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DIOCESE OF SOUTHWELL AND NOTTINGHAM

BEESTON, NOTTINGHAM CENTRAL, NOTTINGHAM NORTH AND
NOTTINGHAM WEST DEANERIES

TOWARDS 2012: A SUMMARY OF THE MEETING AT ST MARGARET'S, ASPLEY ON 6 MARCH 2007

The meeting was attended by 166 people, representing the four deaneries, the diocese and ecumenical partners. Around half of those attending had been present at the previous meeting at St Jude's, Mapperley on 15 May 2006. All but 2 of the 49 parishes were represented.

The proceedings were chaired by Laurie Crawforth, Lay Chair of Nottingham Central and the opening worship was led by the Revd David Jones, Officer for Urban Life and Mission and Ian Cameron, Lay Chair of Nottingham North.

The process so far

Laurie Crawforth introduced the agenda by summarising the situation to date. Following the joint meeting of the three Nottingham deaneries, 15 May 2006, which arose from the desire of the diocese to plan ahead for 2012, Beeston Deanery had asked to be involved and for the past nine months the Steering Group of area deans and lay chairs had embraced all four deaneries. Valuable support had been provided by other advisers, including David Jones and the Revd Jerry Lepine.

The paper *Towards 2012*, which had been circulated, had to be seen as a shadow plan based on the current situation and the projected position in five years' time. The proposals within were in no way predetermined and were offered as a means of promoting the Church's mission and ministry to Greater Nottingham. The Steering Group had identified both strengths and weaknesses in the current situation, but had been encouraged by many examples of shared expertise and mutual assistance. It was on this basis that the clustering proposals were put forward.

The diocesan perspective

The Revd Canon Peter Hill, Diocesan Chief Executive and Acting Archdeacon of Nottingham, recalled the origins of the Greater Nottingham discussions. In the light of diminishing numbers of stipendiary clergy nationally it was projected that the quota for the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham would fall from the current 164 posts to 150 in 2012. In order to reach this total in a fair and structured way each deanery had been asked to:

1. identify the location of its share of about 100 key leadership posts (mainly parochial)
2. produce a mission action plan
3. review deanery boundaries with a view to reducing the current total of 14
4. contribute to the plans for enhanced deanery leadership, both clerical and lay.

This process was guided by five principles: discernment of future needs, systematic forward planning rather than haphazard appointments, an evolutionary approach to change, a recognition that the figures involved were approximate and the primacy of what was appropriate locally.

In an aside Peter Hill recalled that more than twenty years ago a similar review (the Cleaver report) had identified that a new deanery structure was required, that deaneries should be broadly comparable in terms of staffing and resources and that boundaries should reflect contemporary patterns. No radical changes had ensued.

To date, the diocesan task group which was guiding this process with the assistance of the deaneries had identified 107 key parochial posts which were overwhelmingly stipendiary clergy, but included 1.5 self-supporting ministers and 1.0 lay post. The balance of the 150 projected stipendiary posts could be made up of 7.5 Bishop's staff and the Cathedral, 7.5 advisers, 24.0 curates, with a balance of 6.0 mission posts (a pool which would allow flexible deployment in areas of need and opportunity).

The reorganisation of deaneries rested on viability in terms of mission leadership and resourcing. It was expected that between 8 and 11 deaneries would evolve as three-year experiments in place of the current 14. Local resolution of boundary issues should be completed by September 2007 or January 2008 at the latest.

Greater Nottingham deaneries and projected boundaries

The Revd Ruth Worsley, Area Dean of Nottingham North, reminded the meeting that all the work over the past year and more had been based on theological principles. Decisions had to reflect the mission imperative, response to challenges had to be collaborative and the whole process was focussed on the world.

The Steering Group had listened carefully to the reactions of the May 2006 meeting to the various options then set out and had developed the present proposal. The two deaneries, broadly north and south, each had a

distinctive primary focus: north on residential areas, new and developing, schools and some workplaces; south on citywide facilities such as shopping, commerce, universities and leisure. Overall there was a wealth of diversity which needed to be directed creatively. Individual parish churches tended to attract likeminded people, but it was vital to go beyond mere boundaries and be ready to be surprised by the grace of God.

Towards 2012

Each of the deaneries then explained the proposed distribution of key posts as set out in detail in the document.

Nottingham West. The Revd John Bentham drew attention to the diverse forms of ministry in the existing deanery, in particular to students and in the swathe of outer estates. Boundaries were increasingly irrelevant, especially to younger people, and it was essential that they should be seen as permeable. All this pointed to partnerships of one kind or another, rather than the inherited pattern of one church, one vicar. He drew attention to the need to acknowledge and benefit from the role of Readers. The detail of the proposed clusters was adjustable at this stage; as an example the suggestions for the Bilborough parishes and Strelley were already likely to be overtaken by fresh ideas.

Nottingham Central. The Revd Stephen Morris stressed that collaboration was the most important word and this led to learning about others. The deanery over recent years had already developed four clusters which seem to have been a benefit. He mentioned among others the radical appointment of two lay ministers to the Radford parishes and touched on the cross-deanery working between them and Hyson Green where there was an example of a diocesan key post in a local setting. Separate, parallel discussions in the city centre had produced a draft plan for a single parish embracing All Saints, St Mary and St Peter which would have distinctive mission to the city as a whole with adjacent ecumenical partners. He believed that God would give the resources for what He wanted done.

Beeston. Robert Cleave explained how Beeston Deanery came to be involved in the city discussions because of its geographical situation, hemmed in on two sides by the River Trent and the Diocese of Derby. The deanery leaders felt it was worthwhile to explore a potential partnership with the city deaneries and the outcome was the present proposals. The allocation of key posts had started with a clean sheet, but as with other deaneries it was already clear that adjustments would be necessary: a case in point was Beeston and Lenton Abbey which needed enhanced ministry input.

