



# Thames North Synod 21<sup>st</sup> November 2015

10.00 am to 4.00 pm

## Paper B1

### **Update on the Re-visioning Process**

A renewed interest has been noticed recently on discipleship, growth and mission right across all church denominations. It is timely and energizing, inviting Christian communities to reengage with their own faith and God's world. Thames North synod agreed in 2013 that growth, both spiritual and numerical, to be the focus of its mission. God gives growth but we prepare the ground, sow the seed and nurture!

After extensive consultations during 2014-15, the synod developed a framework which is supportive to growth. Two main principles of the new framework are: strengthening and empowering churches through forming local area groups; and releasing people to work locally by streamlining synod committees. The synod agreed to all seven re-visioning resolutions in September 2015 (see the Sept 2015 Minutes) with full or overwhelming majority. This shows synod's renewed confidence and courage to go for growth and missional discipleship for the sake of God's Kingdom.

The purpose of this paper is to update the synod on the progress after the September 2015 synod.

### **Transition Slate of New Committee members**

As instructed by the synod, the Executive Committee has prepared a slate for the new committees for the synod's approval. The Committee collected names and attempted to balance the membership with existing and new people alongside the principle of gender, age, ethnicity and geography. The slate is transitional; half of the members will step down after a year and another after two years. They will be eligible for re-appointment.

### **Budget for the new Committees' programme activities**

It will take some time for the new Synod Committees to develop their working practice and mission strategy to advise the synod. The Executive Committee has made provision of sufficient funds in the 2016 budget to support future programme activities as they evolve and are agreed by the synod.

### **Local Area Groups Formation**

The synod encouraged Area Committees and churches to complete their discussions on forming Local Area Groups as quickly as possible. The Area Committees have arranged several meetings of the churches in their Areas to discuss formation of local area groups. They have also supported the churches which have agreed in principle and those already functioning as a group. Several Churches in the potential groups are considering the Model Understanding document, adopted by the September synod, as the basis for the churches to formally come together in Local Area Groups. The local area groups which are ready will be accepted and acknowledged by the synod meeting and by the Pastoral Committee in between the synod meetings and reporting to the synod meeting. As the groups are forming, the vacancies are also being declared. I suggest the churches use the Appreciative Inquiry

method as they come together to form a group. The cooperation among the ministers and relationship among the church leaders seem to be pivotal to group formation.

## **Handover Briefings from the Standing Committees**

The synod asked the standing committees to prepare handover briefings on key ongoing issues and programmes. The Committees have done an excellent work in preparing their briefings. The briefings so far received by the Synod Clerk have been reported to the Executive Committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November. The Executive Committee will ensure that the issues receive attention during the transition period and are passed on to the relevant committees in due course.

## **Deployment of ministers**

The deployment of ministers of word and sacrament remains a challenge to the whole denomination but not necessarily more critical than various other denominations across Britain. Mission Council recently discussed a paper by the Ministries Committee about the projection of deployment figures from 2015 – 25 in the light of the rising costs of maintaining a minister, declining membership and M&M Fund, and higher demands on pension funds (1/3 ministers contribute but 2/3 ministers receive pension from the same pot).

It becomes all the more important for the churches to watch their heavy dependence on ordained ministry. The churches need to work out how the whole congregation participates in the ministry of all God's people and where they put our precious resource of ordained ministry for its maximum impact. I urge churches to offer more suitable people to be prepared in the role of local church leadership and to take up TLS courses.

The September synod instructed the new Pastoral Committee to develop a synod deployment policy giving clarity on the criteria for the deployment of stipendiary ministry with urgency. While we wait for the policy, we commit to support the committee as it grasps the nettle. In our current situation, the churches will be stronger together rather than on their own as they respond to their calling.

## **Training**

The Re-visioning has encouraged and identified areas for equipping and training. Anne Sardeson, working along with a small group of colleagues has been developing training programmes which will be rolled out in early in 2016.

## **The Office Review**

The new synod structure will change the demands on the synod office. The Executive committee in its role as the employer has undertaken to set up a formal external review of the office and office staffing for the future. A four member review team (two external and two internal) headed by an external expert has been appointed. Terms of reference of the review have been consulted with the office staff and agreed by the Executive Committee. The review group has held two meetings. The Executive Committee will update the synod in due course. The work is in progress.

In conclusion, I believe all the necessary actions have been taken and are making good progress according to the provisional timetable.

*This report was brought to the Synod Executive Committee on Thursday 5 November.*

Andrew Prasad, Moderator (5 November 2015)