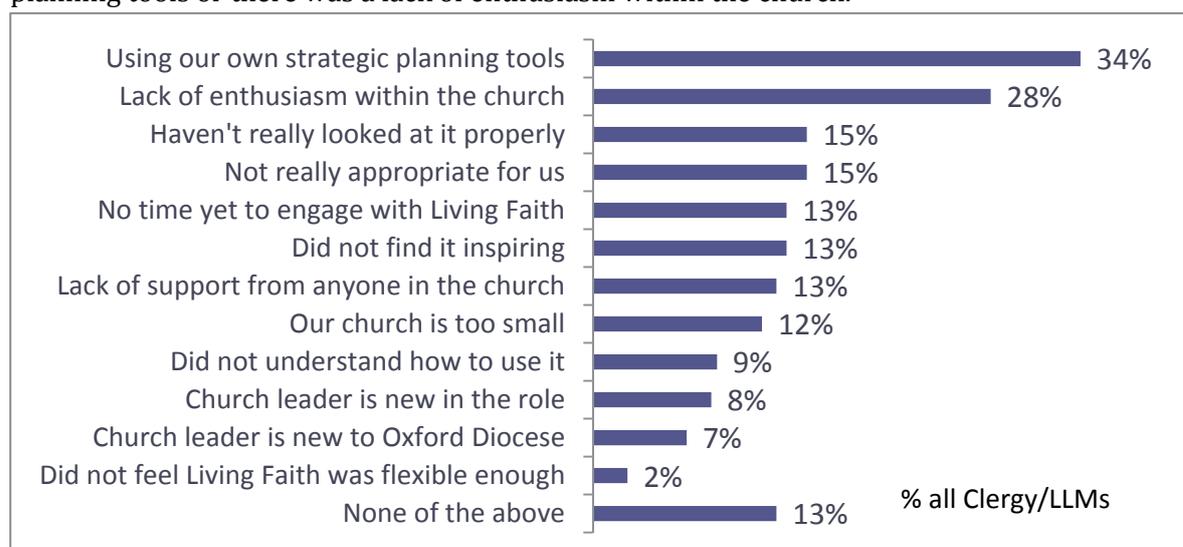
We have a very small congregation who live in a widely spread area. – PCC/CW

Only heard about it about six weeks ago at Church Warden's visitation evening – PCC/CW

We make leaflets available, but very few are taken, but do not refer to or use the framework – Clergy/LLM

WHAT HINDERED ENGAGEMENT WITH LIVING FAITH

Clergy/LLMs were shown a list and asked if anything on the list hindered engagement with Living Faith. This highlighted two major issues: either they were using their own strategic planning tools or there was a lack of enthusiasm within the church.





Those that used their own strategic planning tools were more likely to be under 45, male, serving in a church that was evangelical, charismatic, in a city or town. Those that cited a lack of enthusiasm within the church tended to be rural, catholic, liberal, aged 55 or over.

Clergy/LLMs were also given space to write about what else hindered engagement. Amongst other things, they mentioned: lack of time, context (e.g. small, rural, elderly, LEP), the fact that it was a diocesan initiative, and apathy.

Here are some examples of what was written.

Always the sense that life is quite busy without having to engage further unless required to do so. – Clergy/LLM

