**Tonbridge Deanery**

**Review of Rural Parishes**

**The Ven Julie Conalty**

**Archdeacon of Tonbridge**

**12th July 2018**

****

**Background**

Back in 1999, the issue of whether of not to join these benefices to on another was under consideration when Geoff Dalby, then Deanery Synod Lay chair, undertook a study of the Tonbridge Deanery. A subsequent pastoral study report by Canon Gordon Oliver also touched upon this subject in relation to Hever, Four Elms and Mark Beech and their neighbouring parishes. Then, in early 2017 the Area Dean of Orpington was commissioned to prepare reports for The Ven Clive Mansell on the future of the Chiddingstone benefice, Penshurst and Fordcombe and Leigh – considering the potential for pastoral reorganisation. At his visitation to the Tonbridge Deanery in the summer of 2017, the Bishop of Rochester picked up on this and asked church wardens from all of the ‘Tonbridge rural parishes’ to meet with him and the new archdeacon, Julie Conalty in order to begin considering possible options for the shape of ministry across their patch. This was the start of a consultation exercise that was to include representatives from:

* Edenbridge,
* Crockham Hill
* Hever, Four Elms and Mark Beech,
* Chiddingstone St Mary and Chiddingstone Causeway, St Luke,
* Penshurst and Fordcombe,
* Leigh

Lay representatives attended 2 events (churchwardens and 2 lay reps from each parish were invited, though not all were able to send a full complement of representatives). They were then invited to a meeting at which this report was presented to them. In addition, there were 2 meetings with the archdeacon and the clergy of the parishes.

**Renewal and Reform**

This review is set very squarely in the context of the Church of England’s Renewal and Reform agenda – seeking to address some of the missional challenges of the church in the twenty first century by reimagining the shape of the church’s ministry. This is, in part, a response to the challenges of:

* significant and continuing decline in and ageing of church attendance
* significant decline in the number of stipendiary clergy, which is due to accelerate in the next ten years.

The challenge is to become a growing church – in numbers, in confidence and in depth of discipleship. A key element of the discipleship has to be the work for the common good in the wider community and the redirection of money and resources to where it is most needed and can make most difference. This is a huge challenge in Tonbridge Archdeaconry where many congregations have a strong allegiance to their own church building, fellow worshippers and local community, but are relatively unaware of the challenges faced by other churches – in particular those in areas of high deprivation or facing significant demographic changes. Rochester Diocese is also unusual in that it has retained a number of small one church one priest parishes and where it has multi-parish benefices the number of churches/parishes in a benefice is relatively small.

**Research and the rural church**

During the consultation, group members were provided with the Church of England report, ‘Released for Mission, growing the rural church.’ [[1]](#footnote-1) The recommendations within this report are important when trying to ensure a successful re-shaping of ministry in rural or semi-rural areas and the key ones for this particular review are:

**Recommendation 1** - This research shows that meaningful mission and growth are possible in rural multi-church groups, where time and space is created for it to take place and where the ministry of lay people is enabled and equipped. Strategies for mission and ministry in rural multi-church groups, devised locally, or by deaneries or dioceses should therefore: • include an intentional focus on mission and evangelism • free up the time and energy of lay people and clergy to focus on mission and ministry • envision, nurture and equip the ministry of lay people.

**Recommendation 2** - High quality, speciﬁc and locally accessible training and development should be provided through dioceses for clergy and lay people in multi-church groups to support discipleship, mission, the ministry of lay people, work with schools, children and young people, worship and leadership.

**Recommendation 3** - It is important to build a culture of discipleship within rural congregations. Relevant resources and distinctive models to encourage discipleship need to be collated and promoted to assist in building the foundations for mission in rural communities.

**Recommendation 5** - Multi-church groups should be encouraged to improve systems for managing administration to reduce the burden placed on both clergy and lay people. The provision of this resource could be approached in a number of ways such as: a part time post, an appointment shared across a number of beneﬁces, a full time post for one or more deaneries. The resource could address administration, ﬁnancial accounting, building and churchyard management. This should be seen as an enabling resource which releases time and energy amongst clergy and lay people and should therefore be a legitimate call on mission funding.

