

Diocese of Hereford

Review of Local Ministry

2016

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Introduction

The Church of England, as with other denominations and indeed the whole of western society, is in the midst of profound change. Others have recorded and analysed these changes and it is not necessary to repeat that. Suffice to say that when General Synod (2011) says: "That this Synod recognise the urgent missionary task facing the Church of England to reverse decades of numerical decline and make new disciples for Jesus Christ in every community in our land", when the Archbishops follow this up with a challenge of increasing vocations by 50% in the following 5 years, and when the Diocese of Hereford initiates a comprehensive review of its strategy for mission and ministry, then the bold moves towards Local Ministry, which many since the 1980s have hoped would enable radical change and renewal for the church in these changing times, have to come up for scrutiny and review.

Within the Church of England, the Diocese of Hereford has been in the forefront of Local Ministry developments. Given its deeply rural character and the dramatic decline in vocations nationwide, the diocese, through its Local Ministry staff, has actively encouraged local communities as they have adapted to new ways of providing ministry. Without Local Ministry, many rural congregations may have struggled and died.

At the same time that Local Ministry has raised up lay leadership and promoted a new collegiality between clergy and laity, lay ministry per se has been recognised and authorised within traditional parish life. It may well be, as many have said, that it has been Local Ministry itself that enabled this radical shift from a clericalised church to the ministry of all the baptised. Be that as it may, lay ministry is no longer the exception to the rule, but is an integral part of parish life in all its guises. Consequent upon this shift is the uncertainty that now surrounds the role of the Reader. Once the public face of lay ministry, Readers are now re-examining and questioning the ways in which their ministry is still distinct and valid. By the time of this 150th year of their foundation, some dioceses have remodelled Reader ministry as the training and licensing of many varieties of lay ministry. Given these seismic shifts, some dioceses have found that Local Ministry in its classic sense is no longer necessary: collegial teams, sharing leadership functions, are becoming commonplace and our neighbouring Diocese of Lichfield has broadened the focus of its diocesan Local Ministry staff, who are now generic "Development Advisers".

It is against this backdrop that the Bishop of Hereford initiated a comprehensive review of the diocese's Local Ministry scheme. The process of the review will be outlined shortly. What we wish to convey, right from the start, is the profound privilege it has been for us, the review group, to hear the stories of struggle and hope from benefices throughout the diocese and we are deeply grateful to them for their honesty and commitment. We hope that the process of reflection that taking part in this review has entailed has been of some use to those benefices: some have indicated that this is so and for that we are grateful. There is no doubt that the shape and context of ministry has changed significantly since Local Ministry began in this diocese some 25 years ago and many of our recommendations reflect these wider shifts. A renewal of vision is needed, both locally and in diocesan support structures, in line with the challenge from the Archbishops. It is our prayer that Local Ministry continues, albeit in a changed and developing form, to be the seedbed of vocations both lay and ordained. It is also our prayer that Local Ministry throughout the diocese learns from examples of best practice found in other Local Ministry benefices and grasps the wider possibilities

of mission and abundant life outside the church doors. In all of these things, the love of Jesus Christ sustains us as a diocesan family, and the glorious unpredictability of the Holy Spirit goads us on in our quest for God's purposes, here on earth, as in heaven.

This report represents the combined prayerful thinking, discernment and deliberations of all seven of its members and I am deeply grateful to each of them for the hours of hard work that they have willingly given in forming, conducting and processing this diocesan review.

To God be thanks and praise.

Rev'd Dr Jacky Sewell, ex-Local Shared Ministry Enabler, Diocese of Auckland; Diocese of Hereford Ministry Support Officer; WEMTC Staff Tutor

On behalf of the review group:

Rev'd Marjorie Brooks, Ordained Local Minister, Bridgnorth Team Ministry

John Chapman, Benefice of Kingstone

Richard Glasspoole, LMDG member, Parish of All Saints, Hereford

Rev'd Sarah Hare, Assistant Curate in the Ridgeway Benefice

Julie Lunn, Chairperson of the Local Ministry Forum; LMDG Member, Parish of Madley, Wye Dore Group

Rev'd Prebendary Michael Whittock, ex-Local Ministry Incumbent (retired), Churchstoke

Biblical foundations

Despite the long Anglican tradition of a single priest appointed in each parish, Local Ministry is founded in the Bible's witness that leadership and ministry by the people of God in an established church works well when it is shared. Moses listened to his father-in-law's advice and appointed others to help him care for the people (Ex 4:10-17, 17:8-14, 18:13-27, Num 11:16-30). Jesus chose his disciples as a diverse team and mentored, challenged and trained them for mission and ministry, both alongside him (Luke 8:1-3) and in pairs together (Mark 6:4-13, Luke 10:1-11). Paul ensured there were elders appointed in the churches he founded (Acts 14:21-23). In his letters he repeatedly used the human body as an illustration of the local church: just as the body is made up of different limbs and organs for well-being and functioning, so the local church, as the Body of Christ, works together so that its life, worship, ministry and mission may be healthy and complete (Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:4-30, Eph 4.11-16). Throughout the Anglican Communion today, many dioceses and parishes have found new vision and direction for mission and ministry through careful application of these principles.

Some Definitions

Terminology can be confusing at the best of times and Local Ministry is no exception. In the Diocese of Hereford, "Local Ministry" (capitalised) is the term used to describe a particular way of being church where leadership is shared between lay and clergy and which subscribes to the principles and procedures found in the Local Ministry Manual. It should not be confused with "local ministry" (lower case) as a generalist term for any localised parish context.

“Local Ministry Development Groups” (LMDGs) are the leadership groups whose members are commissioned and authorised by the Bishop to increase and develop the gifts of all within a Local Ministry benefice or parish.

“Companions” are the people appointed to an LMDG on its start-up to be a wise and critical friend, as the group and incumbent establish a new way of developing mission and ministry in a benefice.

Local Ministry is known for its commitment to collaborative ministry; however, the term “collaborative ministry” is not exclusive to Local Ministry and is upheld by many across the church as the way God is calling the church to operate in this day and age. Where Local Ministry differs is in its commitment to collaborative team ministry as an intentional lay-clergy partnership, not simply as team consisting of the various licensed ministers (clergy and Readers) in a parish or benefice.

The Scope and Process of the Review

The initial review brief was to the point: to review the diocesan Local Ministry scheme (as opposed to each individual Local Ministry benefice or parish), as part of a wider review by means of a diocesan Mission Action Plan, which is to be presented to Synod in July 2016.

The Reverend Doctor Jacky Sewell was appointed by Bishop Richard Frith to lead the review. An immediate initial consultation took place with both the Diocesan Support Staff based at the Ludlow offices and with the National Local Ministry Conference happening that same week in Manchester. As a result an extended brief was approved by the Bishop and a review group was formed, representing various roles within Local Ministry and equally representative of lay and clergy.

A method was agreed: that the review would not seek to be an analysis of percentages but rather discern trends (i.e. follow qualitative rather than quantitative principles); the format of the review would consist of questionnaires to groups and individuals, followed up by meetings with groups, individuals, and region-wide forums. Those surveyed would include local LMDGs, their incumbents, Companions and congregations, as well as key personnel within the diocese. Content would include questions of well-being and values, models of being LMDG, and the usefulness of the various Local Ministry diocesan support mechanisms.