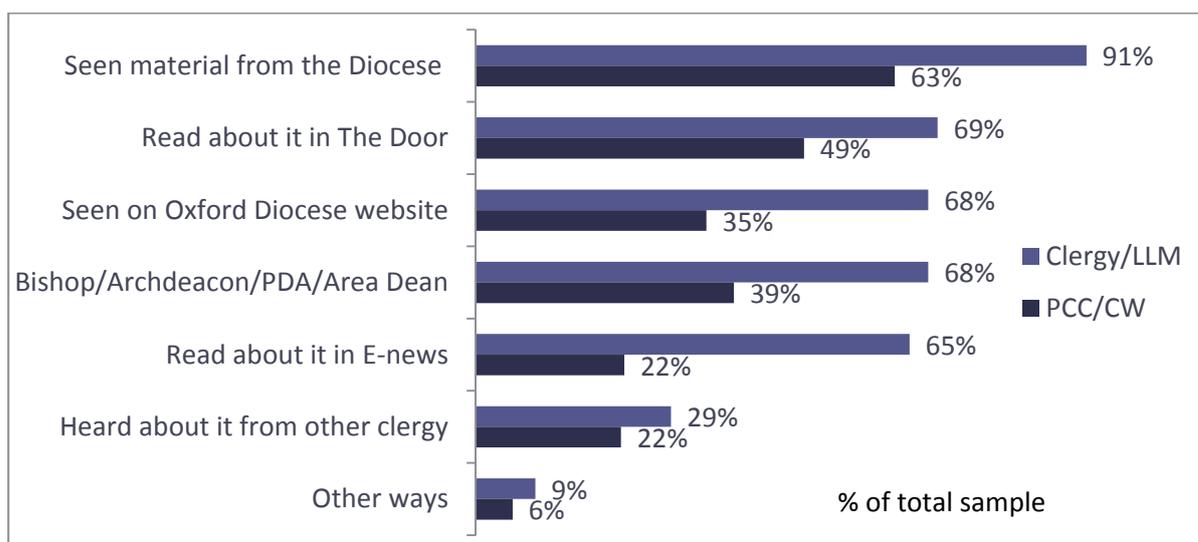
Does not seem to be particularly helpful or relevant to rural churches.

Some saw it as yet 'another' thing to do which was imposed from the Diocese. oxford is quite a distance away from my parishes and some people find it difficult to relate to initiatives coming from Oxford. – Clergy/LLM

I could be wrong, but feel as if the real issue was time. Our parish, and most that I know of, have other emphases throughout a given year to which time must also be given. It might have also help to have had a longer run up to the beginning of Living Faith. – Clergy/LLM

LIVING FAITH: SOURCE OF AWARENESS

Respondents were prompted with a list and asked how they had heard about Living Faith.



The primary source of awareness was the material from the diocese. For clergy/LLMs there were also four equally important secondary sources: The Door, diocese website, senior



clergy, e-news. For PCC/CWs the main secondary source was The Door, which was a source of awareness for 57% of PCC secretaries.

The Door was more effective at reaching clergy/LLMs in rural churches. In rural areas PCC/CWs were less likely to find out about Living Faith through any of the communication channels.

LIVING FAITH: WHAT IS TOP OF MIND

Respondents were asked what was most top of mind for them regarding Living Faith. The responses from clergy/LLMs were generally very positive with these aspects being mentioned most often:

- Communications material, particularly the palette of colours, the logo/diagram and leaflets
- Living Faith framework
- Five priorities
- Sustaining the sacred centre.

The 250 responses from PCC/CWs were also generally positive, included many of the same aspects as clergy/LLMs but they were also more likely to mention Living Faith in relation to the local community.

Here are some examples of comments.

The colour palette in that it expresses creativity. It seems well thought out incorporating the main strands of mission and ministry. Sustaining the sacred centre rightly runs through the palette like a matrix. – Clergy/LLM

The leaflets (e.g. on prayer, bible reading etc.) have been particularly useful as a resource to the congregation. Also the use of the logo and a kind of branding of developing faith from the Diocese has helped raise awareness. – PCC/CW

It's a framework, it helps us keep a balance in our ministry and in the work of the church – Clergy/LLM

A practical and realistic framework for driving the church forward with the congregation and in the local community. – PCC/CW

The 5 themes. Sustaining the sacred centre stands out as most prominent in my mind – Clergy/LLM

Sustaining the Sacred Centre and how it can be applied to everything from personal faith to church restoration. – PCC/CW

Taking our faith out into the community and into the wider world, and making our churches more accessible to all. – PCC/CW



FIVE PRIORITIES: AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT AND HELPFULNESS

Respondents were asked which of the five priorities they were aware of, and for those aware, to what extent they had engaged.



Awareness and engagement was best with Sustaining the sacred centre and Making disciples. This is perhaps not surprising as these were the first two priorities for the diocese, and there has therefore been more time to become aware and engage. Sustaining the sacred centre is also the priority which is central to Living Faith, so the most obvious place to start.

Female clergy/LLMs tended to engage more on all priorities, but most noticeably on making a difference in the world. By geography, those in town churches were more likely than others to be engaged with making a difference in the world, whereas rural churches were more likely than others to be engaged with sustaining the sacred centre and creating vibrant Christian communities. Respondents from City/Large Town churches were less likely to be engaged at all.

Sustaining the sacred centre and making disciples were considered easier to engage with and more helpful than creating vibrant Christian communities and shaping confident collaborative leadership.

