

DEANERY VISION PLAN

Report of vision group: A VISION FOR OUR DEANERY

This group has considered the following issues:

- Use of buildings
- Number of Parishes and how they are managed and ministered.
- Ministry of Lay and Ordained
- Financial sustainability
- Movement from Maintenance to Mission
- Our constant movement forward and not backward so that the status quo becomes a SPRINGBOARD for Mission.

This paper should be read in conjunction with our background papers on buildings and ordained local ministry.

1. **Any vision for the Hinckford Deanery must take seriously the rural nature of the Deanery.** Apart from the town of Halstead, all parishes are very definitely rural although a few have major pockets of housing.
2. **The vision also needs to take into account the fact that the people who live in our parishes relate to a number of different towns,** some outside our county and diocese, including Halstead, Braintree, Haverhill, Cambridge and Sudbury.
3. **We need to recognise the ecumenical dimension** but due to the relatively small number of churches of other denominations present in the Deanery, much work remains to be done in effective working together between the denominations in this area.
4. **A vision for the Deanery should begin with the strengths we have through collaborative ministry, both as clergy and as laity.** All parishes share their clergy with at least one other parish and most have a long experience of being part of a multi-parish benefice. The two recently formed team ministries have given a new impetus to many parishes in learning to work together, to worship together and to resource one another. Most benefices would testify to the positive aspects of this. Nevertheless, there is still a significant number worshipers who remain opposed or apathetic towards involvement with others. It will be vital that clergy, readers, leadership teams and PCCs acknowledge the value in being together.
 - Benefice/Team/Deanery working enables
 - A critical mass needed to enable growth
 - Diverse opportunities and services

- Mutual support
- Shared training
- Resourcing

But how is that achieved without reducing the importance of the local?

- The perception of offering reduced numbers of services
- Clergy spread too thinly
- Difficult decisions regarding buildings
- Finding “SMART” ways of using our buildings – e.g. recognise those which are not Sunday Congregation Churches and look to encourage other uses/services

Less regular worship necessitates need for increased giving through direct debit or standing order. We must tap into the way that people do organize their finances and other areas of their life.

5. **It is vital that we offer training that is appropriate to our predominantly rural circumstances. The Deanery and its parishes need to identify training needs for existing and potential leaders.** Clergy are already fairly thinly stretched across the deanery, however a number of parishes have leadership teams or people who are exercising a variety of forms of ministry. The North Hinckford team have been in the forefront of providing training modules which they have made available for all parishes to share. As we try to grow in mutual support and resourcing, it may be possible for other benefices to offer to the Deanery a course which they can resource or facilitate, perhaps with the aid of the Colchester Episcopal Area Team or other agencies. Diocesan expertise will still be invaluable in the facilitating of courses, but it may not always be the Diocese that provides or leads the course. The Diocese may for example assist with a grant to enable the Deanery to use the Arthur Rank Centre. It will be important that the leadership of the parishes gives these courses their wholehearted support. We look forward to the possibility of the Diocesan Course in Christian Studies offering a base within our Deanery.
6. **Another potential strength in the Deanery is the number of our Church schools. We need to find new ways of helping parochial church councils and congregations to own and value their Church school. Church schools also need to be encouraged to understand the life and work of the local Church.** The effectiveness of the link between Church and school varies in the Deanery. The Diocesan Board of Education could offer assistance to us in this and perhaps we need to look at the possibility of shared information and training sessions. A number of local church school heads liaise, and the Deanery could help to facilitate this. The Deanery might also consider holding a social evening for Church School Headteachers.
7. **Elsewhere in our Vision Plan some consideration is given to a possible Youth Worker for the Deanery. We recommend that a working group be set up to consider the issue.** Consideration could be given to whether it would be possible for a youth worker to focus on both the urban and the rural part of the Deanery. The Deanery might consider sharing with a neighbouring Deanery. Braintree might be considered too urban. Clare be possible if a link across two Dioceses were considered

possible. Alternatively the Deanery could look towards a half time post such as half-time parish priest and half-time youth worker.

