

The formation of an Interim Deanery Chapter

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Recognising that every local church has its own set of circumstances, this paper describes how a few North London churches were able to partner together to establish an Interim Deanery Chapter and to draw in other orthodox local clergy.

The Enfield Deanery in London Diocese (Edmonton Episcopal Area) is blessed to have four Conservative Evangelical churches who are able to work closely together. Through our local ReNew gatherings we have been able to support each other in prayer and partner together to plant a new church at St Matthew's, Ponders End, bringing a fifth church into this partnership. It was at one of these local ReNew gatherings where the idea of forming an alternative deanery chapter was first discussed.

With the Bishop of London leading the PLF process, and us having declared ourselves to be in impaired fellowship with her, we felt the need to distance ourselves from the practical outworkings of her spiritual oversight. Each of us had been in regular attendance at Deanery Chapter meetings and had established firm friendships with local clergy. However, for each of us this broader expression of local unity no longer felt appropriate following the proceedings at General Synod.

Therefore, following Synod in November 2023, and having previously spoken with our Area Dean so he was in the loop, we wrote to our deanery chapter and explained that, with great sadness, we would be withdrawing from chapter meetings. We also expressed our desire to establish what we were calling an 'Interim Deanery Chapter' so that we could continue supporting each other as local clergy. We invited anyone sharing our convictions to join with us, and we offered to speak with any clergy who wanted to understand more about the decision. Wonderfully, the openness of this communication was well received and we received emails of support and understanding from half a dozen chapter clergy.

The inaugural meeting took place at the start of February 2024, and it was thrilling to go around the room, to hear from each other's contexts, and to pray together. We were joined by our Anglo-Catholic Area Dean, the Vicar of a local New Wine church, another evangelical clergyman who is pastoring a liberal-leaning church, and by a clergyman who is orthodox on human sexuality but had no local support and hadn't even been able to share his views with his wardens or PCC. In total, 12 clergy, representing 8 churches are part of this new chapter.

Having worked hard to communicate well with our chapter, one key misstep was not doing so with the rest of the Episcopal Area. This left some evangelical clergy upset that they hadn't been consulted and others questioning whether the language of 'Interim Deanery Chapter' was appropriate. In hindsight, wider communication would have given us clearer opportunity to explain our rationale and language. Choosing the title of 'Interim Deanery Chapter' was a deliberate attempt to demonstrate our commitment to Anglican patterns of ministry and our desire for local partnership whilst also recognising that this wasn't the final solution.

As ever, the Lord uses our missteps for his glory. As upset arose we were able to speak with our evangelical brothers and sisters and explain what we were and weren't trying to do. We also discussed the need for wider evangelical partnership and so out of these conversations the Edmonton Alliance was formed drawing in a wide range of orthodox clergy within the Episcopal Area. This was the vehicle to arrange a meeting with our newly appointed Bishop to unitedly express our commitment to orthodoxy and inability to accept his spiritual oversight. 45 clergy (from an Episcopal Area of 100 churches) met with him on his 6th day in post.

Further encouragement came when the rest of the Episcopal Area decided to follow suit, and I believe there are now 4 'alternative deanery chapters' meeting representing the 4 deaneries. Each deanery has one or two acting Area Deans who meet to pray and liaise over issues such as Common Fund requests.

We continue to long for properly established structures with faithful episcopal leadership. But we are very grateful for the partnerships God's has given to us while we wait.