



SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of Deanery Synod on 20 March 2013 at St Andrew's, Churchdown

Present:

Revd Canon Richard Mitchell, Area Dean, and Mrs Sue Padfield, Lay Chair.

The Revd D Gill, the Revd J Walden, the Revd J Perkin, the Revd J Hills, the Revd S Dangerfield, the Revd A Lomas, the Revd J Bond, the Revd S Mason, the Revd K Madden, the Revd A Jones, the Revd S Taylor, the Revd M Thompson, the Revd J Longuet-Higgins, the Revd K Morgan and the Revd S Hobbs.

Mrs K Carpenter, Mrs H Cotton, Mr N Hogg, Mrs E Ashenden, Mr R Ashenden, Mr T Wiltshire, Mrs P Walker, Mrs J Badley, Mr R Cook, Mrs V Bolch, Mr C Hill, Mr R Parker, Dr A Nicol, Mrs C May, Mrs D Bach, Mrs M McGhee, Mrs J Frost, Mrs B Fellowes, Mrs W Meadows, Mrs M Richardson, Mrs M Mitchell, Mrs J Heylings, Mr M Heylings, Mrs J Smith, Miss E James, Mrs R Blandford, Mrs A Godwin, Mrs K Thompson, Mr P Cotton, Mr A Clive and Miss B Dunn.

Mr A Wilkins and Mr M Bradbury attended in place of Mr P Collins (Sandhurst) and Mrs M Barclay (Staunton) respectively and there were also many other guests from the various parishes in view of the special nature of the meeting.

Apologies were received from The Ven Geoffrey Sidaway, the Revd P Donald, Mr G Davies, Mrs E Frampton, Mr C Jakeman, Mr P Collins and Mrs M Barclay.

Several members of diocesan staff were present – Bishop Michael, Andrew Braddock, Pauline Godfrey, Ben Preece-Smith and Lucy Taylor. Lucy introduced the first session. She told us that the last twelve months or so have seen the launch, in our diocese, of “Journeying Together”. The vision is a diocese that worships together, sharing our faith and values, visibly present in every community and serving the wider world. Within that are several specific priorities:

1. Resourcing each community well.
2. Helping each community plan for mission and ministry.
3. Supporting and equipping leaders.
4. Providing structures and buildings that are fit for purpose.
5. Ensuring good financial health at both parish and diocese levels.

She encourages all church communities to use the Journeying Together document for study, prayer and review of local ministry plans. Synod's discussions that night would focus on the first and fifth of the points listed above.

Andrew Braddock spoke about Effective Ministry in Every Parish, which is a key (but not the only) diocesan strategy involved as we seek to strengthen and grow our churches. EMEP has "matured" since it was first conceived and is warmly endorsed by Diocesan Synod.

Andrew said the first thing to keep in mind is that there's already a huge amount of effective ministry going on. One example is the important growth in the variety of different licensed ministries over the last few years, with the increasing role of self-supporting ministers being particularly worthy of note. In the next 5-10 years, the latter will probably overtake stipendiary ministers in total numbers. And there has also been a great expansion in lay ministry. What is more, with many people becoming involved in things like Experience Easter and Open the Book, it is clear that ministry belongs to all God's people.

There is also a noticeable ongoing decline in the numbers of stipendiary clergy. So the number of *incumbents* has declined. And so parish is added to parish, and so on... there are places where this trend now puts real strain on the parish system, and on incumbents personally. People are tempted to hark back to a "golden age" of "one priest, one church, one parish", which may never have been a true picture. In any case it is now very much *not* the norm: only 22 out of 350+ parishes in the diocese now have that model, and the shift away from it is continuing.

One major aim of EMEP is to begin addressing the problems, allowing clergy to lead and not just become managers rushing from one task to the next. How can we do that while maintaining the parish as a basic unit of ministry? There are several strands to the strategy that has been conceived:

1. A commitment to growing an effective Christian presence in every community.
2. A commitment to growing the ministry of all God's people.
3. Supporting incumbents in strategic leadership and oversight.
4. "Local ministers".

Pauline Godfrey then spoke specifically about that last point, the local minister. Such a person is a recognised focus for the life of the local church, an enabler of the whole church's engagement in the wider community. The local minister would be commissioned by the bishop. He or she is not a "little vicar", working alone, but is to be part of a team of teams. The incumbent will still undertake a lot of the "hands on" ministry.

It is likely that many future local ministers are already involved informally in local ministry. They need to be people of prayer, and encouragers of others; people whose natural instinct is to help others fulfil their potential. They should be able networkers, and mission-minded, ready to see where God is at work. It is acknowledged that they may need support and training to step into a slightly more public role than they have been used to.

What next? PCCs are asked to commit to the vision of EMEP set out above. Each parish/benefice would then undertake a review of its current ministry position, using diocesan officers if helpful. Once a parish/benefice has identified the gifts that need unlocking, it can move from discussion to action. NB in addition to support from diocesan staff, printed materials are also available.

Time was allowed for questions, and the following points arose:

- Bishop Michael described “ministry”, for EMEP purposes, as being much more than just leading worship. It could cover activities occurring throughout the week, if needed, but in general terms it is about ensuring that we have people and skills sufficient to lead the preaching of the gospel, pastoral care and worship.

- It was pointed out that recruitment might produce local minister candidates who are not PCC members. Bishop Michael felt congregations would be well advised to try and ensure that there is a material overlap, otherwise there is a danger church leadership could become split, with incumbent and local minister handling “mission” and the PCC being left with “buildings”.

