



Newcastle Diocesan Synod

Open Synod Forum: Saturday 13th March 2021

This meeting was hosted using Zoom Video Conferencing. To aid discussion those attending the meeting were allocated into breakout rooms. There were 14 breakout rooms.

The notes which follow are the notes from the breakout groups. Each group was asked to reflect on: their hopes; their challenges; and their doubts following the presentations at the Open Synod Forum.

Resources to support the meeting, including a video of the meeting, are available from: www.newcastle.anglican.org/synod

What makes you feel hopeful and why?

We are hopeful of the power of God, his love and his joy in guiding us through this process. We are so pleased that we are able to move forward after hovering and pondering on this for years and are, at last, taking action and looking towards a new future. We are hopeful of the new model of working together, in collaboration with each other. At last, we are breaking down walls, no longer working in silos and in competition with each other. Instead of being disappointed by the things we cannot do, we can be re-energised and revived by working together. It brings hope to lay people who have felt overlooked or have felt not good enough to join in.

We are thankful that the models are permission giving – not one set way but instead are adaptive. The flexibility of the models allows them to be applicable over a wide range of possibilities and contexts.

It's a no brainer!

What challenges you and why?

Communication is going to be key and what we need to communicate needs to be perceived as good. We need to get the message right and deliver it well. It is going to be scary but exciting and we will need strength, will, resources and faith to see it through.

Church has lost its relevance. How do we reach out to people who haven't heard the word or don't currently engage in church? How do we become more visible in daily life and have confidence in ourselves, and give confidence to others, to talk about our faith to others? How do we present ourselves to people in society when we have mixed messages about sexuality, women's ministry, divorce etc. Do we seem a bit dated? What, realistically, do we mean when we use formularies and phrases of "*bringing people to God*"? Are we growing the kingdom or are we just trying to increase numbers in church?

We need to get our own houses in order before we can do outreach – we need to be brave enough to let go of some of the old things and think of new ways of doing church, whilst remaining sympathetic to those who like the old way. We cannot just look after our own needs, there will need to be sacrifices to allow us the freedom to do this. That is going to be a challenge and painful for some people. We need to look outward more rather than being so internally focused.

We need to constantly remember that we are been given the opportunity of doing something new, not just the old ways re-hashed. However, we need to reconcile the different styles and patterns of worship.

How do churches measure success – currently its about the number of people who come through the door and how much money we make and contribute to parish share. But our presence of being with people where they are when there is a need (chaplancy model) is not measurable. Our Christian presence within our communities cannot always be measured, nor will it necessarily bring in our parish share.

However, if people do not "*come to church*" how do we ensure planned giving is maintained?

Breakout Room 1

Do we have the energy and resources to undertake this work as it is a huge piece of work? Do we have enough people with youth, vigour, enthusiasm and personality to do this?

The roll-out of this is key and the decision-making process needs to be done well. There were mixed feelings within the group about how to do this. Would it be better for the Diocese to tell us which models will be better, or should we let the individual churches work it out? This working out of the models needs to be done at the right speed and have time and space to allow honest discussions, that need to be handled correctly. We need to allow everyone to have their say and not just let the loud or confident people drown out their voices.

Mission hubs will need to be managed carefully so smaller churches don't just feel that they have been taken over by somewhere more powerful or popular.

The principal of it is fine but the application of it needs to be carefully managed.

This will need guidance and strong leadership.

If we do indeed see a huge revival, how do we manage that?

Breakout Room 2

[feedback from this group not yet ready]

