

## **Annual Deanery Synod Report 2016-2017**

**by Anne Straight**

Two DEanery Synod meetings were held, the first at St.Johns was a question and answer session with Bishop James, a summary of his address is given below:

He has been Bishop of Rochester for 5.5 years so far and has set up a framework to keep in touch with all the Deaneries.

The two Bishops in Rochester Diocese make regular pastoral visits to Deaneries so that each Deanery is visited at two year intervals.. There is one hour of discussion with each of the clergy, giving the bishops an overview of local opportunities and challenges.

He likes the visits to schools and being kept up to date with projects at the churches.

He appreciates meeting Lay Ministers and is grateful for today's bible study at Burrswood with the clergy

The meeting with District Council members encourages cross reference of Church and council matters. Housing is one of his interests and one of his portfolios in the House of Lords..

A range of housing is necessary to meet a range of incomes and there is an influx of people coming from London who need homes.

The Church is for all in our community and Pastoral Ministry is a Church of England duty.

Progress affects the shape of our communities and this will vary across the nation.

He is concerned about Clergy recruitment. There is some good news that new Stipendiary Ministers are coming forward to be ordained. Our Rural Dean's role in encouraging vocations is appreciated.

25% of existing Stipendiary Ministers are aged 60 or over and 40% are over 55 years old. We are facing a time gap when there will be insufficient ordained clergy to provide the present level of deployment. Patterns will especially as Lay Ministers will become more involved and they will need to collaborate to a greater extent with ordained ministers.

God calls people and he asked us to think prayerfully.

### **The Second meeting in Feb 2017 at St.Mary's included a Presentation on The Diocese's Strategic Framework "Our Conversation Our Future"**

**Matthew** began and gave us an overall picture of his role and the future problems facing the Diocese. He trained as a Town Planner. And he illustrated his talk with charts and coloured maps of Kent.

Kent is viewed as a Rural County but Rochester diocese is not entirely rural. There are 1.2 million people living in Kent. The Anglican church has 48 parishes with a population of 45,358 people. 35 parishes each have over 10,000 people who live in urban areas. Some country parishes have less than 200 parishioners. 8 large parishes include 35% of the people. At present the clergy are over-represented in the Rural parishes per head of population compared with clergy in urban areas.

Currently the main urban areas are the Medway Towns, Kings Hill, Tonbridge & Malling, Bromley and Bexley. Tonbridge & Malling has grown 72% over the last 30 years.

The population in the Diocese is due to grow and this will occur by building new homes in the urban areas where land is cheap in comparison with land values in the countryside. Cost of the associated new infrastructure also is favoured by lower land costs.

The Diocese is establishing a new Strategic Framework to cater for future growth. The previous Diocesan Strategy was published in 1954. At that time the nation was broke financially. There was to be concentration of church resources on Education, housing & Industry. Much the same problems our church now faces in 2017 onwards.

The problems we now face are:-

Opportunities, challenges, development of the Diocesan family, enabling local work, setting up a church foundation for the 10's or even 100's of years, The best use of our talents.

Matthew illustrated this by outlining 3 opportunities.

**Ebbsfleet** 15,000 new homes are to be built with about 50,000 new residents. 28% of these may be in child poverty. Work is needed to build new churches and provide suitable clergy and lay support. **Chatham** will have a population of 28,900. The area needs mission and resources. He suggested a bottom upwards vision and top down provision of resources. £600,000 is available from the Church Commissioners. The existing population is ethnically diverse. There is a proposal to re-open the large, previously closed St. John's church.

**Malling Abbey.** This is an existing community of Benedictine Nuns. There is an opportunity to strengthen our relationship and for partnership with other faiths. They have good existing buildings which can be hired by groups.

**Claire Boxall.**

She described the published toolkit document "Our Conversation Our Future". She handed out copies to Synod members. The document was published last October and is being sent to all parishes who are asked to respond by Easter. The summer will be spent listening and the responses will be analysed and a report to Bishop James presented in the autumn.

She read the 3 questions we must answer

**What may the Holy Spirit be saying to us about our area?**

**What do we currently spend our resources on?**

**What do we need to change about who we are and what we do?**