

Report from the Deanery Restructuring Group to the Norham Deanery Synod meeting on 23rd November 2015

A. Introduction

This report summarises the work of the Deanery Restructuring Group over the past six months and makes a number of recommendations about how we might move forward from this point.

The Group's work has been largely exploratory, in learning about the strengths and weaknesses of each other's parishes, in sharing our hopes and dreams for the future, and in discussing the different perceptions and expectations of the lay and ordained members of the Church.

The report reflects the diversity of opinions expressed by Group members, and represents a conglomeration of views, rather than the unified mind of the Group. Some of the sections contain mutually exclusive ideas, but there's enough common ground to discern a way forward.

Section B provides a summary of the background to the Group's formation and the context of its work. Section C records the membership of the Group, its meetings, and subjects considered. Section D identifies the key points arising from the Group's various discussions, under a series of sub-headings. Section E records some conclusions and observations by Neil Crosbie arising from the Group's discussions. Section F makes a number of recommendations for Deanery Synod to consider.

B. Background to the Group's work

During the stipendiary vacancy in Berwick Parish, the Deanery Pastoral Committee met on 14th March 2013, having been invited to do some thinking about the needs and future possibilities of ministerial deployment in the deanery. Three members of the committee had each prepared a discussion paper for the meeting, in which the following points were made:

Rob Kelsey argued that:

- Working in partnership involves respecting – rather than assimilating – the integrity of each partner. (Working together doesn't necessarily imply worshipping together, for example.)
- Some groupings of parishes that look good on paper don't work so well in practice. It's necessary to work 'with the grain' of the natural relations between neighbouring parishes.

Ann Peters said that:

- In order to be open to new ways of doing things, we should think in terms of posts, rather than personalities (bearing in mind that, in ten years' time, most if not all of the existing post-holders might have moved on).

Peter Middlemiss argued against the 'drip, drip effect' and the 'salami slicing' of stipendiary posts as follows:

The question is ‘What would Norham Deanery do if it had just one stipendiary priest?’ The fact that it may have retired priests and readers mustn’t get in the way of answering the question, for the important thing for me is getting the Church in each parish to work out what it sees as its mission.

Somebody once said that the job of the Church is to keep the rumour of the existence of God alive. ... The need then would be to make sure that in each Christian Community there was a group that would also have this same ambition. Along with the priest they could work out how the many aspects of Church life that are vital for the life of their community are developed. ... If we work out in our minds a system with one, we can work out how to deploy full time and other priests and people in forms of lay ministry.

I am convinced that thinking through such a hypothetical situation, we would be exercised to work out in every community what the mission of the church should be in that place. It may be simple like my imagined parish with no ordained or lay ministry available, meeting on a Sunday, or another day even, to hear the word of God, pray and have coffee and doughnuts. That could then be a sign of hope and not of despair.

The Deanery Pastoral Committee generally agreed that:

- A parish priest is properly concerned with both church leadership and community involvement. This means that geography as well as population determines a parish priest’s workload. Thus, in order to be effective, a parish priest should have the care of a maximum of three parishes (four at the most).
- The purpose of the deanery is to support the local church. Thus, deanery-wide initiatives should ‘add energy’ to, rather than take energy away from, the local church.
- Future appointments within the deanery should include some kind of deanery-wide role.
- Any deanery-wide role should be consultative, rather than prescriptive. The priest with a deanery-wide role should be like a gardener, asking, ‘What’s right for this particular place?’ (i.e. parish), rather than attempting to apply a one-size-fits-all solution across the deanery.

The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne met with the Deanery Pastoral Committee on 3rd July 2014, when he told us that:

- Because of a combination of reduced income and the reduced availability of stipendiary clergy, Newcastle Diocese has been aiming to reduce its stipendiary clergy from about 140 in 2009 to about 130 in 2014 and about 120 in 2019.
- All deaneries except Norham and Tynemouth were asked to reduce their stipendiary deployment by 1-2 posts between 2009 and 2014. As a deanery, we need to be prepared to play our part in the second five-year period.
- We should think in terms, not of diminishing the church in Norham Deanery, but of re-shaping the deanery in order to accommodate whatever changes come along. How might we make best use of our stipendiary clergy, while encouraging alternative forms of ministry?
- We need to engage with the positive aspects of the Church of England’s Reform and Renewal programme, so as to benefit from possible future grants from the Church Commissioners. How might we re-shape the deanery in order to encourage growth?
- We need to think not just about the institutional survival of the church in Norham Deanery, but also about the way in which we serve the needs of our towns and villages, and meet the challenge of a changing countryside.

