

Deanery Strategic Plan: Stroud Deanery. Update for DMPG 20 April 2021

1. Initial analysis

On 18 January 2020 the Deanery managed a face to face open meeting to which were invited all Clergy in the Chapter plus one extra lay representative per Benefice and members of the Deanery Standing Committee. At this point we produced a rough map of the Deanery where important communication networks, geographical features and places of community were noted.

It was apparent that the specific geography of the region (5 valleys meeting at Stroud town centre, hill top communities plus the rural communities in the River Severn loop, major road routes across the centre of the area) presented both significant opportunities and some boundaries to mission. A flat map does not convey the significance of the valley/hill top as possible obstacles to mission. We have recognised from the start that some church buildings will not be sustainable in their current form in the longer term.

With a significant number of Stipendiary clergy fairly new in post (less than 2 years) it was not readily apparent where two posts could be cut and then replaced with one mission shaped post. The clergy felt strongly that theirs were mission posts and by creating a special post for mission it was in danger of taking away the parts of the priest's vocation that could be most life giving.

Then came Covid.

2. Further Development

In August Benefice leaders were asked to complete a questionnaire about the viability of their church buildings/congregations post Covid. A whole variety of new ways of outreach had developed over lockdown, particular in the use of Social Media. Zoom, YouTube and Facebook featured heavily.

Some Benefices have discussed future plans with their PCC's, some have not.

The Clergy chapter met (some in person, some on Zoom) in October and December to discuss the DSP possibilities.

The Deanery Synod in February 2021 met on Zoom with an open invitation for anyone interested to attend. A presentation on the process was made, putting it in the context of the Diocese LIFE vision and the emerging vision for the national church. into small random groups the groups tackled the questions:

- What ministry is important?
- What would you like to keep doing/stop post pandemic?
- What would you love to be doing as a church community that you aren't?
- How do we reach children and young people?
- What do we share in common? How can we flourish together?

The feedback from the groups was collected and analysed both locally and by Revd Dana Delap to identify key themes and directions. This was then discussed by the Standing Committee on 13th April.

3. Current Position – for further discussion and development

In response to the four questions posed recently, our current thoughts are as follows.

(i) Principles and themes

- the need to respond well to two different geographies: the need to minister to the growing unreached concentrated populations along and adjacent to the A419 housing corridor along the centre of the Deanery (Stonehouse across to and including Bussage) alongside providing for the more scattered rural areas noted in section 1 above.
- Continuing to develop the combination of in-person worship with a successful online presence
- Working together both ecumenically and also more effectively across the deanery, sharing resources and ideas and directing colleagues to good quality external resources to reduce individual effort needed.
- Recognition that existing clergy are likely to move on in the coming 10 years and vacancies may not be filled, so we need to engage with the process now so that we have a plan to respond to those changes.

(ii) Potential areas for mission

See above re the relatively unreached and potentially growing populations.

(iii) Priorities for appointments and reducing dependence on stipendiary ordained ministry

- Plans are under discussion in the Stroud team to replace a minister vacancy with an Operations Manager as an equal member of the team – taking on administration but also contributing proactively to overall organisation
- Stroudwater team is working on combining parishes with a view to responding to changing future ministry patterns
- Encouraging lay leadership with development of pastoral and spiritual skills including leading worship
- Be more deliberate in the deployment of Readers and retired clergy
- There is no discernible benefit in altering deanery internal boundaries, but discussions are underway to link Avoning and Cherington into the Minchinhampton benefice.

(iv) Diocesan support

- legal and HR support when required for proposed changes, possibly also communications support
- learning/resources from OneLife particularly to reach younger people
- drawing on existing training offer for lay leadership development
- sense of shared enterprise