

Ministry Strategy Feedback and Advisory Group

Final Report of the Group

1. This document represents the feedback from the Ministry Strategy Feedback and Advisory Group (MSFAG) to the Bishop's Staff, the Bishop's Council and the Diocesan Synod following our period of consultation.

Background

2. The Ministry Strategy Feedback and Advisory Group was set up following the Diocesan Synod's resolution in October 2013 to:
 - (a) welcome the Strategy for Ministry as an important contribution to our vision for growing disciples
 - (b) request the Deaneries, in dialogue with parishes, the Bishop and ecumenical partners to explore the local implications of the Strategy, including the shape of possible Mission Communities, and to report back to the Archdeaconry and Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee
 - (c) request the Bishop's Council to set up a group to consider the feedback received and inform Diocesan Synod's further discussions towards final approval of a Strategy by October 2014.
3. The Group's full terms of reference are set out in Annex 1.
4. The Group consists of a mix of laity and clergy drawn from the Carlisle Diocese, the Cumbria Methodist District and United Reformed Church Cumbria Area.

The work of the Group

5. The group has met on 9 occasions since the start of 2014.
6. In the course of its work it has:
 - (a) received, assessed and published responses to issues from a wide range of sources including lay church members, parochial clergy, United Reformed Church and Methodist ministers, Rural Deans and Lay Chairs,
 - (b) sought reports from Rural Deans and Lay Chairs as to the progress and outcomes of local Mission Community Shaping work and from Archdeacons in respect of discussions at Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committees,
 - (c) attended ecumenical Ministers' Days on the Ministry Strategy in March and April,
 - (d) set up a website to disseminate information about its work and about the Ministry Strategy and Mission Community shaping work,
 - (e) distributed a leaflet to Church Members explaining the basis of the Ministry Strategy proposals,
 - (f) contributed to redrafting the Ministry Strategy document in the light of the feedback received,
 - (g) reported to Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod.

Feedback

7. We reported previously on the initial feedback and the common concerns that had arisen during the original consultation phase and subsequently, together with what we thought were suitable responses to those concerns.
8. We are now in a position to report based not only on the view expressed during that consultation period and feedback received from the clergy/ministry days but also on:
 - (a) Some 45 submissions received as emails,
 - (b) Feedback from rural deans and lay chairs on progress in the individual deaneries.
9. One key point to be made is that we have no mechanism for taking a quantitative view of what the individual members of our churches think of what is being proposed, but it is not clear that that would anyway be particularly helpful at this point.
10. We have looked at the 128 viewpoints that had been expressed in the consultation prior to the 2013 Synods and the 45 directed at MSFAG after its creation.
11. Our responses to 'common concerns' stand in addition to this report in terms of the original consultation.
12. We have had feedback on progress from the 11 deaneries.

Main observations

13. The members of MSFAG have become generally supportive of the notion of mission communities as a result of lengthy discussions and deliberations, and certainly have not seen any evidence for a viable 'plan B' nor believe that 'business as usual' is a tenable strategy. We are probably less confident of the capacity and ability of our three churches to resource and manage the transformational change that is required in order (either together or separately) to successfully implement the proposals in order to fully achieve the impact that is desired.
14. There has been a lack of clarity, perceived or otherwise, in what is being proposed leading to misunderstanding of some key elements of the strategy. This is manifest in some of the issues that have been raised. This may simply reflect a lack of clarity and consistency in communication or it may be associated with a lack of clarity and consistency in our perception of the reality of what is being proposed.
15. A number of apparently negative views can be attributed to misunderstanding the strategy – a point closely allied to the previous one, albeit that misunderstanding can occur however good the communication.
16. The majority of views would appear to range between support and indifference/resignation. We would observe that, in general, attitudes have become more positive with respect to the strategy as people have become more engaged with it.
17. The main risk with adopting the strategy is that we put the structures in place but that nothing really changes.

