

Generous Love for All

Presence and Engagement for the New Quinquennium: A Report from the Presence and Engagement Task Group

That this Synod:

- (a) reaffirm the commitment to the Presence and Engagement programme
 - (b) note with pleasure H. M. Government's grant of £5m to the Near Neighbours project; and
 - (c) accept the recommendations in paragraphs 21-36 of GS 1838 for the future work of the Presence and Engagement programme.
1. The profile of England's religious diversity continues to grow. Not only is the nation home to more people of more different religious and cultural backgrounds, as it is widely expected that the recent census results will show, but media coverage ensures that debates sparked by the revival of religion in our world touch even those parts of our nation in which very few people of different faiths actually live.
 2. The Church of England has played an important role in responding to this agenda. Building good relations with faith leaders, witnessing to the Gospel in religiously diverse contexts and helping people to understand the changing dynamics of faith in our society has been a priority for the Archbishop of Canterbury as well as other bishops and clergy. The Church plays a leading role in national fora such as the Christian Muslim Forum, the Council of Christians and Jews and the Inter Faith Network. At a local level, parish churches and chaplaincies are often spaces where people of many different backgrounds can come together and meet one another.
 3. Partly in recognition of the Church's track record, HM Government has recently funded the Near Neighbours programme, investing £5m over the next three years in the work of building relationships at a local level through the Church's networks. Near Neighbours, administered by the Church Urban Fund, has grown out of the Church's Presence and Engagement programme which has developed over the last five years into a major resource for the Church's witness and service in our multi faith society.
 4. Presence and Engagement seeks to encourage humbly confident disciples for both the 'real' and 'virtual' multi faith reality in which the Church of England is called to proclaim and live out the Gospel. The Presence and Engagement programme is therefore central to the Church's mission and ministry and its work has been reported on to General Synod three times over the last six years.

The Development of Presence and Engagement

5. Following an extensive period of research and consultation led by the Inter Faith Consultative Group, General Synod received in July 2005 the report: *Presence and Engagement: the Churches' Task in a Multi Faith Society* (GS1577) and adopted the following resolution:

'That this Synod

re-affirm the Church of England's commitment in partnership with Christians of other traditions to resourcing ministry, witness and mission in multi Faith areas;

urge dioceses to review and develop their long-term strategies to equip and support clergy and congregations in multi Faith areas;

commend the report Presence and Engagement for study and action in dioceses and parishes; and ask the Mission and Public Affairs Council to take forward the Presence and Engagement agenda and report back to Synod in the next quinquennium.'

6. In response to the fourth clause, the Mission and Public Affairs Council appointed a Presence and Engagement Task Group to take forward the work. Since that time, the Task Group has met regularly and developed a substantial programme. It is appropriate here to note in appreciation the extraordinary contribution of Canon Guy Wilkinson to Presence and Engagement since its inception. Canon Wilkinson retired as National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser and Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury at the end of 2010. Mention should be made here too of the Rt Revd David James who ably chaired the Presence and Engagement Task Group until he retired as Bishop of Bradford in 2010.
7. The Presence and Engagement programme is underpinned theologically by the document *Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue, an Anglican theology of inter faith relations*, published by the Network of Inter Faith Concerns for the Anglican Communion. One of the main resources for the programme has been the development of regional Presence & Engagement Centres (initially the St Philip's Centre in Leicester and Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity, and complemented more recently with the London Presence and Engagement Network and the new Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre in Birmingham).¹
8. There is now a dedicated Presence and Engagement website, (www.presenceandengagement.org.uk) giving access to the documents and resources mentioned in this report, along with web-based discussion forums for other networks that are linked to the Presence and Engagement programme. These networks include the Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers and the ecumenical Christian Contact Group on Islam. The P&E Task Group has developed a range of 'Learning Pathways' which set out in an accessible way the qualities, skills and experience that need to be taken account in equipping people for various forms of ministry and discipleship.²
9. Other resources have included a series of Old Testament Studies, *Encouraging Reading* and a series of Guidelines on different aspects of the church's ministry in multi faith contexts. The Task Group also began a series of Diocesan visits, meeting with Bishop's Staff teams and others in dioceses to hear about challenges and opportunities of the specific areas and diocesan strategies for engaging with them, and to share the resources that P&E has to offer. A detailed interim report of this work, *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully* was presented to General Synod in February 2009 (GS 1720).
10. Since the interim report, the Task Group has continued to meet regularly and to develop the areas of work detailed above. P&E has always worked collaboratively, and much of this work has been undertaken in partnership with others.

