

sustaining it. It is a charisma of which your communities, and the nation as a whole, is going to have an even deeper need in the coming years.

I pray and trust that the fellowship and time you have spent together since Friday has been both an encouragement and an inspiration and that you shall leave the Conference with a renewed sense of the importance of the role that deaneries can play in the life of the Church.

Be assured of my prayers for your ministry as you return to your deaneries and parishes, committed to building up a common life that shows forth Our Lord's love.

Your fellow servant in the service of the Gospel,

+ Rowan Cantuar:

Lambeth Palace

Feast of Saint Jerome, 30 September 2010

THE CONFERENCE PRAYER

Ever-present God,
we thank you that you call us to share your mission and ministry
and equip us with the gifts to do so.
But your call also comes as a challenge and we often fail you.
So, strengthen us when we falter,
encourage us when we become disheartened,
and help us to remember that it is your Kingdom, and not ours,
which we seek and work for.
Build our confidence in this time together,
that when we return to our deaneries
we may encourage others to rejoice
in your call, your presence and your Kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

24

12th National Conference on the Deanery

DEVELOPING DEANERIES

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick
1st—3rd October 2010

*A conference to share experiences of practical initiatives for
serving the community and developing mission and ministry*

Reporter: Dr Mike Springate

Deaneries are often seen as a rather nebulous co-ordinating layer of church management. Parishes generally know their mission and place in the community. Diocesan Synod is the gateway to and from General Synod. But what is the role of Deanery Synods? They have no legal status, so cannot enter into contracts or employ staff directly, which is a hindrance to their mission. At its summer meeting in 2010, the General Synod debated a motion from Coventry Diocese aimed at strengthening the deanery's role, but after amendment to the motion the idea was passed to the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishops for 'updated guidance on available options'. This year's biennial National Deaneries Conference, took up this particular cudgel as "Developing Deaneries".

The Conference took place at the Hayes Christian Conference Centre at Swanwick, Derbyshire, from 1st-3rd October 2010. There were 106 attendees from 37 dioceses. The aim of the Conference was to share experiences and explore ideas of practical initiatives for developing Deanery Mission and Ministry in serving the community.



The Church House Deaneries Group

exists to:

- Stimulate local and national consideration of the developing role of the deanery.
- Facilitate an informal network of information about deanery thinking and initiatives to connect with the church at deanery, diocesan and national level.

For further information contact

The Church House Deaneries Group (CHDG)

Revd Martin Lee, Secretary, The Vicarage, 3 Station Road,
Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne NE12 8AN
Tel: +44(0)191 266 1921, Email: martinlee903@btinternet.com

The National Deaneries Conference

Mr Tug Wilson, Bookings Secretary, 49 Oakhurst, Lichfield
Staffordshire WS14 9AL
Tel: +44(0)1543 268678 Fax: +44(0)1543 411685
Email: charity.services@btclick.com

Web site: www.chdg.org.uk

This report is published by Parish and People and will form part of the Deanery Resource Unit mailing in Spring 2011. Further details at www.parishandpeople.org.uk

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S MESSAGE

During the final conference Eucharist, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Personal Chaplain, Canon Anthony Ball, read out a message of support from the Archbishop.

It gives me great pleasure,

dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to send you these greetings through my Chaplain as you celebrate the Conference Eucharist. Your theme of 'Developing Deaneries' evokes both the vital work that deaneries already undertake in furthering the mission of the Church and the tremendous potential that has yet to be fully harnessed.

Many of you will have heard, either in York or from the voice-file on the Church of England's website, the General Synod debate on Deanery Synods. Whilst the motion put forward by Coventry was amended, the debate, and the discussion it prompted well beyond the Synod chamber, should serve to reassure you that the Church at large recognises the contribution deaneries make and that there is support for ensuring they have the necessary tools to promote the Church's mission.

