



The Deanery Pastoral Committee

WHAT'S A PASTORAL COMMITTEE FOR?

There was no mention of a Deanery Pastoral Committee in the Synodical Government Measure – although it did allow for the setting up of committees to service the deanery synod. So there is no standard written constitution. The Deanery Pastoral Committee has a legal basis through the back door, in that the Pastoral Measure requires it to be consulted in certain circumstances to do with Team and Group Ministries; but here their existence is assumed rather than legislated for.

This means that there are as many different constitutions as there are deaneries that have decided to write one. Many others have no written constitution, and they operate on the basis of an unwritten understanding of what the pastoral committee is to do.

LIKELY TASKS AND ROLES

- Be consulted by the Bishop and/or diocesan pastoral committee on potential changes in the deanery. These can include the setting up (or dissolution) of Team and Group Ministries, the suspension of benefices, the creation of joint benefices, the creation of Local Ecumenical Partnerships etc.
- Take counsel concerning the deployment of clergy in the deanery, sometimes working towards the implementation of an overall diocesan strategy, and feeding their deliberations back to the diocese.
- Create and nurture their own deanery strategy (usually in consultation with the diocesan parties concerned) for the deployment of clergy. This is normally within an overall figure given to them by the diocese.
- Create and nurture a deanery strategy for the deployment of their resources as whole. This would include ministries other than the stipendiary ordained ministry, and would take account of local people and resources within the deanery. By broadening the base from just the stipendiary ministry, the Deanery Pastoral Committee immediately becomes a powerful tool for planning the mission and ministry of the deanery, doing things that can only be done at local (deanery) level; because it alone has the necessary knowledge of current needs and resources.
- Consider pastoral problems and opportunities within the deanery, and support the Rural Dean's ministry in the area. This is only possible when the rural dean is willing to act collaboratively.
- Develop training policies and programmes for the deanery. If the Deanery Pastoral Committee has a remit to consider the broader strategy of the deanery, then training will form a key element in helping people to get from where they are to where they would like to be.

- Consider the deanery as a whole (a deanery is often a more sensible social/community unit than the parish) and ask what areas of ministry are being neglected or need to be strengthened. Christ's Church is called in many ways to express the Gospel in the wider community. In these, lay and ordained both have roles, complementing the parochial ministry. The more we understand this, the more we will notice areas of weakness, and seek to plan to improve.

- Consider relationships with the Local Authority and other secular institutions.

- Consider the ecumenical implications of the above.

- Enable and manage the employment of deanery officers who have been appointed to further any of the above.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER BODIES

THE DEANERY SYNOD AND OTHER DEANERY COMMITTEES

The Deanery Pastoral Committee should, of course, report back to the Deanery Synod a great part of its work. The Synod is the body which will have to vote on matters of policy and strategy.

However, some areas of the Committee's work will have to remain confidential, especially where individuals are being discussed. As the committee starts dreaming new ideas, these could cause all sorts of ripples if they come out to synod in a half-prepared form (especially suggestions that involve the change in status of parishes!). Even so, on the whole, the Church errs on the side of being too coy and secretive, rather than the other way round.

Many deaneries have a finance committee, and all should have a standing committee. Clearly, the pastoral, finance and standing committee business overlaps to a considerable extent. Where the bodies are different, it is usual to have members of each on the other committees to ensure clear reporting back. Where all three bodies comprise the same people, it is possible for all three sorts of business to be dealt with at the same meeting, and this can be an economical and efficient use of time.

THE PARISHES

The Deanery Pastoral Committee needs to have close contact with the parishes, not all of which will be represented by an individual. Some pastoral committees arrange regular parish visits by their members. Another system has the parishes meeting together in threes and fours to exchange their stories, hopes and needs. Certain decisions and suggestions can only be made after careful consultation with individual parishes.

THE BISHOP AND THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL COMMITTEE

One of the most frequently heard complaints in today's church is that 'them at the centre' ignore local decisions. There is a real problem here, as the Episcopal and the Synodical systems sit in uneasy relationship and it is often very unclear where decisions rightly belong.

Bishops and their senior staff have a natural tendency to make decisions about the placing of clergy in the light of the information they have about the individuals concerned, only to discover that they have driven a coach and horses through some carefully devised local initiative. Both sides tend to regard such decisions as non-negotiable, and this leads to mistrust and bad feeling. The very constitution (unwritten) and agenda of most senior staff meetings renders this inevitable. So bishops, archdeacons, diocesan secretaries etc have to learn to trust the deaneries in practice as well as in theory.

Diocesan Pastoral Committees are learning to listen to their Deanery colleagues, but there are still far too many examples of apparent high-handedness, born of a belief that they can see 'the wider picture', or because the consultation has not been handled with sufficient care.

In both these situations, there is a need for consultation *before* a decision is made. The Deanery Pastoral Committee bears as much responsibility for working at this as do the central structures. The channels of communication need to be thought through and worked at from both sides.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Given that the Church of England is so much thicker on the ground than the other denominations, it can often be hard for genuine ecumenical initiatives to happen at parish level. Our Christian colleagues think in larger areas. Real progress can often only happen where a cluster of Anglican parishes is involved, or even a whole deanery.

It makes sense for the deanery to take the lead rather than either parish or diocese, as it is usually closer to the right size to think strategically about the future of the church in a locality. Such thinking, these days, *must* be ecumenical.

If an ecumenical project is going to require significant resources, the chances are that the Church of England will be the major contributor, as we are ourselves significantly better resourced. In these cases the deanery may well be the best body to manage the provision of Anglican resources to the project.

SECULAR BODIES

Deaneries come in many different shapes and sizes. Many bear no relation to the geography and sociology of their area. Many others, however, do correlate to natural communities living within them – communities that are nowadays much larger than the traditional parish.

In particular, when so many important decisions (education, housing, social services, development and environment, for example) happen at local authority level,

and with NHS management covering similarly-sized areas, the deanery can often be the only church unit capable of relating to them.

Many of these bodies welcome the church with open arms if we go in a spirit of partnership and co-operation. We live in a society when many are keenly aware that we are floundering at the spiritual level, and they really want the church (and other faith communities) on board. The Deanery Pastoral Committee has a key part to play in this field, and it is sad if it restricts itself to merely 'churchy' matters.

CONSTITUTION

As there is no 'model' constitution for a Deanery Pastoral Committee; each synod will need to create its own. The constitution will, however, include the following elements:

PURPOSES

Each deanery will need to decide whether to include some or all of the likely tasks and roles set out earlier in this paper.

MEMBERSHIP

The pattern required for the Standing Committee may be suitable: Ten members, of which the rural/area dean, lay chair, the secretaries of the House of Clergy and House of Laity and the treasurer provide five, leaving five to be elected by the synod.

MEETINGS

The Committee will need to meet once, at least, between each synod, and may well have to meet more frequently, depending on how big the deanery is and how much of the suggested agenda it is being asked to tackle.

REPORTING BACK

The constitution should make clear how the Committee will report systematically to the deanery synod, keep in touch with the diocesan pastoral committee and, as occasion demands, consult directly with the parishes.

THE POTENTIAL OF THE DEANERY PASTORAL COMMITTEE

The world is the pastoral committee's oyster, and this does mean 'the world'. The committee is failing if it is only concerned with the church's affairs, important as they are.

The Synodical Government Measure states that the role of the Deanery Synod is to discuss '*in the deanery the whole Mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical*'. The Pastoral Committee's job is to earth this Mission in the practical and the possible, suggesting strategies to the Synod, and managing such schemes as are agreed by Synod.