- It is perhaps not surprising that EMEP may bear comparison with aspects of the operation and governance of some non-conformist churches. But Bishop Michael was keen to stress that the role of “local minister” can be taken by anyone, formally trained or not, previously experienced in church leadership or not.

- There was a concern expressed that, given human nature, the relief that may follow when someone is put forward as a candidate for the first local minister in a given area may lead to the project dying out after that. Bishop Michael explained that the aim was to find someone who would emerge as the leader of a team, rather than someone working alone, and the new system should release the incumbent (perhaps especially in rural parishes) to do a role that will change, with space to think strategically.

- Bishop Michael was asked whether there was any experience from pilot schemes to do with the question of how the church engages with communities. He addressed an issue over the “public profile” of a new type of minister and said he could see that there could be a good case for a diocesan inauguration of some kind. It would be difficult to time such an event sympathetically, since one of the key elements of EMEP is to recognise that each parish develops at its own pace with all of this. But he can see a need to give local ministers authority in an appropriate way.

After a break, Ben Preece-Smith gave a presentation about parish giving. He began by setting the scene with reference to the worrying but seemingly persistent myth that ministry is “free” to congregants, i.e. there are funds elsewhere that pay for professional ministry etc. There was, in the past, material funding for local ministry from the Church Commissioners. In the 1960s that source provided something like 75% of the cost of local ministry. Today it is more like 10%. Looking at it another way, in the 60s a full-time incumbent’s stipend was about £16,000 in today’s money, of which only £4,000 needed to be raised locally. Now the cost is about £43,000 - so the amount that needs to be raised locally has increased tenfold. The number of stipendiary ministers has decreased by about half over the period in question, but

there is still a very substantial overall increase in the effect that stipendiary ministry has on local ministry budgets.

The current cost figure of £43,000 is the stipend of £22,000 plus employer costs of 20% (e.g. NI), employer pension contributions of £8,000, a grant of £1,000 and housing costs of £8,000. The resulting figure of £43,000 is described as the starting point for discussions on parish share. Two other figures are particularly relevant in the discussion. The first is the overall cost of maintaining a single incumbent post, which includes costs of curacy, training, and central services (including the DAC, education and a small contribution to the national church) - the total figure is £73,000. From that can be deducted the financial effect of vacancies (£3,000) and the contribution of the Commissioners' stipend fund and grants (£14,000) to give a "cost of ministry" figure of £56,000.

In terms of our contributions to these costs, where does Gloucester Diocese sit in the national picture? In 2005 we were 26th of 43 dioceses in terms of per capita giving. In 2012 we had slipped to 39th. Bearing in mind that we're a fairly rich southern diocese, the change in that period is particularly worrying. But on the other hand, in terms of personal giving, the Diocese appears to have improved materially, from 31st in 2006 and on a downward trend, to 18th in the most recent report. This may mean parishes' income, on average, has increased substantially. However, what is certain is that Parish Share receipts have only increased by a relatively small amount in that period.

Looking next at the costs of parish ministry over the Diocese as a whole, in 2011 there was a deficit of over £1m. From this it is clear that Parish Share income is not presently paying for parish ministry. Diocesan synod passed a resolution to reduce the deficit to nil by 2015 and we are about half way through the five year plans that were then put in place. It is believed that parishes' Parish Share targets are reasonable; parishes' increased income must feed through to the centre. The Parish Giving Scheme is understood to be very helpful where it has been adopted, and help is also available from diocesan staff and archdeacons. The Diocese also has a wide range of printed materials e.g. publicity showing how much a vicar costs, what £10 pays for, what the Church does beyond Sunday worship, and indeed the annual report. What is more, diocesan staff will look to create new resources where there is a real need.

Again, time was allowed for questions.

- If Parish Share contributions are not going up by as much as parishes' income, this may be partly because some persist in the view that PS is a kind of tax. But it is not, and it ought to be right at the top of parishes' priorities - something they should look to settle almost before anything else.

- How do reps go about convincing their fellow church members of the need to contribute more via PS? We heard from a treasurer who was been in that post for ten years, during which period the amount requested in PS has increased by 100%. They have paid in full every year. The response was that they recognise that every parish will need to make its own decision. Churches with income that truly is growing should pay more. If a parish is really struggling financially then it ought not to suffer

a particular burden on account of PS. But if there *are* difficulties, the affected parishes ought not to just accept the status quo. As mentioned above, schemes and resources are available to support an aim to increase personal giving within a congregation. Personal giving is a fundamental part of being a Christian responding to a generous God - that's a message that needs to go out clearly, perhaps starting with the very young!

- Are parishes' overheads going up? Ben responded that there are certainly strains on parishes' budgets from things like increasing insurance, heating and lighting costs. There may also be a perfectly understandable desire to use increased local income to invest locally or replenish reserves. However, this cannot happen sustainably at the expense of the ministerial budget, which is met via PS.

- The possibility of real forced reductions in numbers of stipendiary clergy hangs over the Diocese if we cannot make serious improvements in overall financial contributions to the costs of ministry. Any such reduction is likely to stretch the current ministry provision beyond what is really bearable. But Bishop Michael and his staff believe parishes will respond to the present campaign, and so avoid the fairly drastic cuts that will otherwise be in prospect.

- It is possible that reps will have "heard this all before" - but nothing much will happen unless they take the crucial message back to parishes via PCCs and their own connections and friendships. Diocesan resources can help, but reps are the best communicators. EMEP and finance are crucial areas of diocesan policy. Bishop Michael pleaded with reps to do all they can to see that PCCs sign up to EMEP, recognising that parishes' current positions differ, and commit to reviewing and increasing contributions to PS.