



**Thames North Synod**  
**Saturday 12 March 2016**  
10.00 am to 4.00 pm

**Paper B2**

*(Report from  
Pastoral  
Committee)*

***O toiling hands of mortals! O unwearied feet, travelling ye know not whither! Soon, soon, it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hilltop, and but a little way further, against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.***

Robert Louis Stevenson: El Dorado

It was a relief when the Pastoral Committee convened for the first time to see around the table familiar faces ... people who know a thing or two about the journey and who bring to the conversation wisdom and faith. A sense of continuity as our Synod structure evolves is reassuring.

The Pastoral Committee has met twice on the 14<sup>th</sup> January and 16<sup>th</sup> February, our agenda blending a range of continuing responsibilities within Synod with new matters arising from the revisioning process.

Supporting the wider work of the Synod and the churches, a level of consultation and synchronising across the new committee structure is appropriate.

This principle is reflected in a number of joint meetings of the convenors, enabling us to progress some matters, we trust, in an expeditious and sensitive manner.

It is our job to facilitate not prevaricate, to assist, not set up an obstacle course!

### **Supporting Local Area Groups**

The Model Understanding which was approved by Synod in September last year has proven to be a helpful spur to congregations as they come together in new groups.

The primary aim of calling churches to work in local groups is to strengthen our shared mission. The synergy between mission and discipleship can hardly be understated while there are important considerations regarding material and human resources. A genuinely cross-disciplinary approach helps us as we share our faith, support each other and use our resources wisely.

It is important the local area groups have effective representation in the new structure and the Pastoral Committee is exploring ways of helping the new groups share their thoughts, hopes and fears, but also their insights and faith. We are also refining the criteria for recognition of new local area groups.

There is no blue print that fits all local circumstances. But there are some basic principles that can help us along the way. The sharing of good practice should become our norm. Flexibility is a component of our pastoral oversight.

### **Drafting a new Synod Deployment Policy** by invitation of Synod, Sept 2015.

Nick Brindley with Hugh Graham presented a paper to the committee, setting out questions and principles, with some suggested policies which might follow. Full discussion followed with

contributions reflecting the varying circumstances of congregations across synod. These considerations will be worked into a revised paper, providing a framework for further discussion.

It is impossible to dissociate the process of local area groups forming and deployment, but it would be a great pity if our work were perceived only as an exercise designed to synchronise these two issues. There is a bigger picture coming into focus and due recognition of all ministries will inform our thinking.

### **A pastoral remit**

In times of significant change, we are called to support those who feel confident about this process, but also those who don't...who fear this is a journey which could leave them straggling or neglected. There is tremendous opportunity for us in these days to harness the considerable strengths of our churches and membership, working together. We are after all one body. Care of the whole matters.

Our pastoral responsibilities draw on the disciplines of discernment, of engaging and listening...and not just to the loudest voice, but the still quietly disturbing voice of the spirit or the marginalised.

The gathering of familiar folks around our table is important. They bring detailed knowledge of our church and synod, accrued over many years. The composition of the committee will change with time as we ensure full representation of the local area groups. We will grow and we will hear new voices too. As convenor I hope I will have the opportunity to join with local area groups in their conversations and planning locally. The centre needs to be connected!

Some weeks ago I was given a map of our Synod. I am becoming more familiar with the names on it, many of which already tell a story that a few months ago I was less familiar with.

Does that map help us get to the final destination? Perhaps.

Does it remind us of the nature of the journey and the people we journey with? ... most certainly.

Our prayer and our intention is that we journey faithfully.

James T. Fields  
Convenor of Pastoral Committee

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