

Some Diocesan Strategies for Ministry

JOHN TILLER

In this article I intend to examine some papers which have been produced by individuals or working parties within different dioceses in order to assist the development of appropriate strategies for ministry within those dioceses. Before doing so I must make it clear that these papers are in no sense official responses to the report *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* which has been referred to the dioceses by the General Synod. In most cases the papers take the proposals of that report into account, but they are examples of parallel thinking, attempting to articulate a strategy at diocesan level, rather than a response to the questions about a national strategy, which it is the responsibility of the General Synod to formulate.¹ Within the total strategic exercise the diocesan level is just as important as the national one: it was noted in the Strategy Report that with pastoral reorganization and the introduction of the Sheffield allocations, both of the total stipendiary clergy and of newly ordained deacons, the diocese has greatly increased in significance as the basic unit for the deployment of ministry. With the establishment of diocesan training courses it has also become in some instances a powerful promoter of shared ministry in the parishes. As things stand at present, therefore, it is the attitude of those responsible for ministry in the dioceses which frequently determines how far national guidelines are followed and whether local initiatives are encouraged.

The sample of material which I have selected represents thinking in a wide variety of dioceses. I have not attempted to discover how much of this thinking has proved to be acceptable to the dioceses concerned. My aim has been to determine how far others who have looked at the problems of ministry in differing situations have made proposals which are strategically compatible or at variance with the more general plan outlined in my report.

1. Birmingham

The Birmingham report² has a fairly limited though important aim. It addresses the confused situation which has arisen through the setting up of new forms of accredited ministry which are not coherently related to each other or to those previously existing: 'A number of ministries have been sanctioned by the Church to meet particular needs of the moment . . . They have been set up haphazardly and the Church is still working out their theological and ecclesiastical implications.'³ The report has no simple or clear-cut remedies. The members of the working party remain uncertain about a number of important issues, including:

- the theological justification for ordaining NSMs with no defined liturgical or pastoral responsibility;
- the need for LNSM in Birmingham, and the relation of LNSM to the priesthood generally;
- whether there is a future for Readers' ministry in its present form;
- whether new forms of lay ministry are needed.

Despite the theological uncertainties the report does provide a vision of ministry in Birmingham in the 1990s: 'Parishes, or groups of parishes, would be supported by teams of lay and ordained ministers, mainly non-stipendiary; the shape and size of the teams would be determined by local pastoral strategy which would be agreed by parishes, the deanery and the diocesan pastoral committee.'⁴ In addition to these parochially based ministries there would be others of a more specialist and 'prophetic' nature. The local church, in assessing its own needs, would play an increasingly important part in calling suitable people to offer themselves for ministry. It is recommended that Readers should be licensed to perform either pastoral or liturgical duties, using the distinction between Canon E4 (2a) and Canon E4 (2b). Candidates for the office of Reader should be accepted only where it can be shown that a need for their ministry exists, in accordance with a local pastoral strategy. On the same basis a call from the local church would be necessary for each LNSM candidate. A diocesan foundation course is recommended to assist the task of vocational assessment before candidates begin training for specific ministries. The report also recommends greater precision about the sphere of ministry envisaged for NSM candidates, and looks at selection procedures with some care. There is an urgent call for a satisfactory training scheme for LNSM candidates, and for Readers' training to reflect the differing pastoral or liturgical emphases of their proposed ministry.

Since this report is principally concerned with NSMs, LNSMs and Readers it does not discuss the future deployment of stipendiary priests nor the continuing role of the incumbent. Nevertheless its recommendations if implemented would move the diocese of Birmingham significantly in the direction of the Strategy Report. This is evident more especially in the call for each local church to assess its own needs for ministry and to develop a strategy which includes the calling out of its

own ministers. There are further parallels in the idea of a foundation course to clarify vocational assessment, and in the desire to distinguish between the variety of ministries at present included in the general term NSM. The main difference of approach lies in the place envisaged for LNSM. The authors wisely recommend that such a ministry should be permitted only in parishes which have already developed their own strategy and moved into a truly shared ministry. Without this the LNSM is in grave danger of being expected to fill the role of the traditional incumbent. However, the report is more open to question in suggesting that LNSM will be appropriate only in rural areas where the stipendiary priest has to look after more than one community and in urban areas where the recognition thus given to a local man will strengthen the mission of the church. This is to condemn LNSM to an inferior status. It follows from the unnecessary, indeed destructive, theological assumption that 'an LNSM by definition, is priest only in the place and congregation which called him.'⁵ By contrast the Strategy Report includes ordained ministry with every other kind of ministry as something the local church can produce for itself and which may therefore appear anywhere, but as at the same time fully part of the one order of priests by association with the Bishop through ordination. The distinction proposed in the Strategy Report is not between local priests and a supposedly 'universal' priesthood, but between local priests and diocesan priests, the distinction lying not in their ordination but in their training, appointment and function.

