

Chapter

3

Towards an Analysis of the Deanery of Luton

Introduction

3.1 This Chapter looks at the Anglican Church in Luton and the other areas of the Deanery. It seeks to summarise what the Review Group has discerned as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges in the Deanery.

- The Review Group has been grateful to read and study the some 40 submissions which it has received. These are summarised in [Appendix 1](#).
- The Review Group has spent a fair amount of time in Luton, meeting many people and driving round. Some of these visits and meetings are summarised in [Appendix 10](#). It has sought to get a good and balanced understanding of the life of the Deanery.
- Inevitably it has done so as 'outsiders'. This is a disadvantage in that, despite the care the Review Group has put into getting to know the Deanery, it cannot know it as well as those who have lived in it and served it for many years. Having said that, it is important to note that members of the Review Group have a wide range of experience of ministry and church life in many different settings.

- Being an 'outsider' is also, however, an advantage in that the Review Group has been able to come with a fresh eye and able to look at the situation of the Deanery overall and not from any particular perspective.

Strengths in the Deanery

- 3.2 **Commitment and Loyalty.** The Review Group has discerned a strong sense of loyalty and commitment in the Deanery of Luton. This is striking and important.
- It is noticeable that incumbencies are often quite long. The clergy of the Deanery are **highly committed** to their ministries and have between them a vast amount of experience. This is a very strong characteristic of the Deanery and a powerful witness to the faith and discipleship of clergy and people.
 - The ministry in the parishes of Luton was described to the Review Group as "**heroic**". This does capture something of the determination and strength of the Deanery.

- There is also a strong strand of **loyalty** within parishes and congregations. This often covers a long period of time.
- It is noticeable that the commitment is sometimes to a particular expression of the Christian faith rather than to the Church as a whole.

Heroes together. The Review Group has been concerned to draw on this strong sense of heroism, commitment and loyalty and to see how it can also be developed to strengthen and energise new and collaborative ministry.

3.3 **The Setting of the Deanery.** There are of course many challenges which face the people of Luton. Some of these have been described in Chapter 2. However the setting of the Deanery also gives some real strengths to the Deanery. Among these, the Review Group would mention,

- The Luton Deanery is **geographically coherent** and therefore relates well to the Local Authority Boundary.
- The church **buildings** within the Deanery are generally **well sited**, and many of them are relatively modern. The buildings themselves, in all parts of Luton are a strong sign of the commitment of the Anglican Church to the town and surrounding villages.
- There is a general feeling that Luton Deanery is currently facing the issues that other Deaneries will face in the future. It is perhaps due to this that there is a general openness to the Luton Review.
- The size of the Deanery of Luton means that it is **able to sustain a variety of ministry** and to serve as a forum in which creative thinking and support can happen.

- The Deanery of Luton has within it the **depth and breadth** which enable it to respond to the challenges it faces.

Pioneers. The Review Group is firmly of the opinion that the Deanery of Luton has a real opportunity to pioneer and grow some new ways of being Church

3.4 **Diversity.** As in Luton itself, there is a great richness of diversity of tradition and theology within the Deanery of Luton. This is a huge strength and a strong foundation for true unity and fruitful ministry.

- The diversity within the Deanery is a real gift as the Church seeks to **engage in a variety of ways** with the diversity of the communities in Luton. This is explored further in Chapters 4 and 7.
- The diversity of the Anglican Church in Luton also enables it to form relationships with a wide **variety of Christian traditions within Luton.** This is a great strength and a particular Anglican gift to the body of Christ in Luton. This is explored further in Chapter 7.
- The diversity of the Deanery reflects the wider **diversity of the diocese and of the Anglican Communion.** It is a precious gift and a great strength to be able to explore such difference in a context of friendship, trust, neighbourliness and shared mission.
- There are many **examples of energy and life** in the Deanery. Several of the congregations within the Deanery are strong and flourishing, being well resourced and hopeful towards the future. In other parishes there are smaller but none the less joyful examples of life and hope.

- A great deal of **community activity** takes place within the Deanery. Much of this involves ecumenical activities and projects.

The Gift of Diversity. The Review Group has worked to suggest ways in which this diversity can increasingly be seen as a gift from God. The Review Group believes that the alternative is to retreat into something of the isolation and fragmentation which can so easily appear attractive and safe.

It is interesting to observe that in 2003 Luton Borough Council published an excellent report entitled, "Sticking Together: Embracing Diversity in Luton"²². Is there a sense in which the Deanery of Luton can learn from this report and claim the title for itself? Will it embrace diversity?

The Review Group hopes that its recommendations serve to celebrate and build on the diversity and other strengths of the Deanery of Luton.

