

Dear Bishop

My Benefice has submitted a response to your questionnaire but I thought I would like to submit a personal response which I compiled immediately after the last Diocesan Synod. I nearly did not submit it as I did not like what I thought all that much. The truth is, however difficult or depressing things are, we still keep pressing on.

My comments are in no way intended as a criticism of Revd Tony Monds who is doing an excellent job – in fact no-one could do more and we are privileged to have him.

Alan Neades

BISHOP'S QUESTIONS

1. What is the 'Personality and Character' of your local church?
2. What are the priorities of your local church?
3. Is there one thing you would like to take on or develop in the coming year (recognising that may mean you may need to stop doing something else)?
4. Are there ways in which we can work together with neighbouring churches to achieve more?
5. How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life?

1. My local church has the personality of a membership club that has lost its *raison d'être*. Members are aging, most are over 65 years, and numbers are falling. The majority attend – when there is nothing more pressing, and more out of habit than conviction. For most one attendance per month is regarded as sufficient. They are nevertheless very concerned about the way business is conducted and strongly object to any changes in the 'clubhouse'. It is part of an umbrella organisation which is, for the most part, also confused as to its reason for existence. There are some oases of life and hope but unfortunately, those who exercise most influence have ditched the 'rule-book' and have adopted their own rules.

2. The main priority of my church is to ensure that there is a service once each Sunday - but only 10 or 12 turn up. To enable this, a Grade one listed building which can seat 200 is provided which has to be maintained, heated, cleaned and insured. In addition, the members are required to contribute in excess of £10,000 p.a. to provide a professional to conduct the services, which he is unable to do because he has responsibility for 5 more similarly placed churches. The second priority is to raise the £20,000 need to pay the expenses outlined above.

3. I would like to hear plain old-fashioned sermons that make clear the fact of sin and the certainty of judgement, the atoning death of Christ and the forgiveness of sin and promise of salvation through faith. I would like this to be unequivocal so that all who attend could be sure of eternal life for themselves and would know how to share their faith with others. I would like to ditch entirely the unbiblical doctrine that all will be saved and go to heaven regardless of their relationship to God through Christ and their acceptance of his gift of salvation through faith. This doctrine makes the cross of Christ of no effect, gives unrepentant sinners a false sense of security and makes sharing the gospel seem unnecessary.

4. If (3) above were successfully carried out so that there were sufficient with a living faith in Jesus then all would joyfully unite. Maybe they would even worship together and the number of buildings might be reduced so that the time and effort spent raising money might be reduced.

5. The measure of success is transformed lives, holy living, lively, Spirit-led worship, love for one-another and a younger, growing body of believers.

Or we could all give up and go somewhere where these signs are already evident.