**Recommendation 7** - Multi-church groups should be supported by dioceses to develop cooperative working between the different churches, with other multi-church groups and ecumenically, where possible. Many rural multi-church groups would also beneﬁt from a process to ﬁnd a collective identity, operate collegially, share resources and expertise, improve communications and develop intentional mission and evangelism.

**Recommendation 8** - Church buildings can be both a blessing and a burden, which falls primarily on the congregation and clergy. Urgent attention needs to be given to a strategy for their future management, as well as continuing the work to sustain buildings through extended community use.

**Deployment and resource data** (figs in brackets appear in an alternative source)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Leigh**  **St Mary** | **Chiddingstone**  **St Mary** | **Chiddingstone**  **Causeway**  **St Luke** | **Hever**  **St Peter** | **Four Elms**  **St Paul** | **Mark Beech**  **Holy Trinity** | **Penshurst**  **St John the Baptist** | **Fordcombe**  **St Peter** | **Edenbridge**  **St Peter and St Paul** | **Crockham Hill**  **Holy Trinity** |
| **Popn 2011** | 1500  (1327) | 700  (910) | 800  (1038) | 400  (430) | 700  (743) | 300  (320) | 900 (1200) | 700  (345) | 8,900+  (9,893) | 700  (1142) |
| **Church Schools** | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **IMD** | 8.8 | 11.5 | 8.8 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 10.4 | 9.8 | 14.1 | 6.6 |
| **2018 offer** | 54k | 45k |  | 42k |  |  | 43.2k |  | 64k | 30k |
| **Last recorded USA** | 50 | 60 |  | 20 | 18 | 18 | 48 | 64  (42) | 120  (152) | 45  (52) |
| **ER** | 108 | 44 | 56 | 38 | 18 | 41 | 105 | 57 | 195 | 132 |
| **Current stipend** | 1 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.6 |  |  | 1 |  | 1 | 0.4 + House for Duty |
| **Additional ministry** | Paid youth/children’s worker;  Reader; Pastoral Assistant. | Pastoral Assistant with PTM |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 Reader; 1 PA; 1 SSM/PTO;. Children’s worker (voluntary) |  |
| **Paid administrator** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Mission Mapping by the Parishes**

Key: green = exceptional yellow = works well red = needs improvement

**Chiddingstone with Chiddingstone Causeway**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Pastoral care (Pastoral assistant/priest) | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(yellow)* |
| Family service and toddler service | Children 1-11 and families  *(rated both yellow and red)* |
| Active youth club not church run but reported to PCC | Youth 12-18/21  *(rated both yellow and red)* |
| Have attracted Christening parents in the past | Nurturing adult disciples *(red)* |
| Links with local village halls – pub – farmers – fetes | Social action *(yellow)* |
| Advent course (used to attract outsiders) | Outreach, evangelism etc *(red)* |
| Donation at Christmas Tear Fund and others | Mission beyond parish  *(rated both yellow and red)* |

**Crockham Hill**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Pastoral care | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)* |
| School groups, Messy Church | Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(green)* |
| Services – links with school, assemblies in church and school | Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(green)* |
| Brownies – Christian leader, CHIPS | Children 0-11 and families (green)  Youth 12-18/21 *(yellow)*  Nurturing adult disciples (*red)*  Social action *(green)* |
| Hotpot supper, Shrove Tuesday | Social action *(green)*  Mission beyond parish *(green)* |
| Fundraising | Vulnerable elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)*  Mission beyond parish *(green)* |
| Church fete | Vulnerable elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Mission beyond parish *(green)* |
| Lent, Advent and prayer groups | Nurturing adult disciples *(red)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Discussion groups | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Womens Christian Fellowship | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Link parishes home and abroad | Mission beyond parish *(green)* |
| Edenbridge Churches in Covenant | Nurturing adult disciples *(red)*  Social action *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Church open during the day | Social action *(green)* |
| Parish magazine goes to every home in village | No rating given |
| Bring in people who help who are not part of the congregation | No rating given |