Responses

Whilst the process of analysis was via discernment rather than statistics, it is useful to lay out the scope of the review and responses received.

At the time of writing (May 2016), the Diocese of Hereford had 122 benefices, many in groups, with 349 parishes. In January 2016 there were 37 commissioned benefices and 26 active LMDGs in the Diocese of Hereford. Those active LMDGs were working in a range of contexts i.e. parishes, single churches, benefices. Some LMDGs were in the process of being formed or had renewal pending; and in some places where there has been an LMDG in the past, the group was dormant. 85 benefices had never been commissioned to Local Ministry.

Surveys

37 commissioned benefices were sent surveys. Responses were received from 21 (57%) including:

- 15 LMDG group responses
- 64 individual members of LMDGs
- 13 incumbents
- 23 licensed ministers including 4 OLMs and 8 Readers
- 73 members of congregations

2 Rural Deans and 4 Companions sent in responses to separate surveys.

Regional Meetings

These were held at 5 strategic points of the diocese: Church Stretton, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Hereford and Ross-on-Wye. Representatives came from 9 of the active LMDGs (30%).

Diocesan Meetings and Interviews

The review group consulted with:

- The Local Ministry Forum (7 members)
- The incumbents' meeting (10 incumbents)
- The Diocesan Support Staff meeting at the Ludlow office
- The 3 diocesan Local Ministry staff
- The Bishop of Hereford and the Bishop of Ludlow

From the combination of these conversations and surveys, responses were received from 25 Local Ministry benefices and parishes i.e. 67%.

Non-Local Ministry (traditional) Benefices

We sent a separate survey to all parishes where there is no LMDG, asking such things as whether they had ever considered Local Ministry but decided against it, and why; whether they had other forms of lay-clergy collaborative leadership, and what support they would appreciate. We received 11 responses, mainly from incumbents.

Findings: In the Benefices

Local Ministry Development Groups

Local Ministry in the Diocese of Hereford covers a wide variety of manifestations, from blue sky strategic oversight through to doing the spade work of the parish or benefice.

The review group heard of many different ways in which LMDGs worked, and the effect that local context has on the shape which ministry takes, for example: the nature of each local congregation; the relationship between parishes which is often affected by social history, terrain, and the deep-seated culture of the area; the relationships with other groups such as Parochial Church Councils; the personal style of the incumbent; the personalities of LMDG members.

We also heard from benefices which may not have formally adopted Local Ministry per se, but who nevertheless have adopted ministry oversight teams comprising both licensed ministers and lay people: their own version of “local ministry”. Reflections on these benefices will be considered further on (see page 15).

The way that Local Ministry teams are shaped according to local circumstance or by preferred diocesan model has been written about at length by others (Bowden, 2000; Greenwood, 2006) and much of what they have described finds resonance here. From the Local Ministry benefices who contributed to this review, two different forms of analysis might be observed: one based on geography, the other based on leadership function. Whilst there is a complexity of factors that bind these two together, there is also benefit in considering them separately.

Geography

The geography of the Hereford Diocese means that the situations in which LMDGs serve are varied and some incumbents felt strongly that their local geography and composition of the benefice meant that their situation was unlike the “norm” of Local Ministry. One or two drew the conclusion that, because of this, the diocesan Local Ministry supportive structures had no relevance to their particular situation. Whilst it is true that each local context is unique to a degree, we observed that there were some patterns in common, based on geography, found throughout the diocese. From the 25 Local Ministry benefices that we heard from in total, we noted the following common scenarios:

- Large, rural, multi-parish benefices with one LMDG across the whole (or the greater part of the whole). In some instances, individual parishes within the Benefice may have opted to retain a traditional relationship to the incumbent. Each parish may or may not have a local member of their own on the LMDG.
- Benefices based on a market town, with a single LMDG, which may encompass one or more of the outlying village-based parishes. In some instances, some outlying parishes may have opted to retain a traditional relationship to the incumbent.
- A small number of benefices with more than one LMDG within the benefice (notably urban).

As a review group we observed that Local Ministry can work well in any of these geographic settings, and is enhanced when membership of the LMDG is intentionally drawn from each member parish.

Leadership Function

Given the biblical foundations outlined in the Introduction to this report, the review group observed that there were four broad models or manifestations of shared leadership which could be used to describe the ways in which LMDGs worked:

- **Eldership:** praying, planning, discerning and vision-keeping.
- **Task-focussed:** engagement in particular ministries with clearly defined roles.
- **Support-focussed** (support both for one another and for the incumbent): prayer, support and exchange of ideas.
- **Spearhead:** an outward-focussed leadership group which ensures ministry and mission happens.

Some groups were clearly and intentionally working to one of these models; others spanned several models or alternated meetings to allow for different foci. All but “Support” involve management; all but “Spearhead” have the potential for LMDGs and the benefice to become stuck in a maintenance mode.

LMDGs that were primarily or exclusively “Support” or “Task-focused” i.e. whose role did not tend towards shared oversight, tended to be more dissatisfied and uncertain of the value of their contribution. It is also true that we heard from some incumbents who expressed frustration that their LMDG did not seem to want to take on more responsibility. Benefices where the LMDG was limited to particular tasks run the risk of doing the ministry, rather than being the ministry leadership.

Benefices where the LMDG’s joint role was primarily that of “Spearhead” tended to have a higher degree of confidence in their outward-facing mission and ministry in their communities i.e. were less stuck in a maintenance mode.

There is clearly no one model for an LMDG or for Local Ministry itself. Whilst for some this is frustrating and we heard comments such as “what are we expected to be or do”, as a review group we see this as healthy and appropriate, as the local church discerns how best to do ministry and mission in its own context. Having said that, whilst we are not recommending one exclusive model become the template for all, the missional element we found to exist in those LMDGs who operated according to a “Spearhead” model is critical if Local Ministry in any neighbourhood is to move from maintenance to outward-facing engagement and mission. More is said about outward-facing mission in the section further on, Mission and Ministry (see page 16).

We encountered widespread dissatisfaction to the move, some years ago, to change the name “Local Ministry Team” to the more clumsy “Local Ministry Development Group”. Whilst acknowledging the rationale, theology and intent behind the shift - that the leadership group should not be mistaken for those who do the ministry in an exclusive sense, but rather facilitate the mission and ministry of all the baptised - the review group also acknowledges the need for simple terminology for use in the local church. Any attempt to review this once more should be undertaken with caution, lest it be seen as either yet another dictum from on high, or an exercise in window-dressing, distracting energy from more urgent questions of mission.

Renewal of Vision

The four-yearly renewal of the LMDG can be an opportune time for revitalisation of the team and reconsideration of its strategic role in the benefice. We urge LMDGs to use their next review cycle as

a time for reconsidering their own model of leadership, perhaps using the models identified above, and using that as the base for any Mission Action Plan. One Companion noted: “when new people join a team this is a critical time; doing training together seems to encourage bonding and common purpose.” The interrelation of each of these - base model of leadership, strategic renewal of vision and action, new membership and renewed coaching to bring the team together - should provide a sound platform within which the grace and energy of God might work (see Recommendation **1.8**).

