

# NORHAM DEANERY SYNOD

[www.norhamdeanery.org.uk/](http://www.norhamdeanery.org.uk/)

FROM THE SECRETARY IAN CORSIE

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## How do I help my neighbour?

We know that there are folk around us who are struggling financially. But in what practical ways can we help?

This was the question addressed by local churches who met together in Tweedmouth Parish Church Hall on Wednesday 2 July. The meeting was organised by the Norham Deanery Synod (the Church of England parishes in the Berwick area) but was open to all local churches.

The first issue explored was debt and the rise of the 'payday lenders'. Anne Howie and Tony Mudd of Northumberland Credit Union Ltd (NCUL) gave a presentation on the savings and loans services they can provide; and this was backed up by Dave Sage who spoke of his experiences over the past two years in setting up Glendale Community Savings and Loans.

News that a 'Berwick and District Savings and Loans' group is being set up to provide a Paying-in Point for NCUL was warmly welcomed, since local church folk can be encouraged to join and get involved as it develops.

Moira Macfarlane, the Manager of Northumbrian CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau), spoke to the meeting about the problems of people in our community without immediate access to food or money, and how to identify and help them. Susan Latheron, the Debt Counsellor in the Berwick office of Northumbrian CAB, followed this up, speaking from long years of experience: the key is to encourage those in need to seek help sooner rather than later. Small cash donations to CAB for helping clients in adversity are extremely important; often help over a small matter tips the balance between despair and hope.

Berwick Food Bank has become a lifeline for those genuinely struggling to feed themselves and their families. Jan Casson spoke about the importance of wide community support, particularly the lifeblood of constant donations of tins of food. This is something we can all help with.

Most people know about the Salvation Army's Harvestfield furniture facility at Ramparts Business Park. Steve Turner reported that turnover is already running far ahead of expectations and expansion is planned. Everything on sale is donated; and profits from sales are used by the Salvation Army for other community projects (for example back-to-work schemes). For those in real need, furniture can be provided free.

The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne, Peter Robinson, then chaired a discussion to identify practical measures that could be taken by local churches and individuals. The importance of

identifying people in trouble was one key issue since the need is often deeply hidden. Another was the task of raising awareness of the help and support that is available to those in real need. Better co-ordination and 'signposting' of information and contact details is an important task for the churches given their presence, and the use of their buildings, in all communities.

Encouraging people to volunteer to help with the relevant agencies, and mobilising the resources of the elderly were also identified as vital tasks. The importance of using church resources to provide school holiday activities was also stressed. So too was the need for active advocacy of the current needs and issues so that good pathways can be found through the complicated jungle of the current welfare system.

It was agreed that the meeting had provided a valuable opportunity to be informed about current poverty problems, and the resources available to deal with them. Churches were encouraged to get involved and to work in close harmony with all the existing agencies and groups active in providing help to those in our community who most need it.

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