NEXT STEPS GROUP

The Report of the Next Steps Group sets out the continuing progress on the Whole Church Mission and Ministry Policy. As the report says, the Whole Church Policy is rooted in the recognition that ‘dioceses are the focus for mission with diocesan bishops acting as leaders of mission’. If you read this Report in the light of that statement, you will understand why the Whole Church Policy consists of initiatives which are about linking and connecting up the work of the dioceses. This is not about the dioceses just ‘doing their own thing’ without reference to one another or to the Province. What we need is the energy and passion which diocesan initiative contains linked together into a coherent expression of the missional life of our church as a whole.

Let me explain what I think that means in practice – forgive me for mentioning as examples one or two of the things which I deal with.

Only diocesan initiative will give you – as we had last Saturday – 120 people in our Cathedral cleared for action exploring in art, music and faith-sharing what it means to speak of ‘transformed lives and communities through receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ’ Only diocesan support will encourage the kind of congregational initiatives which will bring people who are beginning to explore faith questions into contact with us – that’s what our earlier conversation about membership statistics was about. The same applies to many other areas of our life and ministry – new initiatives in ministry which sustain our presence throughout Scotland, new patterns of support and Continuing Ministerial Development for clergy, new focus on Education for Discipleship and Lay Ministries.

What the Whole Church Policy does is to prevent us becoming seven churches. It prevents everybody dealing with everything as if it was unique to them. It encourages the dioceses by saying that we have a shared agenda – and that, the more coherence we bring to that shared agenda, the stronger we shall be.

That’s why the Policy deals with the areas which are set out here – Vocations Strategy, common patterns of ministry agreed with the College of Bishops, common approaches to CMD and to Education for Discipleship and Lay Ministries. That’s why it envisages networks of support for people who are involved in similar work in different dioceses – like Mission Action Planning.

The reality as I see it is that we shall have more provincial cohesion not less – but we shall have, as we already have, more diocesan initiative than before.

Let me mention one further area – that of finance. Those who operate our present financial systems do their very best to be creative and supportive. But it is deeply unsatisfactory – a mixture of different ways of looking at complex problems – separate funding streams for ministry support, curate grants, devolved TISEC and so on.That’s why we are encouraging the development of a Working Party to explore how the financial relationship between Province and Dioceses might reflect the values and patterns of the Whole Church Policy. It would devolve more decision-making to the dioceses – but with monitoring and accountability to ensure that commonly-held policies and approaches are commonly upheld. We had seen this as one way of establishing greater accountability for the money given to dioceses under the ‘dispersed TISEC’ model – but that has now been overtaken by the publication of the MinDiv Report.

I commend the report to you. The theme which runs through much of the work of our Synod is our life in mission. The Whole Church Policy is now simply one part of a wider discourse – and in that sense it has already done its job.