We are of the opinion that the existing Manual of Local Ministry still expresses the “heart and soul” of Local Ministry and is still an appropriate first place to go for LMDGs wishing to review their purpose and identity at any stage, and for Local Ministry Benefices wishing to review their mission and ministry and common life together (see Recommendation **2.9** and **3.7**).

The LMDG and the Congregation

Whilst some congregation members expressed positive confidence in their LMDG, a common comment was that their knowledge of who the LMDG is and what they do was vague. This may seem strange in the context of a four-yearly cycle of calling and renewal; however the default setting for many is still the traditional role of a vicar and PCC and, whereas in most other parts of the worldwide Anglican Communion Local Ministry operates without a stipendiary incumbent (see page 10), in this part of the church the existence of the incumbent remains for many the visible embodiment of leadership. Some congregation members remain wary, seeing Local Ministry as “do-it-yourself church” and wanting the incumbent to assume a more traditional role. The change of people’s perceptions and deep-seated patterns is a task which takes more than a generation. However a simple measure such as photographs of the LMDG placed boldly by a church’s entrance and on parish literature can help shift perceptions and keep people informed.

Vulnerability and Risk

We observed instances of LMDGs in deep trouble, and LMDGs who have been through deep trouble but have survived the long haul and are functioning better because of it. We have also observed some LMDGs who have much to share with others about ways of working with God to bring about abundant life (see Recommendation **1.1**).

Local Ministry can be an instrument that unites a benefice marked by strife and intransigence between parishes. By operating across the local PCCs, and with the consent and support of those PCCs, an LMDG can facilitate:

- A new coming-together of disparate parishes with prayer, goodwill and information-sharing amongst the whole.
- A “smarter” way of managing multiple PCC meetings (see the following section).
- Local mission and ministry initiatives unique to a particular village but with the resourcing by the whole.
- Mission and ministry initiatives across all, in ways that benefit the whole.

A time of great vulnerability and risk for an LMDG and for the overall health of Local Ministry in a benefice is during the time of vacancy and change in incumbent. Whilst some LMDGs have risen to the challenge and provided quality leadership both practical and spiritual during an interregnum - and in fact have been able to do so precisely because they are already present in the benefice with the mandate, from the PCC, for ministry leadership - other LMDGs have not been able to navigate the change and uncertainty. One factor in a successful time of change is the existence of other

licensed ministers, working in partnership with the LMDG. Another is a pre-existing clear role of leadership and oversight which is widely recognised by the congregation. At such times, the internal health and stability of the LMDG is critical and we recommend an extra-supportive presence of a Companion during those times (see Recommendations **1.5**, **1.6**, **1.8** and **3.5**).

As a review group we heard some stories of long-standing dysfunction, strain and tensions within congregations and within their LMDGs. In this, Local Ministry benefices are no different to any traditional benefice or parish. Nevertheless, stories we heard from LMDGs and incumbents persuade us that crisis management, where a benefice or an incumbent is experiencing extreme or long-standing stress, needs significant high-level diocesan input and sustained support (see Recommendation **3.8**).

In a Nutshell

When LMDGs thrive they are characterised by:

- Attending to the group's spirituality and discipleship through regular, intentional prayer, worship and retreat days
- Eating, drinking and laughing together
- Ensuring members are valued and needed
- Encouraging people to take risks
- Working to nurture right relationships between members
- Working to achieve positive relations with other groups in the benefice

When LMDGs struggle they are characterised by one or more of:

- Confusion about their role: within the group, by the incumbent, by the congregation
- A lack of engagement with learning and development or resistance to coaching
- Difficult relationships
- Issues of control and empire building by any member
- Fighting or disharmony with other groups in the benefice

The LMDG and the Parochial Church Council

It goes without saying that trust and co-operation between the LMDG and the (usually) several PCCs is pivotal to the healthy functioning of a Local Ministry benefice. In our regional meetings we were privileged to hear of some creative and constructive ways of bringing the two together. We also heard tales of suspicion, dis-harmony and power-blocking moves, none of which serve to build up the Body of Christ.

Many of the difficulties, perceived and actual, stem from an uncertainty around the legal status, under canon law, of the LMDG. Even a cursory reading of the relevant material reveals that there is nothing that prohibits a PCC from delegating authority for some of its duties to another body within a parish. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how Local Ministry has survived this long, throughout the Church of England, were its leadership structures to have been found illegal (see Recommendation **3.1**).

The reality is that mutually-supportive and quality joint leadership is indeed possible between a LMDG and the several PCCs that exist within many benefices. Some of the factors are:

- In small rural parishes, often the same people are on both. In some instances this is deliberate and in one LMDG all members were also a member of a PCC. For this benefice, the model worked well and enhanced communication and co-operation.
- Those LMDGs which reported a constructive and happy relationship with their PCCs were also the ones who had regular reporting between the bodies.

Some responses to the review highlighted the expectation that “People who hold the purse-strings should be spiritual” that is, Christian leadership in any guise should maintain a healthy concern for relationships with each other and with God. Within Local Ministry, such an expectation should work for the mutual enhancement of relationships, rather than territorial possessiveness about areas of leadership (see Recommendation **1.9**).

One Local Ministry benefice has adopted a pattern whereby all PCCs meet together several times a year. Meetings open with prayer, sometimes led by a PCC member; reports are provided well-beforehand, including the LMDG report; after presentation and mutual discussion of reports the meeting splits so that individual PCCs can address matters that only pertain to them; clergy are available as needed at any one time. In this benefice, ancient feuds between parishes have been healed by this process and there is a new spirit of co-operation between all.

Incumbents

Incumbents within the Church of England’s version of Local Ministry have a critical role, an integral place based on ecclesiastical order and, when Local Ministry is at its best, can facilitate thriving team life.

Responses from Incumbents

A large majority of incumbents reported high levels of satisfaction in working with their LMDG. Almost all incumbents who responded felt valued within the team and most also reported looking forward to team meetings. It was notable that the few that were unhappy with their LMDG were very unhappy that is, there existed a particular and pervasive underlying issue.

Most, but not all, incumbents judged that the LMDG in their benefice parish is fulfilling its role in “doing God’s work”. Those who are less sure are most often frustrated by a lack of understanding within their LMDG of the potential of their strategic role. Some incumbents were concerned about congregation members moving to become a part of the LMDG and exercising a practical ministry for which they had not been trained, and were conscious of tension between wanting to encourage the ministry and anxiety about this.

Reflections on the power which accompanies the role of incumbent ranged widely, from “It’s Leadership” (in a healthy sense), to “I think they accept me on equal terms” and “There is desire to be led” (in a passive sense). Some incumbents, who have taken on a benefice with a troubled history or who have mediated significant difficulties, have been left wary of Local Ministry and what they might have to “sort out” if the LMDG was allowed to assume a full strategic leadership role. In

these instances the incumbent felt the need to retain a more overt balance of power than might otherwise be necessary in a well-functioning LMDG.