Breakout Room 3

Doubt	How it will be communicated in the wider community, beyond the church community?
Doubt	How we do mission in a parish which is expanding (e.g. due to new housing)
Doubt	We may have too many buildings in the rural but congregations are attached to a building and don't like to move
Challenge	How we extend our mission to younger people
Hope	Opportunity to share tasks between parishes (e.g. administration, and other skills) and to develop new skills.
Challenge	How to the models map onto financial giving? How do we afford this?
Hope	That we can pray for this. Can we have a 'transformation' prayer?
Hope	Really hopeful that the re-framing of the values and priorities, and now the different models, give us an opportunity, a mandate in-fact, to make sure we help people uncover gifts that we haven't appreciated in the past, feeding into how a range of different people can have their gifts flourish where they are and then beyond/
Hope	Really hopeful that all of this helps us to continue to re-frame strength and weakness, that when we are weak we are also strong and vice versa.
Challenge	The challenge is around that last hope, that we don't presuppose what is strong from only one perspective. I think the journey we're on allows us to see strengths we haven't appreciated enough, at the same time as being brave enough to speak about weaknesses that are causing us to become not in-fact weak but vulnerable.
Doubt	How some of the difficult decisions that there will inevitably be for us together, and certain places in-particular, will come about. It continues to feel to me to be important that people are aware that this could be part of the journey from an early stage so that any buy-in (perhaps without realising the implications) doesn't turn to resentment, which is much harder to deal with than early conversations that are difficult.
	Need a glossary of terms for the models

Hopes

Good to think creatively - not doing the same things as before the pandemic with less resources and expecting better results.

Lots of this is already happening across the diocese.

Great that this is not one size fits all. Good to have three different models.

Good to have intentionality around this - forces us to make progress.

Gifts can be shared beyond just one parish - better use of the gifts that God has given us.

We say in the Creed we believe in ONE Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. These models make better sense of that

(the challenge is not just to become something like the Methodist Circuit (which will not work!!)).

Resource Church, St Thomas', already doing lots of this stuff (as are others!)

Challenges

Winning over congregations that have been there for a long time!

One challenge is the sense of scale. One parish has 15,000 people. How do we join in with other parishes?

Making sure we understand different contexts in each different parish when a number of parishes are working

together.

That people don't feel that change has been done to them!

Fears

Terminology might be too new for people.

We are all enthusiastic - will those who are not on Synod, Deanery Synod, PCC's etc share that enthusiasm? There is

leakage and enthusiasm at every step.

Do not be afraid (Isaiah 43).

Questions

How do readers fit in?

How does Lindisfarne fit in?

How do retired clergy fit in?

Breakout Room 5

- Hope-stemming from today and where our Diocese is-a visionary Bishop (ref today's address), a new Bishop (Mark) and new Archdeacon-Catherine. Now we need to share with our communities-
- Some of us are sharing already, as envisaged in Models 1+2 (a 5 Parish urban Benefice). Each Parish has a different gift/skill to contribute
- Working in Teams has fallen "out of fashion" recently. We need to "dust off" the concept, re-imagine-each Parish unit offering its strengths, and receiving support for "weaknesses"
- Sometimes not easy to accept another Parish may be taking responsibility for us in certain areas. Focus away from Vicar-led doing everything-to more sharing with Laity
- The facility and benefits-and problems of Zoom. How to deal with "Zoom reticence"? The joy of holding outdoors worship-the quality of conversations after the service much more meaningful than usual post service chat
- How to persuade some Vicars/PCCS to embrace Zoom? We need to "woo" people (this from a retired Clergy)
- Are the new Models going to increase the heavy demands on the willing? Concepts need much discussion/sharing/121 discussion
- What happened to Authorised Ministry? Is it still part of the Plan? Surely fits in so well with the 3 Models. What happened to the Diocesan-wide training??
- Final point before we were cut off to resume plenary!-We must stop looking inward; some PCCs are so resistant to agree anything new...!

Hope

that during the Easter season of discernment we are able to seek the living God and that God speaks His

living word into our waiting.

Hope called to do something new and different

The chance we've had to build up the laity during Zoom worship will lead to a lot more people being ready

to make their contribution in in-person worship.

Hope that people will be empowered

Hopeful with the focus on prayer and biblical focus leaves me feeling hopeful

Hopeful that with these models need flexibility, and that that flexibility is there.

Very positive attitude that we're getting from the church now – come over very well this morning.

Wanting to look forward.

Reaching people with Messy Church

Challenge

Feel really challenged about reaching younger people

Some people are unwilling to embrace change. Not going to go back to pre-Covid. We have a brand-new

congregation. No way we're going to stop streaming.

Will we revert to type? We're not going back to Sunday School.

Will people accept someone who is not the vicar? And will we be able to find the focal ministers.

Hopeful doubt

Hope that this is genuinely outward-looking. When church is up against it it tends to think about its own structures.

