

REPORT OF THE TEAM APPOINTED TO CARRY OUT AN EPISCOPAL VISITATION TO THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST MARY, ST PETER AND ST CEDD CHELMSFORD

TEAM MEMBERS

The Venerable Simon Heathfield, Archdeacon of Aston
Mr Simon Johnson, Organist of St Paul's Cathedral
The Right Reverend Graeme Knowles, Honorary Assistant Bishop
Ms Maggie Swinson, Lay Member of the Chapter of Liverpool Cathedral

PERIOD COVERED

Thursday 18th May to Thursday 25th May (Ascension Day) 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Chapter of the Cathedral had requested that the Bishop of Chelmsford, as Visitor, should instigate an Episcopal Visitation of the Cathedral to provide an external review of its mission and ministry. This he did by means of a letter dated 6th April, attached to this report as Appendix 1.

The team appointed by the Bishop interviewed 66 individuals either singly or in interest groups over the week of the Visitation. A list of those interviewed is attached to this report as Appendix 2.

The Bishop identified six key areas for review. This report addresses these areas in the order they appeared in the Bishop's commissioning letter. The Bishop also added five other areas of "the Cathedral's life and ministry" on which he asked the team to comment if it was so minded. These are addressed after the six key areas.

The team wishes to put on record its grateful thanks to the Dean and Chapter for its hospitality and welcome over the week of the Visitation. It would also like to recognise its thanks to all the employees and volunteers engaged in the life of the Cathedral, especially Ruth Collin and the Chapter Office staff, for their happy cooperation in enabling the Visitation to run smoothly. The team met with nothing but goodwill and helpfulness. The team would also wish to assure the Canon Precentor, the Reverend Simon Pothén, of its on-going prayers in his illness.

GOVERNANCE

The Council

The team was greatly encouraged by the way in which the Council was seeking to define its role and to refresh its membership. There were clear channels of communication, Council members occasionally attending Chapter meetings as observers. Chapter officers are invited on a regular basis to attend Council meetings to report on their field of activity.

The Council's mission statement is as follows:

The role of the Council is to be a critical friend and support to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral, taking an interest in the Cathedral's ongoing life and mission, supporting its personnel, and, where appropriate, developing its vision and providing a structure of accountability and a concern for good governance.

Recommendation:

That the Council, in looking to refresh its membership, should aim both to increase its diversity, including age, and look to the possibility of appointing at least one person from the London Boroughs part of the diocese.

College of Canons

The composition of the College has recently changed. All Area Deans and Lay Chairs are now appointed Honorary Canons and Lay Canons for the period they hold office. This has caused a dramatic rise in the number of people constituting the College, presenting challenges of consistency and clarity in meetings and purpose. One lay chair commented on the frustration of having to go to Chelmsford for a meeting of the College which appeared to have no purpose. There was also an expression of feeling that owing to the rise in membership of the College, a sense of collegiality had been lost.

Recommendation:

That the Chapter thinks carefully about the timing, content and focus of both meeting and purpose and in the hospitality offered at meetings of the College of Canons. Care needs to be taken to feed the members of the College both literally and spiritually, to build up a sense of collegiality.

Chapter

It was clear from the interviews with Chapter members and officers of the Chapter that significant progress had been made in matters of financial transparency, lay membership of Chapter and the place of the cathedral in the diocese. This is seen very much as a work in progress.

Recommendation:

That, in the spirit of the Cathedrals Measure 1999, when new lay members of Chapter are to be appointed, that there is greater representation from the wider geographical area of the diocese.

The Strategic Plan adopted by the Chapter dated 2016 identifies four main themes:

- The cathedral as a thriving, outward facing community
- The cathedral as seat of the Bishop
- The Cathedral shaped by worship
- The cathedral as a public and cultural space

This is a thirteen page document. There is no executive summary or easily understandable and inspiring material for sharing with the cathedral community and city. The team was concerned that there would appear to be no supporting documentation to detail how the Plan might be delivered, who is responsible for delivery, or how “success” is to be measured. In conversation with volunteers neither was it clear how much impact the Plan had on the way in which the cathedral lived out its life and mission on a day to day basis.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter considers ways in which all those involved in the life of the cathedral, whether employed or volunteers, are helped to own and implement the main themes of the Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 2:

That Chapter underpins the Strategic Plan with documentation that ensures monitoring and delivery against agreed timescales.