At a time of elections for a new General Synod the role of the deanery in our processes of synodical government is very apparent – and I am heartened by the numbers of people prepared to offer themselves for this service. Many deaneries will be playing a central part in ensuring that the issues raised in legislation being referred to dioceses are discussed fully and with a close eye on the impact at both local and national levels. This ability to ensure that local concerns and perspectives remain at the heart of our deliberations is one of the charisms of the deanery grouping. It allows the deanery to be so much more than a building block of the synodical structure; to be a means of incarnating the Good News in a way that grows out of a profound knowledge of the needs and hopes of local communities and an ability to bring to bear the experience, resources and connections of the body of Christ. That is one of the gifts I see as I travel around the country and for which I express my profound gratitude to all of you for the part you play in enabling and

This has been a Conference to share experiences of practical initiatives for serving the community and developing Mission and Ministry – and its mood has been positive and constructive.

Two statistics deserve our attention:

1. Although 72% of the British population are nominally Christian, less than 10% attend church regularly. Where, then, is the church for the missing 62%? Has the church lost its market place? We should be ‘cropping up’ churches to replace our current institutions, which no longer satisfy people’s emotional needs and answer questions no one asks!

2. There are one million Roman Catholics attending 10,000 churches, yet one million Anglicans in 54,000 churches. Is this sustainable? A fresh expression of ‘Church’ is necessary to reach the un-churched. Use the cross-cultural mission principle – double listening.

Yet while church attendance has declined, religion is still the norm. People are “believing without belonging”. We live in a consumer-oriented religiosity – a form of secular religion associated with new realities. Children’s attendance has dropped from 80% to 15%. Young people distrust organised religion. Faith groups love their religion but distrust spirituality.

Five conclusions:

1. We need to be in these other communities - where they are, and not expecting them to come to us.
2. We need to develop our understanding of these communities.
3. Bring Church where the people are – find new ways of ‘Being Church’.
4. Let go of old buildings and parishes if necessary to focus on new communities.
5. Reorganise by Diocese and Deanery.

The final message from the Conference Chairman, Robin Brown, at the end of a lively and stimulating Conference, then set the challenge to all participants: The potential of the deanery is in our hands. “Talk to each other” he urged, “and tell others what is happening. GO OUT!”

DEVELOPING DEANERIES

Conference Report

Foreword

Canon Robin Brown, Chair of the Church House Deaneries Group.

1. Keeping our eye on the ball

The Right Revd Nick Baines, Bishop of Croydon

2. Putting deaneries to work

a) Working and learning together

Canon Martin Seeley, Principal of Westcott House

b) Deaneries as mission pioneers

Canon Jean Kerr, Canon Missioner of the Rochester Diocese,

c) Unlocking the gifts and talents in deaneries

The Venerable Roger Morris, Archdeacon of Worcester

3. Welcoming visitors - seven days a week

Helen McGowan, Consultant for ‘Divine Inspiration’ (Coventry Diocese)

4. The deanery as an employer

5. Other conference wisdom

6. Conference reflections

The Archbishop of Canterbury’s Message

The Conference Prayer

FOREWORD

by Canon Robin Brown – Chair, Church House Deaneries Group.

“I pray and trust that ... you shall leave the Conference with a renewed sense of the importance of the role that deaneries can play in the life of the Church.”

So wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury in his message which was read at the closing Eucharist (for the full text, see page 23). The Archbishop’s message was received with warmth and much gratitude and gave us much to take back to our deaneries.

The backdrop to the Conference was a survey of Diocesan Bishops which the Church House Deaneries Group had carried out last year. 70% of the Bishops replied, and revealed that most believed deployment of clergy and collection of funds were the most important aspect of deaneries’ work. Mission came next but, to our delight, mission and ministry became the main focus of attention over the weekend. All of the speakers encouraged us down that path and we were happy to be led!

The one disappointment was the non-appearance of Ruth Gledhill, our Saturday night after-dinner speaker. She was stranded in London. Instead Peter Marshall, our classical pianist, treated us to an impromptu recital and what a treat it was!

A test of the Conference is the way it is worked out in the deaneries in the coming weeks and months. CHDG members were clear the weekend was part of an ongoing process, which began with the survey. We were encouraged by the “buzz” and enthusiasm that were around at Swanwick. Added to that, we have been invited to play a part in working out the implications of July’s General Synod vote on a motion from Coventry Diocese seeking greater scope for deaneries to function as legal entities (e.g. as employers - see section 4 of this report). This becomes part of the process of developing the role of deaneries and we will keep you informed of progress.

