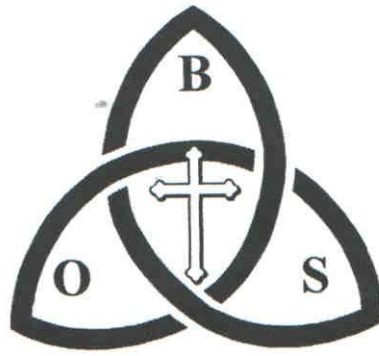


The Way Forward Report

April 2006



The Final Way Forward Report

**Including Appendix of findings and decisions from
The way Forward Meetings, PCC meetings, Youth meeting,
letters and Open Benefice Meetings in January and April 2006**

April 2006

**Prepared by
Benefice Planning Group
(BPG)**

For

**United Benefice of
St Owen's, Bromham
St Mary's, Oakley, and
St Leonard's, Stagsden**

Foreword by Revd Andrew Tweedy

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'

Revelation 21.3-6

This report has been produced in response to our Christian responsibility to past, present and future generations. My experience of church is that we are better at looking backwards or inwards, than we are at looking around us or at looking forwards. However, this is not a recipe for safe travel on the pilgrimage of life!

Our reading, from the Bible's penultimate chapter, reminds us that our God longs to dwell amongst *all* the people he has made and to be our healer, our comforter and our guide. He is also a God of change, who is '*making all things new*' and who calls those who know him to join in his work of transformation and to share his life giving water with all who thirst. This *joining in* with God will involve lots of prayer and hard work, especially prayer. At this stage of the journey we have far more questions than answers and it is not clear where the Way Forward will lead. I certainly have no hidden agenda and my personal preferences may play no part in the outcome. The journey will not be easy for any of us. However, I believe that if we fail to do this difficult work, the generations which follow us may not even be asking the questions.

Please read the report, think about it, pray about it and join in the discussions in the weeks and months ahead.

With sincere thanks to all who have contributed so far and with gratitude for a unanimous decision to proceed with the formation of a Benefice Council on 2nd April 2006.



Andrew Tweedy

April 2006

Summary of the Way Forward

On the afternoon of 2nd April 2006 the 30 or so members of the United Benefice parishes who attended an open meeting in St Owen's Lower School unanimously decided to proceed with the formation of a Benefice Council to lead and direct the three parishes of St Owen's, Bromham, St Mary's Oakley and St Leonard's, Stagsden. This was after considerable consultation, discussion, generation of ideas and a summary report for the Way Forward by the full membership of these three churches and in consultation with our ecumenical neighbours and partners in Christ - Bromham Baptist Church and Oakley Methodist Church. The report said:

'Did you know the United Benefice² Deed is dated 1818, which probably makes it one of the earliest United Benefices in the Country! Isn't it about time we got on with being united?'

The report summarised feedback given at the meeting held in the Bromham Village School Hall on the afternoon of Sunday 29th January 2006 attended by 60 parishioners from the United Benefice of Bromham and Oakley with Stagsden, PCC meetings, a Youth meeting in March and letters.

The purpose of the meeting, along with the other meetings leading to it, was to gather the ideas of the three parishes as to how we might operate more together as a United Benefice i.e. organised as one body (the Benefice) rather than three rather separate parishes. In parallel the Diocese had begun an initiative called 'Vision for Action' and this was felt to be our response to that initiative. This is about how we are being called to respond to God's mission here in the Benefice, to those who come to church, to those outside it, and to our fellow Christians in other denominations. Firstly we need to have a vision of what God is calling each of us to be and do, and then organise ourselves to respond appropriately to that calling. We believe we are being called to reach out to people where they are, to bring God to them and not necessarily to bring them to church.

The report sets out under seven headings:

- children and young people
- worship
- pastoral care
- nurture and outreach
- ecumenical relationships
- world vision and mission
- organisation and structure

the comments and ideas of those who were present on 29th January and some who were not. For each heading there are recommendations, which tend to recommend the formation of a new group to consider each of the suggestions made, to prioritise them and to determine and plan the way forward to make them a reality (or not).