Collaboration supposed to be happening. Doubtful that just by giving it another name it will happen. Need

true collaboration.

Number of people available/willing to take on these roles.

Harvest is plentiful but labourers are few. People are busy – how does God bring God's Spirit to those people.

Hope:

We liked that we are being asked to reimagine what we are as a Diocese

Hope we can spend time focused on schools – that's where we need to nurture faith.

To build on what we've started during lockdown – the reaching out to others and working across boundaries (ecumenical as well as Parish), seeing boundaries as membranes not walls

We can learn from examples where this is already working – MINE has been running for 10 years.

...we make the most of this fantastic opportunity.

We like the number of different models – and the permission to be different.

... we can get the laity involved, that there can be conversations from Bishops to clergy asking why they're getting in the way.

Challenge:

.... getting the incumbent on board

..... that this is seen as a move away from weekly Eucharist because there aren't enough clergy

To be able to keep the momentum going – we need to make sure this gets done.

Being able to engage some of our elderly members who have become used to being isolated during lockdown – those not able or willing to engage digitally

..... of fear – of the unknown, of being bold, of being able to engage people generally.

A real fear of better financed Parishes having the voice that is heard whilst the poorer Parishes are not able to get their point across.

Doubt:

The message in the press that the people in the pews (and the rest of us!) are hearing about the Church having less clergy and more management because of there being less money around will sow seeds in people.

There are less well-off Parishes which have worked together for years but potentially there will be middle class suburban Parishes saying 'we're OK as we are'.

How will churches get from where they are to this without losing the people who are happy where they are?

We work with volunteers not staff and have to take them with us – the way we communicate this is key.

How can we set these structures in place so they are best for change in the future – as things develop, as society changes, they may need to change.

Our key point:

A challenge – This is a great opportunity but how do we get people, clergy, volunteers and those in the 'middle pews', from their very comfortable position to a new model. There is more than likely to be a lot of fear in this and there will need to be a solid change management structure in place to support it.

Hopes

Some hopes were independent of the parish context:

- That we would be can-do people rather than can't-do
- That we would get away from talking to doing!
- We know that God is with us, whatever.

From MINE, where the Parish model involves **5 churches working together across parish boundaries**.

- Working across parish boundaries can work!
- This **enables them to do things they could never do on their own**. Examples were the employment of a Youth Minister, soon to be joined by a Schools Worker, a money advice project and a building project.

From another deprived Urban context, hope:

- that this would not be a system imposed from above
- in the great flexibility that seem to be on offer
- the new opportunities that these models seem to offer.
- that the differences between contrasting but neighbouring parishes would be recognised.

From a Rural parish with a large number of visitors:

- That a new, more collaborative approach
 - might enable more resources to welcome and manage Visitors
 - would result in a more sustainable work pattern.

Challenges

- to be clear that this transformation is genuinely for people and communities, not the church establishment.
- to ensure that decision making wasn't top-down, but genuinely from the parishes and deaneries.
- that more co-operation wouldn't ruin 'small shoots of hope'.
- to bring people with us; we're after positive transformation
- the need to be honest and open about proposals, with integrity
- to balance this with the need to LISTEN and hear what people are saying they need, not what we think they need.

Doubts were expressed:

- whether a collaborative approach would work so well with parishes in very different contexts
- Several people questioned whether **it was sensible to be introducing a further layer of hierarchy** –the Area Minister – eg the MINE parishes had been working well together without 'someone in charge'.
- the need to maintain the stability of a priest / minister living and working in the area (this was emphasised by more than one person, especially those from deprived urban areas and those with a large student population).
- Where is the finance coming from?
- that focus on statistics might override the stories that different parishes would tell.

1. What makes us hopeful?

Forward progress is being made at last – facilitated by positive senior leadership team- they are giving us permission for change and have refreshed us.

We trust through the all powerful presence of God that something will happen and we know to listen closely to God before we act.

The models presented are credible – they acknowledge that one size does not fit all – they take into account the cares and concerns of different parishes.

There are successful examples of cross site working and collaboration eg Anna chaplaincy and Open the Book

We have embraced the challenges of the pandemic and increased our reach by use of online services etc and we can build on this.

It does indeed feel the right moment.

