

The Diocese of Norwich: its ethos, mission and working culture

The Diocese of Norwich is one of the oldest in England and includes all Norfolk parishes except some in the west of the county around Downham Market (which belong to Ely). The Diocese also covers North East Suffolk, including Lowestoft and going as far south as Kessingland. There are 577 parishes and 642 churches – the largest numbers in England apart from Oxford, but serving a much smaller population of less than a million people overall. There are around 300 licensed clergy, of whom more than two thirds are stipendiary and a roughly equal number of active retired clergy. There are around 270 Readers, including those still active with permission to officiate. There are 118 church schools, all but two of them primary schools. The Diocesan Academies Trust will soon have over 40 schools within it, and has grown rapidly. A quarter of Norfolk's primary pupils are in Church of England schools, and the Christian distinctiveness of our schools has been nurtured as a mission priority in the past decade.

A benefice without assistant clergy or other colleagues, an active retired priest, reader or a church school is a rarity. There is plenty of rhetoric in the contemporary church about collaborative ministry but it is a reality in many benefices in this diocese without the term being over used. Many of our multi parish benefices have been established for several decades and churchwardens and lay people are used to taking responsibility there in ways not always apparent in single church urban parishes. A collaborative approach has been encouraged too by the development of ordained local ministry.

The Diocese is often described as rural and yet the bulk of its population live in towns of more than 40,000 people, such as King's Lynn, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, let alone the city of Norwich itself (Greater Norwich has a population of around 210,000). Thetford may well be approaching 40,000 people and some other market towns in the county are growing consistently. So the culture is more urban than some imagine, especially since 42% of all jobs in the county are found in Norwich itself. Hence many people commute into the city for work and some who live in the Norfolk and Suffolk countryside commute daily or weekly to London.

The Diocese is organised on an informal area system. The areas correspond with the three archdeaconries of Lynn, Norfolk (Thetford) and Norwich. The Suffragan Bishops of Lynn and Thetford look after their designated areas with their respective archdeacons and take responsibility for the appointments, pastoral visitations, ministerial development reviews etc. within the archdeaconry. The Bishop of Norwich does the same in relation to the Archdeaconry of Norwich itself which covers the city. However, the Diocesan Bishop is keen to be bishop of the whole Diocese and usually institutes or collates all clergy coming into the Diocese from outside and is keen to respond to invitations well beyond his own designated area. History means that the Bishop of Norwich is seen as a figure for the whole county in secular as well as church contexts. We have deliberately not made this a formal area scheme so that the boundaries are relatively porous. The suffragan bishops also take responsibility for particular areas of work across the Diocese as a whole. The Bishop of Thetford is currently responsible for matters related to ministry and training while the Bishop of Lynn has the social and community concerns

brief in his portfolio of responsibilities. The Diocese maintains a residential youth activity centre at Horstead (a major investment to which thousands of young people go each year).

Every benefice has a pastoral visitation from its respective bishop or archdeacon every two years. Ministerial Development Reviews take place within the context of these pastoral visitations which usually include Sunday worship and often a further full weekday in the benefice as well. These pastoral visitations are the main means of ensuring continuity of personal contact between bishops, archdeacons and the parishes but there are many other means of contact too.

Committed to Growth was launched in June 2007, and has provided a framework for mission in every benefice. It has involved the production of a growth plan focussing on three areas, namely discipleship, service and numbers. It encourages the celebration of what benefices are already doing, and often doing well, helping to shape outreach into the community and ensuring that initiatives which do not work are allowed to die as well as generating new possibilities. Many incoming incumbents have found it a good way of reviewing mission and ministry and planning creatively for the future. It has led to a period of sustained growth, including a modest growth in numbers. In 2016 a refreshed mission strategy, building on *Committed to Growth*, was launched at the Central Visitations called “...more than we can imagine”. Included within it are four workstreams which will encourage mission activity and which each have a share in a new £1.5m mission fund. It follows extensive consultations with the parishes, and will shape wider diocesan policy too.

New mission initiatives, eg Church Army Mission Centres, are possible because the Diocese is in good financial health. Parish Share contributions have risen remarkably in the past three years following the introduction of TRIO (the responsibility is ours) which has made the allocation of parish share much more transparent. Other initiatives, eg companies such as WiSpire and Spire Services, have sought to create new income streams, and this, together with good asset management, is intended to reduce our reliance on parish share in the future.

The general culture in the Diocese is not one of frequent centralised initiatives but of encouragement to parish clergy to take authority locally since they are the church leaders in their own communities. The clergy are trusted to do their work and supported in it. Lay people are valued for their distinctive lay witness and there has been a reluctance here to license and authorise every lay ministry in order to avoid the sort of clericalisation which can be the result. However, we introduced Authorised Worship Assistants three years ago, and this has grown rapidly as a new form of lay ministry. The boundaries between church and wider community are still fairly blurred in this diocese, especially in rural areas, and this needs to be recognised and celebrated by the clergy. In a rural benefice most of the population may well have had experience of the incumbent's ministry through his or her conduct of funerals and services at festivals. That's one major difference between rural and urban ministry even in a diocese such as this.

Almost everywhere, however, church buildings are regarded as important features of the landscape and cherished as such. Keeping them open on a daily basis is strongly encouraged, and there has been a growth in recent years of daily prayer in our churches on weekdays, both through the public saying of the offices of morning and evening prayer and other weekday worship too, e.g. Messy Church. Various fresh expressions of worship, discipleship and service have been

pursued in both urban and rural parishes in the Diocese and there is a Fresh Expressions Advisor to encourage this dimension of our ministry. We are told that the proportion of our overall attendance at Fresh Expressions is one of the highest in the country.

The staff at Diocesan House possess a strong ethic of service to the Diocese as a whole and we encourage clergy and parishes to get to know them personally. Many diocesan events take place at the Cathedral which cherishes its role in serving the Diocese. The Cathedral, as the seat of the Bishop, is at the centre of diocesan life, and not just geographically. Two new buildings (the Refectory and Hostry) have expanded the Cathedral's capacity to provide a venue for a widening range of activities which support the life of the Diocese and its parishes. The Cathedral has many facilities (including a fine library) for clergy and parishes to use.

We seek to maintain our parsonage houses to a high standard since we want the base from which our clergy work to be a comfortable one, able to be used as a family home and a centre of hospitality where that is appropriate. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, began his Journey in Prayer in Norwich prior to his enthronement in March 2013. Thousands of people joined him and the prayer activities organised mainly by diocesan staff in the Cathedral reflected a tradition of using the Cathedral here in that way.

If there are any questions about the ethos, culture and character of this diocese which you would like to ask prior to your interview please do not hesitate to be in touch with the bishop or archdeacon dealing with the relevant appointment.



The Right Reverend Graham James
Bishop of Norwich

September 2016