

Deanery Plan for Gateshead West 2019

The plan should be such that if God does not show up, it will fail miserably.

– Justin Welby

This deanery plan is about consolidation and restructuring of the deanery for a purpose. The purpose is for God's Kingdom to advance. In making this plan, it is our hope that the next plan will be about responding to the growth we have seen through God's grace.

Our plan consists of two parts. The first part is about increasingly mobilising and empowering the laity and the second is about clergy deployment. Of these, the first is the more important.

Laity

In Gateshead West Deanery, we are aware that all of us together are the church, not just the clergy. So we plan to be intentional about growing disciples and discerning and developing the vocations of all God's people.

Over the last few years, we have explored all the "hats" clergy wear. Most of these things could be done just as well by suitably equipped lay people. In fact, the only hats that absolutely require clergy are sacramental duties: weddings, baptisms, giving blessings and absolution and presiding at the Eucharist.

So the most important part of our plan is about mobilising and empowering the laity. Laity have for some time been wearing some of the hats clergy have historically worn. We already have a great set of licensed ministers in our Readers, APAs and lay funeral ministers, and many other people use their gifts following non-licensed ministries. We plan to encourage and grow this practice. In particular, we plan to see more lay funeral ministers, lay preachers and lay worship leaders. Some of these may become lay Readers, but many will not. Some may end up being ordained but many will not. We plan to see more pastoral care, administration and care of our fabric being done by lay people *and recognised as ministry of the church*.

A number of our churches are already beginning informal experiments in some of these areas. In particular, we are encouraging individual people to try new things, to have a go at creatively filling a sermon slot or leading worship. We are encouraging all the churches in the deanery to explore occasional non-Eucharistic worship for the main Sunday service. Already four parishes in our deanery have developed such non-Eucharistic services.

To resource this growth in lay gifts and callings, we will be looking to the wider diocese to provide training opportunities. This would include the existing Reader training, but we also need short, flexible training modules for the cases where Reader training is not appropriate or necessary. For example, we need more training along the lines of *Wings For Worship*. We also wish to see this kind of training happening "on the job", so that the training is not front-loaded and so that people are released into exploring their calling sooner rather than later. We feel that this would be very much in the spirit of the "Setting God's People Free" agenda.

One other “hat” we have talked about is focal leaders. Focal leaders are the individuals or groups who lead church ministries (and, maybe even, entire churches). Together, the focal leaders in a church hold the vision of the church and are seen by all as the “real” leaders of the church. Clergy are generally focal leaders, but lay people can also be focal leaders. We plan to discover and nurture such gifts of leadership amongst lay people which will not necessarily ever lead to ordination. There are already a number of key members in our churches who work powerfully alongside clergy and who could, potentially, become full leaders of ministries in their churches. Such focal leaders will, particularly, need training resources from the wider diocese. They will also need oversight from clergy, but such clergy would not be seen as the “leader” of the ministry area in question.

Unity in our deanery amongst laity is a real asset. We plan to emphasise and encourage this aspect of our life together. Already, we are building networks of people who serve in similar ways. We are talking about sharing gifts across the deanery. This could include, for example, preaching and worship leading, but is not limited in any way. A great recent example is the entirely lay-led ‘Open The Book’ teams partnering and cross-pollinating together.

Clergy deployment

We need to distribute six stipends over the deanery. We plan to do this via partnerships between parishes. These partnerships are about clergy deployment and not about pastoral reorganisation. Most of the parishes of our deanery are entirely comfortable in their own skin in terms of parish boundary, church structures and a local sense of gifting and calling by God. We wish to encourage these local “charisms” and so our plan speaks of sharing clergy rather than joining parishes together.

However, there is one exception: by their agreement, the parish of Blaydon and Swalwell will become two separate parishes with their original boundaries from before these parishes were merged. We anticipate that this separation should be relatively straightforward to accomplish as the two churches in the parish have retained distinct identities. NB the PCC of Blaydon and Swalwell has explored the financial viability of this plan and anticipates no problems.