When synod meets, keep business to a minimum - or abandon it altogether! Concentrate instead on a live issue in the locality. Explore the underlying theology; and from this decide what action should be taken. Then set in train a creative concrete process to ensure that the action is followed through.

A major inhibiting factor is surely that most priests are individualists. When ordinands are in training there is emphasis on team work; but most curate training lacks a team model. In a *Group Ministry*, incumbents commit to work together informally, and there is some evidence that parishes can be successfully clustered in groups based on geography. But these informal arrangements are not strong enough to hold together the larger unit that is the deanery. The alternative in the Church of England is *Team Ministry*. Creating a Team Ministry across a whole deanery, however, would surely be a legal minefield!

e) **Lay/Clergy.** *How do Lay Chairs get involved with clergy?*

Chapter meetings could occasionally be opened up to Lay Chairs. However, the Chapter is mainly a place for clergy to let their hair down together!

f) **Training.** *How do we get Bishops and Clergy to understand that Lay training is important?*

Local mission-based introductory courses work well. In fact, deanery-based training at all levels is essential; it provides the right context, in that it is then training on the job. The serious problem is when people receive training and then do not exercise it. Rather go out untrained than not go out!

6. CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

Alan Harpham, Chairman of the APM Group, a professional business consultant, highlighted with genial humour the key messages from the conference speakers - and then added his own reflections.

The ending of a Conference is often the most important part. Church groups often behave like ‘old ladies’ – no change, frustrating, and with attitudes.

'Added value' may be difficult to demonstrate in small deaneries, so work together with other deaneries. Experience the added value before changing structures.

c) **Crisis: Is crisis a necessary pre-requisite for change and mission?**

A crisis is often the immediate trigger to make us face change, but it is not a necessary pre-requisite. The fuel for Vision and for Mission is a positive one, love - love for people and God (Genesis 12 – 'Go...and be a blessing'). Every moment is in some sense a crisis, a moment of critical judgement.

The Church needs to become more 'eccentric'. Deaneries must focus out, not inwards. People need to recapture their vocation. Members of committees can easily lose touch with this outward spirit.

Church people too readily assume that they – and what they offer – are attractive to people. Sadly this is not so. Therefore we must go out to them.

Ministry in the workplace is thus a vital piece of work, but most 'non-stipendiary ministers' (NSMs) are, or have become, parish ministers on the cheap. A fear was registered that 'Pioneer Ministers' are likely to follow same path of 'domestication'.

d) **How to change. How does Mission work in the variety of deaneries? Do we need Synod?**

If a deanery is to engage effectively in mission, some kind of co-ordinating body is needed. The danger is that it becomes hung up on governance and structure rather than implementation.

What has your Deanery Synod meeting achieved or resolved to do? The people that are needed on synod – the strategic thinkers and entrepreneurs – are likely to be turned off if the deanery is not 'doing' something. The bar needs to be set high.

Thanks to Mike Springate, our Conference reporter; to Frank Harris and all at P&P who publish so much to inform us in our deaneries; to Colin Hill for his work on the survey results; to all our speakers and last, but not least, my colleagues on CHDG. I hope you find this report stimulating and a helpful tool as you share Christ's mission and ministry.

KEEPING OUR EYE ON THE BALL The strategic role of the deanery as a means to a greater end.

The Rt Revd Nick Baines, Bishop of Croydon set the scene for the conference by asking "Is there a happy future for deaneries?"

For organizations to be successful they need a clear purpose, the right leaders, and a commitment to action. The Church and its structures are not there as an end, but as a means of spreading the Good News; otherwise we are wasting our time.

So 'Why a Deanery? Who is it for? What is it for? Is there a shared view?' If it is just a level of synodical electorate that happens to provide an opportunity for local discussion, is it worth it? Anxiety about the deanery is mainly fostered by people talking the deanery down from inside. It is important to identify what aspect(s) of the Church's purpose the deanery is there to serve.