The Deanery Pastoral Committee met again on 14th October 2014, and agreed to make the following proposal to Deanery Synod:

1. An Open Synod is held in the spring of 2015, to which all church members, and especially churchwardens, are invited, to have a full and frank discussion about the issues outlined above.
2. The Open Synod meeting appoints the members of a smaller, dedicated Deanery Restructuring Group, similar to the Deanery Finance Group that met to discuss Parish Share in 2011.
3. The Deanery Restructuring Group comprises the incumbent clergy plus one churchwarden (or significant other) from each parish.
4. The Deanery Restructuring Group meets more or less monthly for about six months, and reports back to Deanery Synod towards the end of 2015.

The Deanery Synod met on 27th November 2014 and approved the proposal.

The Deanery Pastoral Committee met on 13th January 2015, when it was agreed that Ian Corsie should invite Neil Crosbie to facilitate the Open Synod meeting and subsequent meetings of the Deanery Restructuring Group.

The Open Synod meeting took place on 16th March 2015. It was well attended by about 70 representatives from parishes across the deanery. The atmosphere was positive, with a sense that we're working together, that we're looking to the future, and that we're open to new ways of doing things. Following the meeting, the Deanery Restructuring Group was established.

The Archdeacon told a meeting of Area Deans and Lay Chairs on 13th May that:

[We need to] continue to take account of the need for future stipendiary clergy reductions, even though we don't know what the numbers might be. [We also need to] continue the process of shaping the deployment of the stipendiary cohort (and all our ministerial resources, in fact) within each deanery for the purposes of growth. Key to this is each deanery articulating its own outline vision for deanery mission and ministry for the next ten years, so that, rather than spreading the old model more thinly, we can work towards more effective deployment patterns in each place in the diocese.

The Archdeacon also said that, in the past, the Church Commissioners have given approximately £1.5m per year to the Diocese of Newcastle (which is about 20% of the diocesan budget). Under the Reform and Renewal Programme, the Church Commissioners will provide approximately £1.0m from the Deprived Community Fund (which, as the name suggests, is targeted at deprived communities) and an unspecified amount from the Strategic Development Fund (which is intended to promote the growth of the church). The Diocese of Newcastle will need to bid for grants from the latter fund, in order to maintain (or, possibly, exceed) its current level of income. Thus, we in Norham Deanery (and all the other deaneries) need to address the following kinds of questions:

1. Where in Norham Deanery are there mission and growth opportunities?
2. What are the mission and ministry needs within Norham Deanery?
3. What projects might we like to initiate, and what associated funding might we like to bid for?
4. How many more ordained and lay leaders would we like to have?

C. Group membership and work

The Deanery Restructuring Group was formed after the Open Synod meeting on 16th March, to examine the issues that had been raised at the Open Synod, in the light of other discussions taking place within Norham Deanery, the Diocese of Newcastle and the Church of England.

The membership of the Group was as follows:

Parish	Lay representative	Incumbent clergy representative
Berwick	Ian Hankinson	Dennis Handley
Tweedmouth	John Ayerst	Matt Knox
Spittal	Moira Renton	
Scremerston	Gordon Ritchie	
Norham	Terry Harris	Rob Kelsey
Carham	Peter Straker-Smith	
Cornhill	Sue Lindsay	
Branxton	Lesley Drummer	
Ford with Etal	Alan Holmes	Victor Dickinson
Ancroft	Ruth Turner	
Lowick	Jeanie Cooper	
Holy Island	Ian Corsie	Paul Collins

The Group has met on six occasions, as follows:

1. 1st June on Holy Island, when we explored our expectations of the outcome of the Deanery Restructuring Group meetings.
2. 20th July at Branxton, when we examined the strengths and weaknesses of each other's parishes.
3. 30th September at Spittal, when we began to articulate our visions for the future of Norham Deanery in five to ten years' time.
4. 13th October at Hunting Hall near Lowick, when we explored the different perceptions and expectations of the lay and ordained members of the church.
5. 10th November at Berwick, when we discussed the 'raw data' of the responses to a questionnaire previously circulated by Neil Crosbie.
6. 18th November at Horncliffe, when we discussed a draft of this report and endorsed Rob Kelsey and Neil Crosbie, on behalf of the Group, to finalise the report in the light of comments made at the meeting, and circulate it to Deanery Synod ahead of their meeting on 23rd November.

