A note from our Area Dean, Nigel Bourne

Gravesend Deanery is an eclectic mix of churches and church styles, and then of course there are the incumbents! Our Deanery is made up of 14 churches in north Kent bordered by the A2 and the Thames. It extends from Greenhithe to the west – with Bluewater Shopping a mere stone’s throw away – to Shorne in the east, with its delightful country park – a great place for families and dogs. Gravesend, a town with a rich history often linked with the Thames (as well as Pocahontas), is essentially in the middle of the Deanery.

The Deanery Chapter usually meets bi-monthly for breakfast, in each parish in turn. Not only do we eat sausages and drink coffee, we also do some business, share stories and pray for our various ministries. We also meet socially for more food and drink and fellowship, getting to know something of our families. The Chapter, in recent years, has joined with Dartford Deanery for a joint annual retreat. (This once included Angela Tilby’s outstanding exploration of the spirituality of Antony Gormley’s sculptures!)

The Deanery has an active Synod, made up of the usual parish members. Over the past couple of years, the Deanery, not just the clergy, has worked on a Deanery Mission plan, focussing on collaborative ministry and resourcing. We have made some progress but there’s room for progress! I feel we need to encourage significant numbers of new vocations, lay and ordained. Clearly, ‘one size will not fit all’, but ways of discipleship and various forms of worship that further inspire and feed our ministries and communities need to be explored and developed. There is a huge need for the word of God to be heard and lived out in our society generally and, not least, here in Gravesend. In addition to many long and faithful ministries lay and ordained, over the past few years, the Deanery has also been blessed by a number of curates who have all learned and made worthwhile contributions.

I have been in the Deanery for 20 years and recently became Area Dean. I have outlined my desire for the Deanery structure to be even more collegiate in its management with individual clergy and laity taking on various roles and responsibilities. I am taking every opportunity to encourage initiative and include colleagues whenever possible in the areas that have traditionally been centred on the Area Dean.

As a Deanery we are entering an exciting phase in our ministry with the ever-growing Ebbsfleet Garden City, expected to number 40-50,000 people in the next few years. Many members of the Deanery are also involved in Churches Together Activities in Gravesend, which is in part energised by newer Pentecostal churches as well as the traditional denominations. Such activities include street pastors, school pastors, foodbanks, Christians Against Poverty. There is also great cultural diversity in the Deanery, ranging from rural parishes to the hustle and bustle of a the town, which is also home to one of the largest Gurdwaras in the UK.

I would love to welcome a colleague who will be a willing partner in the gospel to meet the obviously spiritual and wider needs of our Deanery, a person who will be a faithful, encouraging and imaginative friend.