¹ <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/links.php?4>

² http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/60_resource.pdf

11. As referred to above, a fourth regional P&E Centre, the *Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre* has been started in Birmingham since the interim report, bringing together aspects of diocesan and ecumenical work in inter faith relations, community regeneration and youth ministry.
12. Further Guidelines have been developed and Diocesan visits have continued. The Bishop of Truro writes, “The visit from the Presence and Engagement project to Truro was a very helpful and positive experience. It was good for us in Cornwall to be given helpful advice on how we can work more closely with other faith communities and I believe we were also able to feed in to the team some of the specific aspects of integration and alienation in a rural setting. Our Faith Forum here in the county were given a real confidence boost by the meeting and contact have been made especially about how we can developed education programmes and visits with other parts of the country so that we can learn from each other.”
13. In March of this year, the Archbishops appointed the Rt Revd Tony Robinson as the new Chair of the P&E Task Group. In May the Revd Dr Toby Howarth took on the role of National Adviser for Inter Religious Affairs and Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs for the Archbishop of Canterbury. In May also the Network for Inter Faith Concerns across the Anglican Communion (NIFCON) published an online study guide to *Generous Love* (<http://www.aco.org/books/>)

Near Neighbours

14. Perhaps the most significant new development is the three-year Near Neighbours programme funded by HM Government with the aim of bringing people together in some of the most religiously diverse and deprived areas of the country through the Church of England’s ministry in partnership with others. Near Neighbours developed out of the P&E programme, is now being managed by the Church Urban Fund and is being largely facilitated at a regional level by the four P&E Centres.
15. The Near Neighbours proposals were mentioned as part of the November 2010 General Synod debate on the Big Society. Since then, funding has been confirmed, the programme design has been finalised and a national Coordinator appointed.

Presence and Engagement and Challenges for the New Quinquennium

16. In their Presidential address to General Synod in November 2010 the Archbishops identified three themes for the coming quinquennium:
 - (i) *To take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England – including the growth of its capacity to serve the whole community of this country;*
 - (ii) *To re-shape or reimagine the Church's ministry for the century coming, so as to make sure that there is a growing and sustainable Christian witness in every local community; and*
 - (iii) *To focus our resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity. (This was re-phrased in the Challenges for the New Quinquennium (CNQ) document as: ‘contributing as the national Church to the common good’)*
17. Presence and Engagement has a part to play in each of these themes and is indeed referred to explicitly in relation to contributing to the common good in the CNQ document (GS1815). The text refers to a number of areas of work at the national level “*where there is more to be done over the next five years*”. Amongst those mentioned as examples are projects: “*enhancing community*

cohesion in areas with a high proportion of people of other faiths and cultures through promoting greater mutual respect and understanding- including the Presence and Engagement programme”

18. Mission is central to the Church’s task, and the Presence and Engagement programme offers theological and practical resources for the Church’s witness in multi faith contexts. The report, *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*, (GS Misc 956) that was presented to General Synod in July 2010 came out of the Presence and Engagement process and needs to be built on in the coming quinquennium.
19. Presence and Engagement is also integral to the goal of rethinking ministry, as the need continues to grow for clergy and lay ministers to be well equipped for mission and evangelism in areas where the profile of faiths is complex and rich.
20. Over the next few years, the increasingly multi religious nature of British public life will present some of the most extensive challenges for the Church of England’s credibility in its established role. Its ability to serve the whole community of this country, whilst remaining true to its aim of growth, will depend upon being able to sustain its claim to be present everywhere and to engage constructively with the whole population. The Church’s responsibility to serving the nation and to its evangelistic mission will have increasingly to learn how to engage effectively with people from other faith backgrounds whilst retaining the trust of the nation.

Proposed Programme of Work for the new Quinquennium

21. Groups and Networks. A new P&E Task Group will be appointed, seeking to retain wisdom and expertise from the previous Task Group while at the same time building the capacity of the Group to deliver the new programme of works and widening the reach of Presence and Engagement into parts of the church where the programme is still not known or understood.
22. The network of Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers also needs to be strengthened through its future annual meetings and supportive visits from the National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser and other members of the Task Group. New networks for those working in schools and chaplaincies in multi faith contexts need also to be developed.
23. The Christian Contact Group on Islam is an ecumenical network that grew out of Presence and Engagement. It brings together Christians involved in the academic study of Islam or particular ministry in Muslim contexts for sharing, learning and mutual support. This Group is currently reviewing its work to ensure that it is both meeting the needs of its members and functioning as a resource for the wider church.
24. These networks bring together people who are often working in isolated contexts for encouragement and sharing. The different networks in turn are able then to function as a resource locally as ideas and lessons learned are shared around the networks, and for the wider church as it responds to current events.
25. Strengthening the P&E Centres. The development of the Near Neighbours programme has provided a helpful incentive and resource for the four regional P&E Centres to develop their programmes, take on new staff and to work more collaboratively. Nevertheless there remains a continued need to strengthen the financial security of the Centres for their core work of resourcing the Church.

