

and may obscure the need for a serious review of stewardship and more realistic levels of giving.

- We need to find out what our communities really feel about the buildings rather than assuming that they value them highly and would miss them (or perhaps don't and wouldn't).
- Using buildings in more specialised ways – e.g. using large buildings for large events!

The most frequently mentioned areas for the Pastoral Committee to address were:

- The need for Durham Diocese and the central Church of England structures to tighten their belts was mentioned repeatedly (and strongly), including the view that some posts/committees had little or no relevance to the needs of parishes/localities.
- Gathering the resources and expertise to support the assessment of all buildings within the deanery in terms of fitness for other community roles and uses.
- Helping any parish where the nettle of closure needs grasping to do so with a positive future vision.
- Supporting individual parishes in the process of making realistic financial projections, and clearly communicating the deanery's overall situation.
- Helping re-educate parishes about financial realities and stewardship responsibilities.
- Supporting the sharing of expertise and knowledge about securing grants.
- Asking whether there is a 'deanery reality' and then dreaming on behalf of the deanery.



Stockton Deanery



**“Building for Mission and Ministry”
A Summary Report from the Deanery Officers**

Version 1.0
15th March 2006

Introduction

Following the Saturday workshop that was held at All Saints, Preston-on-Tees on 26/11/05, the Deanery Pastoral Committee reviewed the process so far and asked the deanery officers to act as the drafting group for the summary report to Deanery Synod. The drafting group met twice to sift through the individual church reports and the reports of the groups from 26/11/05, and a draft reported was prepared and circulated.

How was the report prepared?

The decision was quickly reached to base this report mainly on the notes from the group work at the Saturday workshop, rather than on the full set of parish reports. This was because we felt that the group notes already represented a helpful distillation of the original input.

Review comments were received from the Pastoral Committee, the Clergy Chapter and one locality, and incorporated into the current version. Some comments helped fill gaps in the draft report, while others helped sharpen the focus and make it clearer.

Other localities are due to meet and discuss the report in the next few weeks and their comments will be added as appendices as necessary. We feel strongly that this must be a living document, and so it will no doubt grow and change over the coming months.

Structure of the Report

The report consists of three main parts:

1. Highlights from the comments made in groups at the Saturday workshop about the display of reports.
2. A critique from the drafting group of some of the themes that emerged, along with some reflection and focusing of thoughts.
3. A list of outstanding questions and issues that still need discussing or addressing – many of them issues for the deanery as a whole.

At the end of the report, Appendix 1 contains a summary of the group reports submitted by their facilitators under the three main headings of 'Mission', 'Ministry' and 'Buildings and Finance'.

The most frequently mentioned areas for the Pastoral Committee to address were:

- Building up meaningful involvement in mission and ministry for lay people – training, training, training and more training.
- Supporting the discernment of the gifts/ministries/vocations of all, not just being concerned with the fair deployment of clergy (though that was mentioned too...).
- Helping parishes come to terms with the post-modern world and context – more communications.

Topic 3 – Buildings and Finances

Among the common themes were:

- The need to be more realistic and open about finances.
- Some groups saw rationalisation of buildings as inevitable/essential. Others pointed out that however inevitable it may at first seem, simply closing churches to save money may not answer the problems facing the church now, and may not be right for the future either.
- Congregations will not necessarily gather at another church (even within a locality) if one closes. In other words, we could lose income as well as shedding 'liabilities', which would produce little net change. At the same time we could fatally undermine mission and ministry to a whole area. Closure would have to be in a context of hope and vision for the future of mission and ministry.
- Continuing the situation where churches are used one day a week is not viable or sensible, although the opportunities for shared use in the community are very limited in some places.
- The shape/age of some buildings will require highly imaginative approaches to improve usability.
- Some churches are simply too financially challenged even to meet the basic health and safety and disability access requirements for multiple use.
- It would be great to be able to move the focus of investment to people rather than buildings. Legacies tied to buildings are a mixed blessing,

The most frequently mentioned areas for the Pastoral Committee to address were:

- Finding practical ways of fostering the sharing of resources between parishes and localities.
- Encouraging the strengthening of localities and SMDTs while recognising and affirming the need for diverse approaches.
- Pressing the diocese for change where the (perceived) constraints 'come from above', and being active in drawing in the help of diocesan officers for support, consultancy and training.
- Providing inspirational leadership, ideas, encouragement, etc. and being our conscience by continuing to facilitate discussions and keeping us thinking at a deanery level.
- Working to improve communications, including sharing/celebration of successes/good practice.
- Being active in supporting the process of change.

