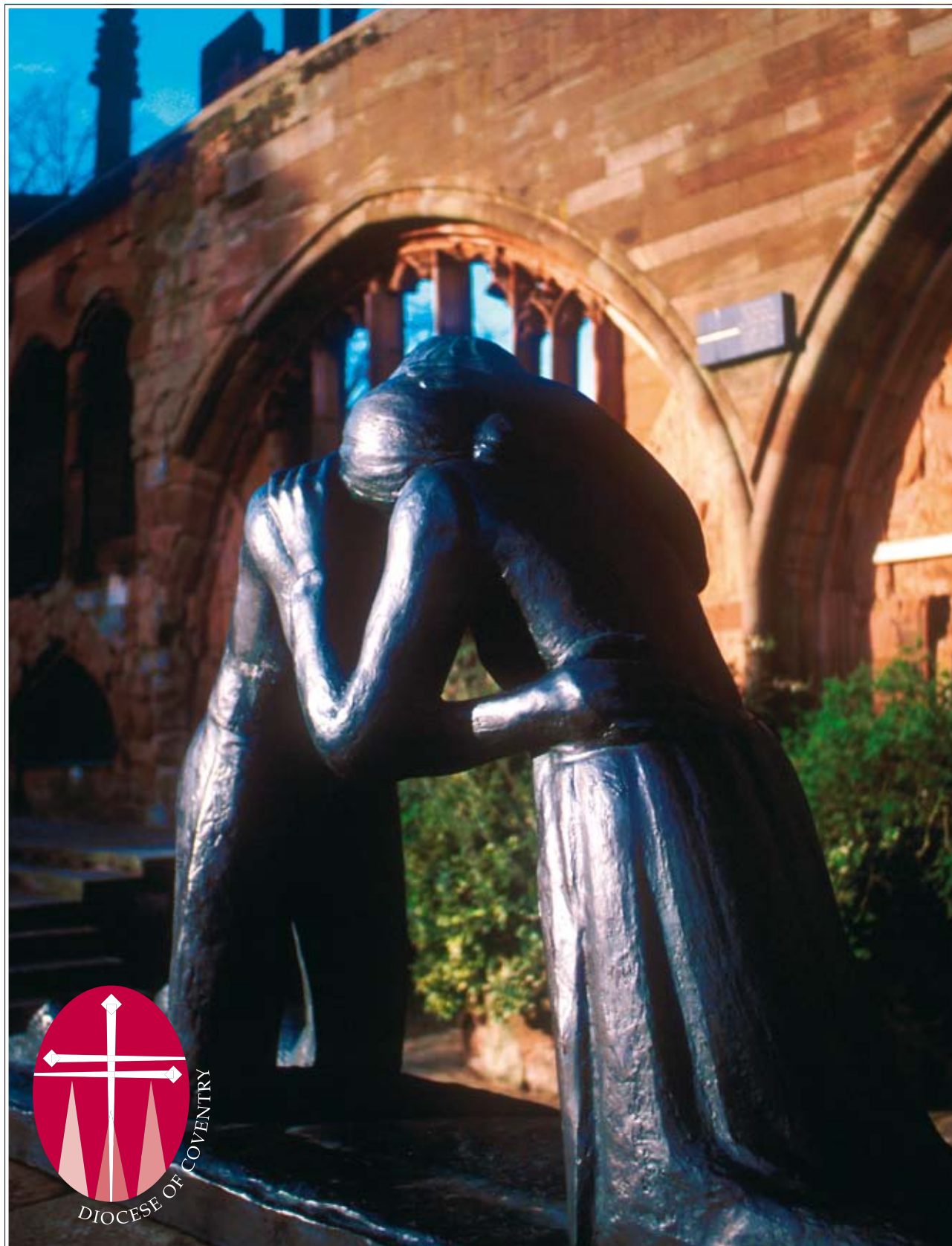


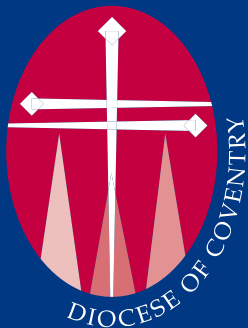
Deanery **Voices**

Social issues in the Diocese of Coventry



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This report has been compiled and edited by Rev Dr John Hall,
Director for Social Responsibility, Diocese of Coventry.