We noted on several occasions during the regional meetings, when the licensed ministers spoke with us together apart from their LMDGs, that some voiced how helpful it was to share difficulties and hear the experiences and constructive ways forward from their peers. We encourage incumbents to make the best possible use of a revitalised licensed ministers' meeting, and the potential riches to be found in an enhanced relationship with a Companion (see the following section; also Recommendations **1.2** and **1.4**).

The role of the Incumbent

It is patently clear that the role of incumbent is key to whether Local Ministry takes place in a healthy manner, as well as key to the particular style and strategic focus of the LMDG. When Local Ministry is supported whole-heartedly by the incumbent there is a stronger feeling of teamwork and development of people's gifts, roles and responsibilities. Where the incumbent is wary about Local Ministry, the people tend to be more leader-dependent, their individual roles tend to be as practical assistants helping in worship or week-day programmes, but without a strategic role, and frequently LMDG members see beyond this and long for something more, both for themselves and for the parishes they belong to.

A dynamic that underlies some of the difficulties that can exist is confusion over the precise nature of the incumbent's role, when commissioned lay leadership stands in partnership with the incumbent and power is shared, in name at least. Some of these dynamics have been named in other Church of England literature (Bowden, 2000, p 70, 109; Greenwood, 2006, p 123). As a review group we have heard this expressed as doubt and concern by clergy both inside and outside Local Ministry benefices. The question might be articulated as, to what degree is the traditional understanding of an incumbent modified by the existence of a commissioned lay-clergy leadership team? A glimpse into the experience and ecclesiastical structures of other Provinces who have adopted Local Ministry may assist us here.

Other Models of Stipended Oversight

Previously this report has alluded to the distinctiveness of Local Ministry in the Church of England. As an Established Church, a stipendiary incumbent is a given part of the model, something not found in the original Michigan model and its variants in other places of the worldwide Anglican Communion i.e., in Local Ministry in its classic sense, an incumbent is not perceived as essential, and it was the *lack* of incumbents that provided the circumstances for the generation of the concept in the late 1970's. In many dioceses around the Communion, Ordained Local Ministers are the sole local priestly presence and leadership is maintained amongst the ministry group as a whole, in partnership with the Church Council. The issue of oversight is solved by the appointment of regionally-based clergy who each work with several ministry groups and leave the day-to-day ministerial tasks to those groups. In such an ecclesiastical framework, it is this person who is charged with maintaining ministry standards, attends to training or calls in other theological educators, provides theological, pastoral, biblical and spiritual guidance as needed, challenges the ministry group with the demands of an outwards-facing gospel, mediates any conflict, and facilitates the ministry group as they make wise decisions for which they then take responsibility. The resulting relationship can be richly rewarding for all concerned. Without such a person, any diocese, as part

of an episcopal church, would have abdicated its responsibility in assuring both adequate ministry to local communities and the welfare and safe functioning of the local ministry teams.

A Way Forward for the Diocese of Hereford

Whilst not advocating a shift to this form of Local Ministry within the Diocese of Hereford, it is possible to see here a guide for the Church of England incumbent in a setting where the usual mandate, conferred by the induction and institution of an incumbent, is tacitly modified by the associated commissioning of an entire lay-clergy team. In the context of rural England, with a densely-populated and church-rich geography (in comparison with rural areas of other Provinces) and with the era of a parish priest in every village long gone, replaced with benefices of up to two-dozen rural parishes, the role of a Local Ministry incumbent can easily be seen to parallel that of the regional oversight provider described above, something that Church of England Local Ministry veteran Robin Greenwood promoted in his early writings (Greenwood, 2000, p 32). Moreover, it is likely that, were the role of the incumbent to be approached in this manner - as overseer, trainer, guide - that many of the uncertainties and problems experienced by some would be met.

One incumbent during the course of this review commented that the key question should have been “How much time and energy has the incumbent invested in the team?” This is a wise observation, both in the light of the previous paragraph, and as attested to by some Companions and by the observations of the review group. Those LMDGs who have had coaching and support from both incumbent and Companion generally show a better understanding of role, and fulfil that role in a significantly more positive manner. We suggest that time invested in the LMDG by the incumbent can likewise result in a stronger sense of identity and role of the incumbent, as well as strengthen the basic lay-clergy partnership that is the foundation of Local Ministry.

Given the above, a healthy balance of power which incorporates the power of the incumbent in a collegial lay-clergy team is a potentially thorny question and one that has been structurally de-centered in other Provinces. However, in itself (and as the review group noted in its survey documents), power is a phenomenon or concept without judgment. Each of us holds a personal power and each of us can use that in life-enhancing or life-denying ways, within the realms of God’s love. Within Local Ministry, the question of power becomes of particular importance as each is challenged to share both power and responsibility. The fact of the incumbent, within the Church of England’s Local Ministry structures, bears a price: ultimately, the incumbent holds the power to dismantle, re-form, or shut down the LMDG and we have heard people speak of this on several occasions as part of this review. Ultimately, it is the manner in which we wield our power that allows it to be a carrier of God’s grace or not: in this, each of us, lay or ordained, is accountable.

Companions

The Companion scheme is a potential blessing, with the potential to be the primary external support for Local Ministry, the first port-of-call for incumbents and LMDGs in difficulties, and intercessory friend. If well-trained and resourced, the Companions could alleviate the work load of diocesan Local Ministry staff. At present the Companions scheme is patchy and needs a revitalising audit to re-establish it as an integral part of Local Ministry.

What is a Companion?

A Companion is designed to be a wise and critical friend, assigned to an LMDG at its initial start-up, for a minimum period of 18 months. Alongside the diocesan Local Ministry staff, they are responsible for the initial training and development of the LMDG, and act as mentor during their regular meetings. At present, it is not envisaged that they will act likewise for the incumbent, outside of LMDG meetings, and we have had described to us the suspicion and misunderstanding that can easily exist between the incumbent and the Companion. Given the vital role each plays, this is a tragedy which needs care and attention. A key recommendation concerns the specific mandate that a Companion and an incumbent be given to develop a mutual relationship outside of LMDG meeting times, such as exists with a mentor or critical friend or other external consultant. This cannot but be beneficial for the whole LMDG (see Recommendations **1.4** and **2.7**).

We have also met with blank looks from LMDG members at the regional meetings for this review when we have asked about Companions. This is not surprising, given that many Local Ministry benefices have been running for a decade or two, and their time for an allotted Companion has well passed into the history of the group. However, the interest in the concept of a Companion has been high, both from LMDG members and from incumbents who have joined the benefice at a later stage in its history or from outside the diocese.

Companions: the Reality

The Companions themselves speak keenly of the joys and frustrations of their role. All agree that the biggest joy is seeing a diverse group of people grow in their faith, leadership skills, and commitment to the well-being of their benefice. The other side of that coin is the frustration associated with the same: holding in tension the personalities and gifts of a group of very different people as they rub-up against each other, including, sometimes, the incumbent. All reveal themselves to be deeply committed to the principles of lay-clergy partnership in the mission and ministry of the church.