2. What challenges us?

There is a lot going on and there will be much uncertainty post Covid – can we find room for this (the transformation project) and prioritise it so we can move forward ?

How do we keep engagement with those who have joined us on line?

Can we get the pace of change correct? Neither too fast nor too slow.

Changing mindset – of clergy and laity- is always challenging – we must look outwards and share resources even when that feels difficult.

Can we make progress before the next storm hits?

3. What makes us doubtful?

Have we got the strength?

Have we got the resilience?

Have we got the confidence?

What makes you hopeful?

We started by mapping the context – this makes me hopeful. Having the courage to dream, about how the future could be. The intention of clearing space and listening to all constituents – this is great. It feels like we have great leadership and energy.

What challenges you?

The anxiety of trying to fit what we have heard into prescribed models. We might need new models, unexpected things happen and we need to be flexible enough to allow this and encourage it. We discussed Matt 9 vs17 about new wine in old skins. Let's not try and shoehorn our ideas into something which is not fit for purpose.

Can we do it? Is it possible? Do we have the (esp clergy) capacity?

What makes you doubtful?

The leadership – risk of too much talk and not enough tangible changes. How might this all play out in small traditional parishes? We need to remember our church structures are not set up for dynamic change. The parish system, the synodical system, the financial model etc Is our organisation right? We might not be radical enough to take this on board.

We must be clear who is responsible for what. One of our group was in a situation where the structures have changed but the area minister is still trying to do the old job and now the new – resulting in not having the time to properly oversee the group of parishes. How can we better support our clergy to work differently and help them do this?

We still have too many buildings. It's a lot of baggage.

We need people who 'get it' on the ground in church communities, not just in the leadership structures.

Other continued discussion:

What is God calling us to do? What do we need to let go of?

A 'new normal' isn't really good enough, that isn't proper transformation!

We need to grab the changes Covid has brought – more people online, more young people coming into the physical church (maybe even because older ones aren't there). It's easy to fall back into old ways when trying to change – how can we stop that happening when things get tough?

People ARE open to seeing things differently. It's a wonderful opportunity for us as a church.

Hopes

True collaboration – everyone valued in building up the Kingdom

Stamfordham etc – Zoom church meetings and started meeting

Approaching from an asset-based attitude – start from what we can do – creativity of this is a hope challenge and a doubt

Alnmouth, Lesbury etc already doing this and challenges, doubt and hope ahead.

Doubts

Will it happen? Have to believe it will

Collaboration between parishes is the hardest thing

Challenges

Creating conditions for flourishing but conditions actually prevent this

Change of mindset

More on Zoom than ever in the church so how can we amalgamate the 2 different approaches

Those who can continue online should be encouraged and it is in tune with people's way of life

How can we keep it going and growing?

Using the outside

Need more of a Venn diagram in model 1 – parishes overlapping?

Need to be partners with our local community – listening

Helping people to grow into the model

Not going back to the separations between congregation and community, it's all one and danger in rushing back to our buildings

Clergy to facilitate everyone being together – bring meaning to why people have wanted to help one another and love at the heart of it

How can you have the energy to be creative when maintenance of listed buildings takes so much energy

Finance needs to be more honest and open – how can we help one another?

Challenge is to *keep* praying and energising and keep travelling together

We need to have *our* attitudes changed too

Acknowledge work of people who do not have faith

What makes you hopeful ? and why?

Inspiring;

A hope for a priest for the future who will be visible in the villages; don't mind what sort, just want one !! (*From Haltwhistle and Greenhead folk*)

All inspiring and exciting and just what we want to hear.

Refreshing as more about God transforming us.

Hope from Warkworth as can see that a priest starting this model is making a difference – contact people etc.

The advantages of lockdown which forced congregations out of buildings and online and facing community and change together

What Challenges and why?

We don't know what level of priestly etc support is available for the area from the Diocese (funding wise) Need to know probable numbers to plan.

If there already is a Deanery Plan will this be taken into consideration?

The Diocese needs to be open in order for us to be engaged .

Need confidence and energy to see this through

How many people are ready for this change? Culture of being too priest dependent. Need culture change and support for folk through it so that they are ready.

