

A NEED IDENTIFIED

Carrying out a brief survey, members of the Church House Deaneries Group realised that very little, if any, training was made available for Deanery Lay Chairs. Training for new Area or Rural Deans is commonplace by comparison and it has certainly been available across the Eastern Region for a decade. This is just one example of the disparity felt by many Lay Chairs between the way Area/Rural Deans and Lay Chairs are both perceived and involved in the life of the church.

Once the need for training was therefore identified, it was agreed by the CHDG members that a pilot workshop should be held in St Albans. Although primarily for those within the diocese, Lay Chairs from nearby dioceses - who heard about the event - attended as well. Twenty two Lay Chairs took part, sixteen from within St Albans - in which there are twenty three deaneries. There was a good mixture of experienced and new Lay Chairs. Eight were very new to post.

As an adult education exercise the balance of the programme worked well, as did the timing. Most agreed the workshop was the right length, although in the Eastern Region, training for Area/Rural Deans is residential and lasts for 48 hours. A good lunch was provided and this proved to be an important part of the day: not just because of the quality of the food, and the fact that it was free, but also because of the time available for informal conversations to take place.

The speakers were all very good, providing information as well as food for thought. The session on "*Understanding the Synodical System*" was appreciated but, on reflection, a better subject area may have been "*The role of the Lay Chair in making the deanery work.*"

What follows is a report of the workshop together with suggestions and comments about possible future events.

THE PROGRAMME

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| 10.00 am | Arrivals and coffee |
| 10.30 am | Opening prayers
<i>Introductions to the Day and each other</i> |
| 10.45 am | Large Group:
The role of the Lay Chair
<i>A power point introduction by an experienced Lay Chair in St Albans Diocese</i> |
| 11.00 am | Small Groups:
<i>How the role is carried out in different deaneries
(With a mixture of new and experienced Lay Chairs)</i> |
| 11.30 am | Large Group: Feedback |
| 12 noon | Large Group:
Understanding the Synodical System
<i>(An Archdeacon)</i> |
| 12.45 pm | Lunch |
| 1.30 pm | Large Group:
The Lay Chair and Rural Dean Relationship
<i>(Lay Chair and R.D. working in one deanery)</i> |
| 2.15 pm | Small Groups:
<i>Main issues for your deanery</i> |
| 3.00 pm | Large Group:
<i>Questions and comments</i> |
| 3.15 pm | Evaluation of the day |
| 3.30pm | Tea and depart |

THE ROLE OF THE LAY CHAIR

This session was introduced by an experienced Lay Chair who has worked alongside three Rural Deans. He spoke of the "Key Points" in his own experience which could also be common to other Lay Chairs including:

- **Appointment by election**
- **Administration for Synod**
- **Standing Committee preparation and involvement**
- **Pastoral Committee**
- **Initiative in developing active Deanery life**
- **Pastoral care for clergy and families**
- **Access to Bishops/Archdeacons re confidential items**
- **Meetings with Bishops and Archdeacons**
- **Informal involvement at Institutions and Licensings**
- **Inspection of churches**
- **Awareness of/involvement in Parish Share process**
- **Involvement in local communities**

Feedback from small group discussions after this introduction focussed on:

INSPECTIONS/VISITATIONS

For several this is shared with the Rural/Area Dean. Others take an experienced churchwarden, sometimes other members of the Deanery Pastoral Committee, occasional a Lay Chair will work alone. Not all Lay Chairs are involved and they regretted this fact.

No Lay Chair (or Area/Rural Dean?) had been asked to meet with the churchwardens after the inspections to discuss the findings, but all involved took the opportunity to discuss pastoral issues. The archdeacon always sends a report to the churchwardens but there appears to be no formal follow-up unless required.

EXPENSES

This proved to be a difficult area, being another example of disparity between Area/Rural Deans and Lay Chairs. The latter received full expenses as a matter of course but only one Lay Chair present knew of the entitlement and received them in full. Are Lay Chairs expenses in the diocesan/deanery budget? What could they claim for? (*Answer: should be the same as for Area/Rural Deans.*) There was a strong feeling that all should claim them, on a par with the Area/Rural Dean, and if they did not want

to keep them, they could gift aid them back to the church or another charity!

PASTORAL CARE OF THE CLERGY

Whilst some felt the Area/Rural Dean may be better placed to provide this, several spoke of the need for collegiality and "whoever was most appropriate to do so."

Some spoke of developing good relations with churchwardens which was often an in-road to clergy support. Others that they had been "used" as a listener/adviser from outside the clerical profession. When pastoral issues are raised during Inspections, experienced showed that if the Lay Chair was accompanied by a member of the opposite sex, this proved most helpful. (See section on Rural Dean Lay Chair model.) Some Lay Chairs support clergy spouses.

UNDERSTANDING THE SYNODICAL SYSTEM

The main thrust of this input was clearly to keep lines of communication open at all levels. The theme was "conversation – journeying, process and collaboration." The final slide in the presentation summed it up: *"Communication is everything!"*

For many, especially those new to the post, the subject matter hit the target – focussing largely on the way synodical government works at national, diocesan and deanery levels.

