**Deanery of Tewkesbury with Winchcombe**

Whilst the challenge of connecting with one another in the life of the local church has been considerable over the last year, this has been even more the case across our diverse deanery.

Holding elections to deanery synod and to the committees that enable our deanery to function has not been easy when faced with such a dispersed context.

As we all know the decline in church attendance and income across the Church of England over successive decades has been greatly accelerated by the impact of the pandemic on many worshipping communities. Those that rely on giving from the Sunday collection and the income from weddings and hall lettings have seen their finances badly affected by the closure of church buildings for much of the past year resulting in an inability for many parishes to pay their full Parish Share.

Across the Church of England there is a recognition that change to traditional structures of ministry is inevitable and needs to be implemented sooner rather than later. The need to identify, train and release non ordained lay people into leadership roles in the local context is taking on a new urgency so as to reduce dependency on ordained stipendiary clergy.

With this in mind, our deanery along with every other deanery in the Diocese has been asked to formulate a Strategic plan in response to the following mission statement:

*‘Working together, we aim to reshape the mission and ministry of this deanery to be more focussed on our shared mission priorities whilst at the same time reducing our dependence on stipendiary ordained ministry to a level that is sustainable for the long term’.*

**Reshaping Mission across our Deanery**

This Deanery planning process is about releasing the whole people of God for the whole mission of God and restructuring ordained leadership to help make us more collaborative and mission focussed. It recognises that financial realities also suggest that the level and shape of ordained stipendiary ministry cannot continue in its inherited model and needs fresh imagination.

Within our deanery, as in all the other deaneries within our diocese there is a consultation process under way which will enable the deanery to identify strategic priorities for sustainable ministry in every community in the future.

Whilst there is a recognition of considerable challenges around maintenance of ancient rural church buildings, ageing congregations, declining income, there is also an excitement about new missional possibilities that have emerged as we have been forced to embrace technology and operate outside the walls of our church buildings in new and imaginative ways. So, the two words that sum up the work of our deanery at this time are:

**Challenge & Opportunity**

Stephen Walker

Area Dean: Tewkesbury with Winchcombe

APCM 2021