

COWLEY DEANERY MISSION ACTION PLAN 2015.

PREFACE: COWLEY DEANERY – A LISTENING COMMUNITY?

There are a great many words, ideas, thoughts, suggestions and plans in this document. This will, of course, be a necessary part of the process of enabling conversations to take place about the way forward for Cowley Deanery in the coming years. But it may seem somewhat incongruent that, for a people who are so concerned with hearing God speaking to us, we end up doing so much of the talking ourselves and I sometimes wonder whether this is because, if ever we do take the time to truly listen to God, we find we hear only silence.

So, in a fanciful moment, I wondered whether the silence we hear is actually the silence not of God speaking but of God listening – listening to the longings of those in need, and of those who have been forgotten by friends and church; listening to the angry and frustrated cries of those who are suffering injustice; listening to the despair of those who have fallen foul of the system; listening to those who, far from having been helped by the church, have been damaged by it; listening to the confused thoughts of children who have not yet experienced real love.

So, if God is doing more listening than talking, perhaps that is what we ought to be doing too and then maybe we might catch something of the heart-broken compassion which led to God coming to stand alongside us in Jesus Christ.

Above all, then, and of enormously greater value than anything we might actually do in practical terms, I would long for us as a Deanery to be a listening community: listening with God to the hopes, fears and aspirations of those who live in our neighbourhoods and across the world so that we might better stand alongside our fellow humans, learn a thing or two along the way and enable Christ to be present once again to this generation.

This document is offered then, as a stimulus for our listening: to one another, to our local communities – and to God. It is not a set of stone tablets but a working and malleable document which needs shaping through our listening. It will be presented to deanery synod on 4th November where we, the writers, will be listening to you, the readers!

Tim Stead 19.10.15

A. WHO WE ARE: INTRODUCTION TO COWLEY DEANERY

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Cowley Deanery comprises 14 parishes covering broadly the East half of Oxford. The area is mostly residential with some parishes, often based around old villages, being relatively prosperous. Others, however, cover some of the most deprived wards in Oxfordshire. The churches, expressing various shades of Anglicanism, have for their focus of mission their own local communities, rather than being mainly eclectic churches. However, there is a huge diversity of resources, both personnel and financial and we survive and thrive as a deanery by committing ourselves to sharing these resources, especially financial, but with an increasing intention also to share personnel, skills and expertise through partnerships for the sake of our common mission.

2. DEANERY AUDIT

Between Sept 2014 & March 2015 Godfrey Stone, a retired Archdeacon of Stoke, carried out an audit of the Deanery to help us to have a better and fuller understanding of the deanery as it is now: the communities which we serve; the Anglican parish churches; the other faith communities; the other institutions around the deanery; the demographics of the area; and the mission opportunities.

The results of his audit are available on request and serve as a fuller account of the basic information we are currently working with.

3. KEY ISSUES WE FACE

However, it does seem appropriate to summarise here the key issues we face as churches in the deanery.

i. Finance

Cowley deanery has always paid its Deanery share in full. However this has always put a strain especially on our poorer parishes who find there is little or no money left to invest in mission. The recent restructuring of our parish share has relieved this burden significantly, though some of our wealthier churches are now feeling the strain of taking an increased share of the load. The primary reason for this financial struggle is because Cowley deanery is ministering in some of the poorest wards in Oxfordshire and, as a deanery, we are committed to supporting ministry in these areas. This fact is reflected, to some extent, in the way the diocese works our Deanery share. But this continues to remain a challenge for us.

ii. support for churches in poorer or isolated areas

It is not just finance which stretches our poorer churches but sometimes the sense of isolation and the relative lack of human resources to develop mission.

iii. New estates

The main new developments planned within Cowley Deanery will be built within the parish of St. Mary's Headington. This will be a major challenge for this relatively small church.

