

## LET US TALK

*Response from*

### THE CLARENDON TEAM MINISTRY

*Consisting of the parishes of*

Alderbury, Farley with Pitton, West Dean with East Grimstead,  
West Grimstead, Whiteparish, Winterslow

#### Introduction

In this response we will try to answer the questions first in relation to the benefice of six parishes and ten churches and secondly in relation to the well-resourced ministry team of five clergy and two lay ministers<sup>1</sup>. It is, of course, impossible properly to reflect the full range of views but we have endeavoured to give you a sense of the personality and character of the Clarendon Team, its priorities and ambitions.

In the last few months, the ministry team, led by the Rector, Revd Nils Bersweden, the Team Council and each parish have been engaged in strategic planning based on evaluating the local churches' and church's aims and actions under the following headings<sup>2</sup>: 1) worship; 2) belonging; 3) growth; 4) service; and 5) outreach as well as the particular role of the church in relation to 6) children, young people and schools. This response draws heavily on the parishes' nascent strategic plans.

The ministry team believes that as a result of the strategic planning work which has been done the churches are more able to describe their current 'personality and character' and the similarities and differences with other churches. Some churches have started to identify aims but have not yet decided on specific actions. Others, who had already decided on the actions they wanted to take in 2013, have made these actions fit the planning template. The *Let Us Talk* process has been a part of our strategic planning process and thinking. We are, however, in the early stages of what is intended to be an on-going and revitalizing endeavor and so our response to your particular questions is somewhat tentative.

Our planning process and some recent developments have led us to once again start to reconsider some basic issues about how ministry in the team is organized:

- Should we continue to be 'team', that is, all clergy serving the Clarendon churches and parishes or
- should the clergy (whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary and regardless of their other responsibilities) work as 'vicars', that is, an individual clergy person having responsibility for and authority over the worship, pastoral care, occasional offices, spiritual health and so on of a particular parish or parishes?
- On our current clergy complement, we could get close to the vicar per parish or two model. How important is it that this is unlikely to be sustainable?
- What impact do our answers to these questions have on the lay people?

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<sup>1</sup> The team referred to are: Revd Nils Bersweden, Rector; Revd Elizabeth Moore-Bick, Team Priest who also has a half-time Deanery role with responsibility for schools and young people; Revd Andrew Poppe, stipendiary curate; Revd Cynthia Buttimer and Revd Jane Dunlop, non-stipendiary Team Priests; and Debrah McIsaac, LLM and Lay Chair and Michael Barratt, LLM in training.

<sup>2</sup> Loosely derived from biblical principles cited in Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Church*

and

- Is it different from the impact on the role of the church in the community?

### 1. What is the 'Personality and Character' of the team churches?

Lord God, the source of our unity, faith and love:  
bless the Clarendon Team, that sharing our gifts  
we may proclaim the gospel and reveal your glory,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Clarendon Team Prayer*

There is a persistent tension between honouring the differences between and the diversity amongst the churches and parishes in the team and, as our team prayer says, sharing our gifts that we may together proclaim the gospel more fully.

We recognise and rejoice that we are very well-resourced. Unusually, there are no impending clergy retirements; we have some talented and experienced churchwardens and other laity in key positions; and we employ an excellent part-time paid administrator. However, we have vacancies for churchwardens, treasurers and so on and can only commit to the administrator on the basis of a one-year contract because of concerns about the state of the churches' finances.

There are some clear family resemblances amongst the churches in the team. The following are characteristics which are important to most of the churches.

- Sunday worship being followed by hospitality,
- 'Special services' - and desire to have more of them. (Our dilemma is whether we use ministerial resources for optimum number of services or optimum effect, that is, to enable us to nurture relationships.)
- Prayer groups
- The perceived importance of the church building(s) in the community
- The church as an important source of information about and aiding communication within the village
- The place of music in some churches (two have music festivals) and roaring success of the Team Choir introduced for Holy Week this year.
- Church/PCC links with the local school

The churches also share many of the same concerns and struggles including

- Each church is dependent on a small number of people to undertake all the tasks
- The differences, albeit small, sometimes feel more significant than the similarities
- Local (village) identity not team identity is most important to almost all and overwhelming so amongst occasional or non-church-goers
- Many want more of a 'clergy presence' (including engagement with the activities of the local community) especially in one of the largest parishes

- Proximity to Salisbury means people do travel to find the kind of worship which is most appealing and unlikely to be routinely available in a rural setting
- Concern about money and in particular the ability to pay the Fairer Share
- Concern about the seemingly inexorable decline in the number of people attending church and fewer people being willing to devote time to church

## **2. What are the priorities of your local churches?**

Central to our strategic planning process is to ensure that each PCC is clear on its own priorities. The priorities which have emerged for the churches across the team are to:

- expand the size of the (local church) family and involve more people in the life of the church
- expand home groups and start new ones
- develop closer links to community
- build the fellowship within the church
- encourage growth and engagement with faith
- assess the use of church buildings and community premises. For example, one church wants to hold many more service in a village hall because they are better attended which others want to promote the use of church building non-church purposes i.e. as a concert venue.