The Finance Committee

The Constitution dated 2015 makes provision for a Finance Committee. Paragraph 11.(a) of the Constitution reads:

There shall be a finance committee of the Chapter with the function of advising the Chapter in connection with its responsibilities in the field of financial and investment management and the management of property belonging to the Cathedral and budget projections, income and expenditure forecasts and budget management.

The function of this body is advisory. The team in talking with the chair, committee members and the Treasurer, was not clear that the existing committee understood this advisory remit thoroughly.

Recommendation:

That, as the Finance Committee is mandatory under 11(a) of the Constitution, the Chapter considers the re-formation of the membership of the committee in order to address more effectively its advisory function.

The Works Committee

The team wished to mark the exemplary way in which this committee functions. It had clear Terms of Reference (2013). The committee reports regularly to Chapter, and felt it had ready personal access to a meeting if needed. Works were carefully planned and budgeted. There was a clear understanding that any works to the buildings, other than general maintenance, must relate to the aims of the Strategic plan. A concern was expressed that feedback from Chapter could be improved and be immediate. The Chapter clearly value this work highly but the team wondered how effectively such value was mediated and received.

Recommendation:

That Chapter Meeting Minutes are made public and, within the whole team, patterns of encouragement and value are regularly and more effectively received.

The Choral Foundation

The existence and function of “The Choral Foundation” was a ground bass theme of the Visitation process. The team observed that there was a basic problem over the use of the title “The Choral Foundation”. In most cathedrals this would simply mean those individuals engaged in the delivery of music to support the liturgical life of the cathedral in question. In Chelmsford this would appear not to be the case.

From a photocopied paper dated 6th December 1995, supposedly approved by “the Cathedral Council”, a Management Committee would appear to have been set up “to be responsible for investment policy and for the distribution of income deriving from monies held in the Choral Foundation Trust Fund”. No such Trust Fund exists, but the monies are held by the Chapter in a **designated** fund, as the Annual Accounts reveal. The committee known as The Choral Foundation meets to disperse monies in support of the music of the cathedral, using income, and occasionally capital, from the designated fund. The Foundation also sponsors concerts, which have run at a loss in recent years. The Foundation would justify such loss as being appropriate as it provides opportunities for the cathedral choir to sing with a professional orchestra and soloists, thus being a formative part of their musical education. There is clearly scope for such activity, but in the light of good governance, it should not run at a deficit; it should attract sponsorship; it should be properly advertised. All this should be within a budget fixed for each event and agreed by Chapter.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter takes to itself the distribution of monies in support of the music in the cathedral, initially approving a budget drafted by the Precentor and Master of the Music, and brought to Chapter for approval.

Recommendation 2:

That the remit of the committee at present known as The Choral Foundation be redefined and its name changed.

The Residentiary Canons

There are two Commissioners Canons (the Precentor and the Canon Pastor) “engaged exclusively on cathedral duties” and one Diocesan Canon (the Canon Theologian), who is funded jointly by the cathedral and the diocese. At present there are no job descriptions for the residentiary canons, neither is there any form of ministerial review. The team wondered if the opportunity of their roles beyond the Cathedral was being harnessed both for the office holders and their impact on their own and the Cathedral’s mission and ministry.

Recommendation 1:

That job descriptions are drafted and agreed by the post holder for the three residentiary canons.

Recommendation 2:

That the Dean's job description is reviewed by the bishop to ensure that it is fit for purpose, and if necessary revised and agreed.

Recommendation 3:

That the Bishop of Chelmsford undertakes the ministerial review of the residentiary canons and the Dean.

The Lay Members of Chapter

From questioning, it was clear that the lay members of Chapter felt themselves to be of equal standing with the clerical members when around the Chapter table. This was not necessarily made obvious in public communication. The lay members clearly have much to offer to the development of the cathedral's ministry and life. Their skills in governance and professional skills is real and valued, but it is not entirely clear how they are deployed and fostered within the whole Chapter's development.

Recommendation 1:

That the names of the lay members of Chapter be included in the entry for the cathedral in the Church of England Year Book.

Recommendation 2:

That the Chapter, lay and ordained, gives careful thought to a Chapter Development Plan, to sit within the cathedral's strategic priorities, including opportunities for professional, personal and organisational development.