iv. Low church numbers and ageing church profile

As a deanery we have great aspirations in terms of reaching out to our local communities and "making a difference". However, we often find that we are limited in what we can achieve by low church numbers and gradually aging congregations. Notably youth work in Cowley Deanery is not, on the whole, very strong. A number of clergy have noted that a significant number of their parishioners travel to some of the larger churches in Oxford Deanery. This would seem something worth reflecting on.

v. Relationship with St.Ebbe's Headington

St.Ebbe's Headington is a church plant from St.Ebbe's Oxford. It is a thriving church in the reform evangelical tradition of the Church of England. However there is no formal relationship between St.Ebbe's and Cowley Deanery. A meeting has been set up to explore possibilities here.

vi. Engaging with local institutions

There are many secular institutions in Cowley Deanery and our representation within these institutions is very mixed. We have good relationships with many but not all primary schools and there is good provision of chaplaincy at the hospitals. But we have very limited involvement with our secondary schools, with Brookes University or with the industrial and business area in the south of Oxford.

B. WHAT WE ASPIRE TO: FOCUS FOR OUR MISSION

1. FIVE MARKS OF MISSION:

We share with the Archdeaconry a commitment to the worldwide Anglican five marks of mission which are:

- i. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom**
- ii. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers**
- iii. To respond to human need by loving service**
- iv. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation**
- v. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth**

2. FIVE COMMON CONCERNS:

We have also noted five common concerns which relate to the communities which we serve and which we feel might be better to work together on. These are:

- i. OUR RESPONSE TO POVERTY AND DEBT**
- ii. OUR MINISTRY IN SCHOOLS**
- iii. OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS**
- iv. OUR RESPONSE TO ISOLATION, LONELINESS AND MENTAL ISSUES**
- v. OURE WELCOME TO MIGRANTS WHILST ENGAGING WITH INTERFAITH AND MULTICULTURAL ISSUES.**

3. RESPONDING TO THESE COMMON CONCERNS:

Some of the ways we are beginning to address these concerns together are through:

- i. Deanery synod focus evenings**
- ii. Sharing best practice through chapter meetings**
- iii. Deanery and archdeaconry focus groups**
- iv. Focus days**
- v. Training days**

4. INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS:

The deanery audit noted the enormous opportunities in Oxford for connecting with the aspirations of people around the world. Suggestions are that we might make better use of these opportunities by:

- i. Individual parishes supporting overseas mission**
- ii. Developing relationships with local ethnic based congregations**
- iii. Developing a world-wide perspective**
 - Working with CCOW, CMS**

C. WHAT WE WILL NEED: TALKING “RESOURCES”

In order better to respond to the aspirations for mission which we have in our deanery, we need resources and the work of building up these resources will need focus and commitment. We have identified six areas:

1. GROWING, HEALTHY, INCLUSIVE CHURCH COMMUNITIES.

All the churches in Cowley Deanery have their own character and, in their different ways and styles, are marked by energy, commitment and hope. However all would also want to say that they could do with growing by at least 1/3 if not more. We have noted four things which each of our churches might find helpful in encouraging growth.

i. Encourage “L.Y.C.I.G.”

“Leading your church into growth” is a national programme which some members of clergy in Cowley Deanery have attended and found very helpful. We would want to encourage more to engage with this programme and for the ideas to be shared more widely. We will focus one of our chapter meetings on this in the coming year and possibly a Deanery synod.

ii. Welcome & inclusivity “check list”?

The audit suggested we might recommend or develop a helpful “checklist” to help P.C.C.s reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in terms of inclusivity and welcome to potential new members, whether seekers or Christian “migrants”. The question of why so many in our deanery travel to churches in Oxford Deanery might be addressed here. The “Everybody Welcome” course has been commended in this regard.

iii. Nurture groups & courses

Noting the role that nurture courses have had in enabling seekers to find their way into maturing faith and discipleship, we would like to support and encourage the development of such courses within our parishes. Not all parishes will be able to sustain a course themselves and so it may be that groups of parishes may work in partnership to deliver a course or even develop a deanery course.

iv. Youth and children

We would especially like to explore ways of encouraging the development of youth and children’s work within the deanery.