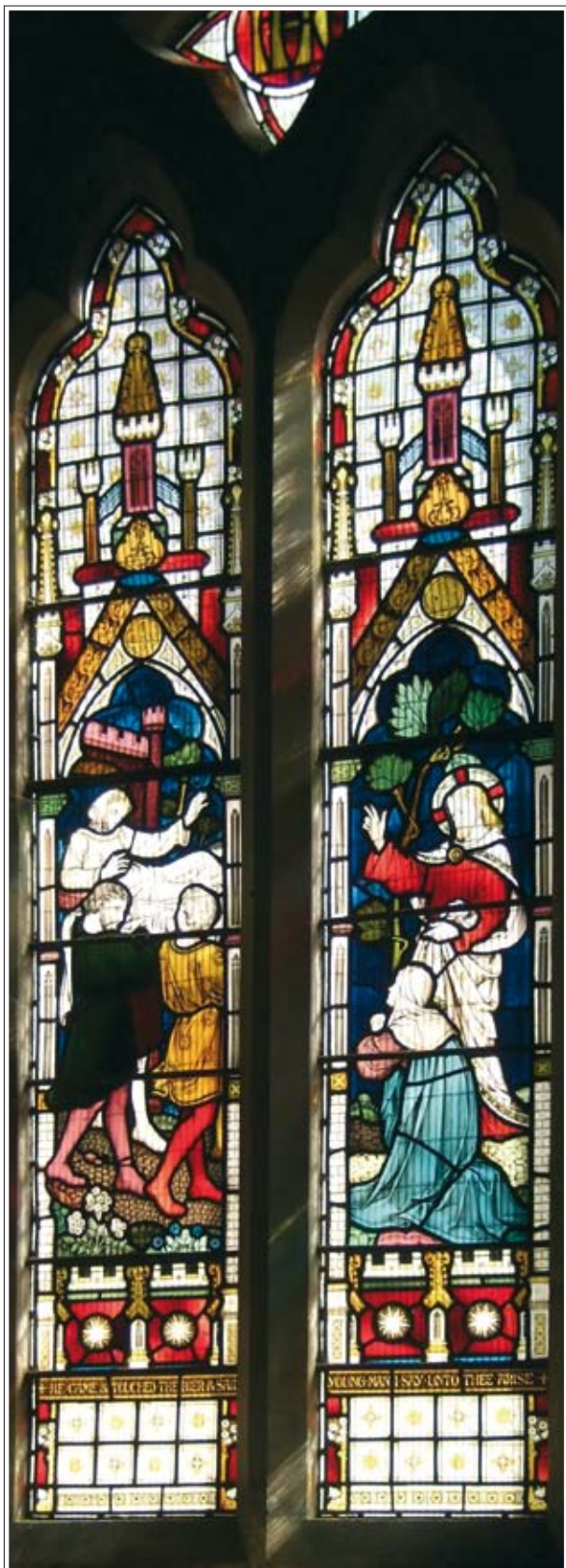
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Deanery Voices

FOREWORD

Social issues in the Diocese of Coventry



Stained glass windows in Church of St Mary and Holy Cross, Alderminster



Christians believe in a God who attends. God hears his people's cry and then responds to their need (Exodus 3:7-9). Following these deep Christian instincts John Hall has attended to the views of people across Coventry and

Warwickshire, in the hope that, through prayer and action, an appropriate response will be made to these cries of the heart.

The concerns that John has heard are those of Christian people. But in being Christian people – especially the sort of people who are ready to represent their parishes on Deanery Synods – they will be views that flow from their attention to the wider human communities of which they are part. As such, this is an important document, not only for the churches but also for civic, community and charitable agencies as they seek to feel the pulse of the local population and respond to local need.

The difference, of course, between God's attention to the world and ours is that our perspective, especially one expressed in a moment of time, is never complete. The tendency for the increasing gap between rich and poor in our society and the pressing environmental danger to the planet to be less clearly stated than they might have been in the 'Deanery voices', is a reminder that our immediate needs can eclipse other fundamental priorities of the kingdom of God.

This Report, therefore, serves as a challenge in more ways than one to go on attending to God's world and then acting with the compassion of Christ. I am delighted to commend it to the Diocese of Coventry and to other bodies in Coventry and Warwickshire.