FIVE PRIORITIES: AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT – PCC/CW





Awareness and perceived engagement for PCC secretaries and church wardens was lower than for clergy/LLMs. The pattern of awareness and engagement was also different in that it was more equal for the five priorities, except for shaping confident collaborative leadership which was lower. The strongest priority for this group is creating vibrant Christian communities.

PRIORITY FOCUSING

Only 10% of Clergy/LLMs claimed to be following the priority a year as suggested by the diocese, most were either using Living Faith in their own way (32%) or were unaware of the priority years (14%). 22% of PCC/CWs were unaware of priority years.

Those more engaged with Living Faith, and more positive about it, were more likely to follow the suggested priority each year.

THE 5 PRIORITIES

Clergy/LLMs were asked to think about changes in their church since the introduction of Living Faith in 2009, regardless of whether Living Faith had influenced those changes. They were given a list of possible outputs relating to each priority and asked whether their church was doing more, about the same or less of each. If they were doing more, they were asked whether this was due to Living Faith or whether they would have done more anyway.

PCC/CWs were not asked the same question as clergy/LLMs. PCC/CWs were given a list of potential outputs and asked which their church had been doing over the last 4 years or so. For each of those selected, they were asked whether Living Faith had had a positive influence on it.

SUSTAINING THE SACRED CENTRE

This is the strongest of all the priorities:

- 92% of clergy/LLMs were aware, 50% engaged
- 52% of PCC/CWs were aware, 32% engaged
- 84% of clergy/LLMs found it easy to engage with and 83% found it useful

The clergy/LLM results show that churches were much more active in relation to sustaining the sacred centre than other priorities, although most claimed they would have been doing more anyway. The biggest increases in activity were to do with bible reading and prayer, where more than one in ten Clergy/LLMs claimed there was an increase due to Living Faith. However, the greatest relative impact was with going on retreats where Living Faith accounted for 31% of increased activity.

We made use of the 'Hour Out' cards at home groups, which led to some fruitful meetings and advice sought for deepening spirituality. – Clergy/LLM



We now routinely incorporate into our PCC Meetings a discussion topic relating to spirituality. – PCC/CW

MAKING DISCIPLES

This is the second strongest of all the priorities:

- 91% of clergy/LLMs were aware, 51% engaged
- 54% of PCC/CWs were aware, 28% engaged
- 72% of clergy/LLMs found it easy to engage with and 77% found it useful

The clergy/LLM findings showed that churches were doing much more to help make disciples, particularly with children and young people. Most of this was not as a direct result of Living Faith, especially reviewing work with young people where 62% of Clergy/LLMs claimed it would have happened anyway. However, one in five PCC/CWs felt that Living Faith had had a positive influence on reviewing work with young people. The area where Living Faith had had the most direct influence was with activities to help people explore and deepen faith, where more than one in ten Clergy/LLMs claimed there was an increase due to Living Faith.

We have been on a real journey of encouraging people to grow as disciples based on a series from the sermon on the Mount. – Clergy/LLM

A small group of husbands who attend Church but who are not confirmed have been having informal meetings with the Vicar and I know that 1 of this group at least will be Confirmed at the next opportunity. – PCC/CW

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD

- 85% of clergy/LLMs were aware, 43% engaged
- 54% of PCC/CWs were aware, 27% engaged
- 67% of clergy/LLMs found it easy to engage with and 65% found it useful

The Clergy/LLM findings showed that the areas of greatest development were directly related to helping other people – engaging more, caring more and being more aware of other's needs. The lowest impact of Living Faith in this priority was in doing more to support charities.

The perception of PCC/CWs was that most churches in Oxford diocese were active in making a difference in the world. Engaging more with the community was thought to be influenced most by Living Faith.

Various members of our congregations have and are taking part in fund raising activities for charities. The Homeless Project continues to provide meals for needy folk and the establishment of a food bank is getting going. – Clergy/LLM



It has encouraged members to do charitable work locally and throughout the wider world – PCC/CW

CREATING VIBRANT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- 83% of clergy/LLMs were aware, 33% engaged
- 57% of PCC/CWs were aware, 30% engaged
- 80% of clergy/LLMs found it easy to engage with and 65% found it useful

Making churches more welcoming was the top activity across all the priorities, where 83% of Clergy/LLMs were doing more and 17% claimed this was due to Living Faith, making this the greatest area of impact.