**Edenbridge**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Hospital visiting | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Holy Communion to hospital, care home, and isolated | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)* |
| Specific services eg bereavement, Mothering Sunday, Christingle | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(yellow)*  Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Home visiting e.g. sick elderly, 1 year post baptism | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Baptism, prep and post | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)* |
| Pilgrim group | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)* |
| Sunday Club (Sunday School) | Children 0-11 and families *(red)*  Outreach, evangelism *(yellow)* |
| New junior choir | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)* |
| Edenbridge Christian Trust. Ecumenical. Youth Club, outreach primary school, Mexico (Rebuild) | Youth 12-18/21 *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)*  Mission beyond parish *(green)* |
| All Age Worship (3 months in) | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(yellow)*  Outreach evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Edenbridge Music and Arts Trusts concerts | Social action *(yellow)* |
| Bridges – ecumenical community centre | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism *(yellow)* |
| Committed laity | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Social action *(green)* |
| Food bank (ecumenical) | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism *(green)*  Mission beyond parish (*green)* |
| Parish nursing (ecumenical) | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism *(green)* |
| Regular services | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(yellow)*  Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(yellow)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Social action *(yellow)* |
| Coffee mornings | Social action *(green)* |
| Quiz nights (in community) | Social action *(green)* |
| Occasional services eg bereavement, Christingle | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(yellow)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)* |

**Four Elms**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Bi-monthly café service | Children 0-11 and families *(green)* |
| Outdoor and school carol service | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)* |
| Remembrance service and school one | Social action *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Pet service | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Social action *(yellow)* |
| Church and school harvest service | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Social action *(yellow)* |
| Village harvest supper | Social action *(yellow)* |
| Home visiting | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(red)* |
| Fete | Social action (*green)* |
| Benefice Lent lunches | Nurturing adult disciples *(green)* |
| Lent courses | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)* |
| Occasional concert | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)* |
| Support Bishop Kwanda | Mission beyond parish *(yellow)* |

**Hever**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Open our church daily | Nurturing adult disciples *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Weekday services (Hever Castle visitors) | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc (*yellow)* |
| School services/care | Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism *(yellow)* |
| Train station coffees | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Social action *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism *(yellow)* |
| Lent/prayer courses | Nurturing adult disciples  *(rated both yellow and red)* |
| Easter Egg Hunt/community services | Social action (*green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Church community events e.g. barn dance | Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Home visiting (Rev or pastoral care team) | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)* |
| Lent/community lunches | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(yellow)*  Nurturing adult disciples (*yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Bellringing | Youth 12-18/21 *(green)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)* |
| Variety of services coffee and sherry socials afterwards | Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Social action *(green)* |

**Leigh**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Outreach | Vulnerable elderly etc *(red)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red (15-21)/green (12-15))*  Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Social action *(red)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)*  Mission outside parish *(green)* |
| Leadership | Vulnerable elderly etc (*yellow)*  Children 0-11 and families (*yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 (*red(15-21)/yellow (12-15))*  Nurturing adult disciples (*red)*  Social action *(yellow)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)* |
| Worship | Vulnerable elderly etc *(red)*  Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red (15-21)/yellow (12-15))*  Nurturing adult disciples (*yellow)*  Social action (*red)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(yellow)*  Mission outside parish *(green)* |
| Planning | Children 0-11 and families *(green)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red (15-21)/yellow (12-15))*  Nurturing adult disciples *(red)*  Social action *(red)* |
| Youth work | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red (15-21)/green (12-15))* |
| Services and prayer | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red (15-21)/yellow (12-15))*  Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)* |
| Weddings and funerals | Youth 12-18/21 *(yellow)* |
| Choir (non existent) | Nurturing adult disciples *(red)* |

**Markbeech**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Music and choir | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(green)*  Social action (*green)*  Mission beyond parish *(yellow)* |
| Men and womens breakfasts | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Children 0-11 and families (*yellow)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Social action *(green)* |
| Weddings | Nurturing adult disciples *(green)*  Social action *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc *(green)*  Mission beyond parish *(green)* |
| Lent lunches | Vulnerable, elderly *etc (yellow)*  Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(red)*  Nurturing adult disciples *(yellow)*  Social action *(yellow)* |
| One-to-One group (Edenbridge) | Children 0-11 and families *(yellow)*  Youth 12-18/21 *(yellow)* |

