

CL asked Dave Male to nominate a pioneering initiative that he has found particularly encouraging. He pointed us to 'first bite', an informal Sunday morning event sponsored by a group of churches in rural Cambridgeshire, led by the Rev Peter Dowman.

The Rev Peter Dowman is rector of Warboys with Broughton and Bury with Wistow, near Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. He was formerly CPAS Regional Adviser for Eastern England.

first bite

Peter (pictured below) says: 'We invite people of all ages (but mainly primary school children and their parents) to come and spend the inside of an hour together on one Sunday morning in the month. We have been running for 10 months. We have seen a first *bite* community develop.'



'Bury Church is one of four parishes in our benefice. It already has pretty informal worship – PowerPoint presentations, a music group, children's groups – and so on. But we seemed unable to attract new families. Meeting at 11.15am doesn't help! Members of the congregation have an evangelistic vision so are willing to try something different.'

'First *bite* meets in our church primary school with the active encouragement of the headteacher. It is publicised through the school but our vision is to reach out to the whole parish. First *bite* does not set out to be a full worship experience – rather, as the name implies, it offers a taster of Christianity – with the hope that friends made this way will be encouraged to travel further – and into faith.'



'We meet in a school – so the atmosphere is very relaxed. We open at 9.30am and serve our free breakfast until about 10am – bacon rolls, toast and marmalade, honey, chocolate spread, fruit juice, tea and real coffee (fairly traded of course!).'



'We arrange family sized group seating around IKEA coffee tables (£7.99), with a newspaper corner. Each time there's a physical challenge competition, as well as craft activities for people of all ages. And there's a Wii game to play.'



'There's always a short presentation based on a topical theme, linking to some simple spiritual truth. We ensure that the presentation's theme is echoed in the video clips we use, and in the challenge, craft activities and our graffiti wall.'

'This presentation lasts no more than ten minutes and then people carry on relaxing together. Last time we met, 90 people were present including 50 children. Of the total only about 30 would be members of our regular congregation which is typically about 50.'

'There are no pews, robed choirs, long Bible readings or sermons. We are exploring together in an easy environment. A guest does not have to subscribe to what they feel uncertain about. If any hymns or worship songs are used, they are performed – we don't expect everyone to join in. We don't take a collection or make a charge!'

'Because the format we use is so flexible there is a tendency for the presentation not to go as scripted! We often think: What should we be doing now to keep people engaged? But the truth is the people who come are happy to be there and they form a community, they are more relaxed than we are! We co-operate more as a team of leaders and workers for first *bite* than in any other part of our church life – and our guests co-operate too. God is at work among us.'

'The big challenge is, If this is first *bite* – what comes as the second course? First *bite* is working as the wide way in, but how can we encourage people through the narrow gate?'