2. Carlisle

This brief and unpretentious report⁶ has the great merit of showing how financial factors are influencing ministerial strategy in a largely rural diocese like Carlisle. It describes clearly how parish quotas have to rise faster than inflation as a larger percentage of stipends has to be found from the 'live' giving of the congregations. It notes how often pastoral reorganization has been a matter of putting together parishes which on their own would be unable to find the money to support an incumbent: 'Some believe that money has played too large a part in determining pastoral strategy.'⁷ What this report proposes is 'a new way of ministering through local leadership in each parish or group of parishes.' This would mean the establishing of mixed ministry teams of men and women, lay and ordained, and a recognition that 'every church member is called to exercise ministry.'⁸ An analysis of what has traditionally been provided by the incumbent shows the extent of the opportunity for shared ministry. There is some heavy criticism of exclusively clerical or entirely stipendiary teams. It is envisaged that the local ministry team could provide leadership within the PCC just as the incumbent does at present. It is anticipated that some clergy may find such changes threatening: 'Having on the whole been trained to work to some extent single-handed, they may need to be trained further to share the ministry of the Church with others.'⁹ The authors of this paper are convinced that

such a strategy should exist 'in its own right and should enable the Church to function whatever the limits of finance and clerical manpower.'¹⁰ Although the details are not filled in it is interesting to find a group from a diocese with many remote rural parishes producing proposals so closely in line with the Strategy Report, even though the latter was not published when this particular paper was prepared.

3. Oxford

The Thomas Report¹¹ was preceded by the appearance some four months earlier of a paper by the Bishop's Theological Advisory Group on Ministry.¹² This was concerned with the implications of a Diocesan Synod resolution calling for the development of lay ministry. As a result the Chiltern and West Oxfordshire Training Schemes had been set up but expectations differed as to what these schemes were intending to provide. The Advisory Group pointed to the varying needs of different kinds of community within the diocese. In setting out a theological framework to contain this variety the paper attempts some definitions which are close to those used in the Strategy Report. There is a ministry of the whole Church to which each is called by baptism and within which individuals have representative and differentiated roles. 'The ordained ministry is composed of members of the *laos* who are authorized to represent the whole Church in their ministry and in their representative functions within the Christian community.'¹³ The essential ideas and aims of the Strategy Report are explicitly accepted.¹⁴ The suggestion that the new local schemes should be used to train people for a Diocesan Lay Order is therefore rightly rejected, and the paper prefers to leave it to the local church in each place to decide what local ministries it needs and what titles and form or commissioning if any would be appropriate in each case. At the same time the report does see the office of Reader as 'a key role in the emergence of local leadership in all kinds of settings.'¹⁵ There seems to be a confusion here between recognizing the undoubted potential of individual Readers to help to build up local ministry, and seeing Readers corporately as precisely the kind of Lay Order which perpetuates the clergy/laity division in the Church.

The Thomas Report is concerned with a strategy for the use of ministry, finance, church buildings and central structures to further the mission of the Church in the diocese of Oxford. Our notice here will be restricted to the section on ministry, but the whole paper is intended to be a single programme for development. In the area of ministry some bold proposals are made:

- a local ordained ministry is seen as the appropriate way to provide the ministry of the sacraments where stipendiary clergy are not readily available and an ecumenical solution is not achievable;
- the deployment of ministry should be done on the basis of 'zones' (a concept of flexible local units similar to the reformed deaneries of

the Strategy Report) and presentation to benefices should be suspended where necessary to make this possible;

- training should especially be developed at the zone/deanery level;
- a process of 'mission audit' should be introduced whereby local churches review their work and goals every five years.

Altogether this report contains the outline of a radical scheme which if implemented would take the diocese well into the practice of shared ministry at all levels.

4. Salisbury

The Bishop of Salisbury's contribution¹⁶ is not surprisingly very different from the committee productions which form the rest of the sample in this survey. Here is an essay in the application of certain theological principles to practical issues concerning ministry today. The need for forward planning and organization is recognized, but these are considered useless without a vision of what ministry means within the Gospel and within the world. Ordained ministry is representative of Christ and formative in giving shape to the Church's total ministry. It can only do so by reflecting the shape of Christ's own ministry as Shepherd, Priest and Servant. 'By ordaining candidates to these Orders, generation after generation, the Church commits herself visibly and structurally to ensuring that these fundamental characteristics of the Christian community shall never die out.'¹⁷ One would like to add that unless they are tested by Scripture there is nothing to stop these Orders reflecting very different characteristics, as history bears witness. However, the Bishop goes on to show that lay ministry 'is not an optional extra nor a stopgap for a shortage of ordained persons, but the necessary result of an ordained ministry that is doing its job.'¹⁸ He draws a clear distinction between gifts and orders: there is no need to commission or ordain people to exercise their gifts in ministry as this is what all Christians are called and equipped by God to do. Nevertheless he is in favour of having certain lay ministries which are accredited throughout the Church of England: Licensed Workers, with a pastoral and evangelistic role, and Readers, who would be 'people fitted for and devoted to the ministry of the Word, in its widest sense.'¹⁹