**Penshurst** (also representing Fordcombe)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we do** | **Category** |
| Social action | Social action *(green)* |
| Sunday school | Children 0-11 and families *(red)* |
| Family service | Children 0-11 and families *(red)* |
| Rector’s pastoral visiting | Vulnerable, elderly etc *(green)*  Outreach, evangelism etc  (*rated both green and yellow)* |
| No specific activity recorded | Youth 12-18/21 *(red)*  Nurturing adult disciples  (*rated both red and yellow)*  Mission beyond parish *(red)* |

NB The above are as accurate a transcription of the completed forms as possible and it was not always straightforward to read between the lines. The coloured grading should only be considered as indicative as people will have judged and rated differently.

**Proposals**

The intention of these options is to create strong enough units for mission and ministry to withstand anticipated decline in the short term and to resource potential growth in the future. There is a commitment to keep church buildings open for the local communities and to try to ensure that congregations have focal ministers wherever possible and regular and easy to understand patterns of worship. Retention of parsonages is also recommended as it keeps open options of housing House for Duty ministers, employed youth and community workers or curates.

It is important to note when considering the options that any solution relying relies on part-time posts is more precarious as there is a dwindling pool of clergy wanting to work part-time. Full time posts open to the possibility of flexible working are much more likely to fill. Rural posts are also attracting less applicants than suburban ones at present.

The proposed deployment of ministers is based on knowledge of current lay ministers in parishes plus in certain options the hypothetical deployment of one SSM/PTO minister (estimated 2 Sunday services per month) and an additional LLM.

Although only church schools are factored into deployment data and the options, as they require considerable input from clergy as ex-officio governors, it is recognised that non-church schools in the parishes also present opportunities for ministry and in many cases ministers are very engaged with them and the church has a strong relationship with the local school(s).

The options are outlined overleaf.

**Option 1**

**Edenbridge and Crockham Hill reunite**

* Popn c. 10,000+ and rising; combined they are financially strong. USA 165; 1 church school. Strong ecumenical working.
* 1.5 stipendiary post. Reader(s) plus PA and PA with PTM. Lay ministry be shared and grown including children’s/youth work.
* Current paid administration be shared and expanded. Employing a paid children’s/ youth worker is recommended.
* The clergy houses be retained at Crockham Hill and Edenbridge.

**Leigh, Penshurst and Fordcombe unite**

* Popn 3,100+ and relatively stable; combined they are financially strong; USA 160; 2 church schools.
* 1 stipendiary post, 1 Reader; 1 PA; 1 SSM/PTO priest; shared paid youth and children’s work.
* Paid administration be shared.
* One clergy house to be sold or rented (rental would secure the house for a possible curate in the future).

**Chiddingstones unite with Hever, Four Elms and Mark Beech**

* Popn. 2,900; financially sound for 1 stipend plus support if combined; USA 120; 2 church schools.
* 1 stipendiary post; 1 PA with PTM; plus 1 LLM. Paid administration be shared.
* The clergy houses be retained at both Hever and Chiddingstone so one can be used if we can secure a House for Duty priest or rented (rental would secure the house for a possible curate in the future).

**Option 2**

**Edenbridge act as a resource church for Crockham Hill, Mark Beech, Four Elms and Hever and they form a united benefice**

* Popn c. 11,500+ and rising. Financially sound; USA 210; 2 church schools. Strong ecumenical working.
* 2 full-time stipendiary clergy. Reader(s) plus PA and PA with PTM. Lay ministry be shared and grown including children’s/youth work.
* Paid administration be shared and expanded. Employing a paid children’s/ youth worker is recommended.
* Crockham Hill, Edenbridge and Hever vicarages all be retained – one for possible curate/ house for duty.

