

DIOCESE OF WAKEFIELD

Urban Issues Newsletter

SUMMER 2008

NATIONAL ESTATE CHURCHES NETWORK

The National Estate Churches Network (NECN) has recently appointed a new Development Officer who is already involved with the planning of this year's National Conferences being held in London, Bristol and Manchester. The Manchester Conference is planned for Wednesday 15th October 2008.

Last year's Conference looked at the effectiveness and difference that churches make to the estates they serve, and at the need for each Diocese to produce a strategy for urban areas and, especially, for estates ministry. Once the Bishop's Advisers have settled into their new role, it is hoped that the work started by Ian Gaskell in the production of a strategy for our Diocese might be continued.

Regionally, Revd David Fletcher has been attending meetings with reps from the surrounding Dioceses to keep up-to-date with NECN matters.

Locally, meetings have been held in both Archdeaconries for those working in 'urban' or 'estate' parishes, although these were disappointing as regards attendance. This is probably indicative of the time/priorities that clergy working in these areas have to make. It has been decided, therefore, to make personal contact with those identified as working in 'urban' parishes and organize future meetings as required.

The Bishop's Advisers are acutely aware that those of us working in these challenging areas need to feel that we do make an effective and distinctive contribution to the people we serve and, above all, we need to feel supported, affirmed and valued in this ministry, especially as we make ourselves vulnerable for the sake of the gospel. This has been clearly apparent from the discussions that have already taken place.

FAITHFUL CITIES

The Bishop's Advisers have attended two meetings in London, convened by the Rt Revd Stephen Lowe to look at how things had developed since the publication of the "Faithful Cities" report. The picture, nationally, is very mixed. Most Dioceses had made some sort of response to the report but, once again, this was varied.

Our own Diocese had made beginnings in this area, under the leadership of the Social Responsibility Officer, but there is still the need for a group to be convened who might carry this area of work forward.

The meetings in London have, however, enabled the Bishop's Advisers to link into the national network for social responsibility / urban faith issues and to gain access to national information. Bishop Lowe has been able to contribute from the national, Governmental and Civil Service perspective.

In addition, the Revd Hilary Barber (Vicar of Halifax) organized a conference in Calderdale which was very well attended and much appreciated. The focus was predominantly around the groups and organisations who already contribute to the well-being of those living and working in the town and the surrounding area.

The Bishop's Advisers would like to thank Hilary for this initiative and for the valuable contribution it has made to the 'Faithful Cities' debate.

In light of the present credit crunch, with many families experiencing financial difficulties, the Advisers are deeply aware of the need for information in order to support clergy in their response to the particular social needs they will, invariably, encounter in the weeks and months ahead.

With this in mind, it is intended that a local support group might be re-established in our Diocese and an initial meeting is planned for 27th November (venue to be confirmed) to consider Ch 4 of the 'Faithful Cities' report – especially since it deals with the burning issue of debt. It is hoped that a spokesperson from CAP (Christians Against Poverty) might contribute to our discussions.

It is also hoped that this meeting may be of interest to both lay people and clergy.

Looking further ahead, the Bishop's Advisers hope to respond, as far as they are able within the limits of their own restraints and parish commitments, to other issues that may surface from time to time, as well as particular issues raised by the 'Faithful Cities' report and from our meetings with Bishop Lowe.

Revd David Fletcher
Revd David Nicholson

Bishop's Advisers for Urban Issues