Topic 2 - Ministry

Among the common themes were:

- The inevitability of a lot more lay ministries and unpaid clergy (Reader/APA/NSM/OLM).
- The need to broaden our understanding of ministry beyond worship to include pastoral care, etc.
- A crying need for more lay training and support groups preferably organised and delivered at a deanery level.
- Freeing incumbents to lead.
- Strengthening the role of SMDTs (again).
- Recognising and encouraging ministry in everyday settings ('rub out the line between the church and the world'), not just through organised systems. In other words, helping people to understand Christian living as a life of ministry for all the baptised.
- Affirming and valuing the riches of the various Anglican traditions rather than being defensive of our own corner or tradition (clergy need encouraging to give a lead on this by working together).

Inspiration From the Display

Before moving to the topics of Mission, Ministry and Buildings, group members were asked to comment on things that had stuck out for them as they looked at the display or that had been in some way 'inspiring'. Some of the recurring themes were:

- A feeling that many parishes are being refreshingly forward-thinking.
- The desire to make buildings available and hospitable for wider use by communities.
- An eye-opening recognition of the diversity of the deanery, and the corresponding diversity of approaches to mission that is needed.
- A concern about the variance between dreams and reality within some churches, and also between the vision of church members and the needs/expectations of communities.
- The inevitability of being open to (even embracing) change, yet recognising and dealing with the inevitable pain and conflict as we 'die to old things (including buildings) in order to rise up anew'.
- A felt need to adjust our attitude to change, so that we no longer view it as an intrusion into our comfortable ways, but as an opportunity for adventure and growth.
- A sense of urgency and enthusiasm that for many parishes is severely dampened by concerns about financial survival.
- A worrying realisation that in spite of other comments about change, nearly everyone desperately wants to hold on to their particular building, which perhaps wasn't the best motivating force for creativity. One person dubbed this the 'club hut' mentality.

Critique and Reflections

The amount of commitment and enthusiasm in the group reports, as well as in the parish paperwork, was very encouraging, with relatively little scepticism and negativity.

Points to Affirm

The drafting group particularly wanted to affirm some of the positive points that emerged:

- The clear recognition of both mission and ministry as the work of all the baptised and the concern to energise lay ministry through identifying gifts, training, and removing artificial constraints.
- The sense of being church 'where we are' (which can mean networks as well as parishes), coupled with the idea that mission in particular is no respecter of boundaries, however wide we cast the net (parish, locality, deanery, or even diocese).
- The feeling that localities and SMDTs need to be beefed up and supported.
- The desire to turn the church inside out and the emphasis on gospel and kingdom rather than on church and congregation.
- The growing sense that we need to move beyond our identity being defined by historic buildings.
- The desire to discover and embrace new ideas, and to take risks.
- The enthusiasm for improving communications, learning from each other, and sharing ideas across the deanery, regardless of our particular tradition.
- The wish for more 'joined-up thinking'.
- The enthusiasm for closer, more active ecumenical working.

Concerns to Share

We also share some of the big concerns, for example:

- The feeling that urgent financial pressures can trap us in an introvert fortress mentality.
- The sense that the chilling starkness of the finances seems to make rationalisation of buildings inevitable, but at the same time the strong feeling that rationalisation could create as many problems as it solves.
- The note of caution that we may not know the real community needs, but that we absolutely need to before leaping into action.

