

*OCULUS EPISCOPI: A HANDBOOK FOR NEW ARCHDEACONS*. HUGH BUCKINGHAM, Archdeacon of the East Riding, House of Bishops Training Committee, 1997. 47 pp. (For further information please contact the Revd Canon Michael Austin, the Archbishops' Adviser for Bishops' Ministry, 22 Marlock Close, Fiskerton, Southill, NG25 0UB.)

A review by the Ven Peter Elliott, Archdeacon of Northumberland.

Would that such a document as this had been available when I was invited to become an archdeacon! It is only sorry that the warmth of commendation by the Committee's Chairman in his Foreword has not been matched by sufficient funding to allow publication in a more permanent and less accident-prone binding. Hugh Buckingham sets out in easily readable form the necessities and the possibilities of the ancient office of Archdeacon which he reminds his readers are as varied as the dioceses in which we minister and the bishops whom we seek to serve.

Though the Handbook runs to less than fifty pages of typescript, the author succeeds in sketching out the main areas of an archdeacon's responsibility and work and alerting the new archdeacon to some of the less immediately obvious pressures and strains which he or she will face in the early months of a new appointment. The whole section on transition from parish priest to archdeacon is filled with wisdom, though a fuller treatment of the double loyalties faced by the archdeacon who combines an archdeaconry with a sector ministry, parish or cathedral responsibility would have been welcome. For these too present unexpected pressures on working routines, spouse and family.

The text then moves through the task of the archdeacon in all its diversity with enormous clarity. The people with whom the archdeacon has to work are clearly listed and their relationship to the archdeacon defined. The archdeacon's responsibilities for buildings whether churches or parsonage houses are explored. His or her role in the appointments procedure is considered. Relationships with the parishes and with the clergy themselves all come under Hugh Buckingham's careful scrutiny. Final paragraphs deal with synodical and ecumenical matters and deceptively briefly with the archdeacon's involvement in the work of the diocesan committees. In each section the author offers facts, the wisdom of experience and a succinct list of further resources. Any new archdeacon who has worked through these sections of the handbook will come to office with a broad understanding of the scale of the task which awaits and will have been prompted to spend useful time with those people who will become close colleagues and indispensable guides.

I was interested that the author scarcely mentions the Pastoral Measure. In many dioceses surely archdeacons find themselves acting as the bishop's representative under the Measure in the consultations which are so often the necessary preliminary to pastoral reorganisation. To many of us 'Suspension of Presentation' and 'Pastoral Schemes' are very much a part of the archdeacon's work where knowledge of the law and the skills of negotiation are required in equal measure. I would have been happier too if the section on 'Special Church Accounts' (page 33) had reflected more accurately the requirements of the 1993 Charities Act and I would have welcomed a crisper reference to the relevance of employment legislation in the section 'Other Appointments' on page 25. A more minor point is that the 1997 revision of *The Churchyards Handbook* (page 2) will be the 4th (not 5th) edition when it is published.

This piece of work has been long overdue as an induction to the work of an archdeacon both for those chosen for that task and, one might add, for those responsible for their selection. It is not unknown for a diocesan bishop to thank an archdeacon for his work by saying 'I don't know what you do but you have done

it very well.' Hugh Buckingham's excellent Handbook carries with it the hope that bishops as well as those appointed to the office of archdeacon will in future know more of what is involved in being 'Oculus Episcopi'.