Neil Crosbie facilitated each meeting of the Group, apart from the meeting on 10th November, when he was unwell. Written notes from each meeting were produced and circulated to the members, and reports from the first three meetings were circulated to all those who had attended the Open Synod meeting on 16th March.

D. Key points arising from the Group's discussions

D1. Insights that have been expressed

1. We've learned about the strengths and weaknesses of each other's parishes, and how better to trust and talk openly with each other.
2. Some of our churches are doing very well in many ways, whereas others are struggling.
3. There are significant differences between the more urban and the more rural parishes.
4. Clergy and lay people have significantly different understandings and expectations of each other's roles and ministries.
5. Being a member of the Church means different things to clergy and lay people. The former tend to think more in terms of believing, while the latter tend to think more in terms of belonging.
6. There's room for a better understanding (by both lay and ordained people) of the role of the clergy.
7. There's a lack of understanding about what is meant by 'lay ministry.'
8. The clergy often find themselves acting as administrators rather than ministers. (There's a difference of opinion among the clergy whether the administrative burden is imposed by 'the diocese' or self-imposed.)
9. The clergy often operate with high workloads and sometimes find it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
10. The whole church would benefit if the clergy had more time to be leaders rather than managers and if lay people had more confidence and capacity to exercise their gifts of ministry.
11. We're in the early stages of a process of change. Some members of the group are keen to continue to be involved in the next stage.
12. There's a willingness to share and work together, which needs careful handling if it's to be done in the right way.

D2. Some suggested propositions for the future well-being of the Church and/or churches in Norham Deanery

1. We worship a God of mission, who cares for the whole earth that he has made. We seek to do God's will in the world and look to God to give the growth. We should be faithful to the Gospel, as Good News for all people, not simply focussed on the number of people attending church.
2. We are all, together, the body of Christ, with different gifts. Some lay people have gifts that the clergy don't have.
3. We should be guided by a vision of the church in which lay people ask, 'What can the clergy do for us?' (or, 'What can the clergy do to add value to what we're doing?') rather than, 'How can we manage with fewer clergy?'
4. We want to develop the discipleship and ministry of lay people because we want lay people to feel relaxed about living out their faith in the church and the world, not because we want to off-load the clergy's work onto the laity, or 'lighten the load of our busy clergy.'
5. There's more to lay development than lay people leading worship.
6. The mission and ministry of the Church are best done at a local level, by a local church that's engaged with the local community. Some things are worth doing collectively, so long as the local church is 'built up' not 'propped up' by the wider church.
7. Each church should have a dedicated minister of incumbent status, who can engage with both the congregation and local community, so as to make a real difference (not just lead an act of worship and go away again).
8. Church buildings are important, especially in rural areas. They belong to and should benefit the whole community, not just the congregation.
9. We should remain open to new and flexible patterns of ministry and worship. There are other ways of worshipping and serving God apart from attending church on a Sunday morning.
10. Energy can be released by doing things differently or more simply, i.e. matching what we do to the numbers of people and resources available, rather than straining our resources to keep doing things in the same old way.
11. Lay people should receive training that is appropriate to their situation (perhaps led by other lay people, rather than by the clergy), so that they're less likely to become 'clergy clones.'
12. We should continue listening and talking to each other, and sharing examples of good practice. We should be open to learning from the experiences and achievements of parishes and deaneries in other parts of the diocese and in other dioceses.

D3. Hopes for how the culture and/or practice of the Church and/or churches in Norham Deanery might have changed in 5 to 10 years' time