In essence there was and is a lot of sympathy with the idea of acting as a United Benefice organisationally and practically. This means doing things together wherever it makes sense and we can. We believe we are called as a worshipping community to join our brothers and sisters in Christ more often and with fewer boundaries than we presently create. The starting point is the formation of a Benefice Council by the Benefice Planning Group (BPG). The latter is the temporary organisation established to do the initial planning work. The former is the on-going organisation representing all three parishes in the Benefice that will determine what roles and committees are best suited at Benefice level and those best suited at parish level and commission them **where they do not already exist**. These individuals and groups will then study the long lists of ideas they have been asked to consider, prioritise them, determine which we should be doing and when, and make them happen.

² a United Benefice is a collection of parishes united under one Vicar, usually with some combined administration and services.

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Please note:

As we hope you will gather from reading this Report the whole Way Forward process is being driven by a desire to consult with as many members of the three churches as possible and to liaise with our ecumenical friends in the three parishes. Whilst the report suggests appointing groups to consider the ideas and suggestions raised, we are committed to including existing committees and groups in those consultations and not to replicate them, or add to them, without their agreement. This will be at the forefront of the Benefice Planning Group's (and then Benefice Council's) work on re-organising and re-structuring the Benefice.

Benefice Planning Group

The Report produced for the Meeting on 2nd April 2006

1 Introduction and Background

'Did you know the United Benefice Deed is dated 1818, which probably makes it one of the earliest United Benefices in the Country! Isn't it about time we got on with being united?'

Once upon a time Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden each had its own vicar. This was some time ago! As you can see above Bromham & Oakley have been a United Benefice for a long time, nearly 200 years, and were combined **with** Stagsden over twenty years. Until recently each has operated a policy of running separately, with separate PCCs and services, with the exception of a combined Evensong at Stagsden on the 5th Sunday of the month.

Membership of the world-wide Anglican Church is growing. Against this background, church attendance in the UK has been falling and each of the congregations has been reducing - despite village growth. Meanwhile, we are told (Bishop Richard Inwood of Bedford), the number of paid clergy is falling, despite an increased number of Ordinands, by 300 per annum, (however as 300 sign up; so 600 are due for retirement each year,) and he tells us we are looking forward to a time when there is likely to be one paid priest per Deanery, where now there are eight in Elstow Deanery. There are now a growing number of non-stipendiaries, but many of these still have their paid jobs to fulfil, and others, are theoretically retired and have other important outside interests. Likewise our Readers are not getting any younger, and indeed one has recently retired after years of sterling service. However there are growing opportunities for lay leadership and new and imaginative ways of 'being church'; and we as a church must respond to these challenges.

Of course Christian outreach requires more time for more activities such as house groups, youth work and other initiatives, all of which require additional clergy (and lay) input and preparation. Where these are duplicated across adjacent parishes further inefficiencies occur. It is also important that our priests maintain contact with people in their other communities, such as the workplace and other interest groups. With 70% of the UK professing to be Christian and less than 10% attending any church, outreach must be the way forward for church attending Christians. We must be an outward looking 'mission church.'

Running each of the three parishes independently, as we do now, is hugely inefficient of our clergy's time with a total of 5 services every Sunday, and up to 7 or 8 on some Sundays with Baptisms and so on, not counting weddings and funerals, both in church and elsewhere. (Di also commits to taking a Sunday service or two at Yarl's Wood at least monthly, and Andrew has commitments as chaplain to the St Albans and Oxford Ministry Course.) Many Sundays Andrew or Di can be involved in leading up to 4 services each. By way of comparison, Carlton and Harrold has one service each (with one stipendiary), and in Cardington, where Stephen is, there is just one service each Sunday.