+ Christopher Cocksworth

Christopher Cocksworth | Bishop of Coventry

Introduction

Setting out the context



In 2009 I set myself the task of engaging with all the deaneries in the Diocese of Coventry to find out what members thought were the key social issues to be addressed. The 11 deaneries bring together significant numbers of

clergy and lay people who collectively are able to voice the concerns of the 198 parishes (248 churches) which comprise the Diocese of Coventry.

It was an outward rather than inward looking exercise, society facing rather than church facing. This listening approach was tackled in as objective way as far as possible using open questions and a standardised process for getting information.

For various reasons, two deaneries, Alcester and Shipston, were not in a position to provide meeting time for me, but some, more limited feedback, received from them by email questionnaire has been included. The detailed methodology of the whole listening exercise has not been included in this publication but is available on request to those who enjoy finding out about such things. What is included here are the important social issues raised. But first it is important to provide some words on context.

2009 was a year in which the economic recession, which began in the latter part of 2008, (popularly reported, for example, in such events as the closure of local Woolworths stores across the Diocese) really began to impact; and, the early months of 2009 were marked by factory closures and redundancies. In this diocese, the impact of this was much more pronounced in Coventry and North Warwickshire. The media was full of stories about the economic future getting worse before it got better. In reality, by the end of 2009, the job losses, though severe, were less than many had anticipated, and over Christmas 2009 some retailers were reporting record consumer spending levels.

Other events in 2009 were concerns around health with an outbreak of swine flu, (thankfully peaking in the early summer); a war in Afghanistan which impacted on local families as the bodies of those killed in action were returned home; and, increasingly through the year concerns around climate change culminating in a significant rally in December in London, a week before the missed opportunity of the Copenhagen summit.

If economic recession, swine flu, the war on terror and a warming planet made up, with other issues of course, the wider global picture; at a local level there were other concerns. There has been, at the local level, closure of businesses in particular communities, resulting in the ongoing reduction in local services as pubs, post offices and smaller shops continued to close. This hit hard. Locally, people continued to wonder what was happening to social and family relations in a rapidly changing world as they struggled with a plethora of issues.

Finally, what of deaneries themselves? They are increasingly being perceived as a 'good thing'. They provide a supportive link between local parishes, a place where important issues of working together can be aired. This particular exercise around identifying social issues is a case in point. What is revealed is that the voice of the deaneries offer a timely insight on the key social issues faced at this time. Concerns are not the same in each place, though there are concerns which are interrelated and widely shared.

Of course these findings are, like photographic snapshots, tied to historical context too. That does not mean they are irrelevant now, but they are to be interpreted carefully before responses are made.

Rev Dr John Hall | Director for Social Responsibility, Diocese of Coventry

Demographic background

Coventry's population has continued to grow since the 2001 census and has become more diverse. There are currently around 310,000 people in the city. The growth of population over the past 15 years has been mainly due to natural growth and not migration, though the city has significant numbers of economic and other migrants, coming mainly as students or workers, but also as asylum seekers and refugees. Coventry's economy, once mainly mass manufacturing, is now much more diverse. The economic downturn has made its impact, represented, at the time of writing, with the number of Job Seeker Allowance claimants at around 5.8% (a figure which has remained stable since May 2009). There are currently 8 people unemployed for every job vacancy in Coventry. (The figures for Warwickshire are 3.6% and 5 people respectively, though as with Coventry there is considerable local variation). More data can be found in the forthcoming survey of the quality of life in Coventry published by the City Council. When available this will be posted on the Diocesan website.

Warwickshire's population is around 530,000, having grown by over 70,000 in 30 years, and spread across its five districts. It has a growing and ageing population. As with Coventry unemployment doubled in the light of the economic downturn, (but from a much lower base line) and has not been so high for 14 years. The south of the county is the more affluent and shows signs of emerging from the recession more quickly than other areas. Nuneaton and Bedworth feel the economic downturn most acutely. Nuneaton is also the most populous settlement with around 80,000 people. Black and Minority Ethnic groups make up around 10% of the population. The recent Warwickshire Quality of Life report (on the diocesan website) indicated the greatest concern in Warwickshire was the need for activities for teenagers and concerns about the affordability of housing and the shortage of social housing provision.