Nottingham North. Ruth Worsley celebrated the achievements of the poorest deanery in the diocese, particularly in relation to the full payment of increased parish share. Referring to individual cluster proposals she described the situation which had led to the suggestions for Basford St Aidan and the Bulwell parishes which currently functioned quite separately; she described the vitality and readiness to explore new directions evident in the now separate parishes of the former Bestwood team ministry; and explained

the possible linking of two apparently disparate partners, Carrington and Sherwood.

There followed a 15-minute break when everyone was encouraged to engage in conversation with someone unknown to them from a different parish or deanery. The reluctance of people to reconvene suggested that this was a productive and rewarding exercise.

Questions and discussion

Roger Howes (Nottingham West) supported overall the proposals for clusters and key posts, but pointed out that much of Greater Nottingham was omitted from the plan (the eastern and southern suburbs which lay in Gedling and West Bingham Deaneries respectively). In response it was pointed out that, unlike Beeston, these two deaneries had indicated that they saw their future mission linked more with their existing rural hinterland than with the city. Nonetheless, the current consultation on the future of the Archdeacon of Nottingham's post (currently vacant) might lead to an archdeaconry more sharply focussed on Greater Nottingham than at present. If this were so, then the four deaneries above would find themselves in a closer relationship. In addition, the Nottingham conurbation is one aspect of the Bishop of Sherwood's role.

Colin Slater (General Synod; Beeston) raised three issues. He was not convinced that the proposals took localness fully into account, particularly in relation to the fragmentation of Beeston Deanery. He thought that Nottingham was given undue prominence under the scheme. He also noted that the proposed boundaries did not tie in closely with those of the civic authorities.

In response it was agreed that localness was essential in engaging the energy of congregations and this was exactly the role of the clusters, but mission meant networks as well as localness, an aspect which the two proposed deaneries were designed to address. Secondly, the current advice to the Steering Group was that the long-term future of existing civic boundaries could not be assured; in any case it was an unattainable task to align the boundaries of deaneries (with their own particular needs) with those of partner churches, public authorities or any other body. Thirdly, Greater Nottingham was a unit because of the economic drive it represented. What happened in the city affected the whole conurbation and therefore the rest of the area must have an input into the city. Again a co-ordinating role for the Archdeacon of Nottingham might facilitate this.

David Gibson (Nottingham West) asked if there was any new thinking about the functions of deaneries, especially in relation to diocesan devolution. In response it was stated that enhanced deanery leadership did not diminish the overall position of the diocese which had allowed the deaneries a lot of scope in framing the present proposals. The new style of leadership might well take on some of the archdeacons' roles. It might be hoped that deaneries would be to the fore in fostering vocations to ministry of all kinds.

Tony Ford (Beeston) averred that the proposals were very heavily weighted towards the city to which places like Beeston and Toton did not look. In

consequence the division into north and south deaneries was senseless. In response it was stated that Beeston and its neighbours were unequivocally part of the Nottingham conurbation and that a partnership between the poorer and more affluent areas was vital for the benefit of each. The perceptions of the under-40s would indicate the validity of the concept of the conurbation.

Ian Park (Beeston) returned to the functions of deaneries. He suggested that there was no indication that the middle-management tier would work and it might be difficult to identify either clerical or lay leaders to carry out this enhanced role. In response it was emphasised that full-time area deans were not an option and it was up to deaneries to make proposals for their future management which might differ between urban and predominantly rural areas.

Christina Baxter (General Synod; Beeston) raised three points. She queried whether it was wise to put all the eggs into the clustering basket (unless shrinkage could be reversed) in view of Bob Jackson's view that team ministries spelt declining numbers. She thought that the proposals were very geographically based; if networking were the way forward, were deaneries as such still needed? Would mutual financial support survive the years transitional to a new structure? In response it was suggested that poorer areas had other gifts to offer, but also sometimes surprise with their financial generosity.

A number of wider issues were addressed by Peter Hill. It was necessary to distinguish between teams and clusters; there was little evidence that the shrinkage which Bob Jackson identified in the first applied to the second. Networking was indeed one aspect of the future; the rationale behind the proposed two deaneries positively met this demand. Certainly relationships were more important than lines on a map. In relation to leadership it was apparent that existing deanery leaders were already rising to the challenge, as the evening's meeting indicated. With regard to Beeston's reservations Peter Hill suggested that the deanery should be considering what it had to offer to the conurbation's mission rather than maintaining its current existence. Finally, he re-iterated that the reduction in the number of stipendiary ministers was due to the overall national decline; Southwell and Nottingham itself might even be able to pay for a few more, but it was projected that the individuals would not exist.

Nigel Rooms (Diocese) reminded the meeting strongly that the boundaries on the map had been drawn theologically to emphasise the interdependence of rich and poor.

Straw poll

The meeting was then asked to vote on whether the proposals under discussion should be referred to individual deanery synods for a decision. This motion was passed by an overwhelming show of hands. Laurie Crawforth stressed that a rapid feedback was required to comply with the diocesan timetable. He also reminded the meeting that the Steering Group had spent many hours and conducted extensive research to produce the recommendations to go to deanery synods. If these were rejected, it was

incumbent on objectors to come forward with viable alternative plans. He thanked all those who had been involved in the process to date: the members of the Steering Group and their advisers, those who had attended and contributed to the evening and to St Margaret's for providing such admirable facilities and catering.

Malcolm Stacey closed the evening with prayer.

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