

To PCC Secretaries, Crewkerne and Ilminster Deaneries, Incumbents and Priests in Charge

26th April 2021

Dear members of the Church communities in Crewkerne and Ilminster Deaneries,

We are writing to you about a proposed change in the organization of our Deaneries. There is no doubt that times have been tough over the last fourteen months and these challenges, as so often, have brought out the best in many of our church communities, with technological innovation, generosity and service to those in need being the principle outpouring of God's love to those we serve. It doesn't feel comfortable to be discussing organisational change at this point, but as we emerge from forced separation maybe this is the precise moment that taking stock and reorganising our area church structure should take place.

The clergy Chapters and Lay leadership of both Deaneries, encouraged by the Diocese, have been considering the possibility of Ilminster and Crewkerne Deaneries being merged once more. Many of you will remember very clearly that we were one Deanery and then divided in 2012 because, at the time, the overall size of the united Deanery was felt to be unmanageable, in terms of distance and Parish numbers. Some of you will therefore, very reasonably, ask why we might seem to be returning to something that didn't work well first time round. We would suggest that since the Deaneries separated there have been some significant changes, as follows:

- Curry Rivel benefice has moved to join Ivelchester Deanery, making Crewkerne Deanery even smaller. This is placing considerable strain on its leadership team and capacity to bring about ways to move forward.
- The Pandemic has necessitated alternative ways of meeting and talking, which has proved efficient and productive in its own way. Although face to face meetings are something we all long to recover, we will also continue to use digital communication to cut down travel and time, creating a mixed approach to our organisational structures.
- Times have been changing around us and there are many significant issues that need to be discussed and developed; making our churches Eco- responsible, Safeguarding, Living in Love and Faith, to name but a few. This will be easier for both Deaneries if we share our respective talents.
- Crewkerne Deanery is, at the moment, without an Area Dean or Lay Dean. This gives an urgency to addressing the question of deaneries. For several months the Chapters from both Deaneries have been working and meeting together via Zoom, on an informal basis as Clergy. As Chapters we feel positive about the combined arrangement; we always wish to be inclusive in sharing our faithful discipleship, and, very importantly, we seek the thoughts of the laity before taking things any further.

As described above, there are many challenges facing the Church of England at present and potentially the most significant facing us, in terms of future parish life, is how we will encourage Lay leadership and organise ourselves when we face inevitable and potentially radical cuts in clergy numbers. The Bath and Wells Deployment Report gives us all a great deal to consider, but acting together as a combined group would allow for greater flexibility and support in responding creatively to new challenges.

The Diocese has outlined the following process:

1. The leadership teams share with Parishes the suggested union and reasons why this would be beneficial (as set out in this letter). Parishes are asked to discuss this as a matter of urgency ahead of the next Deanery Synod meetings in June.
2. At Synod the proposed union will be discussed, and each Deanery will vote.
3. Should both Deaneries vote in favour there will be a further consultation on a draft Order to unite deaneries (this will be coordinated by Peter Evans, Assistant Diocesan Secretary at Flourish House).
4. Bishop Ruth will be advised of the outcome of the consultation and she will then decide on whether to sign the Order to unite deaneries.
5. If the decision is to unite this will come into effect and if not, a new plan of action will be required for Crewkerne Deanery.

As you can see from the map attached, it is clearly a long way from one side of the Blackdown Benefice to the far side of the Wulfric Benefice, but for the reasons given above, as Chapters we propose that it will be beneficial for the Deaneries to be officially combined.

We ask that all PCCs consider these proposals, please, either at a meeting or by email, and let us have your comments by 21st May 2021 either to your Deanery Synod Reps or to either of the following:

Revd. Geoff Wade (Crewkerne) winsmoorbenefice@icloud.com

or Greg Hoare (Ilminster) greg.hoare01@gmail.com

A full discussion will be held at the next Crewkerne Deanery Synod on 2nd June 2021 and at Ilminster Deanery Synod on 30th June. Your views will be valuable as we prepare to vote.

yours in Christ,

Revd. Judith Abbott
Area Dean
(Ilminster)

Revd. Geoff Wade
Chapter Lead
(Crewkerne)

Greg Hoare
Lay Dean
(Ilminster)

Jim Webb
Assistant Lay Dean
(Ilminster)