

MOVING INTO A RURAL MULTI-PARISH BENEFICE

Congratulations! Your experience, ideas and approach have led to you being appointed to your rural post. These will serve you in good stead as you get under way. You will be aware that there is a considerable amount of information to get to grips with in your new context. This document is designed to provide a few pointers to help you appreciate both the 'facts and figures' of your new setting, and some of its specific nuances. Your Parish Development Adviser will be happy to discuss this with you and help you think things through further.

People

- Who's who in the life of each church? Do you have their phone numbers e-mail addresses etc and a description of what they are responsible for? Do they have a description of what they are responsible for? There may be a lot of them, ranging from children's workers to flower arrangers. You may find that the same names keep cropping up!
- Regarding divine worship, are there regular organists or music leaders across the benefice? Who is responsible for the music in worship? Who chooses the hymns? Are there sacristans? Who orders candles, wafers etc and prepares the churches for a Eucharist?
- It can be highly beneficial to meet with all the church wardens across your benefice to gain an understanding of the dynamics of each parish and what is different and what is held in common. Effective multi-parish benefice ministry requires one to be able to embrace the differences and also to recognise where and when it is sensible to do things in common, and where it is not. Villages often seek to strongly guard their own identity
- Who is the resident historian/memory bank in each parish? Who carries the story of the church - its history, key people and events? You might want to bear in mind that every historian has their own perspective on the past. This person will probably be able to tell you about any "traditions" which are particularly important or significant to this church. You might want to consider if it will be right to consult your predecessor to gain their perspective on the recent past.
- Who are the people, or organisations, both in the church and in the wider community, who exercise "power" or influence? Who will you need to talk to about key church/community events such as Remembrance Sunday and Carol services?
- Who has responsibilities across the benefice for Safeguarding and where are the files kept?
- Who are the local funeral directors – names, addresses and contact details and where are the local crematoria /cemeteries?
- Who are your local ministerial colleagues? Try and meet up with your Area Dean soon and get the Chapter and Deanery Synod meetings in your diary soon. Who might take services for you when you are on leave? Are there active retired clergy who have been helping out during the vacancy?

Information

At an early meeting with your churchwardens/treasurers/administrator (if you have one), you will need some key information. Careful discernment is often needed to establish just how much detail you as the incumbent actually need

- Go over the Terriers, Log Books, Inventories (which you and the wardens should sign) and Churchyard plans. Who keeps the plan up to date?

- Which, if any, of the churchyards are open for burials? Are there interments of ashes? What is each parish's policy on churchyards and memorials? Are they well publicized? Are there any faculties for applications for burials?
- Take possession of keys (it is good practice to sign for any keys you hold).
- Meet with the Treasurers to gain a clear understanding of the financial affairs across the benefice. This includes the handling of fees and diocesan returns. Ascertain how clergy expenses are apportioned across the benefice and on what basis. Find out about any Trusts, Discretionary and Charitable funds and any responsibility you may have regarding them.
- Ask to be provided with a list of helpful / important local contact details for doctors, local schools, police, plumbers, electricians, babysitters etc.
- Obtain a local map with some of the key facilities marked, such as residential / care homes, schools, supermarkets, petrol stations, pubs, restaurants or takeaways
- Make sure you are given a copy of the electoral rolls, a list of wider church community contacts, last year's annual reports, minutes of previous APCMs, as these may give a guide on aspects of governance, PCC minutes, and key orders of service/service booklets
- It is very helpful if someone can compile for you from the registers the details and contact information for recent and forthcoming baptisms, funerals and weddings.
- Spend time on the Diocesan website. You need to be aware of diocesan policies on safeguarding, churchyards, GDPR etc.
- Find out if there are any outstanding faculties, either applications or work to be done. Get a copy of each latest Quinquennial report and discuss with the church wardens how things are progressing. Again, while the handling of these will ideally be organised by churchwardens, for you, as the incumbent, to get the lie of the land here can be useful.
- Are there current/ongoing pastoral concerns that you need to be aware of? Who are the people who have been offering pastoral care/support during the vacancy? What needs to be shared/handed over/supported?
- Are there any unresolved conflicts or other human relationship dynamics that should be shared (including any "skeletons in the closet")?
 - How do the churches use contemporary forms of communications such as a website, Facebook, A Church Near You? Who keeps the information up to date?
 - Who do people contact to book weddings and baptisms? Is it you or the administrator if you have one?
 - Is there a calendar that encompasses activities across the benefice?
 - What, if any, are the policies and practice regarding baptisms and weddings, including the marriage of those who have been married before?

The local context

- What schools (primary, secondary, pre-schools) are there in the benefice? It is useful to obtain a sense of what they are like. Are they VA, VC, community, part of an Academy? Is there an ecumenical aspect to any of them? What has the church relationship with them been like in the past? Who are the headteachers/key contacts? Schools along with churches are often a key part of rural life. Gaining a sense of what their expectation of you, for example by leading acts of collective

worship and/or being a governor, is important. Also what might be your expectation of schools?

- What are the community groups where your presence, at least on occasion, will be appreciated? Gaining an early appreciation of the local context and where one can be noticed by a wide cross section of the community are useful here as being perceived to be a visible presence of the church is highly valued in rural parishes.
- Where do the young people congregate? What do they do at the weekends?
- Where do people shop? What sports facilities are there?
- Who are the local employers? Do people commute out of the area to work? If so, where to, and how long is their commute?
- Who are the local patrons, both official and unofficial and how do they engage with church life?

Sharing Ministry

The ministry context you are coming from may be very different. One of the most vital and challenging transitions can be making the move from 'solo' ministry into working with a team of colleagues, lay or ordained. Versatility is essential here. Rural clergy, and their benefices, who thrive are experienced as 'good team players' adopting a range of roles depending on the setting, including that of organiser, contributor, delegator, etc Clear information and understanding about roles, relationships and responsibilities from the beginning is vital. These questions may help.

- Who is part of your ministry team, if there is one? Do they have PTO? Are they licensed or authorised for certain ministries? Are they volunteers? Do they have at least some degree of expectation as to how their ministry is expressed?
- What was the story of the church and of your new colleague(s) during the vacancy? Who took on what areas of responsibility? Did they flourish or drown? How do they feel about your arrival and taking over the reins?
- What working agreements have the members of the ministry team had in the past? Do these need reviewing (or even writing)? Your Area Dean may be able to help you with this.
- What understanding does each of your ministerial colleagues have of their role? Who is responsible for what?
- What is your joint understanding of how often you will meet and in what ways you will be accountable to each other?
- Are the lines of communication between you clear? Do you know who needs to have access to which pieces of information? Is there a clear link between the ministry team and the PCC?
- Do you have a common understanding of how decisions are made?
- If you are part of a formal Team Ministry, how is it constituted and how does it function? What expectations do your colleagues have of each other? What is your common understanding of what it means to be a Team Ministry?
- Is there a history of the benefice training curates?
- How might you hold a positive tension between affirming the existing good things and beginning aspects of innovative creativity?