Whilst three in four PCC/CWs claimed that they were making their church more welcoming, only one in three were talking to the community about how to do this. However, Living Faith was having a positive influence on over a quarter of activities in this area.

Welcome Teams; welcome table after main Sunday Service; strong pastoral visiting team; redecoration and refurbishment of Church Foyer; 'Everybody Welcome' course – Clergy/LLM

Welcomers rota on Sunday mornings. A special needs group provide coffee for the community every Tuesday morning. Redesigning the notice boards to give better information about church activities. Displaying Living Faith booklets. letting the building to community and providing a community noticeboard – PCC/CW

SHAPING CONFIDENT COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

This was the weakest of the five priorities:

- 78% of clergy/LLMs were aware, 25% engaged
- 40% of PCC/CWs were aware, 18% engaged
- 50% of clergy/LLMs found it easy to engage with and 60% found it useful

The Clergy/LLM findings showed that churches were doing more to use people's gifts and skills to help the church, but were perhaps neglecting the development of both existing and potential leaders through encouragement and support.

This is in its early stages. We are developing 'Focus task groups' who come together for short to medium term tasks so that people don't feel they have a job for life, but will help with a task that has an end date. – Clergy/LLM

We have run Growing Leaders twice and are looking to run it again in the autumn...several of the participants have gone on to leadership roles...family service, church warden – PCC/CW



TOP 12 DOING MORE OF DUE TO LIVING FAITH – CLERGY/LLMS

The top activity that clergy/LLMs claimed they were doing more of as a result of Living Faith was 'Making changes to create a more welcoming church' (17%).

The next eleven activities clergy/LLMs claimed they were doing more of as a result of Living Faith were these (mentioned by between 13% and 10%, in order):

- Talking to various groups in the community about how your church could be made more attractive and welcoming
- Asking people about their gifts and skills
- Engaging more with the community
- Organising more community engagement and events
- Organising activities to help people explore and deepen their faith
- Reading the Bible in groups
- Spending time in personal prayer
- Offering pastoral care to others
- Making more use of people's gifts and skills to serve
- Involving more people in church leadership
- Being aware of the needs of others in our parish

At least five of the top twelve activities that clergy/LLMs claim to be doing more of as a result of Living Faith were related to the church looking out into its community.

TOP 6 INFLUENCED BY LIVING FAITH – PCC/CWS

Across all priorities, the top six activities where PCC/CWs felt that Living Faith had had a positive influence were these (mentioned by 20% to 18%):

- Reviewing the work with children and young people
- Engaging more with the community
- Making changes to create a more welcoming church
- Studying the Bible in groups
- Being aware of needs of others in parish
- Encouraging schools to visit church

AWARENESS, USE AND HELPFULNESS OF RESOURCES

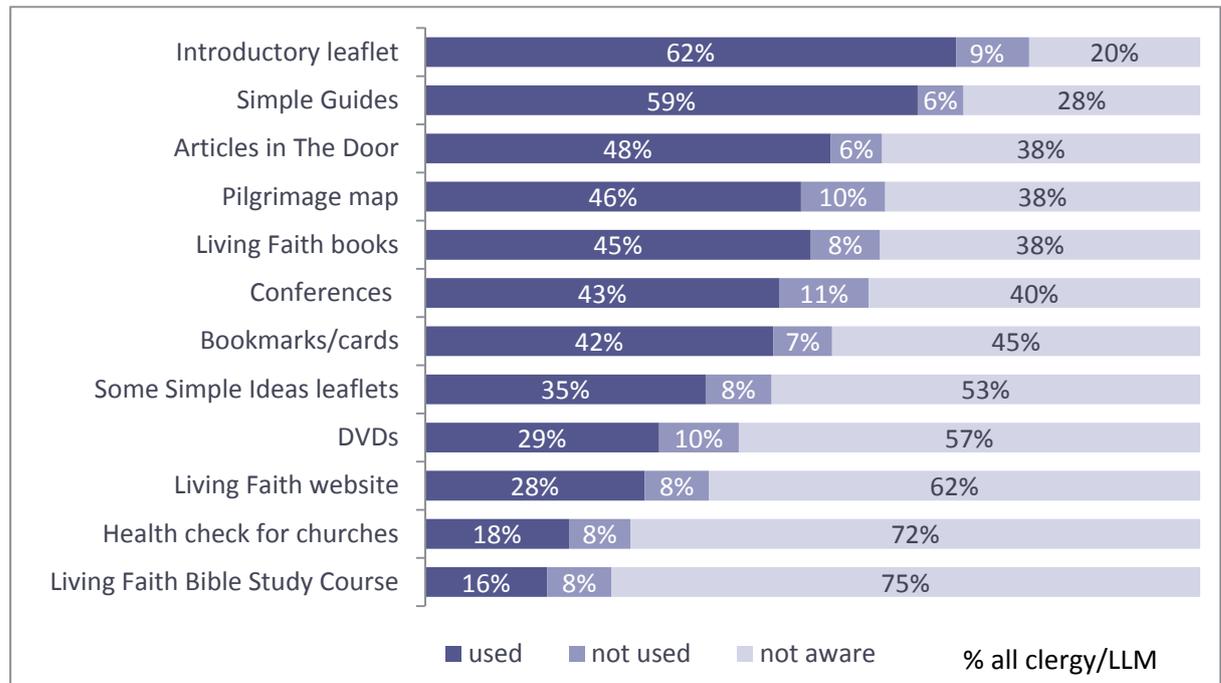
In most cases, if people were aware of a resource they tended to use it. Awareness and use was highest of all for the Living Faith introductory leaflet. For Clergy/LLMs the simple guides were the next most popular, whereas for PCC/CWs The Door was the next most popular.

