

st john's episcopal church selkirk



News Letter

September 2007

Extract

Vestry Meeting

22nd August 2007

The Vestry met on Wednesday 22nd August in the Rectory to continue planning for the future pattern of ministry at St John's.

Consolidation

We began by reviewing the outcomes of the previous meeting and confirmed that what we were planning for might appropriately be described as a 'Ministry Leadership Team', or 'MLT'—that is, a team tasked with responsibility for leading the ministry of all the members of St John's. We agreed that by 'ministry leadership' we meant **enabling and facilitating** the ministry of the whole church community at St John's and each of its members.

This sort of leadership reflects the values of God's kingdom, in which service and up-building one another are primary activities. The dynamic of God's kingdom is not a hierarchy of control but a distribution of ministry. In God's kingdom leaders are servants, and servant-leadership means enabling others to take responsibility for realising their full potential as children of God—not taking responsibility away from them by making choices for them or squeezing them into predetermined patterns of what to do and how to be.

We reviewed the gifts that we felt would need to be represented in a team responsible for leadership *in this sense*. Not all members of the team would be expected to have all these gifts, though some members would probably have more than one! This means that the number of gifts wouldn't necessarily equate to the number of members of the team. After discussion we agreed that, between them, the members of the team would need to have the following gifts and/or skills:

- ⇒ vision and discernment
- ⇒ worship leadership
- ⇒ teaching & preaching
- ⇒ nurture & spiritual direction
- ⇒ organisation and communication
- ⇒ working effectively with people

Expectations

We then reviewed what we had already agreed about our expectations of what a Ministry Leadership Team would look like, and what its relationships would be with the other structures of the Church. These can be listed as follows:

- The MLT would be responsible to the Vestry
- Overlap between membership of the Vestry and of the MLT was acceptable
- Members of the MLT would not automatically be members of the Vestry – they would have to be elected.
- Non-Vestry members of the MLT would be able to attend Vestry meetings if they wanted to
- The MLT would probably include more than one ordained person as well as lay people

- Clergy who happened to be members of the congregation would not automatically be members of the MLT
- The MLT should replace the priest-in-charge rather than one of its members being designated priest-in-charge
- The 'convenor' of the MLT should be the member best equipped to fulfil that task – whether ordained or not

The Role of the Ministry Leadership Team

The Vestry then turned to the question of what the MLT would actually do in the life of St John's in order to fulfil this task of leadership (understood as enabling and facilitating the ministry of us all). We agreed there were two broad complementary activities here:

- Enabling the ministry of all the people of St Johns;
- Advising the Vestry about the way it exercised its decision-making role in relation to the areas of the MLT's remit.

In undertaking these activities the MLT would have a number of functions:

- Making sure that worship services and 'occasional' offices were appropriately provided (including liaison with all involved in 'delivery' of worship)
- Enabling the spiritual development of the members of the church through preaching, teaching, leading study courses, retreats, quiet days etc. and through one-to-one spiritual direction
- Facilitating the outreach of the church – both social and spiritual
- Supervising the 'delivery' of pastoral care, home visits, hospital visits, etc.
- Making proposals to the Vestry for strategically planned developments in the life and witness of St John's
- Advising the Vestry on the suitability of persons to be authorised for roles in ministry as representatives of St John's (eg pastoral visitors, servers, etc)
- Undertaking such organisation and administration as the MLT itself required to enable it to function effectively
- Communicating with the congregation (and others, including the bishop and the diocese) as necessary
- Maintaining links with other churches in Selkirk and with other episcopal churches, the diocese and the province

On the basis of this list of functions, it would be desirable to include in the MLT people capable of leading the church in and through the following ministries:

- ⇒ leading worship
- ⇒ preaching
- ⇒ teaching
- ⇒ nurturing and directing the spiritual life
- ⇒ encouraging

- ⇒ organising
- ⇒ communicating
- ⇒ vision-setting

Timing

We set a goal of calling a team into existence during the early part of 2008, so that the processes of selection and training, as set out by the diocese and the province, could start during the course of next year. This would mean the team would begin to function as a team, working in collaboration with me, in good time before the end of my current license to St John's. When my license period comes to an end, the team would be up and running and ready to continue the leadership of our ministry.