The Coventry Diocesan Directory 2010 provides Deanery and parish population and electoral role statistics on pages 28-29.

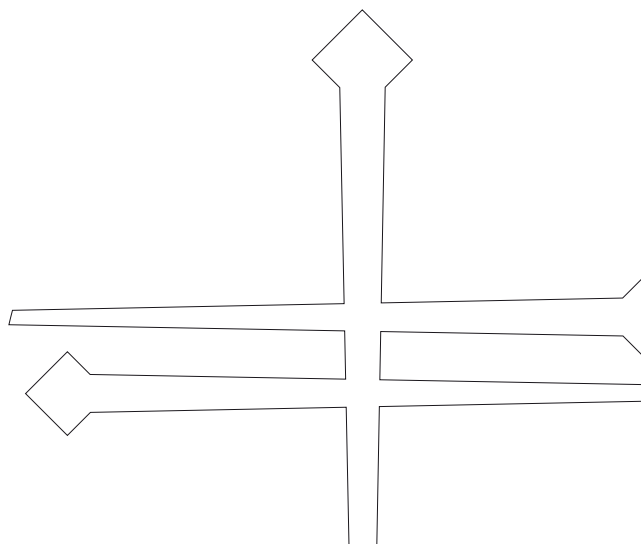
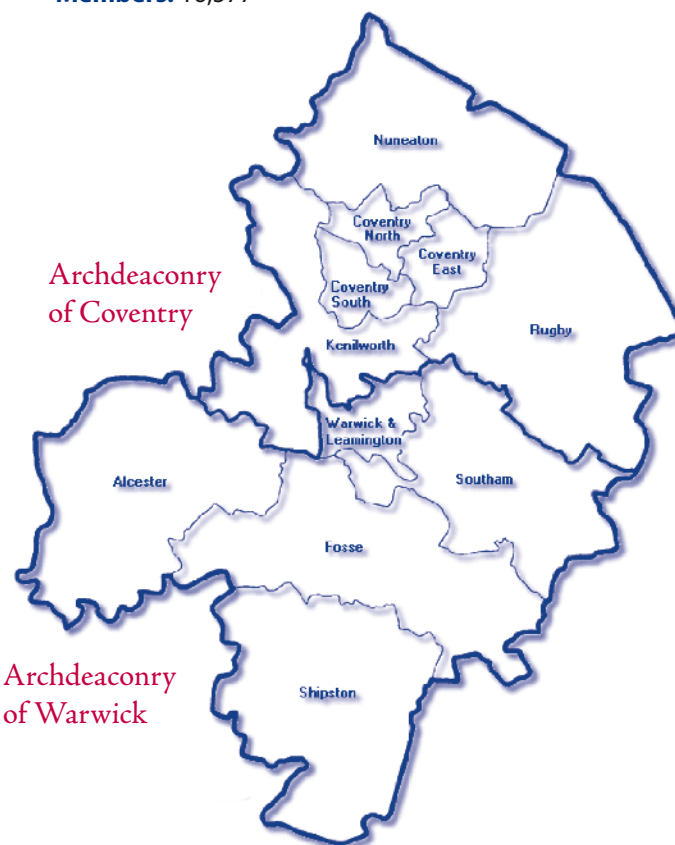
Diocese of Coventry: Deanery map

Size: 173,840 Hectares

Population: 780,000

Churches: 248

Members: 16,577



Headlines

What the deaneries said

Across all the deaneries three issues were key, namely:

- ❖ **The impact of the economic downturn**
- ❖ **The challenges facing local communities, and**
- ❖ **The threats to family life.**

Deaneries varied as to which of these mattered most. Coventry North and Nuneaton, where the economic downturn was being most keenly felt, not surprisingly gave unemployment, redundancies, debt, the credit crunch and the personal and social impact of these great weight.

Challenges facing local communities were the most significant issue in Coventry South, Kenilworth, Nuneaton, Fosse, and Warwick & Leamington. Throughout, the concerns varied with context (eg. social isolation was identified as a particular issue in Fosse).

A loss of what was thought to be good community life and what was sometimes described as fragmentation, lack of care for particular groups, lack of cohesion, and lack of amenities was widespread, were typical of the comments made. In some deaneries a particular plan for housing or other local development was energising and especially mentioned as a local community issue. In one deanery, Warwick & Leamington, there was a clearly verbalised ethos around linking community needs and needy people, with mobilising and engaging churches seen to be an integral part of the solution.