There are two categories of ministry which are under discussion in the contemporary Church of England which the Bishop does not wish to see developed. One is the local ordained ministry. He sees this as providing 'second-class' assistants to the parochial clergy. 'To me that makes nonsense of the very idea of ordination.' He assumes that if these local priests moved 'they would no longer be regarded as ordained persons.' He suspects that they are only wanted so that people can have their services and a clergyman to look after them and avoid the challenge of genuine lay ministry.²⁰ All this of course is a far cry from the concept of a mixed leadership team of ordained and lay persons in the local church exercising a genuinely shared ministry in place of the present incumbent

but with the priests ordained to a single order of ministry which is in principle renewable without re-ordination in a different place. The local ordained ministry which the Bishop tilts at is completely different from the one proposed in the Strategy Report.

Finally, there is a warning that a system of 'elders' governing Anglican parishes would distort our traditional (i.e. since 1921 on a constitutional basis) relationship between incumbent, churchwardens and PCC, and perhaps result in concentrating decision-making in the hands of a few instead of involving more of the laity in a wide consensus. But the policy-making role of the PCC need not be affected if a shared pastoral oversight replaces the sole incumbent, as is in effect already legally required where a team ministry is established under the Pastoral Measure.

Moreover something will have to be done in rural areas where an incumbent presently has to function as chairman of perhaps six separate PCCs.

5. Stepney

As long ago as 1972 four men were ordained at Bethnal Green in the Stepney Area of the Diocese of London to a specifically local ministry. The report of this Working Party on Local Ordained Ministry²¹ clearly regards the experiment as having been unsatisfactory and recommends that it should not be repeated until the whole concept is much more widely understood and accepted. A more positive approach to the problems of ministry in the area would be to consider the following questions:

- What do we all believe about the statement 'Every Christian has a ministry'?
- What sort of minister/s does a parish need?
- What are the essential characteristics of 'ordained priesthood'?
- What is it which is preventing Christians in the Stepney Area from functioning effectively?

The Bethnal Green scheme was clearly too parochial in the sense that it was not backed by the deanery, built into a local strategy and sustained by the whole church in the area: it seems to have been done too much 'in a corner'. One unfortunate result was that a training which was easily denigrated as 'second-class' was associated with candidates from a working-class area. The experience behind this report underlines the need for local ministry to be seen as something which is appropriate (indeed vital) to the Church's strategy in all kinds of locality, but that it is foolish to start ordaining individuals, or even close-knit groups, until the under-lying strategy of shared ministry is a reality. Local ministry is achieved by training churches rather than individuals.

6. Manchester

The report²² recommends that the Bishop in Synod should affirm

strongly 'the shared ministry of all baptized Christians and the responsibility of the local Church for local ministry and local mission.'²³ The flexible definition given to the term 'local church' in the Strategy Report to include cells, worshipping congregations and a reformed deanery as an area of mission is accepted by the Board as the right basis for developing a shared ministry. It is believed that 'the laity's expectations of the stipendiary clergy will become more accurate as they are openly discussed and clarified.'²⁴ The conflict between the deployment of the stipendiary clergy to meet the needs of the parishes and the response to opportunities for sector ministries to meet the needs of a changing society can only be resolved by such open debate. A separate study group on the ordained ministry took the view that if 'every local church contains within itself potential for ministry, it is not unreasonable to suspect that as a norm it will also contain potential for ordained ministry.'²⁵ It is expected that risks may have to be taken and mistakes may well be made in developing a local ordained ministry. There is no thought of 'temporary' ordination or of producing mere 'mass priests'. Local priests must be part of local leadership teams. Readers also, whatever their title in future, are seen as part of this local ministry because 'authentic preaching emerges from the continuing life of the church, and if a Reader is not widely involved in that life his training and developed skills will not be as fruitful as they could be.'²⁶

Another study group looked at leadership in urban priority areas and recommended a strategy which included 'a radical and ruthless review of church plant in such areas, training programmes for lay leaders, and the development of a new pattern of clergy leadership.'²⁷ A small number of experimental areas should be identified where these ideas could be worked out. The report emphasizes the need for all ministries, lay or ordained, local or diocesan, to have the primary aim of serving the 'secular obedience' of the laity in the world and continuing education programmes must promote a better understanding of what this means.