8. **The Deanery should use its Synod meetings to provide information and teaching resource to the Parishes**, so for example, when somebody comes to speak about 'child protection' there should be a general invitation to all concerned people across the Deanery.
9. **The Deanery should review its policy for venues for Synod Meetings.** Churches do not make ideal meeting places. They are not comfortable, and do not easily allow visual presentations to be made. Village Halls should be used where the budget allows.
10. **The Deanery needs to consider its staffing levels** in the light of the ministry it needs to offer and the possible need for the Diocese to reduce stipendiary clergy levels by an average of approximately one per Deanery. We have a possible timeline of current clergy and their possible date of departure. Would we be looking for a replacement priest for each present benefice? This might involve a stipendiary or house-for-duty post offering full-time or half-time ministry. Readers might be licensed to the care of a parish. Do we consider a benefice with a population below 2,500 to be viable? It has been suggested outside the Deanery that 2,500 is the population below which parishes might not expect to have an incumbent. The Deanery needs to take into account, however, the special needs of multi-parish benefices. It needs to recognize the sociological importance of belonging to a particular community and being able to express that belonging in its worship. That having been said, there could be some flexibility in relation to the size of benefices. What place should there be for lighter posts which could be available as first incumbency or pre-retirement posts, or for those with health or domestic issues to cope with?
11. **The Diocese, together with the Deanery, must take a long term view of the possible staffing structure. There needs to be a coherent strategy rather than a piecemeal approach to appointments.**
12. **The Diocese should reconsider its decision not to introduce Ordained Local Ministry.**
13. **Every parish or group of parishes should take up a mission challenge, develop and sustain it with appropriate support and encouragement.** Every parish has been asked to write its own Vision Plan, and to continue to develop it.

Opportunities or Threats

1. Whilst the Deanery could be a supplier of resources (staffing, training etc.) it probably could not resource 37 churches and so this would need ecumenical support.
2. Varying worship offered across the Deanery may be another way of encouraging parishes/groups to take up a mission challenge. However, diocesan planning had, in the case of Large Team Ministries left teams of

individual parishes each with their own PCC. Whilst that structure remains then ‘breaking down the walls of Jericho’ may seem a breeze compared to getting congregations to cross parochial boundaries.

3. The link between worship on a Sunday and money is so engrained that talk of joint services immediately raises the issue of reduced income for Church ‘X’. At an APCM, it was stated that income from Sunday giving had fallen by 10% since joint services been introduced. However, once that figure took account of reduced fees to locum clergy to maintain historical patterns of worship then the figure became a 3% net increase.
14. **We suggest that each benefice move towards becoming a united benefice, and we look for a lead from the Diocese in this matter.** The most important result would be a growing together of the parishes and their people and constituent groupings. Other consequences would be less parochial church council meetings, some doubling up of church officials such as treasurers and PCC secretaries, and a greater awareness of each other’s parishes. Within this framework there would need to be ways of safeguarding each churches links with its local community.
15. **Parishes should be encouraged to do all in their power to work effectively together and to reduce the administrative burdens both for clergy and their own people.**
16. **Each benefice should consider how best to use its church buildings.** There is room for churches in the Deanery that specialise as centres for quiet days, or for drama, or training, and which could then be resourced accordingly for the good of the whole benefice and the wider church. As such opportunities develop within the Deanery, this might also suggest specialist skills for which we might look in making appointments. Parishes should also consider whether their church could be used by their community for non religious-purposes.
17. **There needs to be more clarity about the processes involved in closing a church building,** and courage to “bite the bullet” when such closure would appear to be the only realistic option.
18. **Much further thought must be given to the way we work together, once all parishes have their own Parish Vision Plan.** The priorities of the parishes will challenge the Deanery about our overall priorities, and about the resources of manpower and training we could help to provide, in order to assist their vision to come to fruition.
19. **We intend that the discussion that has been initiated within the Deanery will continue and the Deanery Vision Plan will continue to develop in the years to come. It’s success will depend on the extent to which our vision impacts on:**
 - Use of buildings
 - Number of Parishes and how they are managed and ministered.
 - Ministry of Lay and Ordained

- Financial sustainability
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