

## **Report on Deanery Synod Meeting Held on October 8th 2008 at St John's Church, Abbeydale**

I missed the prayers & welcome by Rev Helen Blackburn and I arrived too late to hear Louise Yauall from Church Army explaining her role at Greystones GP Surgery. Julian said later that she "described a most pioneering and imaginative role that she is developing with doctors' practices which seems to be filling a genuine need which doctor's do not have the time or qualifications to address."

I did arrive in time to hear Sandra Newton, the new Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, who was very impressive. There were the usual questions about how Parish Share is calculated, but everything was dealt with very directly and sensibly, I thought.

A summary of business from the July sessions of General Synod had been circulated earlier by Matthew Porter. Matthew is moving from Woodseats to a job at St Michael-le-Belfrey in York, and his balanced and succinct summaries of General Synodical business will be missed. By me anyway.

Last but not least was "Deanery Review, an Archdeacon's perspective", by our Archdeacon, the Venerable Richard Blackburn.

Deanery Review is the process by which churches within a Deanery are supposed to work together to come up with an agreed plan on how to use and share resources (such as buildings and staff). St Marys has not, as far as I know, been asked for any input to the process in our Deanery. One excuse I've heard is that there would be no point going too far with this until a new Bishop is enthroned. But read on for other possible reasons why there's been no enthusiasm...

The Archdeacon gave us a sheet of paper showing the reduction in clergy numbers around the diocese since 1989 and said that although the "end of the nosedive" might be in sight with regards to falling church attendances, and reduced numbers of people applying for ordination, the improvements in both numbers would not be nearly enough to offset "the retirement bulge". There are now more retired clergy than there are working ones! Because of 'freehold' (the right of a Parish Priest not to be moved if they don't want to go) there had to be a pragmatic approach to managing change. By this I think he meant that it was a shame he couldn't just make Priests redundant, so he had to think of other ways to save money. In defence of the clergy, I'd want to add that over the centuries it has been important to the people of England that their local Vicar, however troublesome or bolshy he might appear to the powers that be, could not just be sent somewhere else without his consent.

Three things that the Archdeacon said churches must be doing:

1. We must grasp the importance of teamworking and networking.
2. We must be adaptable - one service, one style of worship per week does not fit in with the culture of choice, however much we disagree with that cultural trend.
3. We can't expect 'them' to come to us. We must go to them.

Increasingly, the Deanery Pastoral Committee and the Archdeacon looks to the Deanery for advice (apparently, see later). If there is no Deanery Plan, he warned, it is more likely that a living will be suspended (this might mean that appointment of a new Incumbent is delayed, or that a Priest-in-Charge with less rights is appointed).

At this point the Archdeacon referred to the last time he'd addressed Ecclesall Deanery Synod, also at St John's, where the Vicar had been about to retire. The outgoing Incumbent had thought that there was only "half a job" at St Johns, but what had actually happened soon after that Synod was that the Archdeacon had appointed a Priest-in-Charge with a *full time* job at St Johns. The

diocese effectively did this while the Area Dean was on holiday (so much for Deanery consultation), and the job went to one Helen Blackburn. Is that surname familiar? Yes, she's married to the Archdeacon.

The Archdeacon didn't actually say all this. What he said was that St John's had 65-75 communicants on a Sunday, and paid a parish share of £48,000, and that we should ask ourselves if our parishes provided that level of resource. To me (and I'm paraphrasing now, I admit) this sounded very much like "stuff the Deanery plan, if you don't get bums on seats and cash in the collection, we'll close you down anyway".

He said "This is a good deanery...but it has been slow in picking up the baton of Deanery planning and team working". Hmm. Now I wonder why that would be, Archdeacon?

Father Brian Coleman of St. Peters and St Oswalds was, along with "his people" congratulated by the Archdeacon because their congregations had been successfully merged when St Peter's was demolished. Afterwards Fr. Brian bemoaned the lack of investment in lay ministry - the diocese talks a lot about the involvement of the laity (rhymes with gaiety and means non-Priests) and shared working, but makes no financial contribution to training them. The Archdeacon responded that the Church Army and the Church Burgesses make a big contribution to things like this. Apparently the Church Army makes a bigger contribution in Sheffield Diocese than it does in any other Diocese. He also mentioned the Vicar of Pittsmoor, Martin Snow, who manages to pay 3 or 4 full-time staff by applying to other bodies for grants.

He said that we should be less fearful of failure and raised a laugh by saying that some institutions or groups are just not meant to last until the second coming.

Someone asked whether 'clustering' (the buzzword for groups of churches coming together to share resources) could be ecumenical. The Archdeacon said yes, definitely, especially with the Methodists with whom the CofE has a covenant agreement on joint working.

Someone else asked whether the Sheffield Diocese might be merged, to save money, for instance with Wakefield. There was quite a bit of discussion around this, and it seems there are already some 'inter-diocesan' appointments being made. Apparently a few years ago, there was a suggestion that the 5 Yorkshire dioceses might be merged down to 3. It felt as if something like this may well be on the cards and mightn't be very strongly objected to (by the clergy anyway who were pretty much the only voices we heard that evening).

Murray Brown, the Vicar of Norton Lees commented to the Archdeacon "you have put fear into our hearts - have you any encouragement?". I can't remember what the reply was, but it was brief.

The Vicar of Dore commented that there must be trust between parish and diocese. In his response to this, the Archdeacon agreed, but said that there would always be the "danger of management over-ride".

The Deanery had rarely felt so united.

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