- The Review Group heard one observation that visiting the parishes of Luton was like visiting a series of different worlds.
- This sense of fragmentation could, in part, be because **the Deanery is large**. As described above the Review Group believe that there is no obvious or, in the end, desirable way of making the deanery smaller. This was discussed in Chapter 2.
- The fragmentation is compounded by the large number of **small single parish units** and the relatively small number of sizeable ministerial teams within parishes.
- The Review Group senses that the strength of the fears, anxieties and problems which face the Deanery of Luton makes it difficult for effective networking, good community relationships and collaboration to flourish.

The need for trust. The Review Group believes that if the Deanery is to respond to the challenges of the future then imagination and energy, trust and collaboration need to be held alongside heroism and commitment.

There needs to be a shift; there is a sense in which the constituent parts of the Deanery need to be encouraged out of their 'boxes' and to learn from each other.

Weaknesses in the Deanery

- As is usually the case, the weaknesses in the Deanery are to some extent the other side of the strengths outlined above.

3.5 Fragmentation and Isolation. The Review Group has observed something of a general feeling of fragmentation within the Luton Deanery. This can lead to a sense of isolation and loneliness. This would seem to reflect something of the nature of Luton itself.

3.6 Limited collaboration and support. This is one the most obvious weaknesses faced by the Deanery.

- There seems to be a feeling that there are in the Deanery several one man band ministries. This is the other side of the heroism described above. It is admirable but it is not healthy. It is difficult for clergy on their own to have the time, energy and inclination to take ideas forward creatively.

²² A Report of the Community Cohesion Scrutiny Panel, published in January 2003.

- There is a strong feeling that there is not enough **support for the clergy**. The Review Group is not suggesting that there is a lack of support for Luton or even within it. But it does take seriously the perception and the feeling of being unsupported. This only adds to the sense of isolation.
- The comparative **lack of training posts** and other assistant posts also contributes to the lack of fresh ideas and new thinking. Collaboration is a vital ingredient to ministry.
- These issues are explored further in Chapter 7 and suggestions given of ways to try to develop more support and collaboration.

The need for mutual support.

The Review Group believes that issues of training and support are vital within the Deanery. In its recommendations it has sought to take this seriously. People are the Deanery's greatest resource. The morale, training, faith and spiritual well being of clergy, Readers, parish officers and volunteers and all baptised people are the highest priority.

3.7 Limited resources for ministry.

The task in Luton is great and resources are often limited. There is a great need for this to be tackled imaginatively and strategically. This is explored further in Chapter 5.

- There is a large **pastoral work load** in the big parishes within the Deanery. This is not always matched by a large congregation to share the pastoral work. Therefore the sense of the ordained minister heroically struggling on his or her own is re-emphasised.

- In many parishes there is an increasingly **small pool of people** from which to find Churchwardens, Treasurers and other officers and volunteers. This is particularly true, but not exclusively so, in the smaller congregations. Suggestions about this are explored in Chapter 7.
- The current **parish share** arrangements are a struggle for the Deanery with many of the parishes unable to pay their quota. This contributes to the problems facing the Deanery and the morale within it. The Review Group recognises that this is also true in many other parts of the Diocese. It believes, however, that the present system, in particular the flat rate stipendiary contribution penalises smaller congregations. It believes that this needs to be addressed. This is explored further in Chapter 5.
- Generally the **church buildings** in the Deanery are in a good state of repair and well sited. The Review Group considers that there are two buildings which need to be closed and, if possible, replaced with much more suitable ones. It also believes that it would be very strategic to substantially redevelop another. These recommendations are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.
- However the Review Group has observed that many other buildings could be **developed with imagination** to make them more usable as a community resource and an instrument for mission. This, of course, requires resources which may not be immediately available. This is again explored in Chapter 5.

3.8 **A limited range of established sector ministry and ecumenical partnership.** If the Deanery of Luton is to respond to the diversity of the challenges and opportunities within Luton then it must be helped to develop a broader range of non-parochial ministries and partnerships. This is explored in Chapters 4 and 7.

- There are some wonderful and important examples of **sector ministry** in Luton. However, the Review Group believes that the range of these ministries is limited and that it could be expanded. Key areas which could be explored include an inter-faith ministry, a town centre ministry and an expanded work place ministry.
- As discussed in Chapter 2, the ecumenical situation in Luton is complex. There is great strength in some of the ecumenical projects and in the Transforming Luton network. However, there is a general feel that the broader **ecumenical partnership** in Luton needs to be strengthened.
- A particular feature which is noticeable in the Deanery of Luton is the **lack of Church Schools**. This may be reflected in the feeling of increasing marginalisation of the Church and of the Christian population. The Review Group believe that options for increasing the Church's contribution to education in Luton need to be explored. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

Being different. The Review Group notes these weaknesses not as a criticism of the ministry of the Deanery. It sees them as reflecting characteristics of life in Luton. It does, however, suggest that the Church, in obedience to its calling, can find ways in which these characteristics can be addressed and transformed.