The Church exists as a means to an end: the Kingdom of God. We should adopt, as our mission, the words of Jesus: "The time has come; the Kingdom is near; repent and believe in the Good News." The Church should be creating the space in which people can find that they have been found by God. "God is our happiness. God is our torment. God is the wide space of our hope." [Jurgen Moltmann].

The Church needs to be grasped by the grace of God. Deaneries have the advantage of not being locked into one parish. All deaneries are different because of the people that use them. Jesus was essentially 'Anglican' – in the sense that he excluded no one from his circle.

In the deanery, we witness how to be different and yet get on with each other. We must avoid being 'Jonah' – self-obsessed and ungracious messengers. For this is what the deanery is for: to unlock our self-looking view and force us to see the strengths of others. Our attitude needs to be one of "a confident humility" – which also implies, "I might be wrong".

There can be no single or standard model for deaneries. Instead they need to develop as units for mission and for theological reflection, exploring different perspectives and traditions in the context of outward action. In this way they will help create the different types of spaces that will enable people to connect with God.

The key question – at deanery level as at every other level – is this: Is our church a touching place between people and God or an institution of structures?

Deaneries should facilitate team working and support the sharing of resources for the work of mission. Leadership – the right kind of leadership – and vision are crucial. 'Focus on the message; explore areas of conflict; DO ACTION THINGS TOGETHER!'

2. PUTTING DEANERIES TO WORK

Prior to the Conference, a survey of Diocesan Bishops had been carried out to seek their views about the role of the deanery. An encouraging 70% of bishops responded, showing that most believed deployment of clergy and collection of funds were the most important aspect of deaneries. Mission came next but it became clear during the Conference that all three are inter-connected.

5. OTHER CONFERENCE WISDOM

Six significant issues emerged during discussion as a result of the input by the conference speakers.

- a) **Culture change:** *How do we change people's pre-occupation with their parish in order to allow the deanery to engage in mission?*

The potential role of the deanery in mission needs to be presented as a compelling vision. Those who offer that vision must be convinced about it and be committed to it for the long term.

However, the vision for the future must be thought through, with a profound sense of what might be possible. Hence the need for "Big, Hairy Audacious Goals". A clear 'Purpose Statement' is essential.

This does not devalue our inheritance. 'Where we are now' is the starting point. Human beings are inevitably fearful of change – especially in a risk-averse culture – but that need not prevent us offering a positive message of hope for the future.

- b) **How to do it.** *We hear the theory, but how do we make it happen in the face of disinterest? How do we express the 'added value' of Deaneries?*

Those who struggle with change must be heard and understood. Creative conflict in Synod is in principle healthy, but requires mutual trust.

Be clear about what has been decided. Even if things didn't go 'their' way, those who have been heard can usually accept the outcome.

Certain issues polarise. It is important to work at areas of disagreement, on the principle of 'appreciative enquiry', and hear each other's stories. The more we can understand, the more we can forgive.

payroll facility, the diocese carries all the responsibilities of an employer – but has no control over the arrangements under which the member of staff is employed, managed or reviewed. In the event of an employment problem, the diocese is likely to be answerable, for example, to an employment tribunal.

- *The PCC as employer:* A Parochial Church Council can act as an employer because it is a legal entity. Where the local PCC acts on behalf of the deanery, it is responsible for all employment arrangements, for ensuring satisfactory policies and procedures are in place for managing staff and for dealing with any matters arising, such as grievances, etc. But the problem of lack of direct control remains. Most parishes find the legal requirements onerous and the experience of deaneries is that parishes are not keen on these arrangements.

In both scenarios there are risks to the reputation of the Church should the employment not go smoothly. Whilst the church may recognise the difference between the diocese and the PCC as employer, as far as the wider world is concerned, the Church will be seen as the employer in all such cases.

Advice to deaneries, therefore, in some dioceses (based on legal advice) is *not to engage* resources either on an employed basis or under contract. This leaves the deanery in a dilemma as how to provide the support that it has identified as being needed.