2. HIGH QUALITY, VIBRANT, CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY.

Our churches stand in varying liturgical traditions and are seeking to relate to very different kinds of local community. So this will be one of those areas which is developed primarily in the local context. However it is possible that the deanery may have a role in both encouraging such high quality worship and in drawing us together in worship from time to time as a deanery. The following areas have been suggested:

i. Links with local places of spiritual resource

There are a number of religious institutions within the Deanery which might be engaged with as places of spiritual resource including St. Stephen's House theological college, Fairacres & All Saints convents and the C.M.S. headquarters.

ii. Deanery pilgrimage and or retreat?

Often numbers are too small within each parish to run a parish retreat or pilgrimage. It is possible that such things could be done as a deanery. The Cowley St. John annual pilgrimage bus to St. Albans has recently opened up places to others in the deanery. It is possible that this could be developed.

iii. Deanery worship/confirmation?

We have appointed a deanery liturgist to oversee all Deanery-wide acts of worship including institutions and the archdeacon's visitation service. We may consider running other deanery acts of worship including the possibility of a deanery confirmation service, say, once every three years and a deanery One World Week service.

iv. Sharing intercessions

There has been the suggestion of developing a shared intercession list so that parishes can include one another in their Sunday intercessions.

v. Deanery prayer

We are currently developing a deanery prayer which will be made available to all parishes to use from time to time and at all deanery gatherings. The current version appears at the end of this document.

3. MOTIVATED AND WELL EQUIPPED PEOPLE

i. Licensed ministry:

- Current staff licensed to parishes:
 - 13 full time stipendiary clergy
 - 1 S.S.M. incumbent
 - 4 stipendiary curates
 - 9 (approx.) S.S.M.s licensed to parishes
 - 10 (approx.) active L.L.M.s

We are currently committed to maintaining the 13 paid clergy but we are also aware that, as financial pressures increase, this may not be sustainable in the long term. In order to prepare for this possibility, and in any case as a matter of good practice, we would like to explore more carefully the complementary roles of both paid and unpaid licensed clergy and lay ministers. For instance we are unsure whether any of the SSMs and LLMs would be willing to offer their services across the deanery to support parishes which are in need of greater resource or whether any consider themselves underused in their local situation. This was not covered by the deanery audit.

- Making the deanery a good place to work

We would like to make Cowley deanery a recognised good place to work with emphasis on:

- Supporting culture of healthy life-styles & work/life balance
- Offering pastoral and personal support (all Cowley clergy are aware of one of our number who is willing to offer pastoral support in moments of need)
- Affirmation and appreciation of service and work done
- Building sense of Cowley Deanery team (e.g. annual supper for all licensed members of ministry teams)

- Alternatives?

As we consider in the long term the number of paid staff we can support we will also reflect on whether we have got the right kind of staff and whether it would be more effective in relation to our aspirations to employ instead other kinds of staff like youth workers, evangelists or community workers.

ii. Lay ministry

Recognising the fact that our ministry also depends, to a very large degree, on willing and committed lay members, we think that the deanery can play a role in encouraging, enabling and training lay people for ministry within the deanery. Particular areas we would like to offer lay training in the deanery are:

- ministry in schools (collective worship, how to be a governor)
- youth and children's leaders
- pastoral care training
- safeguarding training

4. SUPPORTIVE AND EFFECTIVE STRUCTURES/PARTNERSHIPS

i. Parish partnerships within the deanery

Two Mission Action Plans ago, a “cluster” structure was set up in the deanery whereby all the parishes were grouped into one of five clusters and invited to explore how such a grouping might work for them in terms of mutual support and sharing of resources. These clusters have been helpful to a degree but have remained very loose and have been more apparent in some areas than others.