Conclusions

This survey has revealed the existence among informed people in a cross-section of dioceses of a broad consensus about the need for the development of shared ministry and for the acceptance by the local church of its responsibility for its ministry. This much is directly in line with the Strategy Report. There is much less clarity about the role of a local ordained ministry or about the future of accredited lay ministry. Moreover the implications of this kind of thinking for the position of the incumbent are no more than hinted at in one or two of the papers. A practical proposal would be for dioceses to adopt a policy that when a living falls vacant it will not be filled until the PCC has considered to the best of their ability:

- why they need an incumbent;
- what ministry they can undertake using local resources;

—what a new incumbent's job description would be.

If it is widely accepted that the development of local ministry is a major objective for the coming years then I would draw two conclusions. The first is that local ministry should in principle include ordained ministry. I urge this for three reasons:

- (i) I can think of no theological reason for encouraging the local church to produce all kinds of ministry *except* the priesthood;
- (ii) for the foreseeable future there will be no dramatic increase in the number of stipendiary priests available to staff the parishes: success in developing local lay ministry will enable the parochial clergy to cover greater areas but only at the expense of further distancing ordained ministry from the local church in many places;
- (iii) there remains the problem of what to do about enabling eucharistic worship: even if it is not considered necessary to provide this every week in some places there is still a need to cover major festivals, and in any case the local church ought to be in a position to determine its own pattern of worship without having to fit in with a complicated timetable based on the availability of an itinerant priest.

My other conclusion is that it will be impossible to develop local ministry by extracting individuals and sending them on a diocesan course. This simply does not address the question of what training for local ministry should be about, which is how one particular local church might corporately understand and fulfil its responsibility for its own mission. Training for this purpose must be made available at deanery level, and include all three aspects of cell, parochial congregation and deanery mission area within its understanding of the local church. It is within such a corporate training exercise that acceptable and effective candidates for a local ordained ministry might emerge: they would share both their training and their ministry with lay people and the term 'local priest' would refer to that relationship, not to the limitation of their orders.

NOTES

- 1 J. Tiller, *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry*, CIO, London 1983. In the light of this report (hereafter called the Strategy Report) the General Synod has referred some specific questions to dioceses and deaneries and ACCM has asked for a response by Easter 1986. The report has also been commended for study as an aid to strategic thinking at all levels.
- 2 *Appropriate Patterns: An Integrated Strategy for Readers, NSMs and LSNMs in the Diocese of Birmingham*, Bishop's Advisory Council on Ministry Working Party, November 1983.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p 1. NSM (Non-Stipendiary Ministry) and LNSM (Local Non-Stipendiary Ministry) are the terms which are used in the current Bishops' Regulations for selection and training and they can be used to include both ordained and accredited lay ministry. As will appear later in this article, some dioceses use the more particular term LOM (Local Ordained Ministry).

- 4 Ibid., p 7.
- 5 Ibid., p 5.
- 6 *A Pastoral Strategy for Cumbria*, Bishop's Council and Standing Committee Report, Diocese of Carlisle, June 1983.
- 7 Ibid., p 4.
- 8 Ibid., p 7.
- 9 Ibid., p 12.
- 10 Ibid., p 7.
- 11 *Report of the Working Party on Pastoral and Financial Strategy: The Thomas Report*, Diocese of Oxford, August 1984.
- 12 *Report of the Bishop's Theological Advisory Group on Ministry*, Diocese of Oxford, April 1984.
- 13 Ibid., p 6.
- 14 Ibid., p 7.
- 15 Ibid., p 9.
- 16 *Ministry Today*, A Paper by the Bishop of Salisbury Circulated for Discussion by the Council for Ministry, Diocese of Salisbury, June 1983.
- 17 Ibid., p iii.
- 18 Ibid., p iv.
- 19 Ibid., p 9.
- 20 Ibid., p 8.
- 21 *Stepney Area Bishop's Council Working Party Report on Local Ordained Ministry*, Diocese of London, December 1983.
- 22 *Forward in Ministry: A Strategy for the Diocese of Manchester*, 1984.
- 23 *Forward in Ministry*, Recommendations.
- 24 Ibid., p 1.
- 25 An appendix to the report entitled 'Report of Study Group on Ordained Ministry', p 7.
- 26 *Forward in Ministry*, p 9.
- 27 Ibid., p 11.

Canon John Tiller is Chancellor of Hereford Cathedral and Director-Designate of Post Ordination Training in the Diocese.