

Deanery Synod meeting at Wincanton Methodist church 19 July 2018

Introduced by the Rural Dean Liz Mortimer

Handed over to Revd Tina Hodgett, [Diocesan Evangelism and Pioneer Team Leader]. First, a sing-song. Then a bible reading and prayer to underline our focus on mission. Then she gave a sheet of paper to each group of us with a description of a pioneer. What is a pioneer? Vocation, definition, charism. Our card said “reach places others do not reach”. We had to think of names. A lady who sends a message to everyone (hard copy or emails) in Corton Denham weekly, with a diary for the coming week. Other cards said things like: “innovators” and “dreamers who do” and “explorers”. Led to a discussion in each case. And “people who see things that do not yet exist” and “evangelists”. In discussion, examples emerge who are both local/relatively unknown, and well-known. “Entrepreneurs”. People who ‘write off’ what they are prepared to lose, just to see what happens – so don’t mind if they do lose it. Different to a more “managerial” approach, someone who wants a return from each investment. “Boundary pushers”. Bishop Michael Curry who gave sermon at the royal wedding. “Loyal radicals” and “people gatherers”. Michael Evis, that, and a pioneer. Lots of local suggestions as well as the big names. Led to some quite interesting discussion facilitated by Tina Hodgett.

“Pioneers are people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit’s initiatives with those outside the church; gathering others around them as they seek to establish new contextual Christian community” (Took ten years to agree that form of words!) Don’t look for what has worked historically – but whatever works innovatively there and then/here and now. Appropriate to the context in which it takes place. Pioneers derive their vocational identity from Jesus (Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith – Hebrews 12:2).

Group work: “in what ways was Jesus a pioneer?” Discussed many examples of Jesus’s unexpected behaviour and responses. Spent most of his time with people outside the faith community. Spontaneous, even shocking. The notion of the leader as servant.

Manager or entrepreneur? Do you plan ahead and buy food to suit recipes – or just raid the fridge and the cupboard and chuck it together to make a meal?

Tina showed a photo of a bridge no longer spanning the river but now to one side. The culture (the river) has moved, but the bridge has not. It is not a simple job to move the bridge – or to know what to do – but at least we know the river won’t return to flow under the bridge! A parallel for our churches here in Somerset...

“Fresh expressions of church” – a form of church for our changing culture, established mainly for those who are not yet members of any church. (“Imagine church for those who don’t do church”). If those who come are not at least 30% outsiders, then clearly it’s not a ‘fresh expression’!

The Fresh Expressions journey: loving service, forming community, etc – all ‘ing’ words.....

Q&A – are there churches which open to the homeless? Absolutely...

Includes some ecumenical pioneering efforts to the same end.....

Making the path by walking it.....e.g. by being a parent!

We talked about empowerment. Be happy to have mistakes happen/to make mistakes. Many dead ends...

Case studies described by Tina:

- the Grieve Inn (founded by Jo, for those who are grieving – she would say a prayer – wasn’t a group of churchgoers as such – she painted a river (of grief) and they would say week by week on where they were on this river – and are closely knit – and over time they have become aware that God is with them;
- Boxercise (E London) (boxer came dramatically to Jesus – wanted everyone to know about it – and he founded Boxercise – and with a group of young men who punch bags he is exploring compatibility with faith (in a context where many are psychologically damaged);
- Baby Days (after gave birth, the women talked about the spiritual side of having a baby – and at the end of six weeks they said to Tina that they absolutely need this and don’t want to stop – sending prayers by whatsapp;
- the Upper Room Cirencester (a lay woman who invited people in who were loafing around on the street – and over time became a religious and worship group).

These are all types of ‘grandchildren’ churches which give rise to structural questions – having faith that God will make it all work out.

So maybe the church is a bit like a grandmother – barren (but miracles happen). Fresh expressions is more like a grandchild. Grandchildren do the same things (eat, get dressed, speak) but in different ways to the grandparent. But you love them and are proud of them and want to see them – but don’t necessarily want to live with them or to be them!

Pioneer Project – Tina describes its beginning – her getting money from the church commissioners – includes pioneers of all types, ordained, not, old, young, some have time, others less time etc – and there will be nine full-timers (some lay, some ordained) between the nine deaneries in the diocese. It is a five year project. Lots of training and networking and “hubs”. (Elicits various defensive or critical responses but we are not saying that pioneers are better, just **different**. And of course it is risky in that we don’t know where it will end up!)

That was the end of Tina’s session – 1.75 hours including tea break!

Then for last few minutes the Rural Dean updates us on the deanery plan.

- See the website for developments. Rob Sage does the deanery website (brutonandcarydeanery.net). Send stuff to him.
- Courses; the Radical Welcome day (Sat 20 Oct, North Barrow, 9 to 5) – details from Anne Sear – and I have poster.
- Looking for an appropriate person to work in Secondary schools as a chaplain.
- Also talked about Zambia briefly.
- Course for lay worship assistants.
- And also looking for reps/volunteers from the deanery area (i.e. including us!) to sit three times a year on diocesan synod. Get a higher level picture by attending, including re finance etc. Interesting. And can of course input ideas.
- Safeguarding training. Now a requirement for more people to do it.

In conclusion, this was a refreshing meeting in that we explored faith and outreach ideas in an interesting way, thanks to Tina, and only a very small fraction of the meeting was devoted to admin type stuff!

JDD 19 Jul '18