Appendix 1 – Summary of Group Reports

Notes:

1. Remember, a summary can only ever be a 'best attempt' to recognise everything that has been said. Your precise comment may not appear!
2. This summary tries to represent the 'raw data' accurately, some of which is then challenged by the drafting group in the main report.
3. Several groups found it artificial or just plain difficult to separate their discussion of mission and ministry. This summary tries to organise the responses to keep a meaningful distinction, but we recognise that many comments could be included under either heading.

Topic 1 – Mission

Among the common themes were:

- The need to listen carefully to the communities we are set in and discover their needs.
- Turning the church inside out by a) going out to the community more, and b) simply being more welcoming in every sense.
- Working across parish and even locality boundaries, and especially working ecumenically (almost unanimous). Being more cooperative and collaborative rather than insular, suspicious or superior.
- Strengthening the role of Shared Ministry Development Teams (SMDTs), and encouraging authorised ministers – clergy, Readers, Authorised Pastoral Assistants (APAs) – to share their gifts in mission.
- Serving communities in practical ways.
- 'Tying in frayed edges' by following up the contacts we do have (e.g. through pastoral offices).
- Being more 'visible' in the community, but with a refreshed and renewed image. Being bold and imaginative, taking more risks, and surprising people.
- Investing in children, families and young people.
- Promoting kingdom values everywhere we can.
- Gearing our worship to the demands of mission and taking risks with different styles, times, venues, and so on.

using the term 'stewardship', the drafting group wanted to pose a much broader question than one about financial giving or 'careful' budgeting.)

Where is generous provision for mission in our budgets? Discuss.

How are we going to strengthen the ecumenical dimension of our review? There may be some parts of the deanery where the best building or the best initiatives in mission are owned by/coming from churches of other denominations. However, we are not aware of ecumenical partners having been widely consulted in this process so far except at our sole LEP (St Paul's). It may simply not appear in any of the reports, but if it hasn't happened, what do we need to do about it? In particular, do we need to pay special attention to the Methodist link in view of the Anglican-Methodist covenant? Also, how can we relate better to the 'new' churches that are seen by some as tremendous potential allies, while others perceive them as 'sheep-stealing' all the most enthusiastic and able Christians? How can we engage with existing and potential ecumenical partners now that we are already a long way down the line?

Communications has been highlighted as an issue - how can we make things better? Is a deanery website something we want to prioritise as the first step to better communications, and/or do we need a person assigned to the task?

Can we develop a culture where the 'strong' are always willing to help and resource the 'weak' both financially and practically, and where the 'weak' are affirmed as a vital part of the tapestry of ministry and mission with often unseen strengths of their own? The reality is that unless we address this issue we are condemning some parishes to decline and to closure of their church buildings in the fullness of time. Is this just a case of 'that's life', or are we willing to go the second mile to support them? Can we think beyond localities to acknowledge a handful of strong churches as having a special (but possibly informal) deanery-wide resourcing role? Are there individuals in the deanery who we could support and resource to act as consultants in, for example, health and safety, disability access, fundraising, or financial planning? Can we bear to look at building a factor into our new deanery parish share formula to recognise the burdens of being a small parish?

- The feeling that there are an awful lot of new things (practical and spiritual) for small or struggling parishes (not necessarily the same thing) to get to grips with as we move forward, which can feel overwhelming at times.
- The concern that our buildings were conceived and built in relation to historic practices, human communities, and geographic settings and that the 'parish' may no longer fit the building and vice versa.

Ideas to Challenge

A number of points that were raised gave us cause for concern and we would want to challenge them. At the same time we acknowledge that the reasons for the issues being raised so strongly may be to do with communication or the fact that we have a long way to go in terms of training and education:

- We felt that the criticism of the diocese for being 'high spending' and unfocused on the needs of parishes was largely based on lack of information or on mis-information. Eric Hall's recent presentation to the parish treasurers explains the breakdown of how money is gathered and how it is spent, and shows what a small proportion of the parish share goes to support diocesan officers. Perhaps we need to take responsibility for working harder at getting value from what is spent, rather than apportioning blame?
- We wanted to be cautious about the idea (which may have lain beneath the surface of some comments) that just being a Christian wherever we are, and doing practical things for the community is all there is to mission. We felt that there is more to mission and ministry than that, and that a balance needs to be held between practically based mission initiatives and personal witness and evangelism.
- A number of groups seemed to feel that 'undue' restrictions shackling certain ministries were another evil work of 'them' - the diocese - for example in relation to communion by extension, or the ministry of readers and OLMs. In some cases, the restrictions are perceived not actual, and the option exists to change the patterns of licensing and deployment. But in respect to communion by extension or the sphere of ministry of an OLM, the reasons are sound and theological and need to be better explained so that they can be understood.

