(DS23-21)

**Diocesan Synod question from Stroud Deanery**

**St John the Baptist, France Lynch***.*

*Are the General, Diocesan and Deanery Synods of the Church of England aware of the growing crisis caused by the inability of small parishes to attract congregations willing to provide the governance by Parochial Church Councils including the inability to recruit Church Wardens, Secretaries and Treasurers and so fulfil the Church representation Rules 2020 for governance of those parishes? What steps are being taken to address this and when will residual congregations hear of these?*

In the wider Church of England and in the Diocese of Gloucester, the pressure on churches to recruit volunteers to fulfil the Church Representation Rules 2020 for governance of parishes, especially for small churches, is well known. In our Diocese this issue has been particularly highlighted in the emerging Deanery Strategic Plans and we are working together in different ways to try to ease this pressure.

There are local options which we talk about frequently. These include PCCs working together informally, officers (treasurers, secretaries etc) covering more than one parish, and options around shared admin across larger areas. There are also options for benefice councils which have some powers delegated to them.

There are existing pastoral scheme options which formally combine parishes into one parish and now there is the new 2020 CRR joint council scheme, which we believe will have good take up across the diocese. The Seven Towers Benefice has established the first joint council in this diocese. This keeps the individual parishes ‘live’ but in abeyance and has the facility for everything to be delegated to a single legal entity. This removes the need for any local officers except for churchwardens. So, one set of accounts, one treasurer etc. We are building up expertise and experience on this.

While we understand the pressure on parishes due to lack of volunteers, we do see how some of the options and ways of working described have encouraged co-operation, collaboration and new ways of working that have been incredibly positive and innovative. What is key in all of this, is finding solutions that work at a local level. Nothing can be or should be imposed, and we are very happy to support those local conversations.

As mentioned above, the lack of people resource has been evident in the emerging Deanery Strategic Plans. As a consequence, deaneries are reviewing governance structures which will support mission and ministry locally and across the diocese.

Response from the Archdeacon of Gloucester and the Archdeacon of Cheltenham.

 

**The Venerable Hilary Dawson The Venerable Phil Andrew**