1. We're even better at working together and supporting each other.
2. Lay people are coached, resourced and supported, and feel confident and relaxed about exercising their gifts of ministry by leading worship and serving the local community.
3. Clergy 'help the church to be the church,' instead of being 'helped by' the members of the church. Lay people are supported by, rather than supporters of, the clergy.
4. Clergy have more time for thinking, praying and strategic planning, and for engaging with key people and activities in the wider parish.
5. Lay people are better able to live out their faith in the whole of life, not just in church.
6. Lay people in leadership roles are no longer viewed as 'second class priests.'
7. Lay people lead more acts of worship that are more appropriate to the local community.
8. The clergy co-ordinate their efforts more effectively.
9. There's a greater understanding of the distinctiveness of some of the roles of clergy and lay people. Where appropriate, there's more interchange between clergy and lay people in the roles that are common to both. In general, there's more collaborative working between clergy and lay people.
10. There's more of a 'mixed economy' of worship, with more lay-led services, not necessarily on a Sunday morning. Worship is in a style that suits the people involved, e.g. a simple, informal, and sustainable act of worship in a small church, rather than a 'reduced' version of what happens in a large church.
11. Church buildings are seen as an asset to the whole community. PCCs or Ministry Development Groups are thinking more in terms of community engagement than of 'keeping the church going.' Rural churches are hubs of the local community, working in partnership with Parish Councils, etc.
12. The small rural congregations, in particular, are more self-reliant and sustainable.

D4. Some thoughts towards an answer to the question, 'How might Norham Deanery accommodate a possible reduction of ½-1 stipendiary clergy posts within the next 5 years?'

1. To the extent that some clergy already feel overloaded, a reduction in stipendiary clergy should not be accommodated either by an increased workload on fewer clergy or by overloading the laity.
2. A reduction in stipendiary clergy would necessitate a re-imagining of the expectations of both clergy and lay people, as explored elsewhere in this report.
3. With greater lay leadership and some kind of deanery-wide administrative support, fewer clergy might have oversight of more parishes, without spreading themselves too thinly.
4. Some kind of comparative assessment of clergy workloads might be helpful.
5. The Reform and Renewal programme within the Church of England might provide the opportunity to diversify and even increase the ministerial provision within the deanery.
6. There might be more input at parish and deanery level to the drawing up of clergy role descriptions.
7. Future clergy appointments could include some kind of deanery-wide responsibilities alongside parish responsibilities.
8. Holy Island is both a deanery and a national treasure. Perhaps it could be half-funded as a stipendiary post and half-funded by some other means, e.g. some kind of Trust Fund.
9. Berwick Parish (with a population of about 4,000) could be defined as a half-time, and half-stipendiary post.
10. Berwick Church is thinking of planting a church in the northern part of the parish.
11. The urban parishes of Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal are a natural grouping.
12. Tweedmouth, Spittal and Scremerston have developed a close relationship.
13. Ancroft Parish has more in common with Lowick than with Scremerston.
14. Berwick and Norham could become one benefice.
15. Ford & Etal has close connections with Branxton.
16. Carham, Cornhill and Branxton are working increasingly well together.
17. Holy Island and Lowick are linked through the Holy Island and Lowick First Schools Federation.

D5. Initiatives that might contribute to a re-shaping of Norham Deanery

1. We might devise and obtain funding for a project that helps us to achieve a culture change in Norham Deanery. The project might include the appointment, for two years or more, of someone who would work with us (not do things for us) to develop the discipleship and ministry of lay people.
2. Many churches have a Parish Administrator. We might find a way of appointing an Admin Support Person, to provide a service across the deanery, and work for a particular parish (or for the deanery as a whole) as and when requested.
3. We might explore the possibility of using the rent from the vicarage at Branxton to provide funding for the Admin Support Person or some kind of deanery development project.
4. One person (or a team of people) might work across the deanery to encourage particular churches or groups of churches to develop their own capacity for providing a local ministry to a particular age group, e.g. children, young people, 45-65 year olds, or the over 65s.
5. One person (or a team of people) might facilitate the provision of regular, deanery-wide events that enable young people to express and explore their faith with other young people.
6. We might devise and obtain funding for a project that includes the appointment, for a year or more, of someone who would work with us to develop both local and deanery-wide ministries to a particular age group (as suggested at 4. and 5.).
7. We might devise and obtain funding for a project that includes the appointment, for a year or more, of someone who would work with us to develop the mission, of particular churches or groups of churches, to the wider world.
8. We might explore the possibility of resourcing the church's work in Berwick Academy from across the deanery.
9. We might explore the 'Minster model' of the Church, in which a group of ordained (and lay) ministers, based at a larger, central church, serve the outlying, smaller churches.
10. We might explore the idea of organising a Norham Deanery 'Away Day' and/or occasional deanery-wide events, to help us get to know each other and share a greater sense of belonging together.
11. We might explore the possibility of obtaining the services of a deanery fundraiser, who has the skills to help parishes think creatively and act effectively, in order to raise income from sources other than the congregation (to help with, e.g. parish or deanery projects, or part-funding of the Holy Island post).
12. We might re-visit the idea of appointing a Deanery Communications Officer, who helps churches within the deanery to communicate with each other and to the wider world.

