



Minutes of Extraordinary Open Parochial Church Council Meeting

re Minster Communities

Sunday December 3rdst 2023 – 11.am Rothley Parish Church

Present:

PCC: Rob Gladstone (chair), Margaret Rouse, David Wilson, Sue Wilson, Chris Garnett, Ray Prince, Fred Sleath, Nigel Willey, Margaret Leverment, Susan Pinkus, (secretary), Wendy Lewis, David Hodgson, Liz Barker, Alison Parkinson

In attendance: 31 members of the congregation

Apologies: Wendy Ferguson

Introduction and Welcome

Rob opened the meeting by outlining its purpose.

1. To outline the process behind the plans for formulating Minster Communities
2. To offer a time for questions
3. To explain a task required by the Diocese and offer the opportunity for input from the wider Church community

1.Process

Maintaining church buildings with dwindling congregations, and therefore dwindling parish contributions in many areas, has been an ongoing challenge for many years. This situation has been exacerbated by Covid and the cost-of-living crisis.

At the moment, although not in debt, the Diocese has a £2.15 million deficit budget for 2024 and must, therefore, rethink how it resources mission and ministry.

The eventual decision was to form 20 Minster Communities across the Diocese with 4 stipend posts per community. These persons will not necessarily be ordained clergy. Every parish will have a named focal minister, either lay or ordained.

The current situation at Rothley Parish Church with 1 Church, 1 parish, 1 ordained stipendiary minister is rare in the Diocese.

At the core of the Diocesan vision is:-

1. Ministry to children and young people. The Diocese is very aware that the Church of England is not engaging with children and young people in many areas.
2. Inter-cultural worshipping communities
3. A Christian presence in every community

This vision has already been piloted in Launde Deanery.

It has also been discussed in North East Leicestershire (Thurnby, Scraftoft, Hamilton, Humberstone, Thurmaston and Barkby) for 13 months but has not launched yet.

The latest plan is to focus on larger areas, with the intention of creating a number of Minster Communities within them:

Area 1

This extends across Framland Deanery to the border with Rutland and Lincolnshire, and includes the following parishes in Goscote Deanery: Syston, East Goscote, Thrussington, Rearsby, Ratcliffe and Queniborough.

The proposal is to create 2 Minster Communities in this large area.

Area 2

This is North West Leicestershire and extends from Seagrave across to Ashby, including Rothley and Loughborough.

There would be 4 minster communities in this area.

Birstall, Thurgaston and Anstey will be included in City and Suburbs area in the future.

Fred Sleath and Margaret Rouse, together with Rob as Area Dean, have already attended initial meetings concerning these plans. More meetings are planned soon.

2. Time for Questions:

Q How will this affect our Patronage with CPAS?

Patronage is involved in appointing ordained ministers to churches/parishes. Our current patrons have many concerns about the Minster Community process. They do not want to lose their right to appoint suitable ministers for Rothley. CPAS has stated that sole patronage must be preserved in any future appointments at Rothley Church.

Q How does this affect Deanery structure?

Deaneries are legal structures in the Church of England and are ultimately responsible to the Diocesan Synod and the General Synod, which makes governance decisions for the Church of England. Changing Deanery boundaries is a very long-winded process, so not likely to be done before this process is finalised.

Q Will any Churches within Minster Communities close? For example, if they don't have a viable congregation and they do not have weekly worship.

This isn't in the plan, but Festival Churches may become common. These are churches where the worshipping community is largely absent apart from e.g. Christmas and Harvest. They cannot support regular worship services.

Q How does this effect evangelism and discipleship?

Church does not have to meet in a large building. Christians can meet in halls or houses.

Q What is the logic for the groupings? Is it geography or theology?

Officially it is geography, but, in reality, there are some churches that would not be able to work together due to theological differences. In reality, grouped Churches will need to have theological coherence in order to work effectively.

Q Is this a community or a business decision?

It is true that a business decision would see those communities not self-supporting as closing, but the Diocese does not want to go down that route. It is against one of the Church of England aims: "A Christian presence in every community".

Q What is the position of the individual parishioner in this process? For example, could a parishioner approach any one of the 4 ministers attached to their community?

The role and vocation of every stipend is still being sorted out. The aim is that every Church has a named minister, but this won't necessarily be an ordained person. It is worthy of note that already people's first point of contact is not necessarily the vicar, but other volunteers or lay ministers in the Church family. This is necessitated already at Rothley as Rob, as Area Dean, has current responsibilities across several parishes.

Q Without an ordained minister, isn't there a danger that some churches could veer off in their own direction, away from traditional Anglican teaching?

Training for lay ministers is vital.

Q What will happen to Churches who don't want to join a Minster Community?

The Diocesan plan is that all appointments will ultimately be made to Minster Communities, hence any such church would not receive a replacement if their clergy left.

3.The Task

We have been asked to evaluate what our Church is like in terms of its strengths and weaknesses according to 9 criteria. The congregation are invited to contribute to this. The deadline for our report to the Diocese is January 12th so Fred requested that any contributions be received by him by Friday, December 15th please. Those present were invited to leave their name with the PCC Secretary so that the necessary documentation could be sent out to them.

Rob Gladstone closed the meeting in prayer at 12 noon.