Opportunities in the Deanery

- 3.9 The Review Group believes that there are some exciting **opportunities** available to the Luton Deanery. These will undoubtedly involve change, but will give the Deanery the chance to do something creative and to be collaborative. There are also opportunities to grow ways of being church which respond to the challenges of the future.
- 3.10 The Deanery has an opportunity to engage with the people and communities in Luton.
- The Review Group has found an **openness to the Church** in the community. It is an opportunity to become more visible, making the Christian presence known within Luton.
 - The Deanery has an opportunity to participate in a variety of **ecumenical partnerships** and projects. See chapter 7.
 - There are opportunities for engagement with **other faith communities**.
 - The Deanery has an opportunity to **use its many buildings** more imaginatively and effectively, especially in opening these up to the community.
 - The Deanery has an opportunity to deepen its commitment to **education** within the Deanery
 - The Deanery has an overarching opportunity for **increased collaboration** within the Deanery across parish boundaries.

Opportunity to build relationships. The Review Group notes that at the heart of these opportunities is the theme of relationship. It believes that there is a need, and indeed an opportunity, to build relationships of trust at many different levels between parishes, between communities and between the Deanery and the Diocese.

3.11 As it seeks to engage with the community, the Deanery has an **opportunity to grow and develop ways of being church**

- an opportunity to grow **new ways of being church**. The Review Group hopes that this will be seen to be a central thrust of this report.
- The Deanery has an opportunity for **lay involvement** and for participation in training courses such as 'Growing Together in Christ'.
- The Deanery has an opportunity to benefit from more **Readers and non-Stipendiary Ministers**.
- The Deanery has an opportunity to grow its own ministers by developing a culture of **vocation**.
- There is a great opportunity for **new sector ministries** within the Deanery. The Review Group believes that there is an opportunity for some outside funding for this which could be shared around the parishes.
- A suggestion, explored in Chapter 7, is for individual clergy to have a brief or **portfolio** within the Deanery.

- A number of opportunities for **restructuring the Deanery** have arisen from discussions, including dividing the Deanery into smaller areas, groupings or networks to make them more manageable units and overcome the scale of the Deanery. Another suggestion is for smaller informal groups to encourage collaboration. These are further explored in Chapters 4 and 6.

Opportunity to grow ministries.

The opportunities in the Deanery have simply been listed in this section as they are taken up in more detail elsewhere in this Report. Several of them become the basis of Recommendations. However, the Review Group believes strongly that the opportunities before the Deanery are good and exciting. With the right encouragement and leadership the opportunities can be grasped.

Challenges and hindrances in the Deanery

3.12 The Review Group believes that the biggest challenge or hindrance which the Deanery of Luton faces is the potential failure to grasp the challenges of the future. This is quite a key moment for the Deanery. There is an opportunity to embrace change. There are also strands within the Deanery which make it hard for it to embrace this change. The Review Group has detected some of this in the visits it has made and in the submissions it has received.

- Within the Deanery there seems to be something of a sense of **insecurity and fear**, even of suspicion and frustration.
- There is, in some places, a feeling from some parishes of a **non-awareness of need**, non-acceptance and non-understanding.

- There is a worry about the **financial situation** of the Deanery which links in with parishes being unable to pay their parish share.
- Many parishes **worry** about the loss of the freehold of the incumbent when presentation to a benefice is suspended and about their anxieties not being listened to.

Confidence. The Review Group has sought in its recommendations to address these fears and concerns. Many of the recommendations are about building trust and relationships. The thrust of the recommendations is to encourage people and parishes to look beyond their normal parameters and to grow in confidence and collaboration.

3.13 There are also, in the Deanery, concerns about the **Luton Review** itself.

- There is an anxiety that not enough **time** has been given for the Review.
- There is opposition to **change** from some parts of the Deanery and also a concern that the Review will recommend too many changes.
- However, a further worry is that there is too much **working within parameters** and not enough branching out looking at fresh ideas and suggestions.

Encouragement. The Review Group hopes that in its recommendations and in the thoroughness of this report many, if not all, of these fears and anxieties will be assuaged. The Review Group has had a determined desire to encourage the Deanery.

3.14 The Review Group also believes that another key threat to putting change into practice is the limited **resources** in the Deanery. This has been outlined above and is discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Partnership. The Review Group has sought to address the limits of resources within the Deanery. It believes that this can only be properly addressed by a renewed sense of partnership between the Deanery and the Diocese of St Albans

Rising to the Challenge

3.15 This Chapter has sought to outline key characteristics within the Luton Deanery. They are characteristics which shape the Deanery and strongly affect its life. Nearly all the recommendations summarised in Chapter 8 are rooted in one way or other in the characteristics described in this Chapter.

The key question is whether the Deanery of Luton in partnership with the various constituent parts of the Diocese of St Albans will be able to overcome the challenges and grasp the opportunities before it.