We will deploy clergy in the following partnerships:

- Hillside, Dunston, Whickham and Swalwell sharing three clergy.
- Blaydon and High Spen Rowlands Gill sharing one priest.
- Winlaton and Ryton sharing one priest.
- Greenside and Chopwell sharing one priest. (Note: there are presently two clergy in this pair of parishes.)

Hillside, Dunston and Whickham parishes recognise the special character of Holy Trinity Swalwell and will ensure that Holy Trinity does not simply become swallowed by another church. We recommend that, within the partnership, Holy Trinity will, specifically, be under the oversight of the Rector of Whickham.

Within the Greenside & Chopwell partnership, current and future traditions of both parishes will be respected. We recognise and value St John's as a Society parish and, as such, we will ensure that within the deanery there is availability of male priests who can preside at the Eucharist with the approval of the Bishop of Beverley. These priests may not be Society priests, but will be men who have been ordained by a succession of male bishops. This does mean sharing of provision of presidents between deanery clergy and it means that we must plan to keep a supply of suitable male clergy within the deanery either as stipendiary clergy or as a Non-Stipendiary Minister (NSM) or a retired minister with Permission to Officiate (PTO).

It may be noticed that the Eastern end of the deanery has a greater number of stipends per church (three stipends on either side of the Derwent River, but four churches on the Eastern side and seven churches on the Western side). This is partly due to population demographics: the Eastern side is far more densely populated. It is partly due to geography: it was hard to see a sensible way of dividing stipends more "equally". In total, the number of people on the electoral rolls of the two sides of the deanery are fairly balanced at 550 in the East vs 600 in the West.

We should also be aware of the non-stipendiary, retired and other clergy living or serving in the deanery. We presently have:

- On the East: 2 clergy.
- On the West: 4 clergy.

The chaplain of the Metrocentre also works within the deanery and, presently, resides here too. Looking forward, we have a non-stipendiary priest in training who is expected to remain in the deanery. (It is best not to include curates in the staffing count because the clear focus of a curacy is training rather than serving in the deanery.)

Within the partnerships listed above, clergy will wear many of the hats we have discussed. However, we especially wish our clergy to: be a visible presence in the parishes; to hold and help develop vision; (in many cases) to be the focal leader; to exercise oversight; to preside at the sacraments. We also wish for our clergy to continue to share with lay ministers in: leading worship, preaching, funerals and pastoral care. Of these, oversight will be especially important as laity develop new callings: we need the clergy to be instrumental in setting the laity free. As overseers, clergy will continue to be gatekeepers and risk managers. As gatekeepers, we ask our clergy to focus on giving permission and blessing new things. As risk managers, we ask our clergy to be willing to take (sometimes significant) risks.

Finally, whilst acknowledging the particular partnerships above, we expect a great deal of flexibility and sharing amongst the clergy in the deanery. As with the laity, unity amongst clergy is a key aspiration for us. The partnerships are important because folk want to know who their 'Vicar' is. But we also see the benefits of sharing the gifts of *all* the stipended clergy across the whole deanery.

So, we will request a paragraph in the Role Description of all the clergy licensed to serve in the parishes of this deanery which takes their commitment to playing their part in the mission of the whole deanery further than the current mild commitment to mutual support

amongst their colleagues in Chapter. This is especially important given the different ratios of clergy to churches across the deanery.

Acknowledgments

This plan is the result of three years of work, conversation and prayer by everyone in the deanery. We acknowledge all the work of the deanery synod, PCCs and church members. A particularly rich part of the process was the “speed dating” meetings. The large meetings of laity were also of great value.

Finally, and most importantly, we give glory to God who has guided us in the process. It is a tribute to our churches and God’s guidance that our last consultation with PCCs led to a deanery plan that can be agreed by all.