Rugby and Southam placed the threats to family life at the top of their list. This concern was expressed across a number of deaneries and took various forms – the lack of moral compass in society, the erosion of standards, the scattering of families, the lack of parenting skills, the increased number of single parents, and concerns around the behaviour of young people.

In sum, the deaneries have drawn attention to three clusters of social issues and needs. Their focus has for the most part been on local and immediate matters

of economic, family and community concern, it has not been on wider or global issues, such as climate change, or the 'war on terror'.

Of the very wide range of issues raised, those which could not be readily located within the three key clusters were very few indeed. Yes, one or two people did mention the need for good inter-faith relations, and, the need to address the divide between rich a poor – but these were very much the voices of the margins not the mainstream. The question also needs to be asked, why were issues relating to Coventry City centre not mentioned?

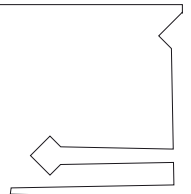
Managing the challenge

Though the focus of the deanery meetings was not on how these challenges were or might be met, it was evident that local churches and Christians were often well informed, if not actively engaged in addressing issues. However, it is suggested that this report serve as a catalyst with discussions taking place in deaneries (with whom this exercise was conducted), but also more widely to consider how the churches might further address these needs.

The following questions might serve to prompt discussion:

- ❖ **What steps can we take to help, overcome the impact of the economic downturn?**
- ❖ **Our local community needs us to do what?**
- ❖ **How might family life be strengthened by us?**

Archdeaconry of Coventry



The Coventry Deaneries (East, North and South)

The voices of the three deaneries of Coventry when taken together flag up three main areas of concern, which attracted over 90% of the votes cast (128/141) namely:

- ❖ The pressures around **family life** (36.9%, 52 of 141 votes cast)
- ❖ The impact of the **economic recession** (28.3%, 40 of 141 votes cast)
- ❖ The state of the **local community** (25.5%, 36 of 141 votes cast)

Poverty and drugs were two further issues which were mentioned more than once (7 times and 3 times respectively). Other issues mentioned were, the loss of children from church life, homelessness and the need for advice services (3 votes in all). What follows is some further analysis across these three headline areas and how they impact differently in the three deaneries. Clearly the linking together of issues is somewhat arbitrary and subjective, and there are definite links

between the three areas, but for all the shortcomings in the exercise, a pattern of commonly held issues of concern does emerge.

Family life

Concern was expressed here at the extent of family breakdown and the state of family life. Another was the high number of single parents and the need for greater parenting skills more generally; and yet another, young people's behaviour and needs. Also, the need for better care for older people was requested. Carers needs were identified as a concern. Finally, the care needs of people with mental health related issues were raised.

Though these issues were for the most part raised across all deaneries there were differences between the three deaneries. Less affluent Coventry East gave weight to family life issues and it was this deanery alone in Coventry, which mentioned poverty and drugs. In both Coventry East and North, family Life issues vied closely with the impact of the economic recession for most votes. Coventry South was much more concerned about local community issues than family life issues.



Above: Coventry Cathedral

Economic recession

A great deal was said about this. Increasing unemployment and redundancies, increasing debt problems, the credit crunch, falling interest rates and its impact on those dependent on savings, the future of work for young people who appeared to be the hardest hit were all mentioned.

The consequences of this were expressed in terms of increased crime, the sense of lack of self esteem and self-worth, the lack of hope and a future, and the changing nature of employment through increased part time jobs and short time working and reduced pay settlements. There was indeed a personal impact behind all the figures. Even the impact of the recession on church giving and life was raised. This issue was a significantly more important area for members of Coventry North deanery.

Local community

The fragmentation of communities was a particular issue here, in part reflected in the loss of local amenities such as post offices, shops and pubs and their relational/social networking benefits. Loss of civic pride, lack of community responsibility, lack of

community cohesion, and poor portrayal of the local community in the media were all cited as indicative of local community malaise. In sum many comments reflected a loss of a sense of community or threats to it. Coventry South was particularly vocal in this respect, and controversial new building developments were identified as raising additional further issues, e.g. around schooling provision required.