For most of the time Derek Draper was here (19 years) the three parishes operated with two full-time clergy, for some of the time with an additional non-stipendiary (Di) and various retired clergy such as Lionel. During the Vacancy we operated with a full-time Curate with a 'retired' non-stipendiary (Di) and various retired clergy. During a Vacancy the clergy are not permitted to make any alterations to the pattern of worship and both of them and the Churchwardens found this a strain.

Andrew Tweedy, our new vicar, arrived in September 2004, and decided to make no immediate changes. However, in April 2005 we lost our Curate, leaving the difficult pattern to be managed by a full-time and part-time priest. More recently we have a Deacon, Paula Vennells who will be priested in September 2006, but continues in full-time employment. (We understand that preparing

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for any service takes at least several hours for experienced clergy and can take up to half a day for the less experienced.) This is Andrew's first incumbency which means he is still 'feeling his way'.

Clearly our parishes need to plan for the future – to being a church responding to a changing society and changing needs - a new Way Forward was being called for. Many of us through our prayers and reflections can see that for a healthy and growing church we need to see what we are being called to be here in Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden, to make ministry here even more collaborative, to empower others to do more and to make the changes that will enable all this to happen. A new initiative had been born and was soon called The Way Forward.

Whilst preparing this report Thelma found that we are far from alone and we quote the Bamsfield Benefice from Suffolk as just one example:

*"We are beginning a new rota pattern of Sunday services in January 2004 for the next seven months as an experiment to ease the pressure on the number of services during each month. The first and third Sundays of the month there will be a service in each church (see notice board for details). On the second and fourth Sundays there will be **one** service for the Benefice, moving round the different parish churches in turn. The idea is to work more closely together as one Benefice, to use better our resources of worship leaders, organists, readers, etc., to worship in larger numbers on a more regular basis which will add quality to the worship and allow more consistency in teaching and preaching. Most of all the new rota will bring the churches together in worship and fellowship, for we believe that the Gospel of Jesus is best proclaimed in and through our united front that in small independent parish groups. We hope and pray that this New Year will see not only the Benefice working more closely together but also the ecumenical 'Churches Together in Wickhambrook' having a more united commitment to working and socialising together."*

There is a changing culture in the UK and later in this report we highlight the issue of the missing generation from Church and the fact that fewer people are in the 'habit' of visiting churches other than for baptisms, marriages and funerals. But this does not mean they are not interested in their spirituality and learning more about 'meaning and purpose' in their lives. We also note that many 'un-churched' Christians find it easier to attend services held outside church in other buildings and with simpler liturgies. This means that along with all churches we need to 'outreach' to people where they are. We have started a dialogue with a Church Army Officer about the possibility of adding a member to the Ministry Team. This role would focus more on outreach than leading existing worship.

As church attendances slip in general there has been a boost to the ecumenical movement and the Benefice has participated in this. Oakley has a Local Ecumenical Partnership formed in 1997 with the Methodists, and the ministers of all the churches located in this Benefice now plan to meet regularly to coordinate ministry. Each of the denominations has different geographic boundaries, with the Baptists footprint ranging far beyond our three parochial boundaries and the Methodists are part of a Circuit that includes Oakley, but also two other churches – Sharnbrook and Clapham under the same minister. All three churches agree that we need to do more together if the Church is to survive for future generations. The governing ecumenical body nationally is called 'Churches Together in England' and you may have come across such alignments locally e.g. 'Churches Together in Bedford'. As yet there is no such organisation spanning these three parishes.

The good news is that Jesus was the greatest agent of change the world has ever known and we, his followers, should like Jesus look to the future, our calling and how we should plan to adapt for it. Society and patterns of family life have changed dramatically and we have managed to adapt. In the recent past all three parishes have demonstrated their ability to adapt to changing needs, we suspect we are being called to respond to necessary changes with humility and good grace in order to help to create a better Kingdom in this Benefice.