At the same time it is not always easy matching up a Companion with a particular benefice and its incumbent. From time to time there is a mismatch (as in any professional or collegial relationship) and the diocesan Local Ministry staff are called upon to step in, renegotiate, and try to find a new Companion with sometimes limited success. Consequently, for some Local Ministry benefices, there exists the residue of a frustrated and futile exercise and for some the sense that Companions may be fine, but this benefice doesn't need one. In some instances the diocesan staff themselves have stepped into the breach and acted as Companions for a period of time, reducing their availability for more strategic Local Ministry support.

Despite this mixed history in the diocese, the concept of a critical friend and mentor to both LMDG and incumbent, on an ongoing basis, is one that carries potential on several fronts:

- As ongoing trainer alongside the incumbent
- As the first port-of-call for incumbents and LMDGs in difficulties
- As the initiator and facilitator of the 4-yearly review
- As an ongoing objective and wise presence for the well-being and focus of the group
- As a sounding board for the incumbent
- As a network of Local Ministry advocates who relieve the diocesan staff of much of the day-to-day work associated with supporting the LMDGs

Because of this, the review group recommends a full audit of the Companions scheme, as the first step to Companions becoming the norm as opposed to a temporary start-up support for LMDGs. It is our hope that the benefits of such a relationship will be seen by the majority of LMDGs and incumbents as outweighing any negative experiences from their past.

In order to achieve this, attention will need to be given to the selection and ongoing training of Companions, as well as a negotiated review within each Local Ministry benefice to determine its history and experience of Companions and how such an ongoing venture might be recommenced (see Recommendation 2.7).

Licensed Ministry

Many Local Ministry benefices are blessed by the existence and ministry of licensed ministers other than the incumbent, such as Ordained Local Ministers, curates, Readers, Self-Supporting Ministers, Ministers in Secular Employment, retired clergy, Pioneer ministers. There is no particular guideline concerning whether such persons should necessarily be members of an LMDG; however, in many instances some or all are, and their presence is warmly embraced and valued. In addition, such extra collegial relationships provide an additional layer of support for the incumbent, especially in matters of extreme sensitivity or confidentiality.

This part of the report particularly addresses the role of the Ordained Local Minister and the Reader, two ministries which are receiving attention and review across the Church of England. Other issues concerning Licensed Lay Ministry are addressed in the section on Mission and Ministry (see page 18).

Ordained Local Ministers

The origin and development of Local Ministry in the Church of England has, from its inception, relied upon the discernment and ordination of local priests, known as “Ordained Local Ministers”. Over 35 years this has progressed from being a novelty to becoming a well-recognised vocational call, spoken confidently as “here to stay” (Torry, 2006, p 162; see also Bowden et al, 2012). However, as in many other parts of the Anglican Communion, the theology of priesthood for OLMs which Local Ministry entails has proved controversial, depending as it does on a concept of priesthood which is restricted and local, i.e. is not transferable or recognised beyond the immediate local church context. At this present time, some parts of the Anglican Communion including some English Dioceses are moving away from this form of ordained ministry and re-asserting the common understanding of priesthood as tenable wherever a priest might find themselves.

In the Diocese of Hereford, Local Ministry has flourished for nearly three decades aided by the vocation of OLMs, and many Local Ministry benefices have maintained a tradition of raising up their own priests to work alongside the incumbent. Their ministry has been and still is highly valued by their local communities, where the quality of their ministry is deeply respected. However over the last decade numbers of OLMs have declined across the Diocese to single-digit figures and responses to this review indicate that the eventual disappearance of OLMs is widely accepted as inevitable.

Part of the dynamic is that the distinction between OLMs and other non-stipendiary ministry has become blurred and not clearly understood by congregations. In the Diocese of Hereford, both have received the same training through WEMTC, and alongside ordinands training for stipendiary ministry. In most Local Ministry benefices the difference between OLMs and SSMs is in title only: in

practice they functioned in the same way. The main difference - deployability - has become a distinction in name only, as many SSMs are settled in their communities and are rarely deployed. On a pragmatic level alone it seems sensible to remove the distinction and give both the same designation. On a theological level, this move would assert the essential equality of priesthood and put an end to the stigma of OLMs as “second-class priests” (see Recommendation 3.2).

Should the ministry of OLMs be discontinued, it is certain that non-stipendiary ministry will remain critical to the success of Local Ministry, and the Church of England will continue to rely on this ministry in multi-parish Local ministry benefices as it does in other non-Local Ministry benefices.

For many in Local Ministry, LMDG membership will represent their calling from God and faithful response. However it is equally true that, for some, their experience as an LMDG member will prove to be the opportunity for further vocational exploration and LMDGs will continue to be a seedbed of the next generation of SSMs. This is something that we would encourage LMDGs to be aware of and foster, in the spirit of the original Local Ministry vision: that ordained ministry is not only appointed from outside the benefice, but is also “home-grown” (see Recommendation 1.3).

Readers

As signalled in the Introduction to this report, the identity of the Reader is in flux nationwide as lay ministry per se is recognised and, in some dioceses, is licensed or commissioned. Therefore the review group acknowledges that what we offer here is part of a wider conversation, nation-wide and within this diocese, about the evolving role of the Reader in an era of active lay ministry.

Despite their long history in the Church of England, this review reveals that there is still uncertainty surrounding the traditional role of Readers, and some congregation members who are unsure of what Readers can and cannot do. In some places, Readers are an automatic member of the LMDG; in others, not, and their membership depends on whether they were called during the discernment process. Increasingly, members of all parishes are developing ministerial roles which “encroach” on the traditional territory of the Reader as lay leader of worship. This can lead to frustration, with some Readers wondering why they embarked on the Hereford diocesan three year training course alongside ordinands, when they could have exercised a similar ministry without such rigorous and demanding training (we recognise that this dynamic is not exclusive to Local Ministry; however, the comments here are from within the scope of our review).

Alongside occasional confusion and hurt, there remains for some a strong sense of vocation, faith in the integrity of the Reader ministry, and in the advanced training they have received. From one Reader, we received a thoughtful commentary on the contemporary role of the Reader per se, and how that might flourish in a Local Ministry context. Because of its honesty and depth of reflection, we offer it here in full:

- ❖ On the Incumbent: We worked well together - particularly as her nature was in the main to be naturally collaborative. Our skills were complementary: I found myself in the administrator-role, devising rotas and forms of worship, whilst she was the creative, ideas-generating leader (which sounds just about the right balance).
- ❖ On the LMDG: An interregnum provided the opportunity and space for folks really to step up. My role has been one of 'holding the ring' between the 7 churches as they have each worked out how they would like to develop. My role has developed in some respects into that of 'internal consultant' or critical friend - providing advice, guidance, a safe pair of

hands, encouragement, resources - and the rota framework! I believe that my role has been entirely complementary. I think it would be fair to say that prior (to that interregnum) my role was the more traditional one of 'allowing them into my space' rather than 'joining them in their space' [i.e. the change was for the better].