18. There is a lack of clarity about potential roles, particularly of those stipendiary clergy who are not mission community leaders, but also self supporting ministers and lay leaders/ministers.
19. There is an insufficient feel for what mission communities will really look like and do when they are in place.
20. Acceptance of and support for the ecumenical dimension is patchy – in some cases very strong, in other places almost non-existent (across the denominations).
21. There has been significant enthusiasm in some deaneries for the process of exploring mission communities but somewhat less in others (in one in particular). There is probably less outright enthusiasm in many of the parishes, in part at least because of a gulf in communications.
22. There has been insufficient communication.
23. We have identified a number of things that we believe must be in place for the strategy to achieve the success that is being looked for:
 - (a) Well-targeted training and support for senior staff in the denominations and for potential mission community leaders in handling transformational change (including, in particular, the need for consideration of the changing roles of the ordained clergy) delivered by highly experienced practitioners.
 - (b) The implementation of the strategy being treated as a real priority at all levels in our denominations, with sufficient resources and attention being dedicated to it.
 - (c) Active management of the process with oversight across the entire area exercised by a suitably qualified, dedicated, potentially full-time resource.
 - (d) Improved communication on the strategy and its implementation – including feedback on what is actually happening on the ground, particularly what is working well.
 - (e) A real focus on growing disciples and the work of mission and outreach coupled with a clear recognition that the forming of mission communities is simply an enabler for what we need to do, rather than what we need to do.
 - (f) Significant lay involvement in the management of the process to match the increased lay involvement being called for at the local level.

Key risks

24. A more detailed risk analysis has been prepared, here we consider what we see as some of the key risks:
- (a) The process may be too widely seen as 'shifting the deck chairs' or as yet another strategy in place of *Growing Disciples*.
 - (b) We may fail to equip leaders (both at Diocesan/District/Area and mission community level) to manage the transformation process.
 - (c) We may be unable to get sufficiently-gifted people into the mission community leadership roles in every mission community.
 - (d) We may be unable to identify and equip leaders for each church and congregation.
 - (e) We may fail to significantly increase our level of mission and pioneering ministry.
 - (f) We will not put sufficient effort into making it happen, in particular not making it a real priority at every level in our organisations¹.
 - (g) We may 'run out of steam'.

The view from the Deaneries

25. The following paragraphs attempt to summarise the responses from the Deaneries to the questionnaire that we sent out (it needs to be borne in mind that there is a dissonance in some areas between the Anglican perception of the process and that of the Methodist and United Reformed Churches²):

Appleby

26. Planning is at an advanced stage, two mission communities have been identified and parishes are now being consulted.
27. The tradeoff was examined between a smaller size of mission community which would help with 'sense of belonging' and a larger size of mission community which would allow greater flexibility within it (and mutual support for clergy).
28. The Methodists have been actively involved, but are working on a different timescale.
29. It is not clear that the parishes are really bought into the strategy.

¹ For example the Bishop's Staff team dedicating a very substantial proportion of their time to ensuring the successful implementation of the strategy in the deaneries.

² And indeed there may well be a dissonance between the view of rural deans/lay chairs and that of people in the parishes.

Barrow

30. Barrow Deanery Synod have voted unanimously that in principle they will work towards becoming one mission community.
31. Ecumenical involvement has been limited – the Methodists and URC church members are concerned about being swallowed up by CofE and CofE members are concerned that there will be an overcompensation for this.
32. There are active plans for outreach and pioneering ministry.
33. The point is made that *'If the Ministry Strategy is to have any mileage it must be owned by church members across the county, who need to feel that their input in the consultation has been taken on board and has contributed to shaping the vision'*.
34. They also say: *'There is a growing positivity about the proposed strategy while, at the same time, a recognition that these proposals are a significant shift in 'Church' as we know it.'* and *'We sense a mixed mood among parishes – there is a level of indifference ranging from 'here we go again' to 'we'll just keep our heads down and continue as we have done in the past' to 'we can't continue as we are; we're stronger together!' Apathy and indifference will be a real challenge'*.

Brampton

35. Planning is quite advanced at the Clergy Chapter level but “things seem to lag when PCCs are consulted”.
36. There is active involvement from ecumenical partners but it is reported that “many in the deanery feel this ‘partnership’ is not wise. The Methodists and URC are a dying breed and we may be better without them”.
37. Outreach proposals seem to primarily focus around the appointment of a Youth Chaplain and Network Youth Church Minister.

Calder

38. Planning is at an advanced stage with four mission communities identified.
39. There are some outstanding issues, in part associated with the present clergy.
40. There has been significant ecumenical involvement, but not all the problems have been resolved.
41. Additional work is needed in looking at outreach and pioneering ministry.
42. Mood in the parishes varies between indifference and very positive, with some less positive but supportive of the idea that this is the only way forward.