Participants were reminded that the deanery synod has no legal clout – but it was still an important body. (This was noted in the reaction to the "Bridge Report" published in the 1990s.)

The work of the Deanery Synod included:

- **Preparing and presenting the Deanery Review**
- **Assisting in setting Share Factors**
- **Assisting in pastoral reorganisation**

Questions and comments revealed a wide variety of practise of involvement by Lay Chairs in the life of the deanery. One issue was how appropriate it is for

the Lay Chair to be involved in the appointment of a new incumbent or priest-in-charge within the deanery.

As with regional training for Area/Rural Deans, we recognised the need to be careful how we use words to avoid confusion. E.g. across the dioceses, the words 'Inspection' or Visitation' are used to describe the same thing. Clarification should be asked for if necessary.

THE LAY CHAIR AND RURAL DEAN RELATIONSHIP

This was probably the session most appreciated and was led by a female Rural Dean and a male Lay Chair in a very rural area of the diocese. The presentation clearly showed the level of cooperation and trust which they share and they became a model of good practise for all to observe.

The main areas raised by them were:

- The need to communicate well and often
- Trust and understanding, with different viewpoints being acknowledged
- Having a common mind on the deanery
- Travelling together provides excellent opportunities to keep in touch
- Alternating the chairing of synod meetings, sharing inspections equally, being involved together in Licensing Services were ways of showing collegiality across the deanery
- Jointly inviting new clergy to the deanery, and those leaving it, for a pub meal and hosting it together. (Spouses are included too)
- Recognising each others gifts/skills/experience and delegating appropriately
- Providing and hosting a supper each May for all churchwardens. (The deanery pays for this and the occasion is used for churchwardens to sign up for dates for Inspections)

Comments after this introduction to this part of the programme:

- The recognition of some of the differences between rural and urban deaneries and different ways of working appropriate to each.
- Some frustration was expressed that the Area/Rural Deans are often invited to meetings with the Bishop/Archdeacon but they are not. (This varies greatly but where it happens it is perceived to be another example of disparity.)
- Managing time – especially when both the Lay Chair and Area/ Rural Dean are in full-time employment.
- Handing over to successor(s) and overlapping with them can help smooth the way for those coming into post,
- Lack of training for lay officers was highlighted in some deaneries and this clearly varies across dioceses.
- Some felt it was good to occasionally attend Chapter Meetings and also Deanery Services, say, in Lent.

KEY ISSUES FOR "MY" DEANERY

The discussion on this subject was very wide ranging and, given longer time, even more subjects could have been raised. Those below are representative of all the feedback

- Expectations of villagers when there is no resident priest. Who is the Church? Role of NSMs/OLMs. Need for education, not least for those who seldom come to church.
- Financial burden of maintaining church buildings and trying to service the living church.
- Deployment of stipendiary clergy: rural v. urban
- Increased housing/population growth across the Eastern Region.
- Role of Deanery with diocesan initiatives.
- Selection and training of ordinands to become appropriate clergy for today and tomorrow. Equipping the clergy: pastoral care v. mission and recognising the rapid changes in society.
- The church's role in multi-cultural parishes
- Ecumenical relations in parishes where there is more than one denomination present but also

where Free Churches have closed buildings and the C of E church is the only one present.

FURTHER TRAINING NEEDS:

Recognising that one day could not possibly hope to cover all subjects which Lay Chairs may want to consider, time was given in the programme to identify further training needs. The following were those which most felt was needed:

- **Further training in Inspections/Visitations**
- **Creating opportunities for sharing good practice**
- **Providing training at regional level whenever possible, even though there are differences between diocese on the role and responsibilities of Lay Chairs. (The same is recognised in the training of Area/Rural Deans, but such differences can lead to helpful conversations.)**
- **Handling interviews**
- **Have a day (like today) every three years – linked with the timing of elections – and across the region.**
- **Every 18 months, hold another day for updating information, changes etc. – within dioceses.**

EVALUATION

Clearly everyone had valued the day, whether or not the participants were newly elected or experienced.

It was understood that whilst the roles of Lay Chair and Area/Rural Dean are in many ways different, as are the ways in which they are appointed, there is clearly a need for good communication between the two. In order to work collaboratively, trust and understanding are also required and a sharing of tasks essential.

By the end of the day, everyone went away feeling encouraged, and, hopefully a little more supported. We owe much to the Lay Chairs who offer a great deal – and not only within the deaneries in which

they minister. It is up to the church to take them more seriously, value them more than we often do – not least by paying expenses on a par with their clergy colleagues – and by encouraging them to become increasingly a model of Christ's ministry and mission which is the calling of the whole people of God.

POSTSCRIPT

Picking up the last of the bullet points under "Further Training Needs", a follow-up day within St Albans Diocese was arranged for June 2007.

Among the requests for possible inclusion in the programme were:

- **Training in confidentiality**
- **The need for a clearer, and up-to-date job description**
- **Funding of the C of E**
- **Communications – again!**
- **How to assist the Area/Rural Dean**
- **Implementing proposals in the Deanery Review**
- **Sharing good practice and also things that don't work well!**
- **How to overcome resistance to change**

There will not be time to cover them all, but they show the enthusiasm and desire there is for further training.