

## **Hinckford Deanery – Deanery Vision**

### **Theology Group**

#### **Introduction**

The Five Marks of Mission have been our guide and inspiration as we have thought about the Deanery's theological response to God's call to us. These are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To seek to transform the unjust structures of society.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Whilst we are conscious that this is a Deanery Plan we have tried not to be too prescriptive and to allow freedom for individual benefices or parishes to develop their own particular ministries.

#### **1. Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom**

##### i. God's Call

The church of God exists because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Its purpose is to proclaim and to embody his resurrection.

Weak though we are numerically in the deanery of Hinckford we worship and serve One who has conquered death and whose love for every human being is unquenchable.

We dedicate ourselves again to telling the Good News of God's Kingdom. We will not lose heart because of our frailty.

Our telling of the Good News will arise not out of some pious sense of duty but because we worship an awesome and life-giving God.

##### ii. God's Call to Worship

Proclamation of the gospel begins with our worship. Each of our churches will, in the words of William Temple, "open the whole of its being to God". That will involve, again in Temple's words, "the quickening of our consciences by God's holiness, the nourishment of our minds by his truth, the purification of our imagination by his beauty, the opening of our hearts to his love and the surrender of our wills to his purpose".

Our worship is the expression of our whole life in Christ and will be shown in both our church buildings and in the temples of our lives.

##### iii. God's Call to Proclaim

We will, in ways which are appropriate for each parish/benefice, make known the story of God's loving purposes, conform our attitudes and actions to biblical teaching and seek to incarnate God's presence.

Nothing will be taken for granted or assumed, either from the past or for the future because the context of our proclamation is

constantly changing. The boundaries of our parishes, which we once guarded as guarantees of our identity, have been penetrated irreversibly by modern travel and technology. However, what God the Holy Spirit provides for our generation we will use to serve his purposes in our communities, schools and churches. Yet whilst technology and outward forms change, Jesus Christ does not and we will be faithful to the tradition handed down to us from the days of the apostles.

#### iv. God's Call to Listen

We will listen to the Holy Spirit and respond to what he is showing us about how to interpret the eternal message for tomorrow's world. Equally, we will celebrate our discoveries of what God is doing **outside** his church for he is present everywhere.

#### v. God's Call to Trust

God has made a covenant with us sealed with the blood of the cross. The promises of God's covenant with us are the rock on which we build.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.”

Isaiah 55 vv. 10 & 11

## **2. Teach, baptise and nurture new believers**

Seeking a scriptural example may prove helpful when considering a theological response to the call to teach, baptise and nurture. In doing so, a simplistic approach and use of scripture must be avoided but journeying with the text may well provide valuable insights for our current and future practice within the Deanery.

A good starting point may be to consider the Acts 8. 26 – 40, where Philip is sent by the angel of the Lord to the wilderness road from Jerusalem to Gaza and there encounters an Ethiopian eunuch reading from Isaiah. Philip explains the scriptures to him, awakening within him the light of faith until the Ethiopian asks to be baptised and goes on his way rejoicing. Is it possible to read this passage in the light of our own situation of ministry?

The wilderness road reminds us of our journey of faith and also of our ministry, bringing with it the idea of danger and difficulty as well as movement and direction. The two strangers in our story are thrown together and develop an intimacy which would not have been possible in other surroundings. The bonds of companionship and trust are forged more strongly, the more arduous the terrain which is covered. . Times of “crisis” (from the Greek meaning judgement or change) such as major milestones in life, bereavement, coming to faith, significant change in lifestyle etc. often compel people to place large amounts of trust in those ministering to them. We are trustees of a great treasure

in those who come to us seeking Baptism or Confirmation, wishing to enrich their faith, play a wider role in the Church etc.

It is here in this risky environment that those to whom we minister, like the Ethiopian eunuch, encounter God. The risk is also present for those who minister. Like Philip we may imagine that those to whom we speak have no interest in our message or indeed that they pose a risk to our safety, comfortable lifestyle etc. As the two sides place trust in one another and in God, both realise that they have much to say to the other:

- For the Ethiopian, the scriptures are explained, the seed of faith, planted by God, begins to germinate, and life begins to take on an entirely different shape. For one who was very much an “outsider” to the religious practices of his time, he is suddenly aware of his place within God’s relationship to his creation. The words which were dry and meaningless suddenly become living and vibrant and directly relevant to him.

We can use this as a model for our own teaching and nurturing, in attempting to transform the faith which seems irrelevant, confusing or simply representative of rite of passage (getting the baby “done”) or quaint historical practice, into something which has relevance and can be a vital transforming factor in the lives of those who come to us.