Other issues

Underlying poverty, there before the economic downturn, was mentioned in Coventry East; and, the needs of asylum seekers as the most economically vulnerable was linked with this. Separately mentioned, but relating to the same social group, were immigration, the need for cohesion and the need to address racism, (in our churches too). It is interesting to note that world affairs, environmental or climate change issues do not figure at all in the Coventry deanery feedback. Now what does that tell us? Probably that what we naturally tend to focus on first are the pressing issues perceived as closest and more immediately relevant to us – our families, our income and jobs and our local communities.



Above: Holy Trinity Church, Coventry

Kenilworth

Although a relatively small Deanery group of just 10 members for this exercise, Kenilworth Deanery identified weaknesses in local community life as their key issue of concern.

The sense of lack of community was stated to be something that affected both young and old. They were concerned at the low level of pastoral care provision for those on the margins of community life.

In particular they were concerned at the level of vandalism communities experienced and the threat this posed to the quality of community life. Perhaps linked with this issue, was the comment by one person that there was a lack of teen facilities provided.

Also mentioned was the current difficulty experienced in the housing market by first time buyers who found it difficult if not impossible to buy a home. On the other hand the proposed development of additional new housing in the area was not welcomed in the form it was currently proposed.

In this deanery two people mentioned their concern for the environment and the need to address the carbon footprint.

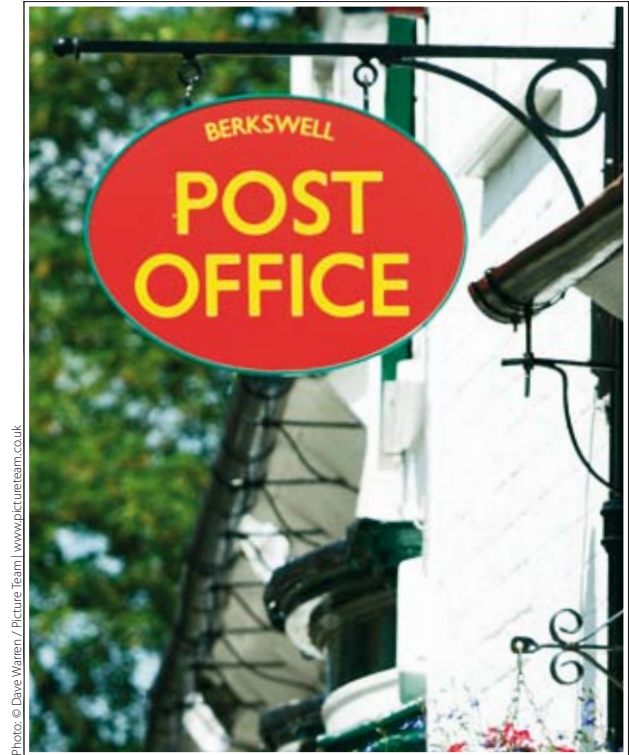


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Comment

Has the economic recession hit Kenilworth Deanery? Though a mention was made in the discussion of the loss of jobs there were no votes cast for issues relating to the economic downturn. It would appear it is not a significant issue here.



Top: The Post Office at Berkswell
Above: Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Stoneleigh

Nuneaton

North Warwickshire has borne the brunt of the economic downturn and this was reflected in their concerns.

The poor financial climate, local redundancies, business closures, future financial uncertainties and the resultant pressure on families were all highlighted. In addition the insecurities the economic downturn created and a real fear for the future were expressed. Low interest rates were a further cause for anxiety for some because of their impact on those dependent on income from their savings. The economic downturn attracted almost half all votes cast by Deanery members (47.6%, 20 of 42 votes cast).

There was a second equally large cluster of concerns around the sense of loss of community (47.6%, 20 of 42 votes cast). Members expressed a real concern to see relations between young and old strengthened as one means of addressing an aspect of this. There also needed to be greater care provided for older people in the community who were often left feeling isolated and fearful.

The remaining two votes cast were used to express the feeling that Christians were under pressure because the prevailing ethos of political correctness hampered them.

This observation could, if linked with comments about the loss of sense of community, indicate that Christians felt impeded in the help they felt they could provide.

One definitely gained a sense of a Deanery under social pressure here.