Although there were no examples among those present, some deaneries are exploring the option of forming an incorporated organisation, with the Deanery Standing and Pastoral Committee taking on the role of directors or trustees in order that the deanery can employ the necessary resources. Whilst the most common type of incorporated organisation would be a *Company Limited by Guarantee*, other types under consideration are *Community Interest Companies (CIC)* and *Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)* – a new corporate structure designed specifically for charities that is likely to become available in the first half of 2011.

a) Working and learning together

Martin Seeley, Principal of Westcott House, picking up the 'deployment' issue identified in the bishops' survey, saw deaneries becoming the normative framework for mission in the future, with parishes as sub-sets.

Organisational anxiety is a common feature of deanery life. Parishes too are anxious about their future. All this makes it difficult for us to work together. But what are we anxious about? Do we no longer believe the Gospel we proclaim?

The anxiety generates a number of responses:

- reactive behaviour – shouting at each other
- crisis to crisis – 'lurching' with no sense of direction
- secrecy and a rigid bureaucracy – imposed policy, only one answer
- members cut off – voices not heard
- no consultation – or at best only a pretence of consulting
- polarised thinking – either/or, no grading of options
- attempting a quick fix – a yearning for instant or easy solutions
- adapting to Lowest Common Denominator or to the least mature – policy thus framed around the weakest, ignoring the complexities
- reactive leadership – following the last person talked to.

Anxious groups will then seek ways of avoiding difficult challenges: presenting the excuse, "the Diocese doesn't care!" They find they can sidestep the bigger challenges in one of three ways. But in all cases, nothing gets done!

- focus on fulfilling needs – "Your leader cares for you"
- identify an enemy to attack or from whom to flee – expressed as worry or complaint
- focus dreamily on a happy future – "Our next meeting will be better"

The following story from Tower Hamlets Deanery shows how it overcame its anxieties about the future by facing its challenges head on:

Overall the parishes in Tower Hamlets Deanery were receiving a 55% subsidy towards the cost of their stipendiary ministry from the rest of London Diocese. The local communities, however, were changing rapidly – with an element of ‘gentrification’ as the City of London ‘moved east’ as a result of the continuing development of Canary Wharf, but also with an increasingly lively and mixed ethnic population. These factors helped to give the parishes a sense of a common task.

The Diocese had produced a ‘Parish Viability’ list in which many Tower Hamlets parishes were amongst the most vulnerable. Plenty of scope for high anxiety levels there!

However it was agreed that the deanery should produce its own ‘Vitality and Viability’ test – to show potential for growth. This assessment was based on widespread consultation and visiting, along with data analysis, with the aim of creating a rolling five-year strategy for sustainable development, monitored by regular SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats).

An early outcome was a clear list of what people thought a church should be:

- open, inclusive, welcoming
- developing people’s gifts and active involvement
- actively engagement with the rest of the community
- living creatively with change

At a Deanery Away Day, a final strategy report was agreed in which the main Mission and Ministry Plan constituents were

- To sustain a vital and viable Church with an active presence in the community;
- To be open and responsive to the way people live locally and engage with them, even outside the traditional ways;
- To work as a deanery rather than parochially to optimise resources and provide greater flexibility; and
- To agree a deanery plan and budget designed to support a mission strategy

It was accepted that the main missing ingredient was an inter-faith strategy. At the time the fact of a 36% Muslim population proved too ‘difficult’.

4. THE DEANERY AS AN EMPLOYER.

In July 2010, the General Synod passed a motion from Coventry Diocese in an amended form as follows:

‘That this Synod

- (a) welcome the wide measure of discretion that each diocese has to determine the extent of any delegation of functions to deaneries;*
- (b) note the increasing range of legal vehicles available to deaneries where it is agreed that a more executive role may help in promoting the mission of the Church; and*
- (c) invite the Archbishops’ Council, in consultation with the House of Bishops, to produce updated guidance on available options, with examples of how recent practice has been developing.’*

The CHDG has been invited to take General Synod’s amended motion forward, while the Archbishop’s Council is awaiting responses from the dioceses as to how deaneries could be improved. A fringe meeting at the Conference allowed delegates to share their experience.

The debate at the July sessions of General Synod has left many deaneries with a dilemma, with no clear way to resolve the issue of how deaneries can employ resources. This is primarily because the deanery is not a legal entity and, as a result, cannot act as an employer.