- For Philip there was a realisation that the Good News was for all, Gentiles as well as Jews. For today’s ministers the realisation may be alarmingly similar as well-organised, closely-knit groups are widened, barriers broken down and new possibilities explored. As well as fulfilling the call from God to teach, nurture and baptise his people, each encounter provides new insights about the nature of God and the way God works in the hearts of those who seek him.

For any of these to happen the seeds of faith, planted by God are needed and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in both the minister and the receiver of ministry. This can then be developed by meeting people where they are (“fresh expressions of church”, presence in the community, work in schools etc.) and travelling with them from that point. Often (as was the case for Philip) those being ministered will take the initiative and we must be ready to respond.

In each encounter, as the Spirit moves, all involved go forward dramatically changed. The teacher, baptiser or nurturer with new understanding to inform future encounters, the receiver of ministry with perhaps the resources to feed into the process of teaching, baptising and nurturing themselves.

Of course all Christians engaging in ministry are different and the contribution that each makes to the teaching, baptising and nurturing of God’s people will be unique. Most of us would be unable to imagine ourselves running alongside the modern-day equivalent of the eunuch’s chariot. There are no ready-made answers therefore, no “right” or “wrong” ways to “do it”. There may be those especially who feel that they are in transition from nurtured to nurturing, as we all are in a sense. The teaching and nurturing process is perhaps most of

all about providing a space for people to ask questions and to explore their faith whilst praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to move us onward on our journey.

Teaching, baptising and nurturing is a community and Spirit led activity not the work of one individual or small group. All of this ministry comes from encounter with the risen Christ and each encounter gives new results, new insights and new possibilities. Each new insight brings many surprises in the experience of the journey travelled together.

### **3. Respond to human need by loving service**

#### John Ch.21 Vs.15-17 tend my lambs, feed my sheep

- Jesus touched the lives of all, no one was excluded from his love and care. There is a vital need for a listening and caring Church, which encompasses everyone from birth to death through all the stages of their lives – each individual is of value to God and loved by Him whatever their age or circumstance and His Church must show that love and pastoral care.
- There is a need for lay people to take on the responsibility of running the physical and organizational side of parish life so that the Minister is able to concentrate on the spiritual side and to visit and talk with people, both those who have been missing from Church and those who do not know Christ, in their own homes, schools, clubs etc.
- Lay Visiting Teams, once trained, could take on responsibility with the Minister for keeping in touch with the ill, the long term sick (at home, in hospital or Care Homes); and those whose circumstances mean that they are no longer coming to Church for whatever reason, e.g. parents with a new baby, working parents, those without transport and the frail and bereaved, who can all feel forgotten or abandoned.
- If people are to come to Church, (especially those who have never had any contact with the Church before, or have lost touch with the Church over the years) they will be more likely to do so, if the Minister has visited them in their own home and talked to them on a one-to-one basis, and assured them of a welcome when they come to Church.
- There is also a need for Churches to support those in trouble both in our own country and overseas, as a visible reminder that we are all the servant of each other and that despite the demands of the Family Purse and repairs etc. the Church is caring for all God's children in a practical way through loving service.

#### **4. Seek to transform the unjust structures of society**

- What are we doing? How are we responding?
  - Some churches within the Deanery have a justice and peace group – some support Amnesty International, Barnabus Fund, etc.
  - A large number of people support the work of Christian Aid.
  - Some supported the Campaign to Make Poverty History last year. Part of this campaign was aimed at trade justice so that people would be paid fairly for their produce and not be forced out of business by free trade.
  - A lot of our churches support fair-trade and many will have a Traidcraft stall.
  - A lot more towns in Essex are becoming fairtrade towns and Chelmsford has recently declared itself to be a fairtrade supporter.
- So part of our response to God's mission in the world is to support fairtrade in our homes, our churches, our villages and our towns. It will help to transform the lives of people if we all do our bit to buy fairly-traded goods as much as we possibly can.

#### **5. Safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth**

- What are we doing? How are we responding?
  - As consumers, do we try to buy local produce?
  - Do we weigh up the need to support fair-trade and/or to support the local producer?
  - Do we even think where our food has come from?
  - Or the flowers that we buy – have they had to be flown from Holland so we can have the particular flower we want, when we want it?
  - What do we consider to be most important – consumer choice or looking after the environment?
  - Are our gardens organic? Do we try not to use pesticides which will harm wildlife?
  - Do we try not to waste precious resources, and to turn off unused lights, taps, computers when not in use, etc.?
  - Do we stop to think whether we should use the car or whether it's a journey we could make by foot or bicycle instead? Do we try to share car journey's when we can?
  - Do we try to recycle plastic bags, glass, cardboard, tins, etc.?
- How much do we care about God's world? Are we actively trying to sustain and renew the life of the earth? What is happening in our homes, our work places, our churches and communities to safeguard the integrity of creation?