Awareness and perceived usage was lower for all resources with PCC secretaries and church wardens.

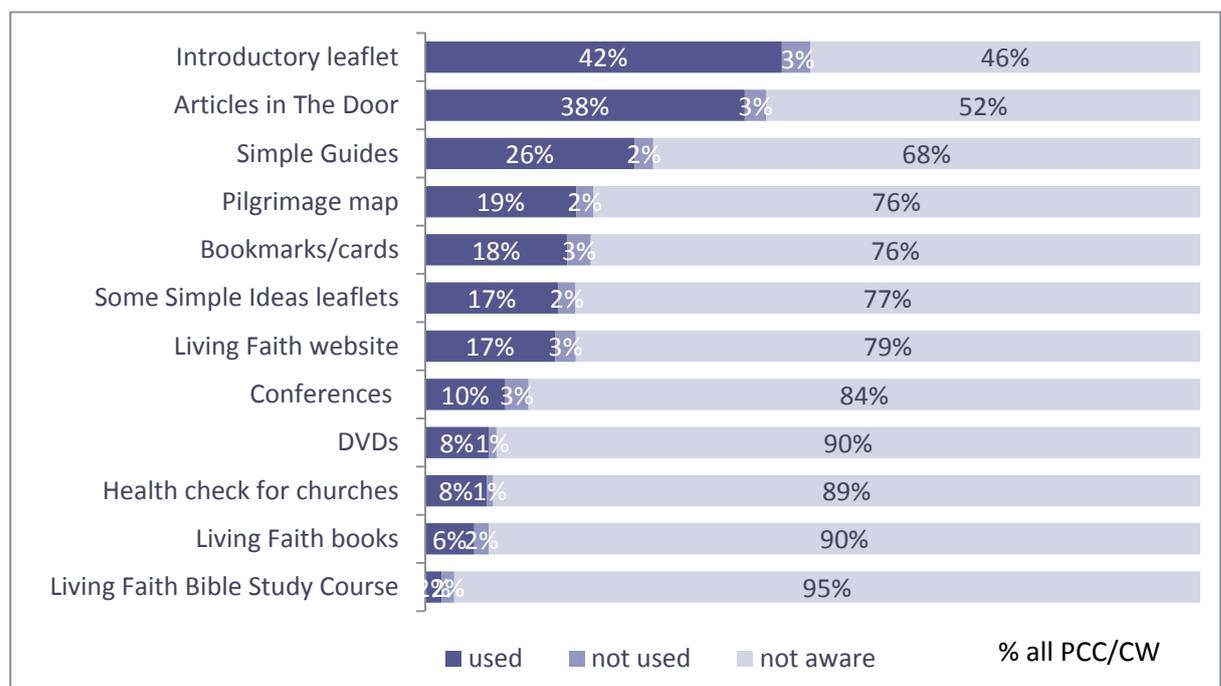


For those Clergy/LLMs that used each resource, the Living Faith books, simple guides and conference were thought to be the most helpful with the bookmarks/cards and pilgrimage map being the least helpful. PCC/CWs that used each resource also found them helpful, and they tended to give higher ratings in terms of helpfulness than Clergy/LLMs.