Carlisle

43. We believe that it is true to say that the proposed strategy has not been well received in the Carlisle Deanery for a variety of reasons. The Rural Dean now reports as follows:
- (a) The Synod is grateful for a lengthy but productive meeting between the Rural Dean and the chair of MSFAG which has led to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the Deanery and the need for an urban-specific response.
 - (b) The more permissive response from MSFAG has liberated and empowered the individual parishes to move into a more serious exploration of working relationships without the fear of perceived contractual commitments.
 - (c) The Synod has revisited again a vision of priestly and lay leadership first offered in 2009 which seeks to serve 'areas' rather than mere parishes, builds on a collaborative model of both lay and ordained, stipendiary and non-stipendiary; and makes provision for possible reduction in stipendiary staff alongside mission/resident need focused targets.
 - (d) Positive relationships with ecumenical partners still continue to blossom, and the active discussions between parishes remain open for ecumenical involvement where/when desired.

Derwent

44. Three potential mission communities have been identified.
45. There has been communication at a clergy level, but more required at the parish level.

Furness

46. Progress in planning is described as 'patchy', five 'clusters' have been identified.
47. They report that *'the towns are natural centres of mission but don't naturally link with the surrounding villages.'* and that the rural benefices *'have common issues and concerns, they are spread over too great an area to form a meaningful missional community'*.
48. They also talk about 'willing' ecumenical partners whose *'involvement has been limited, largely because they have a very wide portfolio of responsibilities, which often don't coincide with the mission communities we have tentatively identified'*.
49. Mission and outreach has primarily been looked at in terms of the Network Youth Church that is currently being established.

Kendal

50. Kendal have been proceeding with the help of a facilitator (Revd Brian Crowe) and are looking at 7 geographically based communities. The process is an ecumenical one focused on mission and outreach.
51. They report *'We would favour functional, mission linkages above administrative tidiness and ease. Thus groupings would adapt or allow for the flexibility of shared, ecumenical pioneer ministry and outreach. We are very aware that in going forward in new endeavours we may be leaving behind some valued and treasured forms hence our painstaking collaborative process to avoid alienation and achieve long term, functioning units'*.
52. They are aiming to build a high degree of long term consensus, accepting that that will result in longer timescales.
53. They report that Deanery Synod members are positive and supportive with a desire to positively engage with the strategy.

Penrith

54. Widespread acceptance that change is needed; the Mission Community model seems to be accepted with most concern being finding and developing local church leaders.
55. Four or possibly five mission communities have been identified.
56. Key points and themes:
 - (a) Need for great communication
 - (b) Support for the ecumenical approach and the need to demonstrate unity.
 - (c) Need for a clear plan to identify/nurture/develop/train lay people and for clarity over the authority local leaders will have.
 - (d) Agree need to resource church growth/fresh expressions/youth work
 - (e) Need to faster (than 2020)
 - (f) Devil will be in the detail
 - (g) Strong support to pool resources, share 'back office' services, reduce administrative burden.

Solway

57. Looking at four mission communities (originally three, but amended to create two for Workington).
58. Significant ecumenical input, but there is a CofE view that it would be much easier if it was just a CofE initiative. There is an issue with the number of mission communities that a new new Methodist minister is likely to have to cover.
59. A Network Youth Church leader is in place as is a pioneer ministerial curate.
60. They point out that we are in danger of implementing a different system in every deanery.

Windermere

61. Are actively consulting down to parish level on a plan to create three mission communities – broad consensus about the way forward.
62. The Methodists and URC have responded positively to the deanery plans.
63. General attitude is one of acceptance rather than enthusiasm – *'some in parishes feel weary of change upon change'*.