Without wanting to interfere with these clusters, especially where parishes have found them supportive, we would like to suggest exploring further the idea of **partnerships** between parishes set up for one of two specific reasons:

1. Sharing of resources

- A partnership might emerge where two churches, sharing some sort of affinity with one another, might deliberately develop a relationship for mutual support and sharing of resources
- This would most likely be one of our wealthier churches linking with one of those ministering in a poorer area but it would be emphasised that the sharing would not be one way only!
- Such parishes need not necessarily be neighbours

2. Shared focus for mission

- It might be that two parishes decided to work together in partnership in order better to focus on mission to a particular local area or a particular group of people
- Examples (further described in the audit) might be:
 - Holy Trinity and St. Francis focusing on Wood Farm
 - St. Andrew’s & Old Marston focusing on Northway
 - St. Clements & Cowley St. John focusing on interfaith engagement
 - St. Clements, All Saints & St. Ebbe’s focusing on Brookes University.

ii. Groups and teams?

Caution is normally expressed by most clergy when the words “team ministry” is mentioned since there are as many bad examples of teams as good. Group ministries, however, are based on a looser structure and should be considered if it is thought that they might offer a helpfully supportive structure within which a number of parishes might work.

A particular possibility would be a Headington group ministry involving either three or four of the Headington churches. This may be explored, depending on the outcome of the current discussions around the appointment of a new incumbent at St. Mary’s.

iii. Partnerships with churches in Oxford Deanery

A number of the larger churches in Oxford deanery are both resource-rich and keen to be involved in mission to areas of Cowley deanery. Where there is liturgical and theological affinity such partnerships may also be explored.

iv. Other partnerships

There are, of course, all sorts of other partnerships which we would encourage parishes to explore within their own areas:

- i. Ecumenical partnerships
 - Such as the on-going partnership between St. Mary's, Iffley and Rosehill Methodist church
- ii. Interfaith partnerships
- iii. Partnerships with institutions

v. Parish boundaries.

A final point under this heading is to suggest that, where demographics and mission priorities demand it, we should not be afraid to address the issue of re-drawing parish boundaries.

5. EFFECTIVE USE OF BUILDINGS

A number of our churches are currently exploring the possibility of major buildings projects and we would like to see these as also deanery concerns as we support such churches while they go through changes and seek to raise funds. These are:

- i. St. Mary's Headington: church hall renovation
- ii. St. Mary & St. Nicholas, Littlemore: church extension project
- iii. Headington Quarry: church extension project
- iv. St. Clements: re-ordering of the back of the church
- v. Cowley St. John: church hall project (now completed)
- vi. All Saints Highfield kitchen and disabled access toilet
- vii. St. Mary's Iffley South and West door conservation, landscaping, heritage path and toilet block.

Sharing knowledge and experience: it would be good if parishes with experience of major building developments would be willing to share such experience with other churches.

6. FINANCE

i. Parish share

In 2015, in response to a number of parishes (both relatively wealthy and relatively poor) saying that the existing system was not working, we moved to a new trial system based primarily on income. This system is simpler and more transparent but relies on openness and cooperation between the parishes concerned. In other words, it especially assumes that every parish will do their utmost to maximise their parish income which, if we "all pull together" will benefit both parish and deanery. So far this spirit of trust and cooperation has been very evident and we will, once again, pay our full share this year (2015).

However a number of the wealthier churches (which now bear a greater proportion of the financial responsibility) may not be able to carry the same load next year and so we are, again, facing significant challenges. We have committed to seeing how this new scheme works for three years before we assess it or decide we cannot, as a deanery, any longer support 13 stipendiary clergy.

ii. **Deanery stewardship campaign**

In order to help parishes become more aware of the degree of financial sharing and the necessary support for some struggling parishes in the deanery we have suggested some form of Deanery stewardship campaign whereby parishes are visited by a deanery team to:

- Share details of the deanery M.A.P. and
- Encourage giving partly on the basis of funding this plan

Such a campaign would also be linked with the idea of “Cross talk” (see section g.)

iii. **Consider need to reduce staff.**

If we fail to increase deanery giving to the point where 13 clergy are sustainable we would need to start to consider where it might be possible to reduce staff without unduly affecting the mission aspirations of the deanery.