STAFFING

The team was impressed by the dedication and commitment of all the staff and volunteers they encountered. The team had a general concern about capacity when it came to the ongoing life, work and mission of the Cathedral. The team encountered more than one incident where a recently written job description in effect only addressed part of the tasks undertaken by the employee. Whilst this is, to a certain extent, unavoidable in a small organisation, it masks the reality of the work load carried by the staff. The moving on of a single member of staff in recent weeks has produced a profound effect on remaining staff's work load. It was also noted that the Cathedral diary was already "hot". On one day during the Visitation the chair formation in the Cathedral church was changed three times. The team noted muddled or, in some cases non-existent, lines of accountability and communication.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter creates a clear structure of distributive authority and reporting which covers the whole life of the cathedral.

Recommendation 2:

That the cathedral develops regular patterns of vocational discernment, gift encouragement and shared ministry in order to grow the capacity and vibrancy of the volunteer base.

Recommendation 3:

That Chapter produces a mechanism by which it can justify an increase in the work load of the office staff and vergers and ensure that any event or service supports the aims of the Strategic Plan.

It was noted that the Dean's PA had responsibility for the writing up of the registers of marriage. This is a serious work for which she had received no formal training.

Recommendation 4:

That the Chapter arranges with the local Registrar for the Dean's PA to receive training in keeping the marriage registers.

CATHEDRAL FOR THE DIOCESE

On many occasions those who were interviewed by the team spoke warmly about a change of attitude between the cathedral and the diocese. The commitment of the Dean to going out into the diocese was noted and applauded. His enthusiasm was appreciated. The presence of the Canon Theologian "out and about" in the diocese was also noted with appreciation. It was noted too that the cathedral staff were seen more in the diocese as preachers.

The geographical and topographical problems of the diocese were also noted, in particular the engagement of the cathedral with the London Boroughs. One particular area of concern was expressed around diversity when it came to diocesan occasions.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter ensures proper ethnic diversity when planning regular weekly worship or when planning or hosting events and acts of worship in the cathedral, involving both adults and children.

The team shared with the Chapter members the possibility of seeing "cathedral" as being people as well as buildings

Recommendation 2:

That the Chapter looks for ways of using its volunteers, especially its Education Team and Music Department, out in the diocese, as well as on home ground.

In conversation with representatives from the diocesan office, it was clear that there was now a more robust and constructive relationship between the Cathedral and the Diocesan office. It was described as a change of mind-set. Rather than being a "client", the Diocese could now look upon its relationship with the Cathedral more as a partnership. It was suggested to the team that there were still occasions when there were financial "niggles" arising from diocesan events.

Recommendation 3:

That the Chapter monitors the way in which the financial billing for diocesan events and occasions is handled.

CIVIC CHURCH

The civic life of the cathedral can be seen to have three elements; the City of Chelmsford, the County of Essex and the London Boroughs.

There was warm recognition of vastly improved relationships between the City and the County. Much of this was laid at the efforts of the present Dean to foster new links. Chaplaincy had been established with County Hall through the Vice Dean/Canon Pastor. The cathedral was and is actively involved in the plans for the redevelopment of the City centre.

It is interesting to note that Chelmsford was only incorporated as a Borough in September 1888 and was made a city in 2012. Even as a county town and new city it is therefore still finding its identity. The cathedral has a great opportunity to be at the heart of this process.

The team were told of the warm welcome that civic leaders received in the cathedral, and of the careful planning and imaginative content of special services (ie The Somme Service). There was much appreciation of the cathedral as sacred space, but also as flexible space to be used by charities. The word "hub" was used repeatedly to describe the building. The hospitality offered by the cathedral was also commented on positively.

The relationship with the London Boroughs part of the diocese is by its nature a more difficult one than City and County. The historic debate concerning a “pro-cathedral” or similar provision was aired again with the team. This highlights the very real opportunity and challenge of such a large diocese, with such distinctly complex regional, civic and other identities. It is not just about location. People spoke warmly of the spiritual meaning of going to Chelmsford, but equally the profile and presence of the cathedral is much weaker in the London Boroughs.

Recommendation:

That the Chapter considers if there are any ways in which the positive relationship between City and County and the cathedral might be imaginatively extended to the London Boroughs.

MEDIA

The cathedral website was revamped in 2016. This was done on a tight budget. It is clean, but might be described more as heritage in approach rather than faith based. It has very little image content that shows people engaged in religious activity.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter considers investing more time and money on the cathedral website, especially in support of the objectives of the Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 2 :

That the Chapter considers how to use the website and all online communication in support of mission, and especially in support discipleship and learning.

Recommendation 3:

That the Chapter engages with the diocese to discover ways in which media coverage and communication might be shared.

A volunteer looks after the cathedral’s social media presence (mainly Facebook and Twitter) which he has done for the last four years. He has recently started to use Instagram, which has increased the picture content. There are on average five or six entries a day. There is no communications strategy at present.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter formulates a Communications Strategy.

