

GENERAL SYNOD

Motion from Leeds Diocese: Background Paper**Introduction**

1. The motion does not define what is meant by “disadvantaged communities”. Numerous groups within society may see themselves as disadvantaged in relation to others. For the purpose of this paper, the term is taken to mean people who are economically hard-pressed and are likely to experience related disadvantages, such as lack of educational opportunities.
2. Failure to include such communities fully within its life has exercised the Church of England over many decades. Numerous attempts have been made to address the underrepresentation of people from disadvantaged communities within the clergy and laity of the church. Most have been based on one thesis or another about the cause of the problem. Some have borne fruit for a while. None have radically reversed the trend.

Different analyses: different histories

3. Initiatives and programmes have tended to reflect different views of what worked in the past and differing perceptions of the theological or sociological weaknesses in the church today. Thus, some will seek to revisit the great evangelistic revival movements like Wesley’s – although attempts to replicate these in more modern times have not had a comparable impact. Others will point to the 19th Century liturgical revival in some East End and other parishes, but with a similar failure to replicate the phenomenon. Yet others point to the significance of Liberation Theology in some parts of the world in the 1980s – but have not managed to translate the approach effectively into a UK context.
4. Different sociological analyses have also informed programmes for change. In the 1940s and ‘50s, convinced that the church was deaf to the true spirituality of working people, Bishop Leslie Hunter of Sheffield sent missionaries into the steel works to discover the “prevenient grace of God” at work among working class men and use that discovery to change the priorities of the mainstream church. But the mainstream church proved impervious to the missionaries’ message.¹
5. In the 1950s and ‘60s, the perception that working class people needed to see themselves represented among the church’s ministry led to the founding of the Southwark Ordination Course, training working men. It soon became an alternative training programme for middle class candidates. Colleges at Brasted and Kelham offered pre-ordination training to enable working class candidates to reach the basic academic standard for ordination training. Many clergy of working-class origin still testify to the value of this training, but it probably served to distance them from their cultural origins rather than embed working class culture in the church.
6. Also starting in the ‘50s and ‘60s, the Worker Priest movement tried to reach into the workplace, with clergy giving up their stipends and vicarages to take low level factory

¹ See: (ed) Gordon Hewitt, *Strategist for the Spirit: Leslie Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield 1939—1962*. Becket Publications, 1985.

jobs where they could fully identify with the workers. But as sympathetic bishops moved on, their successors failed to support the idea which needed long term commitment before it could bear fruit.²

7. The above are just a few examples of how the Church of England has tried to address its lack of impact among people from disadvantaged communities. One lesson is that there are many theological and sociological analyses of the problem, and no single diagnosis captures the complexity. The problem has deep historical, sociological and missiological roots, often differing significantly from one place or community to another. BAME people will tell a different story about the church's failure to welcome them compared to, say, working class white men. The alienation of disadvantaged communities from the church is many stories, not one.
8. If a new study were to be commissioned, it would have to find ways to avoid either repeating one or another over-simplified analysis, or of becoming bogged down in interdisciplinary complexity.

Listening to Disadvantaged Communities through Loving Service

9. Perhaps the greatest strength of the Church of England in its desire to reach people in disadvantaged communities is its commitment to the parish system which makes it present at some level in every community, no matter how marginalised. This marks the Church of England out from almost every other institution. We at least have the basic structure and plant (however neglected) to live among, and listen to, disadvantaged communities just as Jesus did.
10. Our parish structure is only part of the picture – chaplaincies engage directly with people from disadvantaged communities, as prison, military, healthcare and other chaplains will attest. And the vibrancy, and culture of experimentation, brought by Fresh Expressions and other new ways of being church, have often shown imaginative ways to respond to cultures outside middle class norms.
11. The work on Estates Evangelism, debated and strongly endorsed by Synod in February 2019, marks a fresh commitment by the whole church to disadvantaged communities across the nation. It has also helped break through old binary approaches to analysing the problem, with church leaders on estates recognising that social action is impossible without building a cohort of local believers, and that evangelism is impossible without engaging with the problems faced by the estate's people. The Estates programme is one of the first recent ventures in this field to avoid basing today's analysis and action on yesterday's theory or theology.
12. One objective of the Estates Evangelism programme is to change the culture of the clergy (and the episcopate) to value hard and often sacrificial ministry in disadvantaged communities rather than measuring "success" only in terms of large congregations and rapid results. Building up the church in areas where so many problems flow together and where generations of church people have often lost heart, is the work of decades,

² See: John Mantle, *Britain's First Worker Priests*, SCM Press, 2000.

not five-year plans. Like this DSM, the focus on estate communities helpfully calls us back to more Christlike understandings of what ministry is about.

