

Diocese of Chester - Committee for Social Responsibility Report to Diocesan Synod on the work of CSR

The aim of the Committee for Social Responsibility is to resource and support parishes in mission, particularly their social action and outreach. This was a challenging yet rewarding year and the highlights of that work are described below;

Our long term and greatly valued Director, Janice Mason retired in July and is very much missed. Janice worked for the diocese for 20 years, initially as Diocesan Urban Officer, before taking up the role as Director of CSR. Janice shared her wealth of knowledge to support parishes to grow and develop through sound advice, fundraising support and expertise in community awareness and engagement.

Exciting developments also took place such as our recently established joint venture with the Church Urban Fund - **Transforming Lives Together**- which went from strength to strength, creating a new social movement in our churches and developing an asset based approach with communities. In January 2016 two part time workers were appointed: Kath Leigh as 'Lead Community Builder' to cover the Macclesfield Archdeaconry and Wendy Robertson (formerly of the Life Expectancy Wirral initiative) as 'Community Builder' for the Chester Archdeaconry.

Counselling and Pastoral Support continued to be a vital and integral part of our CSR work co-ordinated by Jane Knight, Head of Counselling Services. The Mental Health Forum held a service for World Mental Health Day at Christ Church, Higher Bebington - a powerful and moving service attended by approximately 50 people. In partnership with the Committee for Ministry a very successful day event on Mental Health was held at St John's, Hartford. Over 100 people had the opportunity to hear from guest speakers and discuss and reflect on themes.

The **Mediation Service** has now been firmly situated within CSR and was promoted at the Archdeacon's visitations last year together with support for training more diocesan mediators.

The counselling team continues to be widely used for therapeutic counselling in addition to providing ongoing pastoral support for clergy.

Family Life issues maintained a central position within CSR concerns supported by Ruth Mock, (Family Life Officer). Food Matters 2016 was an initiative established to encourage parishes to focus on the importance of living sustainably and reflect theologically on the place of food within our own Christian stewardship and discipleship. Special events included a Fairtrade Bake-Off, a Lent Challenge to live on £1 a day and a networking event with foodbank co-ordinators. A special display in the Church Tent at the Cheshire Show highlighted Food Matters attracting lots of attention.

Vulnerability and Safeguarding work continued to grow in profile guided by Pauline Butterfield. There are now specific mandatory training requirements and 9 sessions were held for clergy, parish safeguarding co-ordinators and volunteers.

In 2016 a full three day external safeguarding audit was carried out by Social Care in Excellence, a national leading auditing organisation appointed by the Church of England. The quality and standard of safeguarding practice was considered exemplary, underpinned by strong recording systems and good structures in place.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Commission is now fully established, with representatives from statutory agencies within its membership, and is Chaired by HH Judge Tim Mort. Pauline our Safeguarding Officer has provided mandatory responses to the Godddard/Jay Inquiry which remains ongoing although case work remains a priority, and effective inter-agency working with statutory agencies continues. Pauline is assisted by a part time PA, Steve Ellis.

The areas of Rural and Urban Mission and Ministry have continued to be supported by CSR and both have undergone some reflection and recognition of need for renewal.

The Rural Steering Group highlighted issues such as vocations in rural parishes, ecumenical partnerships, challenges for agricultural life and encouraging community engagement. Not only have these been discussed but events were held to widen awareness and understanding within the diocese.

The UMM Committee focused attention upon supporting clergy in urban parishes to make the most of current resources, highlighting the need for practical skills and training for roles such as treasurer or fundraiser in areas that may have a shortage of such expertise.

The challenges of working in places of “non-book” culture was recognised. Engaging with situations in reference to the work of Bishop North was explored – bearing witness to the levels of resilience and creativity required in the future.

Attention was also given to encouraging vocation for urban ministry and an urban ministry self-help group was established, meeting at Foxhill, to enable sharing of concerns and best practice.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees remained a priority for many parishes and meetings were facilitated to enhance the sharing of experience and expertise. Other areas of work included; environment; criminal justice; interfaith and minority ethnic Anglican concerns

Recruitment of a new Director was undertaken in the autumn and I (Deborah Dalby) took up post in January 2017. I have been overwhelmed by the generosity and dedication of parishes in their connection to and practical love of their local community and have much enthusiasm for what we can build upon in the coming years.

Conclusion

The work of CSR is to help the diocese and parishes shape a response to what is happening in God’s world. The events of 2016 have had and will continue to have an impact upon our communities and there is a general recognition that new ways of working are now urgently needed. Developing priorities and raising the profile of the work of CSR is going to be paramount if we are to maximize our usefulness and accessibility.

In 2017 we hope to re-launch our work with a whole range of new approaches. **Engagement, resourcing and prophetic voice** will all come to the fore in the work we hope to undertake through and with others. To this end we are committed to working in an asset based way and in partnership with others in all that we do. Addressing welcome and belonging will be significant especially in the areas of disability, loneliness and isolation and financial exclusion. Practically demonstrating God’s love for us through practical everyday activities has been and will continue to be the beating heart of CSR work.

Deborah Dalby Director of Social Responsibility February 2017

For more information on the work of CSR please visit; <http://www.chester.anglican.org/csr>