



Vicar Appeals to Parishioners

A VICAR has warned his parish that their church could close because only a few people are prepared to save it.

The Rev Stephen Ball, of St. Paul's Church in Staverton, has told residents that the village had changed beyond recognition' and the congregation is dwindling.

The 900-year-old church is facing a hefty short-term repair bill and some major expenses in the long term. Now the vicar is questioning whether villagers actually want a church at all.

He sent a letter to all villagers appealing for help and called a meeting in the church last Thursday - but only 30 people or so turned up.

The letter described how many new homes had been built in the village but said the community spirit had been all but lost and the majority of people do not care about the church's survival.

"All of these factors and more seem to have contributed to the decline in use of the church building," he wrote. "This may, on the face of it, seem to be a negative thing, but I do not believe this to be so."

"As the nature and make-up of the community has changed, so too have its needs, habits and expectations."

"Some no longer perceive the church to be of any importance in their lives."

"I believe the decline is part of the natural evolutionary process in the development of this modern community setting. The diminishing size of the regular congregation has rendered the situation non-viable."

"The fact is we need money now. But we need to look fundamentally at the church and its building. The church isn't the building but the people, so the church won't die if the building goes."

"But we need to try a few different approaches and we need to assess what it means to be a church in the 21st Century."

No decision was taken about the future of the church on Thursday night but the vicar admitted the situation was challenging.

Wiltshire Times, 5 October 2008