



Hello

My name is Adrian Low and I am the priest in charge of the LAMP group of parishes, Haversham, Little Linford, Tyringham with Filgrave, and Emberton. I have just been licenced as Area Dean for the Newport Deanery for two years. My email is rev.adrian.low@gmail.com and phone 07883717642.

A tad more about me and my wife, Joanna. I was a computing academic and manager until 2014 and Joanna was a primary school teacher until 2011 and mother to our three daughters. I moved from NSM to stipendiary ministry in 2014 with a second curacy in the Lichfield diocese, then to six years as chaplain to the Costa del Sol (West). I started a 3-year interim ministry here in September 2021. We have family in Milton Keynes. God has been organising our lives.

On your behalf, I want to thank Fr. Gary for his work as Area Dean, I have been meeting with clergy since appointment and they all expressed warmth for the pastoral care and kindness they have received from Gary, and for his leadership in the deanery over the last five years.

The deanery is expanding in population. Moulsoe, Hanslope and Olney are growing a-pace. There are amazing things going on at churches across the deanery – engaging in mission with the community in new ways: warm spaces, breakfasts and lunches, enormous variety in worship and significant support for refugees, foodbanks, schools, parents and toddlers etc. This is the church.

Reorganisation tries to forecast the future. I would like to have a plan for 2023-2030 in place by September 2023. The pressures on churches are missional, staffing (including volunteers), financial, and structural (buildings). The imperatives are transparency, honesty, team-working and compassion. The halcyon Pride and Prejudice days of one clergy (Mr Collins) person per parish have long gone. Laity led worship, mission and pastoral care are now critical to the spiritual life of most churches. In the last five years congregation numbers have declined, not least because of COVID (and, of course, we are all getting older) but also Christianity is less popular, too often unfairly suffering from a bad press,. Nevertheless we have over 300 people in our various congregations worshipping in our deanery churches every Sunday with just over half of our churches having at least one service on any given Sunday.

Financially, we are mostly rural and consequently receive an £80k subsidy which reduces our deanery share from about £410k to £330k. That is insufficient to pay for 5.5 stipendiary clergy, Andrew, Christa, Coralie (0.5), Gary/Adam, Nick and myself. It costs £60k per full-time clergyperson:

~£28k	~£10K	~£12.3k	~£10k
Stipend	House/rates/insur	NI & Pension	Diocese

see: <https://d3hgrrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/61f2fd86f0ee5/content/pages/documents/on-the-money.pdf#page=17>

The diocesan £10k helps pay for essential diocesan expenditure, for example, on

- Training new priests, curacies, ongoing training of incumbents and training for LLMs
- Safeguarding team, training, dealing with problems
- Legal team – faculties and advisors etc. HR and payroll.
- Communications – speaking to the media, maintaining social media presence, etc.

In 2017 the deanery paid all the share asked of us. Now we pay only 76% of it. Some tiny churches simply can't pay the full amount and keep the roof on. The allocation of parish share between benefices has not changed since 2017 although congregations and populations have changed. It needs a re-think. The DPSC has agreed to look at alternative share models at its next meeting.

But first reorganisation. Financially, given what we have been paying in share, unless things change, we can afford only 4.0 full-time staff in the long run. Paid clergy will be leaving from 2025 onwards so there need be no changes yet, but 2025 will see change and having a plan in place now will give time to get used to the changes and meet new partners. It is also a time for reflecting on what we can be as 23 churches, both growing and giving.

Key dates are:

- 20th Feb 2023 Deanery Pastoral Sub Committee (which has approved this timetable)
- 7th March Deanery Chapter meeting
- 14th March Deanery Synod (to approve timetable and process)
- 15th May Deanery Pastoral Standing Committee DPSC to consider suggestions
- June Synod to discuss final proposal(s) and vote on it/them for proposal to Archdeaconry.

This is a swift timetable but it is only for a plan for 2025-2030.

The implications of closing any church building are substantial. You still need a priest to have cure of souls of that pastoral area, so closure is about reduction in church maintenance costings but not stipend, and closure usually results in no income. If entries on achurchnearlyou.com are right, half of our churches have only 2 services per month, and at least three have only 1 per month. Given MK is growing, do we want to lose churches or vicarages which might service a future population?

There are a number of likely interregnums coming up so the fact that clergy are licenced to the deanery is positive. I have met with some of our excellent retired/PTO clergy who are willing to be used marginally more frequently. And lay ministry is absolutely key and I have agreed with the Archdeacon that 'Congregational Worship Leaders' can be a resource we can train if required.

The deanery is well resourced to lead the different worship services we offer at the moment, and even if we reduce to 4.0 FTE clergy there is still sufficient resource among PTOs LLMs Accredited Preachers etc. providing we are willing to be open to sharing ministry across the deanery.

Reduction of disciples was not on Jesus' agenda. His mission was love, new life, peace and hope for all. That was central, and still is. After September I hope this might become a focus for Synods.

**Meanwhile, the DPSC decided to open March 14th Deanery Synod to all who would like to come.
8pm Newport Pagnell Church**

This year's round of annual church meetings includes the election of members to a new Deanery Synod and if any would like to come and see what Synod is like, please take this as your invitation. We will be revisiting re-organisation this March then and reviewing and hopefully voting on suggested alternatives in June.

How can you make a suggestion in reorganisation? Anyone can go on the web page: www.newport.deanery.uk. You can explore options and propose or show your preference for your preferred plan there. If you need a hand to make it work, email me!

Best wishes

