

Focal Ministry in the Diocese of Leicester

Context

In a time of substantial change and increasing complexity we are needing to pay attention to the nature of ministry required for the future while noticing what already exists and what is emerging. The New Testament model of ministry was to discern, train and equip the gifts of those within worshipping communities and raise up indigenous spiritual leaders.

In the Diocese of Leicester there are a number of people who offer spiritual leadership in local parishes and for the purposes of this consultation this will be referred to as Focal Ministry. This grass-roots ministry offers profound hope for the future flourishing of local churches, it is truly incarnation leadership offered by those already embedded in their churches and communities. We need to ensure that such ministers are noticed, encouraged and resourced and that suitable processes are in place for their support, growth, accountability and well-being.

As these roles are emergent and highly contextual the specifics will vary considerably but some general themes may be identified.

Themes of focal ministry

A Focal Minister offers spiritual leadership to an individual church or benefice. The key leadership responsibilities of Focal Ministers are:

- Being the public face of the church in its community
- Enabling the worship and prayer of the church
- Encouraging deepening faith
- Helping the church to develop its mission and ministry

Key values of the role include:

- Growing and sharing leadership with others
- Enabling the ministry of all
- Attending to their own spiritual growth and well-being

The specifics of the role will vary depending on the Focal Minister's individual gifts, the gifts of others, personal capacity and the context. These specifics will be described in their Ministry plan.

Who might be a focal minister?

This role could be fulfilled by an existing licensed minister (lay or ordained) but may be anyone in the church who is growing into this role. As this role is primarily about spiritual leadership it would be essential that they have a level of spiritual maturity and are committed to deepening their own discipleship.

Discernment

Focal Ministers are identified and nominated by the PCC and authorised by the Minister Community. Discernment is the responsibility of the appropriate body within the Minister

Community in a process that takes account of the guidance on Safer Recruitment of the Diocese.

The prospective Focal Minister will need to undertake the following as part of the discernment process:

- Leadership Safeguarding training
- Awareness of Domestic Abuse training
- DBS check

A Ministry Plan is agreed in consultation the individual, PCC and a supervisor nominated by the Minister Community team. The Ministry Plan will identify:

- A description of the specifics of the role
- the pattern of ministry in terms of hours offered by the minister including time-off
- training needs
- role supervision and support structures
- how expenses are reimbursed
- personal resourcing and support

It is recommended that this Ministry Plan will be reviewed in regular supervision and at least annually.

Training

It is anticipated that training will not be a 'hoop to go through' but a means of resourcing the role they are currently doing or are growing into. The content of training will depend on previous experience and what the context requires. CPAS are currently offering on-line resources for training focal ministers and it would seem a good approach test out this provision with a cohort of emerging focal ministers. This on-line training will be supplemented by in-person reflection groups facilitated initially by the DVE but in time this could be within their Minister Community.

Authorisation

Those discerned by the Minister Community as Focal Ministers will be authorised locally using the approved liturgy. The term of authorisation is for 3 years and renewed after a process of ministry review and appropriate safeguarding requirements.

The contact details of the Focal Minister should be forwarded to Archdeacons' Office.

On-going support and development

Learning

- The CPAS hub will continue to offer resources for on-going ministry along with Diocesan learning events.
- Access to Associate Minister training modules for those who are not in licensed ministry.

- Reflective practice groups will offer time and space for ministry support, theological reflection and further resourcing.

Support

- High quality supervision from within their Minister Community
- Peer support with other ministers in the Minister Community
- PCC takes responsibility for the support of their Focal Minister
- Networking opportunities with Focal Ministers in the diocese and nationally
- Access to additional support such as spiritual direction, pastoral care and coaching.

Current experience

Consultation with some who are currently exercising focal ministry revealed the wide-ranging roles they exercise and the significant impact this has in their churches and communities. They noted a few issues which we need to pay attention to many of which resonate the findings of the Lay Ministers' Survey.

Supervision and support

The experience of our lay ministers is that supervision is frequently absent or inadequate.

Role clarity

Lack of role clarity leads to conflicting expectations between the minister, parish and wider team leading to stress and frustration.

Isolation and workload

Focal ministry has particular features than can result in isolation and workload pressures. A cultural shift is required from the historic model of a single leadership and ministry to shared ministry enabled by the leader.

Building teams

The importance of building teams has been highlighted as a way of ensuring ministry is shared, involving a range of gifts, mitigating ministry stress and isolation and to ensure long-term succession planning.

Primary tension point

The operational demands of church life consistently draw attention away from the desire to lead the church in discipleship, pastoral care and mission. Minister Communities need to pay attention to how Focal Ministers are freed from the organisational burden of their parishes.