- ❖ Times of difficulty: The LMDG's attitude on my arrival. There was a feeling that I would inhibit what they felt they were developing into. That was of course the last thing I would have wanted to do. As the newcomer I was desperate for their guidance. So the relationship was very wary for some time.
- ❖ Perhaps there could be a type of consultant function, (coupled with a more explicit, authorised and trained training role) as the way ahead for Readers in Local Ministry benefices. This would help avoid any friction that might develop with the LMDG over 'Sunday roles'.
- ❖ Ministering locally is 'just the way things should be'. There is only us, holey though we might be, to minister with the local community wholly, so that the world might be holy. Local Ministry's contribution to the enabling of that Holy World is so much more than 'keeping the church open'. It must be, in a way that makes sense locally, to witness to Jesus' love for all, to respond to human need, to work for justice and to safeguard creation. (Our Anglican Marks of Mission of course). Thus moving people on to that agenda is a priority.

As a review group, we affirm the ongoing vocational role of the Reader within Local Ministry. Despite an occasional confusion of role, Readers in this diocese play a vital and enthusiastic part in Local Ministry. They represent a group of lay people who are highly trained for ministry. How much they are used, as with Readers everywhere, depends on local context as well as the inclinations of the incumbent. With thoughtful discernment and in the spirit of collaborative ministry, their role can and should flourish alongside other lay ministers and LMDG members in benefices and parishes (see Recommendation **1.3** and **3.3**).

Non-Local Ministry (Traditional) Benefices

As described in the Introduction to this report, a survey was sent to all parishes where there is no LMDG, asking such things as whether they had ever considered Local Ministry but decided against it, and why; whether they had other forms of lay-clergy collaborative leadership, and what support they would appreciate.

Why Not Local Ministry?

From the responses that came in, it appeared that most had never considered Local Ministry as they didn't perceive the need. A couple of responses voiced the fear that Local Ministry appears to be "unwieldy, bureaucratic, sometimes misdirected and unnecessarily time consuming". Whilst it is true that any significant ministry change comes with attendant long-term implications, we hope that the description of the various models at work in the diocese, and the examples and suggestions for best practice contained in this report, will contribute towards a positive environment for further development of collaborative ministry.

Other Models of Collaborative Ministry Leadership

Given the way lay ministry per se is flourishing throughout the church, and the emphasis on collaborative ministry that is actively taught in theological colleges and through WEMTC, we were keen to hear about other, non-Local Ministry forms of lay-clergy leadership teams and what their needs might be. Models included:

- The churchwardens from each parish meet together on a regular basis and act as a benefice leadership team.
- An informal group of about 8 people meet monthly to think and pray with the vicar about the Church's vision and priorities.
- The gifts of all are nurtured through home groups. Those groups act as the nucleus for events and services, drawing in others who might be reticent.
- A team of lay Readers and willing members of the congregations ready to pull their weight.

Mutual Support

In the following part of the report we advocate for the opening up of diocesan Local Ministry structures to others who might be seeking support in pursuing collaborative ministry. Therefore it is of particular interest to hear from these benefices and their incumbents concerning their own needs. From their combined responses the following were discerned:

- The development of a theology of lay ministry, upheld throughout the diocese
- A forum for sharing experiences and good practice
- Diocesan assistance with lay vocational training and licensing eg worship, pastoral care
- Provide local clergy with accessible tools (diocesan website) for developing lay worship leadership
- The development of a culture of everyone making their contribution (“Every Member Ministry”)

It is our hope and expectation that, in the wake of this report, these issues will be attended to (see Recommendations **2.1**, **2.6** and **2.8**).

Mission and Ministry in the Diocese

At the very beginning of the Introduction to this report we drew attention to the challenge facing the Church of England: the need to regenerate mission - in particular, discipleship-focused mission - from amongst the Five-fold Mission statement of the church (Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, Treasure); and alongside that, the regeneration of vocations, specifically vocations to ordained ministry at a time when there is a chronic nation-wide shortage of priests.

Priorities for Mission

In most of the regional meetings for the review, the issue of a “dying church” was voiced and the distress of many was felt keenly. At times we were seen as representatives of the diocese who were there to assist Local Ministry benefices in finding a way forward. Whilst we had no easy answers, we were on the alert for stories that indicated a benefice or parish who had found a way to regenerate, move from maintenance to mission, and whose experience and insight could be shared with the wider diocese. Many of these are found within previous sections; most are not found as “good ideas of things to do” so much as a re-ordering of priorities.

The following represent some of the challenging questions posed to us during the review process that are as real for Local Ministry benefices as they are for any traditional parish.

- Do I see the church, and mine in particular, as a museum, a workshop, or a sacred space? Is the preservation of my church, its building, style of worship and activities, a vital part of my role as a church member, and do I need to reach out to others in my local community as part of my church membership? Is either of these more important than the other?
- Am I, as a church member and baptised Christian, called to mission? If so, what does this mean for me? Is it the job of all church members to “preach the Gospel”; to “live the Gospel”? Does the word 'evangelism' cause a positive or a negative reaction in me? How might we engage in living the Gospel with children and young people in our villages and market towns?
- What do I understand by “the ministry of all believers”? Should my incumbent be the most important and influential person in our church; in our community? Do all church members have spiritual gifts that should be encouraged and used for the work of the Gospel? How does this or would this work in my own church? Are children’s gifts also valued?
- How do I see the future of the church as the Body of Christ? What about my particular church? Can I contribute to building for the church's future?

We are aware that many factors involved in the flourishing or languishing of Local Ministry benefices could equally be said of any traditional parish. It would be unfair, for example, to accuse Local Ministry of being largely in a “maintenance” mode, disengaged from mission, when the same would be true of many if not most traditional parishes. Therefore during the process of the review we have carefully teased out such comments, and tried to keep the conversation focused on Local Ministry itself i.e. the way in which, (using the above example), lay-clergy leadership teams have enhanced or facilitated mission precisely by being a collaborative leadership team; or, conversely, have remained inward-looking and in “chaplaincy” mode, precisely because the task is perceived as encouraging the gifts of the congregation rather than engagement with the community.

Making and Strengthening Disciples

Several Companions commented on the intrinsic strength of Local Ministry in the area of developing disciples for mission and ministry. Whilst not all LMDGs have taken up this challenge, nevertheless one Companion noted: “Local Ministry provides the opportunity and the space to reflect on God’s call and to develop Christian disciples and leaders in a more intentional way than might happen otherwise”. Another noted that Local Ministry per se helps give “a more intentional focus to mission”. Perhaps most tellingly, one commented that her biggest joy was “seeing (LMDG) members growing in confidence to talk about the part God plays in their life and the life of church”.

Lest these comments be seen as merely strengthening the disciples who already exist in our churches, it is worth reflecting on the need for confident disciples who are part of our church, and whose Christian witness is strengthened, invigorated and made more joyful so that “Tell” and “Teach” become a less-scary option, alongside the less-intimidating “Tend”, “Transform” and “Treasure”. In light of wider church criticism that Local Ministry has become a maintenance mode of church, these observations reveal the capacity that lies within Local Ministry to revitalise the lay leadership and discipleship, and give renewed energy and efficacy to witnessing for Christ in the wider sphere of people’s lives.

