

EXPLORING AND SUPPORTING LAY MINISTRY

Bruton and Cary Deanery Synod Plus
Diocese of Bath and Wells
Monday 19th February 2018

INTRODUCTION

- Revd Tristram Rae Smith
- Rector of the Camelot Parishes
- Ten churches, total population c 2,000
- Champion for Exploring and Supporting Lay Ministry (see Vocation section of Plan)

WHAT IS A CHAMPION?

- Does anyone know? Here are some ideas
- An enthusiast rather than an expert
- I am biased not neutral, clergy member, ministering with village churches
- Seek to be fair and respect different perspectives
- Ask question 'Why?' not simply 'What?' and 'How?'
- Begin with 'What and How?', go on to 'Why?'
- Open up discussion and debate rather than give pre-set answers

WHAT AND HOW? THE COURSES

- Supporting section of Plan speaks of two Deanery courses
- Lay Worship Assistant Course and Lay Pastoral Assistant course
- Further details on Diocesan website, Ministry for Mission, Training, Lay Training
- 9 units for LWA Course, 8 units for LPA Course covering theory and practice
- When and where in the Deanery? Work in progress
- Interested? Please approach via incumbent or person responsible for benefice

WHAT AND HOW? SUSTAINABLE RURAL CHURCH

- Fewer clergy, vacancies more difficult to fill
- Fewer people to pay for the clergy
- Reversible? In what time frame?
- Are so many rural churches sustainable?
- Why sustain rural churches?

WHY RURAL CHURCHES?

- Witness to light of Christ at heartbeat of local communities
- Part of rural 'social capital' e.g. banks, doctors...
- Keep village/small town alive as community rather than a dormitory where 'real life' happens elsewhere
- Partly about Christ, partly about community. Where's the connection?

THE CAMELOT CHRISTMAS

- A village church without a Christmas Day service ?
- Our curate's last minute illness, what about 2 services she was to lead?
- One option, cancel services, please go elsewhere
- LWAs/Churchwardens no hesitation about taking on challenge
- One service - encouraging feedback, we would come to more services like this
- Other service - congregation of 38 (village effective population 60)
- How many of these would have come to a Christmas service held elsewhere?

SOME CHALLENGES

- A question of control
- What kind of messages might get out if clergy are not present?
- Clergy perspective, can be stressful to be responsible even when not present
- ‘My’ church and empire building, can affect laity as well as clergy
- A response, tighten control by training and selection
- But can multiplication of procedures and control crush the exercise of a God given gift?
- A deeper response, growing in relationship with God, integrity, wisdom, humility, finding significance in Christ i.e. discipleship

WHY? THE BIGGER PICTURE

- Church of England report, Setting God's people free
- Summary version on Church of England website
- Very summary version on Diocesan website, news item Diocesan Synod, 25th October 2017
- Our own Deanery resource Dr Patrick Mileham
- Two culture shifts

TWO CULTURE SHIFTS

- Enable lay and clergy to follow Jesus confidently wherever they are
- See Deanery Plan, Community, helping people to serve God in workplace
- Ordained and lay, equal worth, partners in mission, complementary gifts and vocation
- First shift clear, second shift more problematic, what are different ordained and lay gifts and vocation ?
- Look at two very different models for relationship between clergy and lay this evening, 'equip' and 'perfect', not all would favour the one that I do
- If make first shift will we find the appropriate model for the second?

LAY AND ORDAINED - 'PERFECT' MODEL

- And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry,** (Ephesians 4:11-12, KJV)
- Apostles etc/ Gifted office holders/ clergy/ maybe authorised lay ministers
- Saints/ all believers/ laity and clergy
- Clergy role - (i) exercise gifts of office, (ii) **perfect i.e. help laity mature and become holy,** (iii) do work of ministry
- Lay role - (i) helped by clergy to mature and become holy (ii) **no active part in work of ministry** (iii) assist clergy so that they can do work of ministry

LAY AND ORDAINED - 'EQUIP' MODEL

- The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry** (Ephesians 4:11-12, NRSV)
- Clergy role (i) exercise gifts of office (ii) **equip all believers** (iii) so that all share in the work of ministry
- Lay role (i) to be equipped (ii) so that **will share with clergy the work of ministry**

SO WHO'S RIGHT?

- Different views - Serving Together, 14-17, esp 15-16, 'perfect' model (?) or Thielman, Ephesians, BECNT, 277-280, 'equip' after some discussion
- Go further, explore Greek grammar and word meanings in their context, integrate with Biblical theology
- Own view, heart says 'equip', head agrees on balance of linguistic arguments but not an expert
- But what practical difference does this make?

THE SAINT AT THE SCHOOL GATE

- Saint new to faith, confused, anxious and frightened
- Vicar reassures, suggests course (Alpha, Pilgrim, Faith Pictures etc)
- Saint meets friend at school gate who questions purpose in life
- Saint now confident to say, Jesus an unseen friend who helps me in need
- 2 years pass, Saint attends adult Sunday school, e.g. Christians and war
- Friend at school gate questions bloodthirstiness of Old Testament
- Saint passes on insight learnt on course including Bible references

THE SAINT AND THE PERFECT MODEL

- How do we understand what saint is doing at the school gate?
- ‘Perfect’ model - no badge, no ministry. Presents a problem.
- The ‘nasty’ vicar, saint not commissioned to teach, dangerous, I will instruct those at school gate, you can assist by handing out publicity for my talks
- Saint feels disempowered, disenfranchised, even angry
- The woolly vicar, not quite ministry not sure what it is but all rather marvellous
- Saint feels confused
- The nice vicar, is there a shadow of a collar, do you have a vocation?
- If right, there will be no saint at school gate, safely packed off to theological college

THE SAINT AND THE EQUIP MODEL

- Why can we not simply celebrate what saint has done as ministry?
- Models matter, Windows XP and Windows 10
- The equip model affirms the vicar who offers reassurance and teaching/training
- The equip model affirms the saint who has done the ministry (evangelism, teaching)
- Celebrate and move on!
- Much to be affirmed about perfect model, hardworking, multitasking clergy with laity assisting and growing in holiness
- Character matters as well as action, being as well as doing
- And yet..... ?

WHAT AM I CHAMPIONING?

- Leading worship or visiting the sick clearly training and accreditation may be helpful and even necessary
- Hope the Lay Worship Assistant and Lay Pastoral Assistant Courses are enjoyable
- But championing lay ministry about so much more than giving people badges or helping them to ‘fill in the gaps’ in the provision of ordained ministry
- About recognising and affirming the work of God wherever this is found
- For me, yes, it is about the ‘equip’ model which can celebrate this
- And about the greater goal of enabling all of us, clergy and lay to follow Jesus confidently wherever we are