AWARENESS AND USE OF RESOURCES: CLERGY/LLM



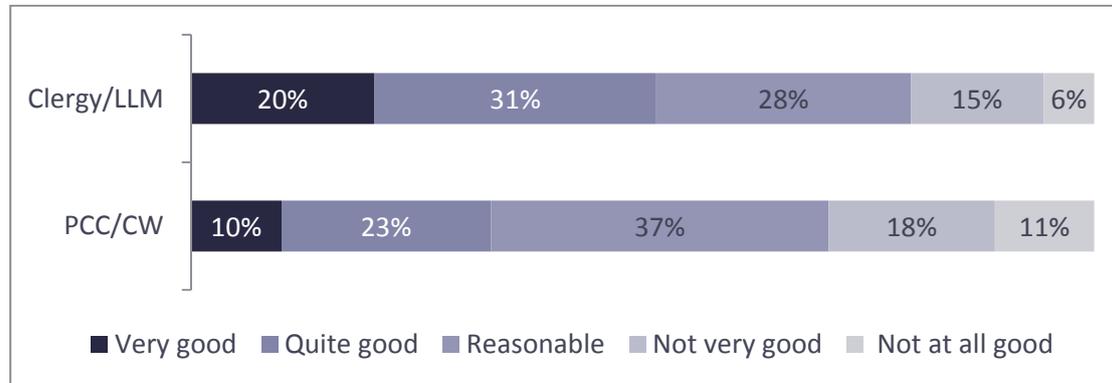
AWARENESS AND USE OF RESOURCES: PCC/CW





HOW GOOD A USE OF RESOURCES

All respondents were asked whether they thought Living Faith was a good use of resources.



Most respondents felt that Living Faith was a reasonable or good use of resources. As might be expected, there were differences by levels of engagement. 75% of Clergy/LLMs who engaged to a large or some extent felt it was a good use of resources, whereas 62% of those who did not engage at all thought it was not a good use of resources.

LIVING FAITH ATTITUDE STATEMENTS

Clergy/LLMs were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with 14 statements regarding Living Faith. They agreed most with these statements, in this order:

- It is worth having a vision and framework like LF within Oxford Diocese
- The LF material uses clear and easily understood language
- LF provides a very good framework for churches to work with
- We found LF very flexible to work with

They were least likely to agree with these statements:

- It would be better if LF was more prescriptive
- Most of our congregation know the vision and purpose of LF
- LF has helped to transform our church
- Church members were enthusiastic about engaging with LF

In another question with those aware of Living Faith, 64% agree that it had inspired them and 66% agreed that it had given the freedom to do what they felt was best, rather than being prescriptive.

Clergy/LLMs were clearly positive about the Living Faith framework, and appreciated its simplicity and flexibility. However, they also acknowledged the difficulty in getting congregations to engage with Living Faith and to see transformation as a result of engagement.



LIVING FAITH OUTCOMES

LIVING FAITH: OUTCOMES (CLERGY/LLM)

For Clergy/LLMs in churches that had engaged either to a large or some extent with Living Faith, the majority agreed that Living Faith had:

- given us the freedom to do what we feel is best, rather than being prescriptive (78%)
- inspired me (73%)
- provided a useful framework for our church activities (67%)
- provided stimulus for us to take action (67%)
- helped us to be a Christian community that lives and shares the love of God (59%)
- encouraged people to support others on their Christian journey (59%)
- inspired other church leaders (56%)
- helped people to deepen their enjoyment of God (53%)
- helped people to recognise God's presence in everyday life (52%)
- inspired members of our congregation (51%)

It is encouraging to see that that many clergy/LLMs agreed that Living Faith had inspired them and had given them the freedom to do what they thought was best for their parish or benefice, however it is too early to see much in the way of direct outcomes from Living Faith.

GREATEST CHANGES IN CHURCH AS A RESULT OF LIVING FAITH

Respondents were asked what the greatest changes were in church life as a result of Living Faith. 37% of Clergy/LLMs and 45% of PCC/CWs said 'none'. They claimed it was very difficult to directly link Living Faith to change, but were often positive about the general influence of Living Faith. Here are some examples of what was written.