Other feedback received

64. There was misapprehension that the strategy in some way excluded the 'minster model'; the final revised form of the strategy needs to make it clear that that is not the case. This also related to the role of 'greater churches' and whether some single parishes should be allowed to 'go it alone'. We have expressed the view that parishes cannot simply ignore the reduction in stipendiary clergy numbers and assume that it will not affect them and also the view that a 'greater church' should be in a position to actively support other churches and congregations.
65. Attention was drawn to the excellent *From Anecdote to Evidence* report, and in particular its findings with respect to Team Ministries; clearly we need to encourage people to read the report but we also need to make it clear what it is about the mission communities approach that will lead to growth in a way that team ministries generally have not.
66. A number of people have called for specific mention of 'ministry at work'.
67. Detailed questions were received about many of the legal aspects of the operation of mission communities which we have attempted to address.
68. A number of people have questioned the ecumenical aspect, the degree of support for it and the apparent exclusion of other denominations with whom a number of parishes already work.
69. Attention was drawn to the need for oversight and particularly the need to equip the leaders of mission communities to lead and manage the transformational change that is required.
70. Some people questioned the need for mission communities as a vehicle for mission and outreach, or questioned the need for anything more than loose informal relationships.
71. Barrow suggested, and subsequently adopted, the notion of a deanery-wide mission community with informal, fluid groups within it.
72. Carlisle Deanery raised a number of questions following on, in part, from the apparent almost total lack of support for the strategy at parish level.
73. Several people have queried whether the projected number of SSMs is realistically achievable, but that has generally been in the context of the need to have more lay leaders to provide a more healthy model of church.
74. A number of people have raised the issue of the differing ecclesiology of our three churches.

75. Consideration needs to be given to the issue of clergy who find themselves serving more than one mission community (this is most likely to be an issue for United Reformed Church and Methodist colleagues) and the implications in terms of capacity.

Conclusions and recommendations

76. The conclusion of the Group is that the Strategy for Ministry, as amended, should be presented to Diocesan Synod with the recommendation that it should be approved and that the parishes and deaneries should be asked to work to set up mission communities within the timescales envisaged. The Group believes that the Strategy offers a realistic way forward to meet the challenges currently facing the Church.

77. The group also conclude that there are significant risks associated with the implementation of the strategy (as detailed in a separate paper – *Risk Analysis*), but that:

(h) doing nothing offers a significantly higher risk, and:

(i) we do not have and have not heard a better strategy for implementing the *growing disciples* vision on a Diocese-wide³ basis.

78. The group were unanimous in their recommendation of the need for active management of the process, including:

(j) giving priority to the work required at every level from individual churches to the Bishop's Staff team

(k) dedicated resource – potentially a full-time person – providing oversight and accountability for progress

(l) properly resourced and effective communication as the work unfolds

(m) active management of the identified risks.

79. The strategy envisages much greater lay involvement in the mission, ministry and running of our churches – a move very much to be welcomed. The group believe that this needs to be accompanied by a substantial increase in the level of lay involvement in the leadership, management and oversight of our church structures.

16 September 2014

³ It is certainly possible that other models might work in some individual parts of the Diocese, but we wish to grow disciples everywhere – not in just a few places.

Annex 1

Bishop's Council - Ministry Strategy feedback and advisory group

Genesis

Set up by Anglican Bishop's Council at the request of Anglican Diocesan Synod following formal resolution at the October 2013 Synod meeting.

Remit of the group

To consider any feedback received on the Ministry Strategy, hold an overview as the exploration of shaping mission communities takes place and provide interim reports at every Bishop's Council and a presentation to Council in time to inform the Diocesan Synod on 11th October 2014.

Membership of group

2 lay members including an elected Bishops Council member
2 Ecumenical Partners
2 Rural Deans
An Archdeacon
Diocesan Secretary

Membership

Lily Hopkins – Lay Chair of Kendal Deanery (Chair)
Chris Angus - Bishop's Council
Rev Sarah Moore – URC President of the Cumbria Area
Rev David Stretton – representing the Methodist District
Rev Stewart Fyfe – Rural Dean of Appleby Deanery
Rev Angela Whitaker – Rural Dean of Kendal Deanery
Ven Penny Driver – Archdeacon of Westmorland and Furness
Derek Hurton – Diocesan Secretary

Number of meetings - monthly to September

Tasks

- Consider the summary of the feedback and write a response.
- Receive regular reports from the establishment of the shaping groups and Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committees and consider any questions and concerns raised.
- Raise, discuss and ensure resolution of issues by appropriate people e.g. Bishop's Staff, Ecumenical Partners, Rural Deans and Lay Chairs, National Church and Church House officers.
- Maintain and make available a log of the issues raised and the agreed responses.
- Prepare interim reports for each Bishops Council and presentation of findings to Bishops Council in September 2014.