

# Heywood & Middleton Deanery Synod

Notes of the Special Meeting of the Deanery Synod held on Monday, 26th June 2004, at the Old Grammar School, Boarshaw Road, Middleton.

## 1. Present

There were 39 people present

Canon Nick Feist chaired the meeting.

The guest speaker was Ven Dr John Applegate, the Archdeacon of Bolton

The meeting was open to all Churchwardens and P.C.C. members

## 2. Purpose of Meeting

Its purpose was to consider the two papers on the Proposed Clergy Deployment Strategy and Priority Parishes.

## 3. Opening Prayers

The Area Dean opened the meeting with prayers and the Lord's Prayer

## 4. Presentation of "Deploying Stipendiary Clergy"

John Applegate requested written comments on the proposals by end of Sept 2004.

He opened the proceeding by explaining that it took 5 to 7 years to 'create' a new vicar. More are now retiring than are being ordained and will be in the foreseeable future of 5->7 years. The Diocese was originally expecting to lose 19 stipendiary clergy, but that figure is now 23, in the period 2003 -> 2006. He explained that natural wastage will account for this loss and no one will lose their jobs. These figures relate only to stipendiary clergy and do not include NSM, OLM, Lay, the collaborative ministry, the Ecumenical ministries, or retired clergy.

The general expectation/assumption that each parish should have a stipendiary minister, and the historical apportionment of clergy based on population rather than the area of a parish would need to be challenged in the future. He also recognised that not every parish had a defined 'Mission' and each parish will need to have a clearly defined Mission in the future to help answer the question, with which John challenged the floor,

**"What is the best way of deploying clergy to promote growth?"**

He indicated a document "Mission Shaped Church" was available from Church House Publishing as a source of extra information and comment.

(Ed: <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/product.asp?id=68225> at £10.95))

He went on to make the observations that people no longer related to their immediate neighbourhood, often relating more to 'far-off' groups. There had been a drop of 30% in congregation size in recent years and there was much less voluntary work going on. There were new opportunities in mission through 'networking' and there was room for a 'mixed economy' of 'new church' and 'old church' styles. He pointed out the different ways the Greek Orthodox Church, for instance, have in their variety of 'ways in' to worship: Holy men and women to assist with prayer, use of shrines; they also support monasteries as well as their churches. Catholics also have different types of work and outreach in parallel with church based activities. He suggested that we have been putting more and more 'eggs into the Parish basket' for too long, and we should be exploring new ways, as well as maintaining the old ways, in the future. We should be planting new churches or re-planting churches where church life is on the edge of collapse, and referred to the Priority Parish Paper, which discusses these issues in detail. New ideas could be tried such as afternoon worship. This had been tried in Salford and 50+ -> 100+ congregation increases had been seen.

Questions then were taken from the floor.

Rev Andrew Millar asked, "What defines a viable parish?"

John replied that it was a difficult question to answer. He outlined some properties a viable parish would possess:

- Financially able to pay its way
- Would have candidates for confirmation or the OLM
- Would have a manageable population
- Was properly resourced

- Have a priest with a positive attitude
- Its ethos wouldn't be inward looking
- Would have a commitment to mission
- Would have a cross-section of age groups and not one which was predominantly retired and would be active in involving the younger community.

John made the observation that one of the difficulties in any re-organisation is that people tend to feel they 'belong' to a church building and not the C of E *per se*.

Comments were made about retirement ages: 70 was the age for incumbents or 37 years of pensionable service, whichever comes the sooner. There was no upward age at present for Priests-in-Charge. It was also recognised that there is currently a high dependency on retired clergy to maintain 'normal service'.

## **5. Group Question and Answer Session**

Following the presentation, a questionnaire was circulated at the meeting to get some immediate feedback on some of the issues. The meeting split into groups and each addressed a sub-section of the questionnaire. Time was short and hence the brief answers. (Ed: Apologies: Responses were too fast to minute them all)  
(Ed: The responses to the questionnaire are separately attached.)

## **6. Area Dean's summary of responses**

- There are too many buildings to support... (so long as it isn't ours!)
- We currently spend £15M/annum on buildings and £7.5M on clergy.
- How do you keep faith with the existing congregations?
- Lay Mission is important – in workplaces and we should play to people's strengths
- Lay visits could be done to follow up 1<sup>st</sup> time attendees
- Clergy should be released from unnecessary paperwork – either through paid or voluntary staff.
- We should share resources across existing parish boundaries
- There is an expectation of the people which, with existing patterns of worship, cannot be maintained with a shrinking number of clergy.
- Possibilities of holding afternoon services should be investigated
- Expecting priests to take on an extra parish at the end of his/her working life is an unreasonable expectation of the priest's abilities and can be a psychological blow to his/her current ministry.
- We should put expectations on ourselves to discover our own talents and put them to use.
- God has put us into this situation. The question is how do we respond?
- We will need to support poorer parishes from the richer parishes as we are all 'one body'.
- We need a leaner, fitter church.

## **7. Comments from the floor**

- Time was too short to do a proper justice to the topic and the possibility of a longer session should be looked into, possibly by means of a Conference. John said this could be arranged if there was support for such.
- We need to get to the 'grass-roots' and seek the opinions of the people
- Slides and material should be made available for wider use.  
(Ed: Slides are now available on the website or on request)

## **8. Final Summing up and challenge**

- What is the mission for in each of our parishes
- Each parish needs to publish a Parish Mission document for the consideration of the Pastoral Committee
- We need to grow together, knowing how each of us wants to move to achieve their particular mission.
- Make use of the resources produced by Robin Gamble :- "Plan for Growth"

## **9. Closing Prayers**

The meeting closed with prayers and The Grace at 9:30pm.