Little obvious change, more change in leaders' outlook & encouragement – Clergy/LLM

Living Faith has encouraged the larger of the two churches in the principles by which it was already living - so hard to see big changes there. However, it has helped shift the focus of the smaller church from building and tradition to more of a discipleship focus – Clergy/LLM

Living Faith is supporting a church journey already started. Perhaps we should have made more use of it. – PCC/CW

I think the impact of Living Faith is only just beginning to have an impact. We have a great sense of church growth and greater involvement of the wider community – PCC/CW



HELPFULNESS OF SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Respondents were asked how helpful certain improvements might be, here is the list in order of perceived helpfulness:

- Better communication
- More sharing of ideas
- More accessible resources
- More ideas of what to do
- Opportunity for collaboration with others
- Focus on one priority each year
- Living Faith events

Other suggested improvements from clergy/LLMs included:

- Develop ways of increasing ownership of Living Faith throughout the diocese
- Make it clear how Living Faith can work for those with their own strategy, MAP, etc.
- Share ideas and good practices, ideas for application
- Relaunch of Living Faith, communication of what resources exist, give Living Faith more time
- Ensure all newcomers to the diocese are aware of and fully appreciate Living Faith

Other suggested improvements from PCC/CWs included:

- Do more at deanery or even benefice level, particularly to support small rural churches
- Continue to encourage those not yet involved
- Communicate more effectively
- Do something about the perceived blockages in communication and engagement
- Keep Living Faith simple, encourage short-term goals (as well as longer term vision)
- Give it more time
- Share ideas, and examples of Living Faith in practice
- Build Living Faith networks, have local champions

FINAL COMMENT

Respondents had the opportunity to comment at the end of the questionnaire. Here is a comment from the Clergy/LLM survey which summarises the response to Living Faith very well.

A great initiative. Sorry, Lord, that we have failed to make better use of it.



LIVING FAITH RESEARCH SUMMARY

Living Faith has permeated well throughout the diocese, with 95% of Clergy/LLMs aware of it and 82% engaging at least to some extent. PCC/CWs reported lower levels of awareness (76%) and engagement (63%). For those that engaged the most, Living Faith had become the foundation for strategy and planning.

14% chose not to engage at all. One of the main barriers to engagement was perceived relevance, with some churches using their own strategic planning tools and others feeling it was not relevant to their context, perhaps because they were small, rural, elderly, part of an LEP or going through a time of change. Other barriers included apathy, lack of time and a resistance to diocesan initiatives.

Most people used the five priorities to suit their own situations, rather than focusing on one priority a year as outlined. This fits well with the ethos of Living Faith being a flexible resource that can be adapted to accommodate local circumstances.

Sustaining the Sacred Centre is the strongest of the five priorities - it has high levels of awareness and engagement, was thought to be the easiest to engage with and the most helpful of the priorities. Sustaining the Sacred Centre is central to Living Faith and was the first priority that Oxford Diocese focused on, so it is not surprising that it should be strongest. In contrast Shaping confident, collaborative leadership has the lowest levels of awareness and engagement, was perceived to be the most difficult to engage with and least helpful. The fact that this was the last priority for Oxford diocese to focus on will have had an influence, although church leadership is a challenging area to work on.

In most cases if people were aware of a resource they tended to use it. Awareness and use was highest for the Living Faith introductory leaflet, with simple guides and articles in The Door being next. PCC/CWs were less aware than Clergy/LLMs of all resources, although articles in the door were a particularly effective way of communicating with PPC/CWs. Of those that used the resources, the Living Faith books and simple guides were considered to be the most helpful.

Most respondents were positive about Living Faith as a use of diocesan resources, although those that engaged more were significantly more positive than those who did not engage at all, most of whom did not feel it was a good use of resources.

Those that engaged with Living Faith most found it to be inspiring, a useful framework and effective stimulus for taking action. They also agreed it helped people live and share the love of God and to deepen their enjoyment and recognition of God in everyday life.

One of the main ways in which churches changed due to Living Faith was to look out more into their communities, particularly by making their church more welcoming.

Clergy/LLMs were clearly positive about Living Faith and appreciated its simplicity and flexibility. However, they also acknowledged the difficulty of getting churches engaged and seeing transformation as a result of engagement.