## **3. Is there one thing you would like to take on in the coming year (recognising that may mean you may need to stop doing something else)?**

The priorities for the parishes and churches of the Clarendon team are:

- Growth, that is enabling growth in understanding and faith
- Service, that is loving our neighbours and serving others
- Outreach, that is encouraging others to faith and to the church (growing in numbers)

although most of the parishes/churches have yet to specify particular actions to be taken towards achieving these aims.

Other churches have come up with specific proposals for example:

- to extend the collective prayer life of the church through a new monthly prayer guide or to become the 'local House of Prayer';
- to improve the sense of belonging through breakfasts after the 8 a.m. communion; and
- to continue with a parish Quiet Day or plan a parish pilgrimage or retreat.

Almost all of the PCCs thought that preparations for the pastoral offices were important to the life of the community and the church. For one church, the most important issue is a single (named) non-stipendiary clergy person taking on more individual responsibility for worship and pastoral care, and having a higher profile at village event. All churches intend either to continue to work closely with the school and to renew their efforts in connection with children and young people.

### What might need to be given up?

Whilst recognizing their importance, we (in this case the ministry team and, to some extent, the PCCs) would like to stop expending quite so much time and effort on finances and other aspects of maintenance'. For example, in 2012 and the first few months of 2013

- as a Team initiative, 5 of the 6 parishes undertook stewardship campaigns. They were successful although no parish has yet succeeded in achieving a level of committed giving which equalled share;
- much time and effort has been invested in setting up a system to deal with the organisation of pastoral offices and with the receipt and payment of fees. (At the recommendation of the Team Council, each PCC has assigned 35% of parochial fees, which is about equal to the increase in fees, to the team to defray team expenses.)
- Team expenses has been a difficult issue as has the process on fairer share

#### 4. **Are there ways in which we can work together to achieve more?**

We would suggest that it would be most helpful if the Diocese was better able to provide practical advice and assistance to team ministries as for example we recently benefitted from advice on recruitment and employment packs, or undertake HR work itself on a break-even basis. It would also be helpful if, wherever possible, information returns etc. could be submitted to the Diocese on a consolidated basis, and any communication to churchwardens, treasurers or PCC Secretaries were copied (by email) to the incumbent as a matter of routine.

It would also be helpful to consider the timing and timescale for initiatives such as *Let Us Talk*. It was not launched until shortly before Advent and the deadline for submissions was very soon after the APCMs. Parishes and teams would be able to provide more well-considered, thoughtful and prayerful responses if there was a considerable chunk of 'ordinary time' during which to mull over and discuss these important questions.

Time is a most precious thing and it may be beneficial if we start looking at our work as church (whether as parish, team or diocese) by looking at the amount of time an individual (or group) is reasonably able to commit to church business given their normal work and other commitments. Then, we need to ask how productively that time is being used and cut out anything that is not going to grow the faith in our community.

Why? In some of our villages, we have much going on which builds relationships within the community but rather less that actually builds faith. To this end 'the church' - the local church and the individual, the team and the parish, or the diocese and the benefice - needs to scrutinize the expectations it has, the demands it makes and the priorities it set: "Quite simply until the Church is

growing, anything that is not on the "growth path" should be . . . cut out or given such a low priority that it never happens. Once it is growing and thriving one can afford some of the 'nice to haves!'"<sup>3</sup>

**5. How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life?**

We are not sure that we know or can make any sensible suggestions. Indeed, we are not convinced that the quality of church life can be measured. We think that there are, however, some indicators that a church is healthy and is having a positive impact (none of which would count bottoms on seats!) including:

- growth in vocations, formal and informal to ordained ministry and lay service;
- thriving, growing and flourishing home groups where new spin-off groups and new leaders are the norm;
- a willingness to rejoice in faith and release people to worship elsewhere;
- a lively ministry to children and young people and engagement with them; and
- an engagement by the church at all levels in the issues of the day characterised by a willingness to listen and learn.

**Submitted by Revd Nils Bersweden on behalf of Clarendon Team Ministry**

**May 2013**

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<sup>3</sup> Comment on a draft of this response from a Team Council member