Process

The procedure for calling the team will be as follows:

1. Towards the end of 2007 a nomination form will be handed out to everyone in the congregation on several successive Sundays. The form will list the ministries indicated above, with space under each for members of the congregation to write down the names of those they consider appropriate people to be leaders of our common life in relation to the ministries concerned. A separate section of the form will ask for the names of any who it is thought might be invited to consider ministering as ordained persons. This section will include some brief explanation of how ordained ministry relates to the ministry of all and to leadership.
2. Members of the congregation will be asked to take the form away; prayerfully (and anonymously) to complete it with the names (including their own if they wish) of those they think might be suitable as leaders under the various headings, and to return it (perhaps into the offertory plate at church) by a given date.
3. Once all the forms have been returned, the Vestry (or a sub-group) will meet to consider the names that had been put forward and to agree who should be approached with an invitation to consider becoming a member of the MLT. Other names put forward will remain confidential.
4. It will be up to those who are approached by the Vestry to decide whether or not to accept the invitation to be part of the MLT. Only when they have done so, and those who have agreed to form the MLT are made known, will any names be made public. At this point the official selection process for potential ordinands and agreed training tracks for lay members of the MLT will begin.

The advantages of this process (which has been used successfully elsewhere) are that there should be a high level of congregational ownership and recognition of the team, coupled with confidentiality, discretion, and space for individuals to consider whether they are truly being called to this ministry of leadership

Next business

At its next ministry leadership planning meeting in October, the Vestry will be considering—and, hopefully, approving, the wording of the form to be circulated to the congregation in December.

Reaction from Bishop Brian

About a week after the Vestry meeting I had a meeting with Bishop Brian to review my first 5 months as priest in charge at St John's. Bishop Brian responded positively to the direction in which the Vestry is moving and encouraged us to continue. He expressed the hope that what we were doing in Selkirk might come to be seen as a model which other churches in the Borders might implement in ways appropriate to their own context in the future.

He was, however, doubtful about the Vestry's hope that the MLT might become a sort of corporate priest-in-charge. He felt the canons of the Scottish Episcopal Church could not be interpreted in such a way as to allow for a corporate body to be responsible to the Bishop for the 'cure of souls' in a charge.

We looked at possible alternative ways forward. One would be for the MLT to take responsibility for the day to day leadership of ministry under the oversight of another priest. As things stand at the moment, this would be the incumbent of another charge in the Area, but in the future, there was a possibility, if a number of charges opted for the sort of pattern we are planning for St John's, that a stipendiary priest might be appointed in the diocese with the sole responsibility of overseeing the work of leadership in such churches on behalf of the Bishop.

Another possibility is that the Bishop himself take on the role of priest-in-charge of St John's, with the ordained members of the MLT as his curates or chaplains in the congregation. The Bishop was reluctant to go down this road. He felt it might work well in a diocese like Argyll and the Isles, with only a handful of parishes, but it was not a model he could contemplate in a diocese the size of Edinburgh!

A third possibility is that one of the ordained members of the MLT be designated as priest-in-charge. In effect, this is, in any case, the position we shall be in for the first few years of the MLT's existence, since I am already in post as priest-in-charge for the next four years. Changes to the canons governing the deployment of ministers are currently being considered by the General Synod, and one effect of these will be to make it easier for non-stipendiary clergy to be appointed Rector of a church. (Another effect will be to abolish the distinction between incumbencies and independent congregations, so that the designation 'priest-in-charge' will disappear. As far as I know, few people apart from the Committee for the Canons have yet seen the detailed text of the proposed changes. I certainly have not, but I have the impression that they will be designed to increase the ability of the bishops to link charges together by limiting the power of Vestries to appoint Rectors with tenure.)

Clearly the Vestry will need to consider these possibilities at a future planning meeting, and decide which is the best way forward in the long term for St John's. Fortunately, we do not need to make a decision about this in a hurry, since our position is clear until I retire in 2011, so we can take our time to consider the options and find the solution that is right for us.

David Sceats