Top: St Paul's Church, Stockingford
Above: St Peter's Church, Galley Common



Photo: © James Kerr | www.jameskerr.co.uk

Rugby

Rugby Deanery members identified a cluster of pressures around family life as a quite specific concern. Linked with this was an identifiable lack of social and moral compass in society which was also expressed in terms of an erosion of standards (36.1%, 22 of 61 votes cast).

The Deanery also had a very diverse set of concerns around community life, raising a wide breadth of diverse issues, and which it voiced with equal strength (34.4%, 21 of 61 votes cast).

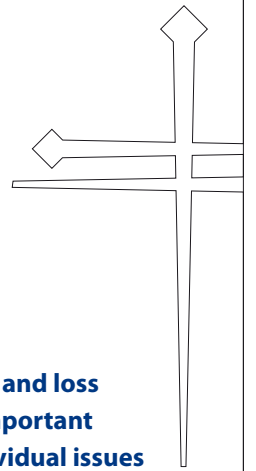
In rural areas of the Deanery there was said to be social isolation and a lack of amenities. More generally, homelessness, a lack of mental health care provision, concern at the power of the media, the devaluation of education, social fear and anxiety, and a lack of inter faith understanding were cited. Young people were seen as associated with unwelcome violence on the one hand, and as not being valued positively on the other hand.

The economic downturn was a slightly less significant item for members, which was, interestingly in this deanery, expressed as both a global as well as local concern (24.6%, 15 of 61 votes cast). Again, young people were specifically mentioned, this time in connection with the lack of job opportunities available to them.



Top and above: St Margaret's Church, Wolston

Archdeaconry of Warwick



Alcester

It was not possible to arrange a visit to the Alcester Deanery in 2009, so a questionnaire was sent out to Deanery members.

Only one reply was received from the Rural Dean himself. As a key member of the Deanery with an overall perspective of the Deanery his comments are included below.

In this Deanery unemployment, parenting, house prices and the isolation of the elderly were all mentioned, the first two, namely unemployment and parenting being the most significant issues here.



Church of St Mary the Virgin, Kinwarton

Fosse

In the Fosse Deanery, social isolation and loss of community was the single most important issue. Though a large number of individual issues emerged in the exercise, votes were almost all attached to this issue (77.4%, 24 of 31 votes cast)

Members, perhaps making a connection here, also said that churches needed to be better linked with the community and church care in the community needed to be extended. Others referred to the need to improve community relations. Some pointed to the need to provide better pastoral care for specific groups of people (i.e. the elderly, young people).

A second cluster of issues related to the economic downturn but this was not nearly such a pressing issue for this Deanery (16.1%, 5 of 31 votes cast).

Two other issues were voted for, attracting one vote each, namely the presence of migrant workers in this largely rural Deanery and problems affecting family life.



St Nicholas Church, Loxley

Shipston

As with Alcester Deanery, it did not prove possible to visit, and again a questionnaire was used. Again, there was only a very limited response (4), albeit a very comprehensive one by the respondents who gave full replies. In fairness to them their feedback is given below.

Unemployment and the Recession were key issues for respondents. Also mentioned and linked was the threat to savings and risk of future higher taxation.

Questionnaires referred to climate change worries, the costly campaign in terms of lives lost in Afghanistan and dissatisfaction with the Government's 'incompetence' and 'interference'. Also cited were the loss of local community facilities (e.g. Post Offices) and the impact on the quality of rural life. Financial concern at the ability to meet the parish share, the need for care for the elderly, and a desire to see clean water provision in Africa each had one mention.



Top and above: Church of St Mary and Holy Cross, Alderminster

Southam

Southam Deanery members placed family breakdown and related matters as their number one concern. The scattering of families was felt to be an issue. Included here are the related concerns around young people's behaviour, in particular drinking excessively and vandalism (45.4%, 15 of 33 votes cast).

A number of community related issues were voiced, the isolation of the elderly and their lack

of accessibility to essential services; the lack of retirement/nursing home provision in the area; the pressures on finding the financial wherewithal to keep the local charity school open; the lack of children and young people's amenities/activities; and a particular local issue relating to the Cemex company's plans (27.3%, 9 of 33 votes cast).

The economic downturn shaped responses. Job security was an issue as were financial worries, the recession and credit crunch generally (16.7%, 5 of 33 votes cast).