**Leigh, Penshurst and Fordcombe, and Chiddingstones unite**

* Popn 4,600; financially strong; USA 220; 3 church schools.
* 2 full-time stipendiary clergy; 1 SSM/PTO priest; 1 Reader; 1 PA; 1 LLM. Shared paid youth and children’s work.
* Shared paid administration.
* 2 clergy houses retained; the third sold and a smaller house suitable for curate purchased.

**Option 3**

**Edenbridge act as a resource church for Crockham Hill, Mark Beech, Four Elms and Hever and they form a united benefice**

* Popn c. 11,500+ and rising. Financially sound; USA 210; 2 church schools. Strong ecumenical working.
* 2 full-time stipendiary clergy. Reader(s) plus PA and PA with PTM. Lay ministry be shared and grown including children’s/youth work.
* Paid administration be shared and expanded. Employing a paid children’s/ youth worker is recommended.
* Crockham Hill, Edenbridge and Hever vicarages all be retained – one for possible curate/ house for duty.

**Chiddingstone and Penshurst and Fordcombe unite**

* Popn 3,100; 3 church schools; USA 170; financially sound.
* 1 stipendiary clergy, 1 PA with PTM; 1 LLM, 1 SSM/PTO priest.
* Paid administration to be shared.
* Additional resource would be needed to provide ex-officio governor to one of the church schools in this option.
* Rent one vicarage (rental would secure the house for a possible curate in the future) or sell one and secure a smaller house for a curate.

**Leigh explores uniting with Hildenborough**

**Leigh alone:**

* Popn. 1,500; USA 50; financially strong;
* 0.5 stipend; 1 Reader; 1 PA; paid youth worker. Paid admin support affordable.
* Leigh vicarage required.

**United these 2 parishes could be very strong. Total ministry would be:**

* 6,500 popn. 1 church school. USA c.200.
* 1.5 stipendiary clergy; 2 paid youth/children’s workers; plus SSM/PTO clergy; Lay ministers and paid admin.

**What now?**

The representatives from the parishes and the clergy are asked to take this report back to their PCCs and to discuss the options. The report will also be presented to the Tonbridge Mission and Pastoral Working Group (TAMPWG) at its September 2018 meeting.

PCCs can provide written feedback to the archdeacon once they have deliberated, but please note that this is still an informal consultation.

Where PCCs wish to have wider discussions about the options before feeding back or in order to engage the wider congregation they can request a facilitator via the archdeacon. Should PCCs wish to discuss an option with those of neighbouring parishes then this can also be facilitated.

**Please could each PCC submit feedback to the Archdeacon by the end of September**.

There is no set deadline for the drawing up schemes or plans but any parishes falling vacant during this pastoral reorganisation can expect to have interim arrangements for ministry rather than proceed to appoint a new vicar – this is to reduce the risk of redundancies.

**GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

DBS Disclosure and Barring Service (use to be CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check)

ER Electoral Roll

FTE Full time equivalent (used in respect of employment and hours of work)

IMD Index of Multiple Deprivation. UK government qualitative study of deprived areas. Using various indicators such as income, health, crime, environment etc. Ranks every small area from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived)

Indicative offers What used to be the Parish Share. Diocesan consultation on revised system over summer 2018.

LLM Licensed Lay Minister (embraces what were Readers, Pastoral Assistants and Evangelists)

Occasional offices Baptisms, funerals and weddings

PA Pastoral Assistant

PTM Permission to Minister. As PTO above but applies to Pastoral Assistants.

PTO Permission to officiate. Bishop grants this concessionary ministry licence usually, but also under other circumstances, to retired minister or lay reader over the age of 70.

Renewal and Church of England’s programme for growing the church

Reform including investing on the future, encouraging various ministries

SSM Self Supporting Minister (previously called non-stipendiary minister)

TAMPWG Tonbridge Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Working Group. Chaired by the Archdeacon it supports mission and growth in Archdeaconry, considers Deanery mission plans and makes recommendations on pastoral issue arising from the parishes.

USA Usual Sunday attendance

1. https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%201092%20Released%20for%20Mission%20-%20growing%20the%20rural%20church.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)