

Workshop 4

Shaping Ministry in dioceses: better or different?

This workshop aimed to provide a space for delegates to discuss how their diocese is reshaping and reimagining ministry in response to strategic needs. How do stipendiary clergy, self-supporting clergy and lay ministers fit into the picture, and what roles do need to be filled?

Speakers were:

Derek Hurton, Diocesan Secretary, Diocese of Carlisle

The Revd Canon Sally Gaze, Dean of Rural Mission Consultancy, Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

The workshop was hosted by Catherine Nancekievill, Head of Discipleship and Vocation, The Archbishops' Council

Derek and Sally both represented dioceses pro-active in planning for the future ministry needs of the diocese, with the Diocese of Carlisle slightly further on in implementing the changes. However, their respective dioceses are taking different approaches with Carlisle significantly changing their structures and St Edmundsbury and Ipswich working to change the culture in congregations before attempting any structural changes. It should be noted however, that the changes in Carlisle are not entirely a top-down exercise and there is considerable freedom given to local congregations.

Both dioceses explained their context, and although both have a rural identity, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich actually has substantial urban areas.

Diocese of Carlisle: God for all

The diocese of Carlisle has created a county-wide ecumenical partnership (LEP), enabling CofE, Methodist and URC congregations to work together in ecumenical mission communities. This new structure and collaboration is enabling a shift of ministry from stipended and ordained leadership focused on pastoral care and the church members, to ministry that is predominantly lay and/or self-supporting focused on mission, participation, and the non-members. This involves moving from ~150 stipendiary ministers to ~80 stipendiary ministers, almost half of whom will be quasi-episcopal mission community leaders and a 200% increase in self-supporting ministers. The ambition for lay ministry is an explosion of every shape and kind, with low levels of authorisation and licensing. These major changes are a response to their strategy 'REACH':

- MeReach: individuals sharing faith through everyday life
- InReach: church communities becoming more welcoming and drawing people in
- OutReach: reaching out into communities beyond the fringe to share the good news
- BigReach: using marketing and digital media to stimulate people to think about where God is in their life

The diocese has already implemented the LEP and created several mission communities. The challenges they are facing include wrestling with decisions between short-term tactical benefit and long term strategic benefit; creating buy-in; managing finances during the transition and the capacity for diocesan and local teams to both continue 'keeping the show on the road' at the same time as creating a different future.

Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich: Growing in God

The diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is developing a strategy for growth: growing in depth, growing in number, growing in influence, growing younger. They face the challenge of a very large number of small congregations in large multi-parish benefices and have the lowest number of people per church in the Church of England. Their response is to work with congregations in benefices to develop different patterns of ministry that arise from their context. These include focal ministers, fresh expressions, chaplaincy, ministry clusters, church plants, resource church and missional communities.

To provide for the range of ministries and to work within a culture that places high value on licensing and authorisation, several additional pathways to lay and ordained ministry are developing. The Auxiliary Ordination Pathway was of interest to delegates. This is a pathway to provide ordained ministers who are locally selected and trained.

The diocese understand themselves to be at the beginning of their journey, so their focus is on creating the flexibility and openness in pathways and in congregations that will enable change to happen. In combination with careful engagement with the local context, this is resulting in a variety of expressions of church and ministry: 'catching the wind of the spirit'.

Discussion

The delegates discussion and questions centred around:

- Legal and technical questions about LEPs, mission communities, auxiliary ordained ministers and other areas. Some quite detailed information was shared, however there is appetite for a much greater depth of this type of information to be shared between dioceses.
- How to gain buy-in and engagement with congregations. Comments offered included the value of facilitating local decision making over a planned period and the importance of the very active backing and presence of the diocesan Bishop.
- What the theological basis is for the increase in number and diversity of lay ministries and how do we understand ordained ministry if we have focal lay ministers leading churches and lay leaders of Fresh Expressions.
- The opportunity to draw the Theological Education Institutions more fully into the conversation about the future shape of ministry (nationally and in dioceses) as they would bring considerable expertise and experience.
- What the dioceses were doing to develop the ministry and discipleship of all, particularly those living out their faith at work or home, and how this related to the rapid increase of lay ecclesial ministry. Can both flourish or does lay ministry become a priority because of the perceived need in churches?