26. The Task Group proposes that an important element of the P&E programme will continue to be focussed on the continued viability and sustainability of these Centres, helping them to develop fresh opportunities for resourcing the Church and fresh sources of funding. The two newest Centres, the London Presence and Engagement Network and the Birmingham Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre, may require particular encouragement, as London PEN moves into Phase 3 of its work and Birmingham develops its regional and wider offering, especially in terms of youth ministry.
27. Near Neighbours. This programme is developing fast, with a new national Programme Director, the Revd Liz Carnelley, appointed in May, and Near Neighbours Coordinators scheduled to be appointed in each of the four P&E Centres by the end of June. While the lead for this programme is being taken by the Church Urban Fund, the Task Group through the National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser and the CUF Chair will meet regularly to ensure that the P&E agenda, out of which NN grew, remains at the heart of the NN programme.
28. The NN programme is being evaluated and monitored by the New Economics Foundation, with the intention that clearly understood and evaluated outcomes will enable the programme will attract further funding for more areas of the country when the initial three year programme comes to an end in 2014.
29. Guidelines for various aspects of the Church's mission and ministry among people of different faiths. To date, 8 of these have been drafted: Multi Faith Forums and Councils, New Religious Movements, Civic Services, Marriages, Baptisms and Funerals, Provision of Multi Faith Prayer Spaces and Care of Converts. The P&E Task Group proposes that as the existing Guidelines are authorised, further Guidelines be developed in the areas of Religious Symbols and Clothing, Use of Redundant Churches, Religious Issues in Church Schools, Actions at Times of Tension, Occupational Requirements, Partnership with Other Religious Organisations, Ethical Evangelism and Multi Faith Worship.
30. Sharing the Gospel of Salvation. Building on this report (GS Misc 956), the P&E Task Group proposes a programme of research to understand in more detail how parishes are engaging in Christian witness in multi faith contexts. Examples of good practice will be shared and theological, strategic and practical resources developed for use at diocesan and local levels. This work ties up with other aspects of the wider P&E programme, including work on the Guidelines, theological and biblical reflection and Diocesan visits.
31. Scriptural and Theological Reflection: The Task Group proposes to follow up the *Encouraging Reading* Bible studies with a series on the New Testament. Theological reflection will continue in partnership with NIFCON and others.
32. Presence and Engagement Website. The Presence and Engagement website is crucial to the good functioning of the Presence and Engagement networks, and to the ability of the programme to disseminate the resources that it produces. This needs to be renewed to keep it both accessible and useful.
33. Staying Present and Growing in Multi Faith Areas. The Task Group proposes to begin a formal process to determine what the Church of England's future presence might look like in strongly multi religious contexts. In some contexts of religious diversity, notably Greater London, Anglican churches are growing partly through ethnic diversification. In other areas, the Anglican Church

along with other ecumenical partners can find itself beleaguered, especially at a time of serious budgetary constraints.

34. There are opportunities, for example in linking with Fresh Expressions, but also particular implications of losing traditional models of ministry and mission that need to be thought through carefully in multi faith contexts. What are the implications of working collaboratively with different ecumenical partners? At what point does the Anglican presence in a particular locality become too thin for it to embody the life of the national church? The Task Group will look at different parish contexts, reflecting with congregations and the dioceses concerned on the theological and ecclesial implications of structural and financial decisions that have been taken.
35. Analysis of the 2011 Census. The first Presence and Engagement report in 2005 drew heavily on statistical analysis that mapped data from the 2001 Census, particularly around religious affiliation, to parish boundaries. As the data from the 2011 Census becomes available, the Task Group proposes to undertake similar statistical analysis on this more recent data complemented by a process of consultation. This exercise will provide information to enable parishes, dioceses and the national church to know who they are serving and inform decisions about the deployment of resources for ministry and mission.
36. Diocesan Visits. It will be vital for the P&E programme to remain grounded in the diverse contexts and needs of the different dioceses in the Church of England. The Task Group proposes to continue the programme of Diocesan visits by its members, as well as visits to the Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers by the National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser.

On behalf of the Presence and Engagement Task Group,
The Ven Richard Atkinson

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