Many dioceses have given to the deaneries the responsibility for the development of Mission Action Plans. Where the deanery identifies a need to employ additional or specialist resources in roles identified by the Mission Action Plan, or to engage in a deanery wide community initiative, it is faced with “How do we employ the resources?” This applies mainly to the employment of lay resources but can also apply to ordained resources in certain circumstances. The advice across the dioceses is diverse and confusing with no common or co-ordinated approach.

- *The diocese as employer:* Some dioceses facilitate the employment of deanery staff by acting as the ‘employer’. In addition to providing a

- We need to show hospitality to strangers for our own good – so that we can hear what they say about us.
- Being 'open' is good, but we need to be actively encouraging people to come in.
- The best way to connect with the visiting stranger is by sharing stories – hearing their story, and learning how best to respond with ours.
- The counter-intuitive truth is that an open church is a *safer* building – as confirmed by the Ecclesiastical Insurance Office!

A church building that is open seven days a week can be used in many ways – but beware of limiting these uses. We must not presume that everyone will like what we like. Whatever people see when they visit a church building tells them something about us and our attitudes. Appropriate and welcoming signage and messages are thus vitally important.

Church buildings across the country are already being used in a huge range of different ways. For example:

- Part of the church converted for use as a community space,
- multi-parish cycle tours – these are often organised by regional 'Old Churches Trusts' on the same weekend as National Heritage Open Days
- themed booklets that tell the story behind the different features of the church or describe local church life
- Days organised across the deanery to care for churchyards
- The church providing a venue for a village shop or a farmers market
- The church providing a home for the lending library
- The church being used as a village cinema
- Social events such as fish and chip suppers in church

The objective is to make an impact on the wider community, so that (as is already true in many rural communities) *people think the church belongs to them*.

The Church does social enterprise better than anyone else! Use the deanery to *make things happen*, by supporting initiatives by individual parishes. The message is, "Don't be afraid to show what you have – celebrate it!"

Contact Helen.mcgowan@divine-inspiration.org.uk for more ideas and resources – mentioning the Developing Deaneries Conference.

Groups don't automatically work well together. In any situation there are likely to be unacknowledged inhibiting factors. These need to be brought into the open:

- Anything that drags – 'baggage', past history, negative forms of accountability
- Context – other affiliations, treasured traditions
- Networks – e.g. the interplay of different social, cultural or generational groups
- Hidden agenda – other concerns and pre-occupations

In learning to work together it is crucial to have

- Faith and trust in God and in one another – build it through conversation and celebration!
- Confident, but listening leadership – offering clarity and continuity
- Shared vision and agreed task – which then involves others by contagion.

b) Deaneries as Mission Pioneers

Jean Kerr, Canon Missioner of Rochester Diocese, aptly introduced as "an enthusiast for the Gospel", saw deaneries as "A place of vision, beauty, service, wholeness – and struggle. Their focus is where and how people are living."

Deaneries can be the butt of many jokes, but recent church changes mean that what they can now achieve is endless! Deaneries mean Mission and Ministry – in that order. The challenge is about how all can flourish together.

Jean's day job is to deliver an invitation to local churches to 'engage'; "Would you like to think about...?" Deaneries are thus invited to "grow their own future" with no top-down formula. All deaneries are different, and will therefore develop different programmes – and all will have alibis for doing nothing!

Inviting deaneries to take greater responsibility for mission is not to be seen as a back door to cutting posts. Deaneries need to inspire members to look beyond the pounds, in order to allow the Holy Spirit into their midst to enable them to look to the future, to what God is offering; rather than to how things are or have always been. There is a huge gap in our understanding of what is going on in the world around us and how society is changing. The gap is widening between Church and the outside world in uncertain times; so we need to re-educate ourselves.

Jean finds in her work that lay people are often better than clergy in seeing possibilities such as:

- adjoining deaneries looking at plans together – especially in the same local authority area;
- treating boundaries as opportunities, not walls;
- cross-deanery work for new mission initiatives (“Fresh Expressions”) and enabling Bishop’s Mission Orders;
- clustering of parishes, especially where there are ‘sink estates’;
- gathering around strengths, expertise or agreed mission tasks.