Fostering Vocations

Earlier, in the section discussing Ordained Local Ministers, we noted that raising-up local vocations has always been at the core of Local Ministry and we urged Local Ministry benefices to continue to be the seed-bed for ordained ministry (see Recommendation **1.3**). Likewise in the section on Readers. Here, we address the fostering of lay vocation to specific areas of ministry.

The flourishing of lay ministry is not peculiar to Local Ministry. In many dioceses, lay people's gifts and skill are recognised and nurtured and sometimes lead to publicly-recognised licensing to specific areas of ministry. Nevertheless, Local Ministry is particularly well-placed to encourage the growth of non-ordained vocation. As signalled in the LMDG section describing the various leadership modes which LMDGs can adopt, some LMDGs operate on assigning particular role to each member (see page 6): this can result in a deepening and strengthening of vocational call as, for example, pastoral care team leaders or family ministry co-ordinators. In other cases, where the LMDG operates more as an eldership, such specific ministries may flourish amongst the congregation, operating under the oversight of the incumbent and LMDG. In each instance, the flourishing of lay vocation happens not in a vacuum: it is part of the very essence of Local Ministry and emerges naturally and intentionally within it.

In the next part of the report we address training needs and we commend the Diocese of Hereford for its plans to advance training for lay ministries throughout the diocese. By endorsing and legitimising licensed lay ministries, the diocese will be adding breadth and depth to existing Local Ministry and provide openings for people who feel that they have something to offer that does not necessarily fit within existing patterns of licensed ministry (see Recommendation **1.3**).

Findings: Diocesan Structures

Local Ministry Forum

The Forum is a valuable and integral part of diocesan Local Ministry structures and has been so since its inception. Originally conceived of as a sounding board for the Local Ministry staff, comprising mainly lay members of LMDGs and chaired by a lay person, it has served well in that form thus far. However, in its present form it suffers from a confusion of identity and the time has come for a re-ordering of its purpose and membership.

On a visit to the Forum, the review group asked current members to prioritise the various purposes it serves. It became clear that the lay members valued Forum as a vehicle of communication and mutual support; whilst the staff needed a small group to act as a sounding board and plan events such as the annual Local Ministry Celebration. Clearly these two needs were at variance. In addition, in its present form, it is not representative of all LMDGs and a larger group would make it too unwieldy for its primary task.

In the regional meetings for this review, we asked the combined LMDG members, various clergy, and congregation members what they thought of the Forum. Overwhelmingly, those present, who were not themselves a part of Forum, did not know of its existence and were intrigued by its possibilities, particularly the potential for a regular, regional place where specific topics could be discussed by LMDG members, experiences and insights shared, and collegial, mutual training for LMDG members happen. The time is clearly right for a change.

We propose that there is a need to dis-establish Forum in its present form in order to give birth to two separate bodies:

- i. A strategic focus group (as opposed to an oversight group) which exists in order to work with the diocesan Local Ministry staff in achieving the aims of collaborative and Local Ministry in the diocese. Its membership to consist of representatives of the various roles currently included within Local Ministry and should be no more than five people, ensuring a balance of lay and clergy. Whereas the current Forum meets twice a year, this group should meet termly i.e. three times a year (see Recommendation **2.3**).
- ii. A Forum for lay members of LMDGs which exists in order to offer a place for mutual support and sharing of best practice, including specific input from the Local Ministry staff on topics of mutual learning. This body to be open to members or representatives of all the Local Ministry ventures in the diocese and should be facilitated by a diocesan Local Ministry staff member or other Diocesan Support Staff person. Meetings should either be replicated in different regions or deaneries, or move between them in rotation (see Recommendation **2.4**).

Local Ministry Annual Celebration Day

This annual gathering of all involved in Local Ministry, plus anyone from the diocese who is interested, is looked-forward to and warmly appreciated. The only suggestion received from regional meetings concerns “getting the message out there”, i.e. advertising boldly and well-ahead of the event.

We recommend broadening the scope of this gathering, so that it caters also for those benefices who have developed their own form of lay-clergy collaborative leadership (see Recommendation 2.5). In doing so, three aims will be achieved:

- i. Extending knowledge of the actual practice of Local Ministry amongst other like-minded benefices and congregations.
- ii. Supporting those benefices who wish to develop other forms of lay-clergy team leadership.
- iii. Broadening the mandate of the diocesan Local Ministry scheme.

Incumbents Meeting

As with the Forum for lay LMDG members, this group has existed since the beginning of Local Ministry in the diocese and has been through cycles of highs and lows that are common in most long-standing structures.

We attended a meeting, and also consulted with clergy, on their own, at the regional meetings. It was noticeable (and predictable) that those who came to the diocesan group were strong in their appreciation for the opportunity to meet with their colleagues and have time with the Local Ministry staff. It was also noticeable (and predictable) that those who did not come to the group but who spoke with us at the regional meetings were less complimentary.

The three main areas for comment were:

- i. **Membership.** Should the meeting be just for incumbents or should it be for any licensed minister for example curates and SSMS; also incumbents from other like-minded benefices wanting to share experiences and best practice.
- ii. **Purpose.** Sharing with other colleagues is deeply appreciated; however with considerable travel involved it would help to know in advance the focus or topic for each meeting.
- iii. **Location.** Holding meetings regionally would help enormously.

As with the Lay Forum, the time is right for a fresh sense of vision and purpose for this gathering. Given that the landscape of ministry is changing across the Church of England, that collaborative ministry in its widest sense is becoming embedded within many dioceses, and the voices of the non-Local Ministry benefices in this review, we feel the incumbents’ group should be expanded to include other licensed ministers, including Readers, working with both Local Ministry and other, non-Local Ministry forms of collaborative lay-clergy team ministry (see Recommendation 2.6). Such a breaking-down of distinctions can only strengthen and validate the ministry of all licensed ministers as they seek new, collaborative ways of being church.

Given the number of incumbents who mentioned the difficulty in travelling long distances within the diocese, we will also be recommending that such support groups should either be replicated in different regions or deaneries, or move between them in rotation.

Local Ministry Support Staff

At present there are three staff: a full-time Local Ministry Officer; a part-time Local Ministry Development Adviser, and a part-time Local Ministry Office Co-ordinator. There is no doubt that the three Local Ministry staff are deeply appreciated and valued in the field; we as a review group are in no doubt that their existence is crucial to the health and well-being of Local Ministry and, by extension, to all collaborative ministry in the diocese.

Office Co-ordinator

Whereas, even ten years ago, consultants and educators relied on a PA to create their documents and educational material, in this era many field professionals have the skills and technology to quickly create and re-create much of their own material and the role of PA has changed dramatically to one of broader systems manager. It has been no different in the Local Ministry department. Over the last six years and originating with the move of the combined diocesan Support Staff from Hereford to Ludlow, the role of Office Co-ordinator has progressed from that of secretary to that of general office manager, a role for which the present employee is eminently well-suited, with a complex and demanding brief. Two aspects are worth noting here:

- What could have been a difficult re-shaping of the position has been well-managed, and the result is a long-serving employee with experience and sensitivity for a role which frequently involves complex conversations with others in the diocese.
- The fact that this role opens the door for sometimes-lengthy conversations with people who may pop in or phone up means that the tasks of the day sometimes suffer. This has not been mentioned as a problem by the Office Co-ordinator; however the review group is left asking: who in the diocese could or should be filling the need of an impartial listener for clergy? And, should clergy be utilising their spiritual directors and peers better?

