

# Developing a new Ministry Strategy for the Parishes and Deaneries in the Diocese of Chelmsford

## Introduction

Bishop Stephen's paper *Transforming Presence*<sup>1</sup>, which was enthusiastically approved by Diocesan Synod on 5 November 2011, sets out four strategic priorities for the diocese:

- Inhabiting the world distinctively
- Evangelising effectively
- Serving with accountability
- Re-imagining Ministry.

This document has been prepared for the *Time to Talk* Consultation Day on 21 January 2011. It sets out some of the principles, values and questions that we will need to address as we develop our response to the fourth of these priorities. In setting out on this task we are not beginning with a blank sheet but are building on at least the following:

- The 2009 Deployment paper and the Deanery Vision Documents
- Recent stipendiary number projections
- Work on vocations (as presented to Diocesan Synod in November 2010)
- The on-going diversification of authorised lay ministry including the introduction of Authorised Local Preachers
- The introduction of locally deployed self-supporting ordained ministry.

This work is also in line with national Church of England priorities, as articulated by the Archbishop and endorsed in General Synod's *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* (GS 1815):

We are called:

- i. To take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England including the growth of its capacity to serve the whole community of this country;
- ii. To re-shape or re-imagine the Church's ministry for the century coming, so as to make sure that there is a growing and sustainable Christian witness in every local community; and
- iii. To focus our resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

Developing a ministry strategy that will serve the development of God's mission in our diocese may not be easy. We are diverse in our geography and demography as well as our understanding of theology, church and ministry. Our aim should be to use this diversity as a source of strength. This will require both grace and effort in order to foster a greater sense of mutual respect, trust and partnership in the Gospel.

<sup>1</sup> Booklets are available from the Diocesan Communications Unit or can also be downloaded from the website. There is also a video introduction by Bishop Stephen at [www.transformingpresence.org.uk](http://www.transformingpresence.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Available at [www.churchofengland.org/media/1163101/gs%201815.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1163101/gs%201815.pdf). See also the progress report GS MISC 995, available at [www.churchofengland.org/media/1287487/gs%20misc%20995.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1287487/gs%20misc%20995.pdf).

This paper aims to set out the key issues that require thought and action. In the main, these are presented as questions in order to promote prayerful discussion in parishes and deaneries as together we seek to discern God's wisdom and direction for the future. In many places, at least some of these topics will already have been addressed, so there will be experience and wisdom to reflect on and develop.

## Principles

The following principles were first set out in the 2009 paper *Principles for the Deployment of Ministry 2009-2016* and provide a foundation for the new thinking that is now required:

1. To recognise the diversity of available ordained and lay ministry (full-time, part-time; stipendiary, self-supporting; locally or nationally deployed; pioneer, strategic leader and/or parson, active retired; Church Army Officer, Reader, Pastoral Assistant, Evangelist etc.)
2. To recognise that the church is called to serve God's mission. This includes pastoral care for church members and the wider community together with the development of worshipping, witnessing and serving congregations which are turned outwards towards others.
3. To enable opportunities and new developments in ministry and mission to be supported alongside existing forms of church ministry.
4. To be committed to sustaining healthy communities, congregations and ministers through appropriate leadership and collaboration.
5. To recognise and affirm the plural nature of Christian leadership, mission and ministry.

## Two Fundamental Questions

There are two fundamental questions to address as we shape our Ministry Strategy:

- I. *How can we best accommodate our different understandings of **Priestly Ministry** and the place of the **Eucharist** in our worship?*

This relates to the role of the parish priest as incumbent. In order to avoid the extremes of being either a hierarchical clergy-led church or a clergy-less lay-led church, some speak of the movement from seeing the church as a community with a minister to being a ministering community. If this is right, how can we avoid dependency on ministerial hierarchies and promote mutual enabling and accountability within the Body of Christ? What is the particular contribution to the churches' mission that should be expected from clergy - recognising their different roles as incumbents, associates, or in sector or secular ministry? How can the churches in this diocese develop appropriate patterns of shared leadership between clergy and lay people?