The motivation for genuinely ‘fresh’ expressions of what it means to be communities of Christ’s disciples perhaps can be found

- in the prophetic style of 1 Peter 2 v 9-10: where those who were once a ‘no’ people, are now a ‘people of God’.
- In a change in how we view those we have traditionally regarded as ‘outsiders’.
- In identifying and filling the gaps left in most deaneries where humans are not flourishing and the church appears painfully tied in fragility, apathy or ignorance.

The DNA of deaneries needs to be infused with a deeper understanding, care for and feeling for the hope that this might offer in people’s lives today.

What can Fresh Expressions look like in a deanery?

Church buildings should be treated as assets, not millstones. The role of ‘Divine Inspiration’ (which is 50% funded by English Heritage) is to show how we can celebrate our church buildings – based on the aphorism of Hebrews 13 v 2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware”.

Churches can and should be used creatively seven days a week. The Cathedrals and Church Building Report “Building Faith in our Future” helps focus this.

The report makes three key assertions:

- i) *Churches are not just for Sundays*: We who are the regular worshippers should share them in an unconditional way.
- ii) *Churches are not museums*: Most visitors ‘drop in’ for a reason; and they look at the building and what it says about its members. It is important to enable these visitors to appreciate your church. The average length of visits is twelve minutes, so promote no more than ten facts about it.
- iii) *Churches are not golf clubs*: They are not intended as formal, smart places for members only.

Church people are often frightened of sharing their church – just as many non-church people are frightened of entering it. The challenge is to “Welcome the anxious”. People’s responses are then very different. We need to discover what kind of people visit our churches and what are they looking for. The outcome is a form of ministry. People come with many different motives and reasons beyond just simply enjoying the space and peace. Welcoming visitors unconditionally means not assuming they know what ‘the church’ (building or people) is about.

Four insights may challenge us and encourage us to make better use of our churches:

- Many deaneries will have people with specialist skills in the care of buildings that could well match what is available through the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC).

More energy would be released for any or all of these by following this maxim: 'Fewer meetings and more genuine *meeting!*'! However, whether any of this might come to life, or enable the deanery to fulfil its potential, depends on a number of other factors:

- The deanery needs to make geographical sense.
- The deanery needs to be big enough – but not too widely scattered – so that the deanery can clearly offer 'added value' in mission terms to its local churches.
- The attitude of parishes and benefices to their deanery will vary and the 'mix' of parishes in a deanery will affect the way in which cohesion and common purpose can be developed. A deanery will function more effectively when it recognises its internal dynamics. Three models are commonplace:
 - A *federal* model: no one church dominates; therefore parishes are free to grow their relationships (or indeed they can become more isolated)
 - A *minster* model: one larger church functions as a 'distribution depot' feeding resources out to satellite churches.
 - A *hybrid* model: a federation of mini-minsters – who may actually be implicitly in competition with each other.
- The attitude that the deanery is not where a parish wants to send its top talent. Some parishes don't want to share their gifts around!

In summary, deaneries operate as a mixed economy of neighbourhood and network, which allows them great potential to collaborate together over a wide area. There is a major job of promotion needed: "Deaneries are a central part of Mission and Ministry. Every church needs a deanery!"

3. WELCOMING VISITORS Seven days a week

Helen McGowan of 'Divine Inspiration' (who consults for other dioceses from her Coventry base) offers practical and creative ideas for effective engagement with visitors to your church.

- In existing church buildings, there might be scope for changing the timings and/or the shape of church services
- Opportunities might exist to re-start church afresh in a new building, owned and financed through the deanery,
- Deaneries can take the lead in creating a 'community hub', a facility that could include (for example) a coffee shop, GP surgery, shop, Post Office, computer cafe etc, together with a place of quiet.
- New places are needed to provide a sacred space that is accessible to groups in society for whom the traditional church building is a barrier. Christ's disciples today may well benefit from meeting in a different location or a different mode. How about in a pub?
- More ideas can be found in the resources available through the "Fresh Expressions" web site (visit www.freshexpressions.org.uk).