- When the chips are down it still appears that many congregations would be tempted to engage in wider/multiple use of buildings for the sake of preserving them rather than for the sake of mission and the gospel. We also tend still to talk about 'getting in' young people and families because that's what we need to keep going in the future. We must be very self aware about our motives!

Some Questions and Issues for Further Discussion/Action

The questions and issues below are offered by the drafting group as things that are not directly part of the process at a locality/parish level, but that also need further discussion and/or action. They are not intended to form the whole agenda for the next stage of discussion in parishes and localities, where the main question to address will be 'What do we need to do in response to all this?'

Indeed some of these questions present challenges that can only properly be taken up as a whole deanery, and so the Deanery Synod will be the right body to decide how to go about tackling them. However, feedback or input from parishes and localities on any of them would of course be welcome, and you may find you feel prompted to take some direct local action on one or more of these issues.

How can we continue to nurture Christian vision and dreams within our communities? In other words, how can we keep the momentum and freshness of this process, ensuring that it remains high on the agenda right across the deanery?

Is a significant and renewed role for the deanery as a mission unit emerging from this process? Is Stockton Deanery rather than Durham Diocese about to become the structural level at which we most naturally relate for sharing of best practice and resources, for training, and for leadership? If so, is that right? If it is right, how can it be resourced? Can a part-time Area Dean really lead such a deanery? Would we need a more significant deanery budget to make things happen?

Are the roles of the Pastoral and Standing Committees shifting? The process and the questions on Saturday 26/11/05 inadvertently implied a raised profile for the Pastoral Committee in leading future strategy development for the deanery, and the answers from groups seem to affirm that, but is it up to the Pastoral Committee to be encouraging and leading parishes in this way? In other words, are we in the process of redefining

the role of the Pastoral Committee and/or Standing Committee and/or deanery officers? If so, is that the right thing to do, and how do we formalise it in relation to the Deanery Synod? If these committees don't do it, who should?

Are we on the cusp of turning this into a big review of boundaries and pastoral organisation? There are a lot of quite strong and good comments from groups about working across boundaries. We can be very informal and choose to ignore the boundaries if we put in place the right mechanisms, or we can simply redraw them. Which would be the right thing to do?

What is needed to encourage and enable collaborative ministry to become more missionary focussed? SMDTs were designed primarily with 'ministry' in mind (usually understood in a narrow sense), and localities often concern themselves with ministry issues across a wider area rather than mission. Do we need to redirect the brief of existing groups, do we need to renew what we have, or do we need something in addition? How can it become part of the culture?? (N.B. This is already being taken up with the Board of Ministries and Training!)

If we face up to some of the limitations that can't be overcome, what is each of our buildings actually really, really good for? One idea that has been discussed in terms of our buildings becoming instruments of mission is to look at specialisation as the way forward, with a group of buildings (perhaps within a locality) being used in different but complementary ways by the larger group of communities/parishes/congregations. For example, one might be better for hosting courses, another might be good for community groups, and another might be good as a prayer centre. Is deliberate specialisation just a crackpot scheme, something that might work for some churches but not most of us, or a good idea that we could look at more widely? If so, how can we take the idea further?

Is better stewardship actually the central issue? Some people would say that if we could stop moaning, take responsibility, and get Anglicans to give like Baptists or Catholics, we'd be able to solve all our problems with buildings and finances at a stroke, and have money to spare for mission. Is it true, and if so, what can we do about it? Could we do GEM on a locality basis to help with this? How can we foster a better sense within the deanery (or localities) of mutual accountability for finances? (N.B. By