CATECHESIS AND PROCLAMATION

The team witnessed the use of the cathedral buildings for the work of St Mellitus on the first day of the Visitation. This was an excellent example of the cathedral’s involvement in teaching and learning. It also showed the cathedral as host to a vital part of the church’s life, enabling fellowship and worship to happen alongside learning.

People spoke warmly of the Canon Theologian’s work in delivering education and in resourcing the diocese.

One of the people interviewed asked the question “How do people come to faith within the context of the cathedral?” Apart from *Breakfast with the Bible* each Sunday morning at 8.30am, there would appear to be little sustained teaching opportunities within the cathedral’s community life.

Recommendation:

That the Chapter creates a learning programme aimed both at the regular congregation but also at those seeking faith.

Worship

The team witnessed both weekday and Sunday worship. The weekday Offices were well attended, both by the Chapter and by others. The said services, especially the morning Office, had a feeling of being rushed. The team was delighted to see and hear a local school singing Evensong during the Visitation. This was well attended by parents. The three Sunday services were well presented and distinct in character.

The team was surprised that the 9.30am Eucharist had no input from the music department, other than the provision of an organist. The cantor used in the psalm was a member of the congregation. There was considerable comment from many of those interviewed that the cathedral played a vital part in providing a place of calm quiet in the middle of the city. It was stressed how important it was to maintain this amidst the cathedral's otherwise hectic activity.

The team witnessed the Chapter respond to a national event (the Manchester Bombing) by the provision of space to light candles and allow public engagement.

The team was aware that there was an ongoing need for the Chapter to take some risks around those who might be invited to take some part in liturgy. There was a feeling that in order to be invited to play a part publicly, the individual had to have become substantially part of the worshipping community.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter ensures that the said Offices are given the dignity of time and speed enabling an atmosphere of unhurried calm.

Recommendation 2:

That the Chapter and music department consider ways in which the cathedral, as a centre of musical excellence, might enrich the 9.30am Eucharist in a way appropriate to the purpose and positioning of this service.

Recommendation 3:

That the Chapter ensures that whatever other activity is going on in the cathedral, there is always maintained a space for private prayer and solitude.

Engagement with the poor and marginalized

The team met with the cathedral's Youth Minister and with the St Mellitus Student (Mixed Mode 3 year placement). The *English for Women* project, headed by the Mellitus student, showed the cathedral at its best, engaging with a marginalised sector of the population of the city in a vibrant and structured way. The cathedral's community chaplaincy work, headed up by the Youth Minister, includes both the Priory and the J's Hospice as elements of its engagement. The cathedral also hosts on a weekly basis *Welcome on Wednesday* which provides an easy access occasion to which all are welcome, giving the opportunity for fellowship, help and support.

The development of the Cathedral building

The cathedral church rejoices in being such a beautiful, open and adaptable space. Many of those who were interviewed spoke of the delight in being in the building.

Praise must be given to the vergers who keep the building clean and tidy.

In speaking with the BID Team, mention was made of the Shire Hall, and its back elevation, facing the churchyard. If there is to be a development of this building which faces the cathedral, then there is a challenge to the Chapter as to how it uses the churchyard space, and how this might be used strategically.

The cathedral is almost invisible from the main shopping streets of the city. How could this be addressed in partnership with the city? As the city's development plan emerges, the Guy Harling green space will become a vital lung in the heart of the new development on Waterloo Lane. How is this to be protected and utilised?

In all the conversations there was a lack of a clear, compelling theological understanding of the city, its social geography in relation to the cathedral and how that sits within the civic, social space. The cathedral is renowned for its works of art, but their quantity is somewhat overwhelming, creating a feeling of restlessness. There is no Chapter Arts Policy.

Recommendation 1:

That Chapter, in consultation with local and national resources, develops a clear and imaginative theological rationale for the cathedral in the city's social, cultural and geographical spaces.

Recommendation 2:

That the Chapter ensures that the development of the churchyard and Guy Harling garden support the Strategic Plan and its aims.

Recommendation 3:

That the Chapter together with the cathedral's Fabric Advisory Committee draft and adopt an Arts Policy. This policy should cover the commissioning of new works of art; the regulations surrounding the installation of temporary works of art; the rearrangement of the current collection to create a calmer, more focused, display.

Recommendation 4:

That the Chapter seeks ways of making the cathedral more "visible" through signage and interpretation.