We need this to be an intentional choice and not something that happens by default. Needs to be strategic There is a tendency to see individual needs and not the larger picture.

Financial challenge as limited resources. People challenge as limited priests.

Challenge of getting young people involved and engaged as we change together.

Zoom has brought in new worshippers- how to take them along .

There are geographical, money and priestly challenges. (Rural Geography)

What makes you Doubtful? And Why?

Wider parish community need to be helped to understand and be taken along

Perplexed as to how to discern where the Spirit is leading, but while attending to the realities that exist – finance, age profile,

Options 1 and 2: are they another way of managing decline rather than engendering change? Route 3 fees more hopeful A worry that Mission hubs may be a short-term fix but not long term solution

How will other churches feel if they are not the one who is chosen as the Mission hub church?

We are hopeful because...

- there is recognition that change is necessary - we can't go on as we are
- this is something new and exciting
- the resource church is not a single model and theology
- we already have examples of all three models happening in the Diocese and the opportunity to learn from these
- we are learning due to covid that holy communion is not the 'be all and end all', so we can have a new understanding of what church is about

We are challenged by:

- the massive mind shift needed for these new models
- changing from a passive to an active engagement with church from the laity
- getting the timing right as we 'settle out' after covid
- bringing people together with a common vision
- changes to the legalities and administrative structures
- how do Deaneries work better together and are they fit for purpose - possible working in a more fluid and ecumenical way
- need to start where we are
- how do these changes work with clergy deployments
- with aging congregations, how will this effect vocations to lay ministry
- getting the right timing with authorised lay training and the changing models of church

Our doubts are:

- will the resource church really work
- good on paper, but how will we get there
- is this piecemeal or planned

I've added the values and priorities discussion as it was interesting.

Everyone agreed that the values and priorities have been important for a long time.

Questions?

Not sure priorities really are priorities. Can they be interpreted to justify what we are already doing?

Are they pointing us to collective change?

Are they helping guide us to what we should hold onto and what we should let go of?

Challenge: Reflecting on open, generous and engaged in prayer may give us the opportunity to grow.

Mission: Meet people where they are in a non-judgemental way, being prepared to get our hands dirty, making the Bible and our faith relevant, lots of different ways to do this. See where God is already at work and prioritise the poor and oppressed. As we all play our part the overall picture is much bigger than we can imagine.

Quote "*Bloom where you are planted*"

One of our group was worried that the C of E has lost its way and that vicars will become managers/ administrators rather than actively leading parishes.

What makes us hopeful and why?

Accepting we have a problem and thinking about finding solutions

Talking about this, listening to each other, sense that transformation is happening already

Collaboration: Lots of good examples in the group of good collaboration between parishes, within teams and ecumenically. These good examples may be helpful as parishes think about working together.

Positive experiences of online zoom services, lent groups and coffee mornings, many plans to continue these as we come out of lockdown, with a hybrid of in person services with live streaming on line.

Exciting outreach, Willington team now getting about 150 Facebook hits each week for the sermon, changed the way we preach, one point and accessible to those outside of our normal congregations. Some of these people have joined the online services and lent groups, important to be sensitive as to how difficult it may be to come to church in person and to continue to spiritually nourish them.

Excitement about parish replanting, a vicar of a smaller deprived congregation who have little IT access was excited about working with others to enable new life to come into her church.

Beginnings of eco-church

After the challenges of Covid which have made us readjust and rethink, this is a good time to create new ways of being and thinking as a church.

Challenges

Geography in rural areas, especially in the winter

How do we achieve collaboration in a theologically broad church?

Finances

Doubt

Conservative nature of many churches, difficulty accepting change, changes will have to be carefully explained and done

Is it going to be counterproductive, to reduce the numbers of clergy?

Worries that laity are not trained leaders and too much may be expected of them, do not want clergy to become administrators.

Looking after the fabric, being a treasurer and safe-guarding across several parishes may be a lot of work, most people are limited in the amount of voluntary time they are able to give. May be different visions across the parishes as to how these things should be done.

Fears that a lot of resource goes into administration, how can this burden be lightened to free up people for mission and ministry and to be outward facing.

Sensitivity to those who do not have internet access or do not want to use it. Worried that they may have been left behind over the last year, how do we include pastoral care for them.