2 The Process

The Diocese launched its 'Vision for Action' programme to assist parishes in October 2005 and the Revd Andrew Tweedy had begun to discuss areas where we could improve our ministry since then. All three PCCs were asked to think about the church's mission during PCC meetings held in Autumn 2005 and came up with some excellent ideas that we have listed in The Feedback document in Appendix 1.

On Saturday 17th December some of us were invited to a public meeting in Oakley church as a follow on to these PCC meetings and to meet a trainee Church Army Officer, Martin Hartley in order to explore ideas around outreach. Andrew Tweedy introduced the views from the three PCCs with help from the floor and further ideas and notes were captured and are included in Appendix 1.

On Sunday 29th January 2006 a public meeting was planned and held in the afternoon for all three churches in the Village School Building in Bromham opposite the Baptist Church. The 60 people who came represented the three Anglican parish churches and most of the congregations and we had a small representation from Bromham Baptist Church. The average age was not 'young' other than 'at heart' and few younger parents were able to attend. The 60 were divided into 5 groups, with mixed representation by church and congregation, to discuss seven topics (see Summary or Appendix 1), with each group asked to focus particularly on one or two specific topics. In the event, with half as many people again attending as we had thought, we spent the whole afternoon in discussion of the topics and then each group gave a presentation on their findings and ideas. These were collected onto flip-chart papers at the front. There was a tremendous 'buzz' in the room and most people got to have their say and a huge amount of findings were gathered in by the 'Benefice Planning Group', a group formed to facilitate the event and deal with what would follow.

On Thursday 2nd February, the Benefice Planning Group comprising the Ministry Team and those shown as facilitators (**F**) and scribes (**S**) in the appendix to Appendix 1 together with Alan Harpham who facilitated the meeting, met to discuss a first-pass of all the findings and make any corrections.

On Monday 6th February, the Ministry Team met with Thelma Coles and Alan Harpham to review the findings and begin to draw up some conclusions and recommendations for the Way Forward. These were taken away by Thelma and Alan and drawn up in this report. It is planned to hold a further meeting on Tuesday 21st March for younger adults and parents to gain their input on these ideas for children and young people in particular.

The first draft was reviewed by the same Team and then put to the Benefice Planning Group for their inputs before compiling this final Report. This Report is being issued to every member of each of the three churches (Electoral Roll members) but is open to others who attend, and copies have been circulated to the leadership of our sister churches – Baptist and Methodist.

Please read the report and if possible attend the next public meeting on **Sunday 2nd April, again in the Village School in Bromham, at 2:30 p.m.** The meeting will share the Report and discuss how we can move the recommendations into being. In most cases the recommendations involve forming groups to consider and prioritise the ideas collected and formulate plans to bring them about. It would be helpful if you were to think about your gifts and what contribution you may be called to be making to The Way Forward. If you are unable to attend please pass your thoughts (ideally written down) to a member of the Benefice Planning Group – see last page.

Thereafter the recommendations will become actions and outcomes and we all hope and pray for a more together and active church serving God and reaching out into the community with the message of God's love.

3 The Recommendations and Findings

Children and Young People

Recommendation 1

Create a Benefice wide planning group (including a Baptists and Methodist representative) for youth and children to **think through** how we respond to the needs of our younger people, including **prioritising and considering the following ideas**:

- Survey of families and young people to
 - find out what they want
 - search for parental helpers and other volunteers
- Benefice-wide Sunday School
- Combined after-school clubs – consider linking with:
 - Oakley Footprints started as an LEP initiative but now run by the Methodists,
 - Baptist clubs, etc.
- Combine with the school lunchtime club
- Shared leadership across Benefice for Sunday School and other youth activities
- Plan regular meetings of Youth team leaders to coordinate and hand-over children progressing through the stages
- Design ‘all-age’ worship ideas for presenting to Worship group (WG)
- Assist in delivering ‘all-age’ worship – both Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic
- Advise Worship Group on alternative locations for worship, more joint ‘family services’ on different Sundays affording more choices to families in worship patterns
- Invite all Mums and their toddlers to Bromham Wednesday 14:00 service
- Move Mums and toddlers to Oakley and Stagsden on occasions
- Strengthen links to Uniformed Groups based in or visiting the Benefice
- Design special services, themed services, ...
- Offer to help with and join the Baptist’s Holiday Club
- ‘Special activity days’ e.g. Easter, Christmas, Pentecost, Advent,
- Establish all-age craft days
- Start up church cross-Benefice sports activities and events
- Restart sleep-over activities at Chellington and other youth centres
- Re-name organisations and groups where appropriate to indicate a new beginning
- Help to establish new school links
 - ‘open the book’ needed for Oakley, discuss with Bedford centre for ‘Open the book’, (Note: Revd Jacqueline Owen has experience from Clapham, and Margaret Inegbedion from Bromham)
- Link to children’s communion preparation group – led by Ministry Team
- Link to youth Confirmation group – led by Ministry Team
- Link to Mums and toddlers for new recruits and Baptisms – link to Ministry Team

This recommendation and its suggestions are derived from the findings from the meeting on 29th January 2006 and previous work, included in full in Appendix 1, which included:

- Missing generation problem
- Variety of activities, youth work across Benefice
- Lack of continuity and coordination across Benefice
- Incomplete array of ‘youth church’ and youth clubs across Benefice
- Shortage of volunteer leaders
- Baptists have paid leader
- More non-Eucharistic and family services sometimes in non-church premises

Worship

Recommendation 2

Create a Benefice-wide Worship Committee that includes Ministry Team members, Parochial Church Council representatives, including possible future Young Church / 'All-Age Church' representatives to **plan patterns of worship, including prioritising and considering the following ideas:**

- Produce annual diary showing all services in entire Benefice including 'special services'
- Develop a Benefice wide Pew Leaflet showing this week's and next week's services, notices, hymns, prayers and readings, ... (*already in place*)
- Plan and design themed services
- Invite more visiting preachers
- Better publicity on church and village notice boards – especially family and outreach services
- Consider future reduction in total number of existing services to enable:
 - more 'new ideas' services
 - increase in joint worship cross-Benefice
 - different venues and locations for worship
 - more alternative liturgies
 - alternative music settings
 - different lengths of service
 - alternative forms of sermons or dialogues or Q & A sessions
 - additional 'Songs of Praise' services
- Find more lay-worship leaders (some working in teams) to lead non-Eucharistic services
- Develop training for new lay-worship leaders
- Consider moving pews and/or importing chairs to create new worship areas
- Consider use of reserve sacrament to relieve clergy on occasions
- Design contingency plans for non-Eucharistic service for use in emergencies such as clergy ill, that a lay person can use
- Use of more technology:
 - Possible amplification in Stagsden
 - portable sound amplification/reinforcement system for other venues
 - multi-media projection systems – laptop and projector

This recommendation and its suggestions are derived from the findings from the meeting on 29th January 2006 and previous work, included in full in Appendix 1, which included:

- Existing pattern fixed, inflexible and too comfortable?
- Shortage of clergy
- More desire to worship together as a Benefice
- Greater variety of:
 - worship style – liturgy (Eucharistic/non-Eucharistic) and music
 - preaching or dialogue or ...
 - venues
 - themed services, family (all-age) services and special services
 - service times
- Services not accessible to new comers, young families
- Most based in church and not out in community
- Wider use of technology
- Better communications about services across the Benefice

Pastoral Care

Recommendation 3

Form a Benefice Pastoral Group (this could be The Benefice Council or a sub-committee) to **determine pastoral strategies and policies** for the Benefice and any parish pastoral committees that are formed, **that encompass:**