Any pioneer initiative or 'Fresh Expression' will be a fragile plant which, like the olive seed, may take a long time to germinate. Leaders in the deanery must allow it time to happen and avoid knee-jerk reactions and premature judgements.

The big underlying question is whether we are just to keep the Church on the road or to seek ways to grow numerically and flourish spiritually. Jean believes that these latter two are connected. Deaneries are well placed to engage with 'pioneer ministry', but are prone to spend too much time analysing and debating differing views on current issues. They then either respond in the ways they have always done, or else they deny that there is any issue at all. Either way, creative opportunities have been side-stepped.

Instead the call to deanery members is to "go new ways: *more of the same will not do!*" There is no shortage of action in the church, but much of it is squandered, not focussed. How can you ask the people and structures who have contributed to the problem to find the solution? "How do we inspire people?" Jean asked. "By letting the Holy Spirit inspire us!"

c) Unlocking the Gifts and Talents in Deaneries

Roger Morris, Archdeacon of Worcester, saw deaneries as units for co-operation in mission, being well placed to operate beyond parish boundaries and with other organizations – particularly as people have become more mobile and belong to several sub-communities of interest.

The Bridge Report (1997) has a lot to answer for. People remember it mainly because it proposed that deaneries should be abolished, implying a complete failure to imagine deaneries as other than tired, bureaucratic bodies. Certainly the report suggested that many deaneries had little relevance to the life of the church today, and that lay membership was too often elected on the 'buggin's turn' principle. No wonder many have lost interest in the deanery or have become dispirited.

But Bridge did note the deanery's liaison role with business delegated from the diocese. The report also recognized that deaneries provided potential areas of co-operation in mission; that they enabled the Church to collaborate with other institutions; that they could co-ordinate resources for mission; and had a range of human and financial resources to facilitate mission beyond parish boundaries. Deaneries can also provide support and encouragement, not least to parish clergy, who often feel isolated and lonely.

So why are deaneries seen as so dull? Parishes and benefices often have little sense of their deanery – yet few can survive alone. A network approach needs to be at the centre of all mission planning.

Clues to growing the deanery as a body and strengthening its identity:

- Chapter meetings need to be taken more seriously. As clergy feel more and more isolated, priests lonely and 'invisible', Chapters are essential to release them into deanery life.
- Lay Chairs can encourage liaison by visiting all parishes in order to foster a greater sense of deanery cohesion.
- Cohesion will be strengthened through a lively deanery newsletter and/or web site. Pictures of people & places will have more impact than anything else. Many

people today have considerable communications and technology skills. Such a resource needs to be pooled.

- Deaneries need to develop a deanery 'Mission Action Plan' (MAP) – encouraging cohesion by thinking strategically together about Mission and Ministry – see www.churchmaps.co.uk.
- Churches in a deanery need to work together to identify places needing co-ordinated ministry e.g. schools, supermarkets.
- A 'Skills Audit' will enable expertise to be shared across the deanery – especially expertise in areas that go beyond traditional concerns of finance, governance and church maintenance.
- Parishes in a deanery need to learn to collaborate positively and generously in the allocation of Parish Shares – so that it can be a source of mutual support and encouragement, rather than a duty required by the diocese.

A whole range of more specific projects and tasks can also contribute to this sense of mutual encouragement and common purpose, and draw on the skills that have been identified during the audit – many of which will otherwise go under-utilised. Some of these examples may seem quite familiar, but they take on a new significance if attitudes change. No deanery should imagine it has to attempt them all!

- Deanery social events & competitions.
- Deanery quiet days and retreats.
- 'Open' Synod meetings with invited speakers.
- Deanery Music and Evangelism.
- Deanery services, provided they have 'added value' – e.g. visiting musicians, speaker etc.
- A Deanery Library of Resources – so that no parish need feel it is out on its own.
- Deanery finance advice – perhaps in the context of a free exchange of PCC Annual Reports & Accounts – to help those who are stronger to understand the needs of the weaker.
- Despite the conclusions of the Bishop's Survey, opportunities for vocational development and training are more accessible at deanery level.
- Worship and Spirituality perhaps focused through a Deanery Prayer Diary.
- Children and youth liaison and resource sharing.