13. The Archbishops' Council's Objective 9 – to make the church a welcoming home for all – currently focuses on four relatively marginalised groups: one is people for whom the middle-class profile of the church is alien. The work on Estates is a major element in addressing this objective. But there are also new initiatives to convene church people from other marginalised areas, such as coastal towns, to listen to their experiences and find ways for the National Church Institutions to support them more effectively. The work starts with listening, and local experience, not with an analysis of “the problem”
14. Meanwhile, the national church is putting financial weight behind its commitment to disadvantaged communities, as below.

Lowest Income Communities Funding

15. Lowest Income Communities (LInC) funding was introduced in January 2017, replacing the previous 'Darlow' funding. The money is paid according to a formula to 25 dioceses and seeks to give dioceses extra capacity for the strategic reallocation of funds to support the Church's mission in the poorest communities. £24.6m was awarded in 2018.
16. Over time (and recognising we are in only the second year of a transition planned over ten years), the aim is that the funding will be directed towards lowest income communities to support and develop the Church's mission, i.e. the funding will be investing in growth. The primary financial responsibility for mission and resource allocation lies of course with dioceses – this funding seeks to target monies to give dioceses some extra capacity for the strategic reallocation of funds towards the Church's mission in the lowest income communities.
17. Transitional payments are also being made, tapering down over a ten-year period, to assist dioceses who are receiving less funding than they did under Darlow. £10.9m of this funding was provided in 2018. In addition, all these dioceses have been offered a one-off sum of Restructuring Funding in 2017-19 (totalling £12.7m).
18. Dioceses are asked to provide information to the national Church (and, through the national Church, to each other) on how they use these funds, in order to facilitate accountability and mutual learning. There are many excellent examples of the work that this supporting in individual parishes and communities.

Strategic Development Funding

19. Strategic Development Funding (SDF) was first introduced in 2014 and significantly expanded from January 2017. The aim is to support activity which will make a significant difference to dioceses for mission and growth in line with their own strategies.
20. Since January 2017, 31 dioceses have been awarded a total of £105m of SDF. The projects funded include a wide range of models to grow the Church, many focused on

specific areas and those groups amongst which the Church is currently making little impact. The Archbishops' Council has agreed that a significant proportion of SDF should be allocated to mission to those living in deprived areas, and currently 30% or £36.3m has been awarded to projects for activity in deprived areas.

21. In addition, the Strategic Investment Board is providing direct support for the work of the Estates Evangelism Task Group: £60,000 was provided to develop its work in 2017.
22. Through this substantial investment we hope to understand better which approaches to mission work best in deprived areas, so they can be suitably adapted and replicated in other areas. There are already some very encouraging initiatives from which we are learning.

Conclusion

23. This paper is intended to assure Synod of the Church of England's institutional commitment to be "A Christian Presence in Every Community", including the most disadvantaged. There is new energy behind work which reaches out to – and listens attentively to – the people of these areas, and that includes a stronger and more targeted financial commitment than for many years.
24. If Synod calls for a new study of the Church of England's weaknesses in reaching disadvantaged communities, it is suggested that the time to do this would be when the LInC and SDF schemes come up for review. These will provide key data for any analytical study. As more dioceses assess the impact of the new funding regime with its targeted approach to less well-off communities, we will have many contemporary accounts of a wide variety of approaches, embodying different contextual understandings of the church's mission with disadvantaged communities – adding up to a great deal more knowledge and experience of how to address our record of communicating faith effectively among the people of disadvantaged communities.

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