- Considering opening up existing prayer groups into inter-Benefice groups
- Reviewing policies for:
 - Baptism
 - Marriage preparation
 - Bereavement support and Services of Remembering
 - Hospital visits
 - Pastoral visiting
 - Home communions
- Ensure good communications
 - use new Benefice Pew Leaflet
 - consider shared Benefice magazine
 - sharing existing Bromham Parish News with Oakley
 - consider including Stagsden's existing news letter in combined magazine
- Links to local organisations needing charity supporters e.g. Yarl's Wood Befrienders, Toy library, Bechar,
- Planning and delivering
 - Benefice Quiet Days and/or Evenings
 - House Groups
 - Study groups
 - Out-reach – Alpha courses with Baptists or different outreach courses e.g. Emmaus or Alpha courses across the Benefice

This recommendation and its suggestions are derived from the findings from the meeting on 29th January 2006 and previous work, included in full in Appendix 1, which included:

- Regular house groups and study groups
- Benefice shared Quiet Days
- Cross-parish training for Baptism and Bereavement visitors, and Marriage preparation
- Interfaith links
- Cross-Benefice prayer groups

Nurture and Outreach

Recommendation 4

A **Benefice Group** (this could be *The Benefice Council* or a sub-committee) to

- **determine nurture and evangelism strategies and policies** for the Benefice and for any parish pastoral committees that are formed
- **consider appointment of a Benefice Church Army evangelist**, Martin Hartley, to work in partnership with the three parishes and our ecumenical partners, and
- **create an 'Adult Education' link person** that **encompasses considering how best to:**
 - increase dialogue with the Baptist and Methodist churches about joint initiatives of outreach and nurture, including:
 - courses for beginners and enquirers
 - e.g. Joint Alpha and/or Emmaus courses and/or Table Talks
 - Nurture church leaders
 - Encourage evangelism and outreach in existing church community
 - Learn from each other across the Benefice:
 - E.g. Oakley links to Community Plan, church at heart of the village e.g Amigos, Footprints, social events, Barnstormers,
 - E.g. Bromham fellowship meals, friendship meals, coffee drop-in mornings, Bereavement Group, Pastoral C'ee, Friends of St Owens, ...
 - E.g. Stagsden totally integrated with community fellowship, runs Coffee Pot mornings, TOADS Work gang, Concerts, Friends of St Leonards, ...
 - Reach new-comers to our villages with a welcome leaflet from the churches
 - Form social groups for younger 'husbands and wives'
 - Create links to more advanced Christian education opportunities, such as the St Andrews – Bedford Lay Training Centre, St Albans and Oxford Ministry Course and its successors
 - Improve publicity for Bedford Lay Training Centre, SAOMC, Diocesan Courses, Turvey Abbey courses, etc ...
 - Encourage people to explore their vocation.

This recommendation and its suggestions are derived from the findings from the meeting on 29th January 2006 and previous work, included in full in Appendix 1, which included:

- Regular house groups and study groups
- Benefice shared Quiet Days
- Cross-parish training for Baptism and Bereavement visitors, and Marriage preparation
- Interfaith links
- Cross-Benefice prayer groups

Ecumenical Relationships

Recommendation 5

Form a Benefice Group (this could be *The Benefice Council* or a sub-committee) to

- **encourage the ecumenical initiatives and activities that are already taking place**
- **conduct a research project to investigate the possibility of creating a Churches Together in Bromham, Oakley and Stagsden with Bromham Baptist Church and Oakley Methodist Church**
- **(this might be widened to include Clapham and Sharnbrook (the Methodist area))**
- **grow the presence of Christianity in the three parishes that encompasses considering how best to:**
 - encourage more inter-working through existing joint Ministerial lunch meetings (which presently include Mark Hatto and Steve Gaunt (Baptist church) and ensure that these include Jacqueline Owen from Oakley Methodist church
 - increase joint services with the Baptists and Methodists in the respective parishes
 - increase 'pulpit swapping' between all the churches and denominations
 - ensure:
 - Oakley LEP, currently being reviewed, has a healthy committee and activity level
 - Representatives from each church can attend the other's Council or PCC meetings
 - Continuing the joint LEP evensong services and encouraging whole Benefice to attend
 - Bromham – St Owens and Baptists Joint Churches Committee continues to thrive and will develop with more decision making empowerment from parent churches
 - consider more ecumenical joint work across the Benefice and denominations for:
 - youth work
 - bereavement support
 - 'Open the Book'
 - 'Witness Walks'
 - Social groups - Men's and ladies' groups
 - Investigate Churches Together in Bedford and Bedfordshire and other local 'Churches Together' groups

