

**PARISH OF SANDERSTEAD**

**PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL**

**RECORD OF AN OPEN MEETING HELD ON 19<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2013**

**AT ALL SAINTS' CHURCH**

**Present:** Rt Rev Jonathan Clark, Bishop of Croydon, Rev Canon Martin Greenfield, Rev Susan Atkinson-Jones, Rev Richard Ford, & some 65 members of PCC/DCCs & of the congregations.

- 1) Martin began by welcoming the members of each Church who were present, & Bishop Jonathan. This was followed by prayers & a hymn.
- 2) Bishop Jonathan then gave a most interesting & inspiring address. Key points included;
  - The Mission Challenge was now at its greatest in this sort of area of suburbia.
  - This was because suburbia was at a point of cultural change which had been experienced in the Inner City some decades ago. The Church needed to respond to this if it was not to become isolated & suffer inevitable decline.
  - We needed to determine what was in our “spiritual DNA” & then how to express this in a different way. It was a matter of evolution, not revolution. This meant determining our essence, what we really are, & what was “non-core”. Evolution was an essential part of tradition – simply repeating things was not being faithful to our tradition. The words “tradition” & “treason” came from the same root – we needed a bit of the latter in order to preserve the former!
  - The point of cultural change being experienced in suburbia could be called “the end of Christendom”. Faith was no longer a natural part of the experience of the community. Many people were now some generations away from experience of Church.
  - That did not mean the need for God was not just as deep as before. But Christians needed to be more explicit in talking about the Faith – between themselves &, above all, to those who came seeking God but knowing nothing about the Faith. This was in contrast to traditional Anglican diffidence about discussing what were regarded as very private matters.
  - We needed to dig down to find what we REALLY believe about God, but that did not mean the end of doubts & differences which would surely remain.
  - It was not a question of becoming a “non-church” but of demonstrating welcome & friendship in everything we did.
  - As in the Early Church, Christians & their values would stand out more in the world.
  - Churches would either decline to the point of desperation or they would start to evolve with the environment in which they found themselves. This had to start from the bottom up.
  - There were seven marks of a healthy church:
    - Energised by Faith (as opposed to just keeping going)
    - Outward-Looking Focus (with an emphasis on “whole life” rather than “church life”)
    - Seeking to find out what God wants (as opposed to trying to please everybody)
    - Facing the cost of change & growth (rather than resisting change & fearing failure)
    - Operating as a Community (rather than a club or “religious” organisation)
    - Making room for all (inclusive, not exclusive)
    - Doing a few things & doing them well.
- 3) The meeting then broke into groups for discussion. Points made in the feed-back session included:

- Examples, eg from St Antony's of doing a few things well – but those activities needed to be resourced properly.
  - One sign of a Church energised by Faith was how it looked – did it show what was happening within the church family? This had implications for how our buildings needed to evolve.
  - Specifically for All Saints', there could be a vision of how to develop the adjoining land, as a community hub, with café etc, particularly given the paucity of such facilities in the heart of Sanderstead.
  - There was a lot of potential in the parish, with the differences between the Churches being a source of strength. But it would be risky & therefore scary!
  - St Edmund's had identified the essence of its mission in its origin as a community church. The need was to build on its many links with community organisations – but it would be a lengthy process.
  - Traditionally congregations did not talk about their Faith – between themselves or to anyone else. But if one did, people actually responded. It was difficult, so perhaps we should start by talking more to each other about Faith.
  - The lessons to be learned from Pentecostal Christians who were very open & bold about their Faith, & ready to demand things of God.
  - Such insights from newcomers were very important & we needed to take them on board (a view supported by several people).
  - We needed to know our Bibles better, so as to express the power of the Word of God.
  - In visiting some Churches there was a real expectation that God was there to be heard – this said something about the importance of the Team.
- 4) Bishop Jonathan, Martin & others then commented on the output from the discussions:
- It was so good that people had talked to each other, & encouraged each other, in the way they had – as St Paul said to the Ephesians.
  - We needed to go out into the community, but could we do that when there tended to be separate congregations within the Churches? Perhaps we should practise getting together ourselves first?
  - We needed to make church attractive but had to accept anything involving the supernatural would appear “weird” to the newcomer. The point was to be welcoming.
  - How could we hang on to the things we value (such as the Book of Common Prayer) & still grow? The point was that tradition, including the liturgy, was a gift from God & could be the basis for change & growth.
  - There was an enthusiastically positive response to Martin's question whether we saw benefits for Mission & Ministry in working as a Team.
  - Bishop Jonathan would like to see a Team focus in the Mission Action Planning which would be vigorously encouraged over the coming year – exploiting the diversity of the different Churches & their different gifts, but doing as a Team what we can do better together.
- 5) Martin concluded by saying that he felt overwhelmed by the response at the meeting. God was doing something great here, & we can be part of it.
- 6) The meeting finished with a Blessing from Bishop Jonathan.