



## Letter from the Leadership Team to the congregations of the Kent Estuary

Dear friends,

As you will know, the eight church councils of the Kent Estuary have all been considering, over recent weeks, the report of the Working Group, with its proposals for the direction of travel for our Mission Community. All have now reported the outcome to the Leadership Team, and we have now responded to the Bishop of Carlisle, and the Archdeaconry and Mission and Pastoral Committee by 31<sup>st</sup> March as we were asked to do.

Seven of the church councils voted on the proposals. Of the seven, four were unanimous and across the other three, there were only three recorded votes against the proposals – although at Arnside Methodist Church only a minority of those present actually voted, with most members abstaining.

St. Thomas' Milnthorpe chose not to vote but submitted an account of their discussion and the concerns that were raised. The final sentence of their submission indicated that they did not wish to hold back from what could be an exciting and vibrant change in church life, but that it must be done sensitively and with great care.

In our repose to the Diocese, we have therefore reported that the direction of travel has received widespread support and thus formally approved. We have emphasised that this is the beginning of a journey. There are significant concerns that will need to be addressed and a great deal of detail that will need to be worked through, necessarily involving us locally. We believe that this will involve two different processes. One is the formation of a new parish, which is a matter for the Church of England - a process which will include formal consultations and legal procedures, involving both the Diocese and the Church Commissioners. The second is an agreement between that new parish and the Methodist Church, which necessarily would involve the Diocese, the Cumbria Methodist Circuit, and the North West England District, thus creating a subsequent phase to the progress of the direction of travel. As some of the council responses noted, a more formal agreement for ministerial collaboration between the two Churches raises particular issues that will need to be considered prayerfully and thoughtfully.

We have asked for clarity about the nature of the various processes that will now need to happen, the way in which we locally will be involved and the potential timeline. The Diocese has indicated a willingness to fund an additional associate priest for 18 months, pastorally to support the change process and again we have asked for clarity about the likely timescale. As part of our commitment to open communication through the whole of this process, we will write again as soon as we have more information from them about the route map.

The Working Group was clear that their proposals sought to provide a basis for refreshment, renewal, and growth in both our worship and our witness, seeking to reverse – with the help of the Holy Spirit – the trends of recent years. Inevitably, in the next stages there will be much focus on organisational, practical and legal issues and on concerns and fears which change brings. It is important that as we all work sensitively through all this, we do not lose sight of that objective.

As you know, the approach of the Working Group and the subsequent meetings of the church councils were intentionally underpinned and supported by prayer, both personal and corporate. It is essential that this remains the case as all of us move forward, as we seek the Lord's will and guiding for the future.

As the living traditions of our faith teach us, each generation of Christians is called to share the love of God in Christ in the power of the Spirit. The challenge for us, at this moment, is how we can better do that in our villages and across the whole of the Kent Estuary in the coming years – amid so much that seems uncertain. As we move forward, exploring the implications of the direction of travel we have agreed, and as we begin to work out what it means for us all in practice, let us pray that we can be open to all that God will show and teach us.

Yours in Christ,

*Members of the KEMC Leadership Team*