This recommendation and its suggestions are derived from the findings from the meeting on 29th January 2006 and previous work, included in full in Appendix 1, which included:

- Improve communications across the denominations
- Further development of relationships with Methodists (LEP) and Baptists
- More joint social and pastoral activities
- Diversity brings value and learning – growth and development
- Cross-Benefice prayer groups

World Vision and Mission

Recommendation 6

Form a Benefice Group (this could be The Benefice Council or a sub-committee) to **determine World Vision and Mission strategies and policies for the Benefice and any parish Charity/link coordinators** (or committees) that are formed, **which encompass:**

- Considering formation of Benefice links (via the three parishes) to local developing communities in three continents – South America, Africa and Asia
 - Bromham has some existing links on the ground in Uganda (Di and Alan)
 - Oakley LEP has links with Karibuni Trust in Kenya
 - Yarl's Wood links – on our doorstep
 - consider inviting ex-detainees for their testimonies
 - consider attending Yarl's Wood first Sunday services
- Working with 'Make Poverty History' initiative
 - individually
 - corporately working with schools (who are also using it) – themed services aimed at schools and congregations
- Ensuring 'World Vision and Mission appears regularly on Benefice and PCC Agendas
- Appointing 'Charity coordinators and reporters' to communicate our work in this area to the congregation and wider community using displays, magazine, etc. ...
- Working to encourage Fair Trade and purchase of Fair Trade goods
 - individually
 - corporately in our churches
 - at Bromham Flower Show
- including regular 'slots' in Church
 - invited preachers
 - notice boards
 - notices in pew leaflet
 - news in Benefice Magazine
- developing the individual parish church policies for giving to charities
 - locally
 - internationally
 - short-term (one year)
 - longer term (regularly for a number of years)
 - proportion of income?
- considering a 'Home and Away' Poster showing income and expenditure including giving to charities
- considering providing more information on Workplace Ministry in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire and the role of Industrial Chaplains

This recommendation and its suggestions are derived from the findings from the meeting on 29th January 2006 and previous work, included in full in Appendix 1, which included:

- Make Poverty History
- Fair Trade
- Charity giving
- Missionary work
- Workplace Ministry
- Focal person to report on links and their work

3.7 Organisation and Structure

Recommendation 7

*The **Benefice Planning Group (BPG)** should **develop plans to create a Benefice Council** and its membership **to lead and direct the Benefice along the following lines:** [This Council will take responsibility for certain roles **and** delegate others to individual PCCs. Some roles may be vested in an individual and others may require the formation of a small committee reporting to the Benefice Council **or** the PCC. **The BPG will also establish priorities for each recommendation.**]*

Benefice Council Roles:

To develop strategies and policies for:

- Children and Young People*
- Benefice Administration
 - review clergy admin support
 - consider re-establishing Parish Office
- Ecumenical Relationships
- Pastoral Care*
- Finance
- Worship*
- Nurture and Outreach*
 - Education and development
 - Communications including Benefice pew leaflet, magazine, web site, ...
- World Vision and Mission
- Transport between Parishes

Benefice Council Membership:

- Chairman – Revd Andrew Tweedy
 - Other Ministerial Team members (ideally no more than 4)
 - Elected Lay Chair (from 9 lay members below)
 - Churchwardens (2 per parish)
 - Lay member (1 per Parish appointed by PCC)
 - Benefice Administrator (non-voting member in attendance to take Minutes)
 - Co-opted members (maximum 4 inc. 1 Baptist and 1 Methodist – non-voting)
- (Total number 13 plus attendee and co-optees)

Frequency and duration of Benefice Council meetings:

Initially 6 per annum, alternating monthly with PCC meetings (also recommended as 6 per annum), thereafter may be reduced by agreement of the Benefice Council.