E. Some conclusions and observations by Neil Crosbie

1. The work of the Deanery Restructuring Group as presently constituted is due to come to an end. The Group trusts that its work will be of benefit to the future well-being of the deanery. It does not see its work as being an end in itself but more a Stage One of an ongoing journey. Its hope is that others will build on its explorations.
2. The context in which we work is ever-changing. Beyond the Deanery, the Church of England's Reform and Renewal programme continues to develop. A new Bishop is due to be appointed to the diocese, and the impact of her appointment on the deanery is, as yet, unknown. Whether or not a possible reduction in the number of stipendiary clergy will actually come about remains unclear. The wisest approach to the ever-changing context is to envision how we would like to operate as a group of churches within the deanery and then to work intentionally towards that.
3. The first and perhaps the most challenging task of any change journey is to re-imagine how we would like the future to be. In its conversations, the Group has touched on some major issues, such as the nature of the church, the role of parish clergy, the extent to which clergy role descriptions might be varied, and the available capacity of both clergy and lay people for strategic leadership at deanery and parish levels. These and similar issues will need to be investigated, debated, and broadly agreed upon in order to provide a common foundation from which to move ahead.
4. Change is always personal. It is not something that happens to others 'out there.' It starts with 'me' and then with 'us.' The working of the Group, through different approaches at each of its meetings, has deliberately sought to build trust, to enhance open communication between all, to surface different perspectives and disagreements, to manage conflict, to achieve consensus, and to keep other stakeholders informed. Whilst the size of the group and the inevitable absences of members from each meeting have been inhibiting factors, I consider that the Group has made good progress in this regard and I am hopeful that the Group's experience can inform the future stages of the change journey.
5. Establishing and maintaining momentum is an important element in any change process. The Group has managed that reasonably well, committing itself to six meetings in six months in order to achieve the goal of reporting to Deanery Synod on 23rd November. There is a danger now that this momentum might stall, as a new group is formed and necessary communication takes place with PCCs and other stakeholders in the deanery. My advice is to keep moving forward, establishing a new group and undertaking various communications activities in parallel, rather than completing an extended communications exercise before establishing a new group to keep the process moving forward.

F. Recommendations

1. Having done what it was asked to do, the Deanery Restructuring Group, as constituted by Deanery Synod in November last year, should disband.
2. A smaller Steering Group should be formed to work on the next phase of the re-shaping of Norham Deanery, as follows:
 - a. The Group should have a majority of lay members, comprising one person (either lay or ordained) from each of the five benefices, either including or with the addition of the Area Dean and Lay Chair.
 - b. Membership should be based primarily on the ability and willingness to make a contribution. Some continuity of membership with the Deanery Restructuring Group would be helpful.
 - c. Deanery Synod members should be asked to recommend candidates for membership of the Steering Group.
 - d. EITHER Deanery Synod should delegate the appointment of Steering Group members to the Deanery Development Group (which is due to meet on 19th January 2016), for endorsement at the Denary Synod meeting on 9th March.
 - e. OR Deanery Synod should ask the Deanery Development Group to bring a proposal concerning the membership of the Steering Group to the Denary Synod meeting on 9th March.
3. The Steering Group should organise an Open Synod meeting early in 2016, to report back to a larger number of people from across the deanery on the contents of this report.
4. The Steering Group should consider the initiatives outlined in D5., and any other appropriate initiatives, and bring concrete proposals to a Deanery Synod meeting by the end of 2016.
5. The Steering Group should consult with the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne at an early stage, to inform him of our progress to date, request his support for our continuing progress, and seek his advice and guidance.
6. The Steering Group should explore the possibility of inviting appropriate people from beyond the deanery and diocese to visit Norham Deanery, with a view to informing us about what happens in other parts of the Church and inspiring and guiding us about the options available. One example of such a person might be Lindsey Hall, the Director of Local Lay Ministry in Lichfield Diocese (see <http://www.lichfield.anglican.org/ourdiocese/children--youth/ministry/local-lay-ministry/>).
7. This report should be presented for discussion to the PCC of each parish by a local member of the original Deanery Restructuring Group, with the responses collated and submitted to the new Steering Group.