

## The Review by "Outraged of Glyncorrwg"

Lying in bed one morning listening to the early news, I heard some disconnected phrases - "the Church in Wales ..... 50 recommendations ..... things have to change if the church is to survive". Once I was up and doing, I took my usual approach, and Google quickly provided a copy of the report.

On reading it, my first reaction was one of horror - doing away with the parish system, huge church "areas", more churches closing, all about money, money, money! I could feel a letter coming on, probably signed "outraged of Glyncorrwg".

After further thought, I still have criticisms. It seems to me that the brief the committee was given was unfocused, even a bit woolly, and with no idea of what "success" will look like - more people in church, church finances balanced, a wider and more active church membership? However, the analysis did cover some key issues:

- \* few children or young people in churches;
- \* where they are present, seldom any meaningful role for them;
- \* how a lay ministry can work alongside an ordained ministry, within a team approach;
- \* parish reorganisation on the basis of secondary schools (whose catchments reflect genuine communities);
- \* new structures to allow wider participation in top level decisions, and improved communication between bishops and congregations;
- \* church buildings adapted to meet a range of community and church needs, offering a real resource to local people.

There are, of course, lots of other issues addressed in the fifty recommendations, from new Diocesan arrangements and a permanent See for the Archbishop to improved mechanisms for appointment of clergy. All necessary, but the heart of the recommendations for most of us lies in the parish structures. How do we maintain the community that lies at the heart of the church? Is the church still the place where all of us will "find God"? Much as we tend to dislike change, can we afford to hang on to the past if as a result we have no future?

Does the review offer some hope? I think it may. From the choir stall in which I sit each week, after two years of an interregnum, I can see the congregation dwindle week by week. We're very successful in attracting children and young people but find it difficult to hang on to them, despite, I believe, providing very good roles for them within the services, choir and Sunday school. I am frustrated at a lack of opportunity to make my voice heard on issues about which I feel strongly, and where I see the church adopting stances which make us less and less attractive to a public with whom we appear to be out of touch.

What could we have? Team ministry, genuine leadership at a local level, with a mix of skills and enthusiasms, not only offering support for church members active within their own smaller communities, but who would also themselves be able to draw on the support of congregations. They would be working across an historically, socially and geographically recognisable and coherent area, based on a key local institution, the school. That is an attractive idea.

Will the Church in Wales take the initiative, and endorse the proposals quickly enough for us to see them put into effect?

After reading the review, and thinking about how it would relate to our own position in Glyncorrwg, I wrote to the Archbishop with my thoughts. He responded, and passed my email on to our Archdeacon. That's one thing about the Archbishop, he's very accessible, so if you have views about the review proposals, write to him - now!

**Les Jones**