

Report of Deanery Synod 2020

There were only two synod meetings during 2020 due to the pandemic (one in January, held here at St Johns and another in November by Zoom) and there was only one topic on the agenda for both meetings. This topic being the re-structuring of the Diocese.

The meeting at St Johns consisted of the Archdeacon, Karen Lund and Helen Platts (Chief operating Officer of the Diocese) making presentations of the Diocesan vision for this re-structuring and commencing the consultation process over the proposals. It was emphasised that this re-structuring was necessary due to the large reduction in attendance across the Diocese, the consequent reduction in income and reduction of stipendiary clergy.

The main area of the Vision was the creation of seven new greatly enlarged Deaneries which would then be broken down into Mission Communities. Each Deanery would have a full time Area Dean ie they would not have a parish of their own, to oversee the management of it.

Everyone was invited to express their thoughts and views to them in the next few months.

The next meeting was the first (very delayed!) meeting of the new triennium and therefore officers had to be elected. Most of the officers continued in post ie Yvonne Mackereth of St Marys as Lay Chair, but Budget Secretary was vacant. Carol volunteered for this post and was duly voted in. (Budget Secretary is also on the Standing Committee).

The only other item on the agenda was the Briefing Document re the Diocesan re-structuring (which had been prepared following on from the consultation) regarding the proposals for the new enlarged Deanery and the "Mission Communities" within it. All the new deaneries will come into being on the 1 June 2021. Our Deanery will encompass the whole of south Manchester from the city centre to Wythenshawe.

It would appear from the maps in the report that each Mission Community will be taken from a natural geographical area ie the Stretford deanery will split into the Flixton, Urmston, Davyhulme area as one Community and the Stretford parishes into the other. However the two Old Trafford parishes may

move into the inner city Community as they stated they felt more aligned to that area.

The vision of the Diocese is to be “a worshipping growing transforming Christian presence at the heart of every community”, which to us, means get out there and be in the community and while we are doing it preach the gospel.

Because of the shortage of both personnel and money, not doing anything is not an option. We have been very fortunate at St Johns in that our congregation has been relatively stable. However most other Churches in the diocese have seen large falls in their congregations.

We broke up into discussion groups within our “Community” ie the DUF area. One of the ideas of being in a “Mission Community” is that we can share our resources together to work on projects. This means that any project is not constrained by the old parish boundaries and we (lay people as well as clergy) can work together on it more easily. One example of this that has already happened that Janice Mortimer mentioned, is Flixton Folk Festival which we thought worked really well. Other examples could be the sort of projects that we have worked on together with Flixton Fellowship where they had the freedom to go into the other parishes. (It is still envisioned of course, that our ecumenical links will be maintained and hopefully extended. The Diocese is sharing this document with our ecumenical partners.)

It is envisaged that each community will be led by a missional leader with a team composed of stipendiary clergy, self supporting ministers, lay readers and other laity as appropriate, who in turn support our congregations. Each congregation would maintain its own traditions and expressions of worship. In this way resources could be more easily shared.

Carol Cosham mentioned that bringing in this kind of structure could lead to rampant bureaucracy. Good lines of communication would need to be set up and used. Also good governance structures would be essential as each congregation would be accountable to each other. We are not sure how this is going to work in practice.

A further presentation of the briefing document was done on 13 January 2021 via zoom. This was a diocesan wide meeting. Emphasis was again made about falling congregations and subsequent reduction in income to pay clergy.

A short presentation was made by a rep. from Rossendale who have set up a similar structure as a Mission Community (MC). They felt it was working well.

Comment was also made that a pilot had been set up in North Manchester which appeared to be working satisfactorily. It seemed like it was an enlarged team ministry. However reservations were expressed that local pastoral links might be lost with such a large structure. It was also felt that each locality within the MC needed a "pastor" figure to be a local community link (figurehead?) as well as to the local congregation.

We broke up into discussion groups and mention was made again about possible difficulties in managing this hierarchical structure that will need to be put into place. This in turn will need strong leadership and management skills from the MC leader and others. Sadly more details on how these structures will work on the ground had not yet been worked out, though it would appear that these might be forthcoming in the autumn.

We await developments!

Carol Cosham

Janice Mortimer