

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Deanery Synod Report Jan – Dec 2019

The Deanery Synod met in February, May, July and October in 2019.

At the February Synod, The Revd David Beales gave a presentation on Pioneer Ministry. The concept behind Pioneer Ministry is to find creative ways to get God's message through to people.

Having previously lived in Dunstable, David and his wife moved to Essex with the idea of connecting and engaging with people beyond the church. With a friend he introduced the concept of the 'Church on the Farm', where new animal arrivals were blessed and people were encouraged to bring their own pets to special services for a blessing.

In his Ministry he has found simple ways of communication, including football; which led to him getting involved in an ex-offenders' football club, and encouraging the gathering of friends and their acquaintances for food, friendship, the Apostles' teaching and prayers. Having engaged, he then asks the question, "would you like to take this further"?

In Matthew 28, Jesus says, "Go and make disciples, baptise them and teach them to obey the commandments".

David challenged us to ask ourselves the question 'Can we create a North Essex hub', and how can we employ what we've heard in our own ministry?

At the May Synod, Rev'd Margaret Davis gave a thought-provoking talk described the three-month sabbatical that she took at the end of 2018 where she explored the issues faced by rural churches across the country. She described that there are many challenges to Rural Ministry, and the approach taken from area to area can vary greatly.

In isolated areas, particularly where a large percentage of parishioners are farmers, loneliness and depression can be a major factor, which is often exacerbated by a lack of transport links. That isolation can also mean a lack of support, with both Clergy and Laity forced to work long hours, which can be both exhausting and disheartening.

Each of the rural parishes Margaret visited have risen to meet their own challenges in different ways. Some have re-examined how they conduct their worship, and have implemented solutions that range from removing pews, to moving from the church building to the Village Hall. The Carlisle Diocese are pioneering an Ecumenical Church, for the Clergy of the different denominations leading the Worship, while closer to home, Littlebury church has cut back on the number of services, but increased its links with Great Chesterford.

It is a fact that it will not be possible to continue to maintain all the church buildings in rural areas, however, walking away is not an option. This is an issue that the church will increasingly need to deal with in the years to come.

In July, the Archdeacon Robin King gave a talk on 'Resourcing your Church', and challenged the Synod members to re-examine the various issues that they face in their churches from an alternative perspective in order to find smarter and more novel solutions. Likening challenging situations to the task faced by a rower in a boat, Archdeacon Robin described the point where rowing harder will not make you go any faster. When this happens, though, you can - somewhat counter-intuitively - let the force of the boat carry you further and faster, i.e. you let the boat do the work. He asked that we re-assess what we view as problems, and see if they might not be opportunities in disguise, or if by taking the opposite approach you might discover a more effective solution.

For example, where a parish has no church warden – could that job be shared out among multiple people, lightening the load of the task and taking advantage of the accumulated experiences of multiple people? Many parishes expend a lot of effort focusing on attracting

young people to come to church, but could some of that effort be more efficiently spent attracting older people? Where are the areas where, if we did less, we might do better?

At the final meeting of the year in October Rev'd Dr. Elizabeth Jordan discussed what was new and innovative in Lay Ministry and what can we do to help others recognise their calling.

There has been a proliferation of ministry under various 'titles' in the past, but it has been recognised that the Diocese needs to simplify things by asking:

- what is it you are doing?
- what resources do you need?

For example, in relation to funerals, there has been a big change in recent years with a distinct increase in humanist and secular services, and the church needs to rise to this challenge. The parishes have indicated that there is a need for more resources to support funerals, and Pastoral Assistants have been identified as a resource that may be able to fulfil this need. Bereavement can be extremely difficult and unwelcome but at these times, a good listener is helpful and often a way to introduce Jesus. The concept of 'Spiritual Companions' has been developed to allow certain Pastoral Assistant to take funerals and pass on their wisdom and understanding in a one on one ministry.

The key message of the talk was that the Laity can do all sorts of things to support the church, in ways that do not necessarily require authorisation. There is also a lot of training resources available for those who need it. Pastoral Care training is open to anyone recommended by the Incumbent, specifically for people with listening skills and empathy from worldly experience. A tutor is appointed, who can help recognise a person's particular skills and suitability for various roles.

There are many ways in which individuals can support their church, and these can take a variety of forms and levels of formality. The church and individuals will need to work together to best determine how best to make the most of their gifts.

The Deanery Service was held at the Church of All Saints, Great Chesterford on 20th October.

Kevin Halsall