In one of the audit documents, Godfrey, using a fairly broad formula, suggests a way of assessing the relative workload of each existing parish. We recognise that these figures do not take into account local knowledge or future developments like Barton Park but, based on these numbers a number of possibilities might be explored.

Please note that the following ideas are NOT proposals but rather ideas which may help us to focus on real possibilities, if necessary, for the future:

- All Saints, Highfield: could this work as a ½ time deanery post & combine with ½ time Brookes chaplain if funding can be found for this?
- Cowley team: with SSM support could this work with 1.5 stipendiary posts?
- New Marston: could this combine with either Old Marston or St. Clements?
- Headington group: could this manage with 3 instead of 4 incumbents?

There may also be other ideas but it would be important to note that a reduction in stipendiary clergy does not necessarily mean any reduction in delivery of ministry if SSM and LLM ministry were offered in support.

7. TEAM BUILDING AND GOOD COMMUNICATIONS

Many of the ideas above for responding to the challenges we face as a Deanery rely on a developing sense of Cowley working together as a Deanery. One of the most powerful tools to enable this to happen will be good and effective communication.

We therefore suggest two initiatives:

i. Deanery newsletter

This would be a quarterly e-newsletter in which any parish could either write a short article about the challenges or joys they are facing or advertise an event they would like to open to the whole deanery. Deanery wide news could also be shared here.

ii. "Cross talk"

This has happened once and was very well received and we would like to encourage much more of this. The idea is that a member of one parish in the deanery would be invited to speak at the morning service of another parish (either in the sermon slot, in the notices or during coffee after the service) about the parish from which they come, sharing their own joys and challenges. Such an initiative may well lead to the sort of partnerships we have described in section d. i).

D.WHAT WE WILL DO: FIVE THINGS FOR THE COMING YEAR

There are a great many ideas in the above document and clearly we will not be able to act on all of them immediately. So, this is offered as a guidance document for perhaps the coming five years. Each year we will set a number of priorities and review how they have developed at the end of the year.

The 5 things we feel we should focus on in 2016 are:

1. Deanery stewardship campaign linked with "cross-talks" & developing partnerships
2. Set up a deanery newsletter
 - Including a shared intercessions list
3. Develop schools ministry initiatives
 - Including putting on a deanery morning/evening for anyone wanting to explore a role in school's ministry, so that we can start planning that.
4. Set up loneliness and mental health group (Headrest initiative)
5. Focus on LYCIG ("Leading your church into growth") processes.

E. A NAME AND A PRAYER

Finally it has been pointed out that the name “Cowley” deanery is neither helpful for those parts of the deanery which are clearly not part of Cowley (i.e. most parishes) nor an accurately descriptive name for those outside Cowley Deanery.

At the same time neither is the name “Oxford” deanery any more helpful or accurate as a name for the parishes on the West side of the river.

We therefore propose a name change for both deaneries to “Oxford West” and “Oxford East” which would give a much greater sense that we are all working together for the good of the greater city of Oxford.

And a Deanery prayer:

Holy God, blessed Trinity,
we give thanks for your diversity
which we see in the wonderful mix
of people and places in our Deanery.

May we also know your unity
as we share our talents, time and money,
so that no part is left in need.

Holy God, blessed Trinity
Fill us with the confidence to share
the hope we have found in Christ as we:
stand with the poor,
cherish the young,
sustain the environment,
reach out to those who are excluded;
and seek friendship with those of different faiths and cultures.

Holy God, blessed Trinity,
Bless the earth and all her people.