

## **Report: A vision of Ordained Local Ministry**

'The Eucharist is at the very heart of Anglican life. It is both source and fulfilment of the koinonia we share as Christians and it flows from the baptismal waters from which we were born anew.'<sup>1</sup> If this is true and as a Communion we hold true to the principles of Ordained Presidency then the continual rationalisation of Ordained Clergy within our diocese does little to strengthen the position of the Eucharist in our worship. In fact such rationalisation could be seen as compromising its position. However, the financial implications of this downsizing are understood.

In the Eucharist we are involved in a dynamic concept which takes us back to the Cross and forward to the end of all things so that it becomes both part of time and history and also a window onto eternity. As such the celebration of the Eucharist brings alive the worth of human beings created in God's image and redeemed by God's complete outpouring of himself in love for his people. The Holy Gospels widen and enlarge our understanding of the Eucharist, drawing out the promise of the kingdom and reality of our resurrection faith in the reality of the new and risen life in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist is therefore an act of great intimacy and one which can only be celebrated with equal intimacy shown in the personal (pastoral) relationship between priest and people<sup>2</sup>. For that relationship to be achieved, the priest must build up a working understanding of the community he is called to serve into. To achieve that with any level of sustainable success thought must be given not only to the number of people one priest can serve but also the problems of working across communities each with their own distinct and well guarded identities. The necessary relationship cannot be achieved, we would suggest by continually relying on retired clergy coming into a congregation for a couple of hours per week. Neither can it work successfully when the Incumbent and other ordained clergy in a team or benefice are seen dashing around different communities.

In all of this surely we have to be creative with our use of resources and challenging in our dreams. Christ turned the world on its head when he, the King, was crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross. Should our vision be any less tide turning?

If the Eucharist is to be at the very heart of our lives as Christians and as Anglicans then the sacraments must be available to congregations regardless of their size or how far down the lane they worship. As they meet, each congregation must be free to, and freely encouraged to call from its pews priests who will receive the necessary training and support so that they, local people themselves already with that necessary pastoral relationship, can return to offer a weekly sacramental worship embraced by the intimacy already talked about.

On the other hand we may of course want to move away from the Eucharist and bring into a more central role the Service of the Word using one of many different styles of liturgy and this would bring contentment to many. Sacramental worship can then be offered in the form of Communion by Extension. But does such worship truly signify the reconciliation of the human race in Christ; will it contain the call of God for us to be bread for the world and will it send us out from Christ's Table to serve and work for justice and dignity in the local community and further afield?<sup>3</sup>

**In the end our vision is currently tempered by the financial realities that surround us from parish level upwards and so it is inevitable that Ministry as Partnership will remain a buzz phrase for the foreseeable future. The partnership can and does work with all who answer the call to serve God working as one body be they priest, Reader, Lay Evangelist etc. However, our dream is that the Eucharist will remain the central focus of our faith in this Deanery and that Ordained Presidency will continue supported by priests called from our parishes to serve in our parishes; to serve with intimacy and pastoral knowledge. Financial concerns should not place us in a situation where a high proportion of congregations are denied sacramental worship each week.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Renewing the Anglican Eucharist: Findings of the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation*, Dublin, 1995

<sup>2</sup> *Ministry in the Countryside: A model for the Future*: Andrew Bowden, pxxxv; (Continuum, 2003, London)

<sup>3</sup> Dublin, 1995