A related issue concerns the pattern of Sunday worship - the trend towards parish communion requires a great number of priests each Sunday morning. Should we restore the profile of services of the Word that can be led by lay people? In some parishes, the

main Holy Communion service takes place at different times - including weekdays - or with multiple congregations joining together. Could this practice be adopted more widely? Or, rather than reducing the number of Eucharistic services, should we expect congregations to identify one or more suitable people to be ordained locally to sustain the sacramental life of the community?

Responses to these questions could differ depending on whether priority is given to the pastoral needs and preferences of existing members or the missional opportunities and spiritual health of the local population. How might any such differences be accommodated?

2. *What sort of authorised **Lay Ministry** does the church in Essex and East London require for the future?*

Every baptised Christian has a ministry to exercise within the Body of Christ, some informally or "for a season", others in formally recognised or more permanent roles.

Flowing from this, some subsidiary questions include: How can we best equip all God's people to be God's ambassadors in their various contexts? What kinds of ministries would best foster spiritual and numerical growth? Do we need to look again at how lay ministers are authorised and formed? What role should Readers have in the future? What is the right balance between prior training and on-the-job learning? Which ministries require diocesan/episcopal authorisation and possible licensing? Which can and should be commissioned and/or trained locally? Are we using the best titles for our current categories of authorised lay ministry? What new ministries might be appropriate (eg funerals, worship leader)?

### **Key Values and Topics for Consideration and Action**

As we address these questions, the following topics and values will also need to be clarified, agreed and acted upon in ways that are appropriate to each local context.

- I. How can we ensure that we **Build on Strength** and **Improve Quality**? How do we protect currently healthy and strategically important parishes from being disabled by reducing ministerial resources but equip them to become sources of nourishment to enable and strengthen other churches seeking numerical and spiritual growth? Work is needed to identify our strategically important parishes and to agree the criteria to be used.

Some possible indicators include: engagement with all Five Marks of Mission<sup>3</sup>; sustainable numbers and finances; effective use of occasional offices; recent baptisms and confirmations; a history of vocations to lay and ordained ministry; growth (numerically and spiritually); connection with wider deanery/diocese/world church; a suitable context

**I. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; 3. To respond to human need by loving service; 4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society; and 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.**

for training new ministers; effective collaborative leadership; etc. Are these the right indicators to use? What else is important?

2. That said, our criteria for deployment must be **equitable**, and sensitive to the **contextual diversity** of our diocese. A one-size-fits-all solution is inappropriate. There will be a challenge for us to value our proper diversity and at the same time, avoid special pleading from different constituencies.

How might we do this in deaneries, Episcopal Areas and across the Diocese as a whole? How do we identify missionally important contexts that might require long-term financial support and/or additional ministerial resources? How can we support deaneries and benefices to determine the appropriate number of congregations and/or buildings that are required for mission, worship and pastoral care in a way that is sustainable and fosters mutual health and vitality?

3. **Collaboration and Connectedness** is vital to avoid isolation and ensure appropriate involvement with wider Anglican, ecumenical and civic structures and organisations. There must be no solo ministers and no solo parishes. At every appropriate level (church, benefice, cluster/group/team, deanery) there should be mixed teams to lead the mission and ministry in that place, which might be termed Mission and Ministry Leadership Teams, recognising that the way these will be expressed will vary widely according to context.

How can we improve our mutual interdependence and support that fosters greater effectiveness in mission and ministry? What different provision may be needed in urban areas with churches in close proximity or in rural contexts where travelling distances are greater? Should every parish and deanery be asked to create interconnected and mutually supported Mission and Ministry Action Plans to 2025?

4. **Sustainability** must be a priority for us both in terms of the availability of licensed ministers and finance. We have a range of predictions regarding the reduced availability of stipendiary clergy over the next 10 years (see below for more details). These reductions are the result of retirements not the lack of money. However, our economic context is challenging and we currently find it hard to balance our budget.

In future, should we expect to be able to afford our parochial stipendiary clergy without national support (we received around £2.5M in 2011)? Should any future grants from the national church be directed to mission priorities - either support for strategic but poor parishes or for new mission work - rather than on-going parish ministry?

