

## Diocesan Synod 12 10 2019

Bishop Simon Burton-Jones spoke on the work of the new Growth Enablers:

The worst kind of defeatism is when we stop doing the right things because we don't see quick results. The second worst kind of defeatism is when we won't try something new because we can't imagine the results. The Holy Spirit is a spring of living water for us. Think about the liquidity of water and its capacity to seep everywhere. There is a fluidity and speed about God's work that means we are always catching up.

Part of the duty of mission is to notice the opportunities, the patterns and trends of local life. To join the dots. Behavioural science and behavioural economics are expanding all the time. How do we identify spiritual behaviours in our communities and respond to them in ways that point to Jesus?

One of the risks of parish ministry – I speak from gold star personal experience - is to re-invent the wheel. To arrive at an idea that has been thought of and implemented already just down the road. Thankfully I think we are moving away from this failing as parishes learn from one another, but there is still some way to go. There is also a strong case for obtaining a more objective view of what is going on in the parish. We like to think we know our parishes well, but it is unlikely we do, given the speed of change and the greater anonymity of neighbourhoods.

Think back to the world in early 2011 when the last census was taken. The banking crash had just happened, austerity lay ahead, social media was in its infancy, politics was stable. It has been a decade of astonishing change that impacts intimately on our neighbourhoods. When we've sat in front of the same CCTV screen for months on end (if you'll take the metaphor), it's easy to miss the movements that matter. A fresh pair of eyes goes a long way.

We have created three growth enabler posts, one for each archdeaconry. Two of them are here today: Abi Hiscocks (who will work in Bromley and Bexley archdeaconry) and Dylan Turner (whose patch will be Rochester archdeaconry). The third, Graham Wilkinson, will work in Tonbridge archdeaconry. Here are three things, among others, they will do:

1. Come alongside parishes to help them further establish a vision for numerical and spiritual growth, using the excellent toolkit created by our own clergy and lay leaders.
2. Work closely with each archdeacon and their steering group to deliver support in a coherent, informed way.
3. Share thinking with those who support ministry with children and young people and who deliver community engagement, to ensure we do not miss things or fail to mobilise behind the Spirit's leading.

Here are three things the growth enablers will not do:

1. They won't tell people how to do things, like the worst kind of management consultant.

2. They won't have pre-programmed answers from a one size fits all checklist created by a diabolical diocesan algorithm. There is a receptiveness and flexibility about this process, so that learning can be shared across the diocese. Each growth enabler will come with an open and enquiring mind, keen not just to advise, but to be advised so that other parishes may benefit.
3. They won't audit the church they visit. Let me spend a moment or two on this one. I get twitchiness. The feeling that your inadequacies are only ever inches from being exposed. We are defensive because the Church seems to exist in practice in an edgy twilight world somewhere between grace and law. There's no doubt what we believe. Grace, God's boundless favour, should free us to live boldly and lovingly. Instead, we wait for the next discouragement to come our way for how we think we've failed. And then visit the same criticisms on others because we've been hurt.

If anyone feels anxious that their ministry is going to be found wanting, I invite them to contact Caroline Butler, my PA, and she will fix up a time when you can come round to my home and listen to me talk about my own weaknesses and mistakes in ministry. Block out a day for it.

We need so much more honesty in our ministry for God. Because it's then we begin to join another set of dots, those that connect our human weakness and God's strength. If I have any prayer for our diocese, it's that this kind of honesty will be liberated.

The growth enablers will come in their own human weakness, to help create a dynamic of encouragement, support and advice in mission.

We are a people of resurrection. And we all have a deep longing for Jesus to be embraced in our lives and in the lives of those around us. To bring healing for people in this most insecure and fractious of times. To help make this a reality, we have to work more closely and smartly together in mission.