PCC Roles

- Finance*
- Pastoral*
- Communications
- Fabric*
- Ecumenical* (Oakley LEP; Bromham with Baptists)
- Charity Coordinator and reportage

PCC Membership:

As now, but possibly without Vicar as Chair and without Ministerial Team member in regular attendance – except for important agenda items.

Every group that we recommend in this report should visit the Diocesan and Church of England and other web sites to find further information that would support their endeavours.

* **Roles likely to require a committee rather than an individual.** Some committees could be at Benefice level rather than Parish level as now. Some suggested individual roles might be preferred as a committee.

4 Conclusion

The Benefice Planning Group would like to express their sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to this Report in any way and particularly to all those who attended the meeting on the 29th January and shared their views and ideas. We also thank all those of you who have been praying about these issues and the Way Forward and we would ask you to go on doing that and asking that we may all be guided by God's Holy Spirit.

We have tried to take cognisance of as many people's ideas as possible and present them in this balanced report. The Benefice Planning Group has determined the set of recommendations and is keen to get some of these underway as soon as possible. Some that are not contentious will happen immediately, such as a Benefice Pew Leaflet, others that may involve more debate will follow after the public meeting on the 2nd April at 2:30 p.m. in Bromham Village School, opposite the Baptist Church.

We hoped that as many people as possible would come to that meeting convinced of the wisdom of the contents of this report and committed to seeing The Way Forward become a reality. Clearly we recognise that change can be painful and requires effective consultation and agreement prior to changes being made. However, we absolutely believe that the time to change for the benefit of all three parishes and the future of God's work in this place is **now**. We want to respond to the changing culture and needs of society and become an outward looking church reaching into the community. We need to use our resources, people and energy in the best possible way and to be well organised and avoid duplicating activities.

In conclusion, we believe that the only way forward is to move to a centrally led Benefice with shared administration and sub-committees wherever possible to ensure the wise and judicious leadership of the whole Benefice and all three parishes within it, and our links with the other denominations.

We believe that the Benefice Planning Group should be empowered by you, the membership, to do this as soon as possible and to maintain the impetus of this work.

Yours in Christ

The Benefice Planning Group, comprising:

Revd Andrew Tweedy and the Ministerial Team – Revd Di Harpham, Revd Paula Vennells, Olive Albon, Margaret Inegbedion.

Lay members: Alan Harpham (facilitator and Benefice), John Brett (Stagsden), Dave and Gill Butler (Bromham), Thelma Coles (Bromham), , Roberta Hatt (Oakley), Philip Jackson (Bromham), John Stringer (Oakley), Jenny Sudworth (Oakley) and Chris Young (Bromham).

5 Postscript

On afternoon of **On the afternoon of 2nd April 2006 the 30 or so members of the United Benefice parishes who attended an open meeting in St Owen's Lower School unanimously decided to proceed with the formation of a Benefice Council** to lead and direct the three parishes of St Owen's, Bromham, St Mary's Oakley and St Leonard's, Stagsden. This was after considerable consultation, discussion, generation of ideas and a summary report for the Way Forward by the full membership of these three churches and in consultation with our ecumenical neighbours and partners in Christ - Bromham Baptist Church and Oakley Methodist Church.

Attachments:

Appendix 1 – Groups' Feedback from The Way Forward Open Meeting held on afternoon of 29th January 2006 in the Village School Building, Bromham.

Appendix 2 – Feedback from the meeting with parents of youths and young children on evening of 24th March 2006 in the Village School Building, Bromham.

Appendix 3 - Feedback from the second Way Forward Open Meeting on afternoon of Sunday 2nd April 2006 in the Village School Building, Bromham.