5. **Presence** - to ensure that there is at least one recognised "God person" or parson living in every community and associated with every church building/congregation. This is an important ministry for all clergy to exercise but in some places a lay person will be needed to provide or supplement this focus. Such people will be key members of their local leadership team and connecting points with the wider church and society. Clear accountability and support structures to the incumbent, rural/area dean and the archdeacon/bishop are needed as well as provision for training. How might this be achieved or developed in your context?

6. A key priority must continue to be the promotion of **Vocational Discernment and Learning** processes as part of the growth in discipleship for all our clergy and congregation members. Just as we value life-long learning, we must also practice life-long discernment of God's call to mission and ministry - this links to our new strategic priority of "serving with accountability".

What additional resource is needed at diocesan/deanery/parish level to make a difference? How do we draw on the ministry gifts of the full diversity of ages, ethnicities and cultures represented within our diocese? How might we begin vocational discernment from teenage years and refresh that discernment throughout life? How might we make better use of the ministerial capacity of retired clergy and lay people? In some parts of the Anglican Communion, there is much less reliance on nationally trained and deployed clergy and so, congregations are expected to discern and develop the ministry leadership they require from within. How might we encourage greater self-sufficiency without damaging our mutual interdependence? How might we better provide support and learning opportunities for all authorised ministers throughout their time of active service?

### **Stipendiary Numbers and Deployment**

It is well known that the number of stipendiary clergy available nationally has been reducing for many years. The most significant factor at present is their average age and the very high number who are likely to retire in the next 10 years - in Chelmsford, 47% of our stipendiary incumbents are aged 55 or over.

New vocations to stipendiary ministry have been reasonably healthy and consistent in recent years but are not sufficient to offset the high number of retirements.

However, when the number of self-supporting and active-retired clergy is added to the number of stipendiary clergy and licensed Readers, the Church of England has more ministers available now than ever before. The challenge facing us is to re-imagine the provision and deployment of ministry and finally let go of the cherished hope that every congregation will be best served by having a full-time stipendiary cleric of their own.

And so, our work on how we deploy fewer stipendiary clergy must go hand-in-hand with reconsidering the ways in which the church uses all the ministerial resources that are available in order to promote health and growth. Our paid clergy are likely to become more "episcopal" and have greater spans of oversight of both geography and other ministers. More self-supporting ministers will take on leadership roles. Greater levels of team-working and collaboration will be the norm. However, care will be needed to prevent clergy from becoming simply managers and administrators. How can all ministry be re-imagined in a way that is life enhancing, vocation fulfilling and relevant to the pastoral needs of the church and the mission opportunities of the world?

The 2009 paper *Principles for the Deployment of Ministry 2009-2016* began the current process of discerning new patterns of ministry and deployment priorities. Much progress has already been made but, sadly, the projections available to us at the start of 2009 have proved to be too optimistic and the decline in the availability of stipendiary clergy is likely to be larger and last for longer than previously predicted<sup>4</sup>.

Further work is underway to revise the targets and timing that are needed for Episcopal Areas and Deaneries but it is already clear that, if nothing else changes, we must plan for an average 27% reduction in stipendiary clergy in 2020 from the 2009 benchmark. We do not yet know when the reductions will finally bottom out, but it seems reasonable to assume that there will be further change beyond 2020.

Rather than plan reductions year-by-year or by utilizing the next retirement, it might be prudent for Deaneries and Episcopal Areas to consider how to best deploy the stipendiary clergy likely to be available in, say, 2025 - which, if vocations to stipendiary ministry do not increase, may be 30-35% lower than in 2009. From this worse-case perspective, we could then consider such things as:

- What additional lay and ordained ministry will be needed and how might these new vocations be discerned, trained and deployed?
- How can we further develop new ways of working and collaboration now, in order to prepare for the future we anticipate?
- Having formulated a pattern of ministry for the future with fewer stipendiary clergy, how could the larger number that will be available to us over the next 10-15 years be best used during the transition period?

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<sup>4</sup> We were expecting a reduction of 47 posts by 2016 (12%). Later national projections predicted a reduction of 57 posts by 2016 (15%) and a further 18 by 2019 (20%). By Autumn 2010, the national forecast was for an overall reduction of 25% by 2020 (making a possible reduction from 2009 of 27% in Chelmsford).