Congregational Development and the roles and responsibilities of volunteers

Every cathedral which is also a parish church faces the problem of identity. One thing is clear. The cathedral is a cathedral first and foremost. Every cathedral, though, does have a congregation, large or small in number. This group of people commands the right to pastoral care. It is the duty of the Chapter to provide this care.

The Lay Chair of the relevant Deanery Synod pointed out how difficult it was to deliver a coherent pastoral plan for central Chelmsford, as the cathedral, to all intents and purposes extra-parochial, sat on a "parish" which contained the city centre. The team were also told of the large number of new flats being built or formed out of old commercial property within this "parish".

It was clear that there was little contact from the cathedral to those living in the "parish". The cathedral pastoral team make no leaflet drops to new residents. Seasonal literature is delivered by them not to the "parish" but to members of the worshipping community.

Recommendation 1:

That the Chapter engages in serious debate with the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Chief Executive of the diocese and the local Deanery as to the future of the cathedral's geographical parish.

Recommendation 2:

That the Chapter in the short term formulates a pastoral plan to service the residents of the cathedral's geographical parish.

There is a body of some four hundred people who make up the volunteer body of the cathedral, covering such activities as welcoming, stewarding, flower arranging, educational work, pastoral assistants, bookstall, social activity and fundraising, junior church, helping hands.

The team asked everyone it encountered the question:

Where do you see spiritual flourishing in the cathedral?

The answers were very interesting but they tended to focus exclusively on structures, events and activities, and not on personal development. This we heard little of the spiritual growth of the congregation, or of any efforts made to encourage discipleship. There is a flourishing Junior Church, but there would appear to be little link between the parents of children attending and the ongoing worshipping life of the cathedral.

The team met with the Cathedral Wardens. At present the wardens' role would appear to be purely functional. They fulfil the role expected of a Churchwarden in a parish church during the time of divine worship. They function as "team leaders" for the sidespeople. One Interviewee commented:

"The wardens need to develop their leadership role, which includes representing the people to the clergy, and the clergy to the people – and at all times publicly championing the mission and strategy of the cathedral."

A warden, when asked by a person from the secular world to describe the work of a warden had said "It's like an usherette, but without the ice-creams".

Other than tradition, it was not clear why there should be six wardens. There are thirty five sidespeople.

Recommendation 3:

That the Chapter gives serious consideration as to how lay leadership might be developed in the regular worshipping community.

Recommendation 4:

That together with the Bishop and dean the cathedral community identifies the essential spiritual qualities they desire in all those sharing leadership in order to prioritise the spiritual flourishing within the cathedral's mission.

Recommendation 5:

That the Chapter reviews the "job description" of the cathedral wardens to separate liturgical function from lay leadership, considering a change of name for the office which better speaks of its function.

Recommendation 6:

That new cathedral wardens and sidespeople are given relevant induction training, including briefing on the cathedral's Strategic Plan.

The Cathedral School

The Cathedral School is a Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. It is located east of the cathedral itself. There are 315 pupils on roll, in a 1.5 class entry. The Precentor has acted as chaplain to the school, and the cathedral congregation has traditionally provided foundation governors. The school uses the cathedral church on a regular basis for worship.

A number of the cathedral choristers, male and female, attend the school. The team was told that because of this link, the musical standards of the school were high and much appreciated by the parent body. The future could very well involve the school in academy status.

Both the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors said that it had not been easy since the beginning of the year to maintain the link with the Cathedral staff owing to the illness of the Precentor. There had been a general lack of secure communication which had led to the feeling that the relationship between school and Cathedral had "lost its way".

Recommendation 1:

That in the short term the Chapter ensures that there is a clear defined communication route between the school and the Cathedral.

Recommendation 2:

That in the short term an individual, lay or ordained, is identified as Acting School Chaplain.

Recommendation 3:

That in the revision of job descriptions for the Dean and residentiary Canons the post of School Chaplain is clearly located.

Any person or body on whom functions are conferred by or under this Measure shall, in exercising those functions, have due regard to the fact that the cathedral is the seat of the bishop and a centre of worship and mission.

Cathedrals Measure 1999 Part I (1.)

In carrying out this Visitation on behalf of the Bishop of Chelmsford the visitation team has had this precept before it at all times. The recommendations listed in this report address the three primary reasons for which a cathedral exists, as laid down by Statute. They are intended to strengthen and embolden the mission and ministry of the cathedral.

SIGNED on behalf of the Visitation Team:

*The Right Reverend G Knowles
17 July 2017*