St Peter's Church, Wormleighton

Warwick and Leamington

This Deanery approached the task having made a clear link between community and church. The issues raised emphasised to members present the churches' responsibility to their communities. Hence, the most mentioned issue was how to mobilise the church to look outwards, how to keep young people and children activities going in the church, and the need 'to reach out' from the church to isolated groups, e.g. the disabled.

Other issues raised were making the church a 'living' church and not a 'heritage museum' and providing meeting opportunities for the isolated elderly. Maintaining church buildings was an issue. In sum these issues focussed around community needs and the churches ability to meet them (55.4%, 41 of 74 votes cast).

Free standing community issues were identified such as the need for an engaged citizenship; concern at the town centre violence and other issues at night in Leamington; and, in the day time people just hanging about. There was also the loss of community facilities in villages. A more general issue was the size of the division between rich and poor in society. These were the community concerns where church was not specifically mentioned (14.9%, 11 of 74 votes cast).

Concern at the level of family breakdown and the need for better parenting were again linked with the churches' need for mission behind this'. Family related issues attracted significant comment (14.9%, 11 of 74 votes cast).

The economic downturn, job losses and debt also figured (14.9%, 11 of 74 votes cast).

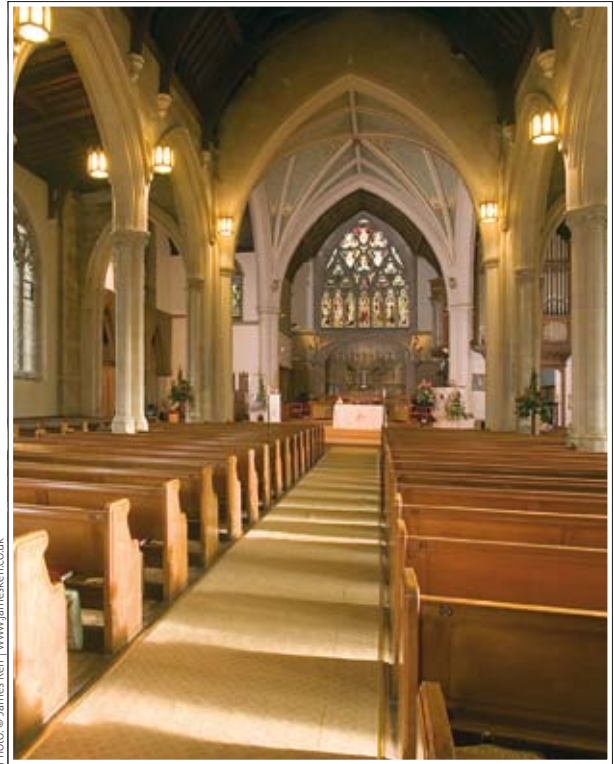
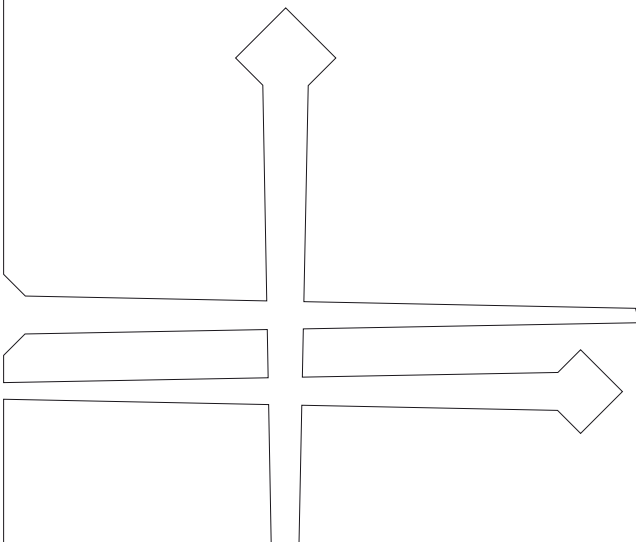


Photo © James Kerr | www.jameskerr.co.uk



Top: Holy Trinity Church, Leamington Spa
Above: Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick



Key issues and key questions:

- ❖ **The economic downturn**
What steps can we take to help overcome it?
- ❖ **Challenges facing local communities**
Our local community needs us to do what?
- ❖ **The threats to family life**
How might family life be strengthened?



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