

## **The Provincial Local Collaborative Ministry Officer and the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles**

My job as Local Collaborative Ministry Officer for the Province takes me travelling across Scotland from Shetland to Dumfries, but the Diocese I spend the most time in (and love the best) is that of Argyll and the Isles. Recently I spent a weekend with the people of St Mary's Strontian, receiving wonderful hospitality both from the congregation and from Charles and Lorna Tongue.

The pattern for such visits is to offer skills' training sessions in the church itself, so that *all* members of the congregation can attend such workshops, rather than simply those who have the time and the money to travel to some central location. There is no blueprint for what is offered, hence the word 'local' in the title; each charge determines what *its* needs are as it tries to enable every member to be involved in the mission and ministry of the congregation. St Mary's had asked for some input on worship leading skills and this was duly offered, with half the adult congregation turning out on the Saturday to attend the session. The session was partly theoretical, partly practical, and all agreed at the end that it had been not only valuable but also great fun. It was agreed that a further session on leading Intercessions would be held in the near future, and materials were left to enable the congregation to run that by itself.

Such weekends usually involve me preaching on the Sunday and then leading a discussion about the mission of the charge over a shared lunch – St Kieran's Campbeltown, last visited in January, is especially good at such collaborative hospitality! Out of this generally comes some strategy regarding new steps for the charge to take, and a pledge from LCM to support that onwards journey with workbooks or personnel.

Once a year, I visit Local Collaborative Ministry charges in the company of Bishop Martin in order to review the congregation's progress on this pathway. The aim of such annual Reviews is to enable *the congregation itself* to discern the areas of life together that are going well and those that require attention; to outline training and resource needs for the coming year and to negotiate their delivery with the diocesan and provincial personnel present. We do this by asking people to tell stories about what has been happening in the congregation using the three areas of the baptismal promises as a guide: *How have you continued in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?* (worship, prayer and devotional life) *How have you proclaimed the good news by word and deed?* (outreach and evangelism; connections made with the community in which your church is set, locally, ecumenically, nationally and globally). *How have you worked for justice and peace?* (how you have 'honoured God in all creation' and been good stewards of God's earth? Where are you as regards the Provincial Stewardship thrust/Charis?) Congregations that already have such a review lined up for this year comprise St Margaret's Whiting Bay, St Mary's Strontian and St Kieran's Campbeltown.

LCM is currently working on compiling a new workbook called *Welcoming Small Congregations; affirming and developing the mission of small congregations*. This is a compendium of resources designed to enable congregations with fewer than 15 members present on a Sunday to build on their unique strengths - strong bonds of friendship between members, an ability to notice and welcome newcomers, intergenerational ways of being – in order to reach out into the communities in which they are set. It encourages such congregations to find their niche and 'do that one thing well'. Building on the work of MYCMI, it also suggests ways of connecting with children in the community and setting up a club or other gathering for them, whether independently, ecumenically or in partnership with a secular agency. Since 73.1% of all congregations in Argyll number less than 25 on a Sunday, this may indeed be a useful resource for the Diocese! The aim of the workbook is to bring encouragement, hope and fresh vision to these small charges, and to help them see themselves as vital organisms with the potential for change and growth,

rather than allow their slightness to drag them down into a slough of despairing inactivity and eventual death. For small charges are a “welcome” ingredient in the eco-system of our Province.

Thank you, Argyll and the Isles, for being so open to the work of Local Collaborative Ministry and so very welcoming to its Officer; I look forward to many more happy visits such as this latest one to St Mary’s Strontian.

**Revd Dr Anne Tomlinson**