Local Ministry Development Advisor

This position, of more recent origin, has rapidly become valued in its own right, and the present Development Advisor has a full work load of four-yearly reviews, training and development tasks, and trouble-shooting in the benefices, as well as acting as Companion for some benefices who have not found a suitable match.

As this review has been underway, wider moves amongst the combined diocesan Support Staff are also shaping up. A new “Diocesan School of Ministry” is in its formational stages and it is a logical and synergetic move for the Local Ministry staff to be an active part of it. Consequently, the present Development Advisor has taken on the dual role of assisting with planning and shaping a new ministry training structure, which is intended to meet the need of equipping lay people for their ministries, as well as bringing coherence and structure to the present work of the combined Diocesan Ministry Support Staff.

Local Ministry Officer

The position of Local Ministry Officer has been in place for over 20 years, since Local Ministry was first planted in the diocese. The role, as with that of the Development Advisor, is a complex one, vacillating between the joys of seeing lay leadership blossom and flourish within benefices, and headache and heartache when dynamics in a benefice become toxic. As a review group, we note the following:

- The nature of the job may mean that the Local Ministry Officer walks a delicate path. Whilst part of the brief is to assist benefices who decide to make the deep shift from traditional ministry to Local Ministry, the incumbent is still the incumbent. Occasionally, suspicion and alienation exists between the incumbent and the diocesan Local Ministry staff. As with the Companion, this is a tragedy. The working relationships between an incumbent and the diocesan Local Ministry staff has the potential to work for the good of all and is but another manifestation of collaborative ministry per se.
- One of the burdens of being a highly-skilled consultant is that demands for your services stretch wide across any organisation. In the church, this is compounded by our core value of vocational service and the perception that clergy are always available as the job demands. Thus, Bishops' Staff in any diocese share a complexity of tasks and roles across the diocese, irrespective of their core job description. This review has made some recommendations - for example the re-shaping of the Companions - that will necessitate significant input from the Local Ministry staff, should Local Ministry in this diocese move from maintenance to mission. Ultimately, a re-vamped Companion scheme should alleviate the workload of the staff. In the meantime, this comes at a time when the Local Ministry Development Advisor is taking on added responsibilities in lay training (see above). We question whether these shifts will happen unless the Local Ministry Officer is freed-up, by the diocese, to concentrate on implementing some of the recommendations in this report (see Recommendation **2.10**).
- Should the Diocese of Hereford go the same way as neighbouring dioceses, and re-shape the Local Ministry staff positions as generic "Development Advisors"? There is no doubt, as made abundantly clear from the very beginning of this report, that the landscape of ministry is changing for the Church of England. In the same way that traditional ministry is evolving, so is Local Ministry. A model which was originally imported from Michigan in the 1980s has not remained static: it has evolved into many manifestations around the Anglican Communion and inspired many congregations and clergy to seek their own ways of transforming the church. Elsewhere, we have recommended opening up the Local Ministry meetings to others who would like to share the conversations. At the same time we recognise that the specific needs of Local Ministry benefices still need specific support. At this stage, we believe it is enough to loosen up the mechanisms and broaden the vision (see Recommendation **2.1**). The experience of changing the name of the LMTs to LMDGs was not a happy one and, given that other diocesan Support Staff roles are evolving, the time may be right for further changes in a year or two.

Training

Embedded throughout this report is the issue of training: training and coaching for incumbents and LMDGs as they take up the challenge of Local Ministry and negotiate changes further down the line; and training for lay people as their gifts and skills flourish and more responsibility is delegated to them. Particular issues are:

- The vast majority of negative comments about the ministry training offered at present pertain to location. Whilst initial resourcing of an LMDG does happen in the benefice, it is

the training and resourcing for particular ministries which is the point of this comment. Regional and “cluster” training for lay ministries is needed, as well as one-off diocesan workshops in a single location. The shaping up of a nascent “Diocesan School for Ministry” is awaited with anticipation (see Recommendation **2.8**).

- We also heard requests for local training and meetings with other LMDGs. These requests concerned both a pooling of wisdom and experience, similar to the conversations that happened during this review, and strategic forums built around specific issues identified by members. Whilst the incumbents have had the benefit of their meeting, the same has not been available for lay members up until this point. We hope that the re-shaping of the Local Ministry Forum and de-centralising its meetings will go some way to providing this.
- The on-line Local Ministry material: (http://www.hereford.anglican.org/churchwork/mission_ministry_and_development/local_ministry/leaflets_and_brochures/index.aspx) and the Local Ministry Manual are both excellent resources that need very little adjustment. However they are largely unknown to LMDG members. The on-line material on the diocesan website in particular is all-but invisible and even the review group had repeated difficulty locating it (see Recommendations **2.9** and **3.9**).
- Incumbents can have such punishing schedules that they look for good value at diocesan or regional meetings, if they are to make the long return trip. Providing some specific input around a topic and making it known in advance will make the incumbents’ meeting a more attractive proposal.

Diocesan Strategy and Appointments

On a national level, we commend the way collaborative ministry is being advocated and encouraged by Ministry Division in its guidelines for training of ordinands. We also note the ways in which collaborative ministry is embedded in the academic and formational programmes of WEMTC. Both of these factors will work for the health and well-being of the church in future years and lay the foundations for future Local Ministry and its variants.

However, despite the long and reputable history that Local Ministry in the Diocese of Hereford has, it is clear to us that its presence in the diocese is not as strong or robust as it could be. The hope and expectation of the Local Ministry network that eventually an LMDG would be formed in every benefice has not materialised. With hindsight, given the maxim that difference is healthy within the body of Christ, perhaps this was never a realistic expectation. We acknowledge that some benefices may never become Local Ministry benefices. Even so, parishes and benefices must still evolve to meet the needs of ministry in this day and age.

Benefice Vacancies

One factor already discussed is the considerable effect that the incumbent has in the well-being of Local Ministry and the consequent vulnerability of an existing LMDG during a vacancy, the appointments process, and during the settling-in period. We note stories we have heard, some of which are included elsewhere in this document, of ways in which an LMDG has grown in confidence, unity and strategic ability during such times. We also note those stories of LMDGs who imploded

under the stresses of a prolonged vacancy; or whose new incumbent subsequently dismantled progress that had been made. Even when the circumstances may have made such a move necessary, the resulting damage to relationships at an impressionable moment is painful for all concerned. We consider that there are ways in which LMDGs can be better supported during these times and the support of a Companion, as an existing, trusted critical friend and mentor would be an obvious start, giving support alongside any other licensed ministers who would naturally step-up during a vacancy (see Recommendation 1.5). We identify the Statement of Needs as a strategic document where the expectations of the Local Ministry benefice need to be carefully and explicitly voiced (see Recommendation 3.5).

New Incumbents

A new incumbent may also find that the “honeymoon” is over sooner than anticipated, and that behind the interview process a plethora of fraught dynamics awaits. We strongly urge that, in order to sustain and develop a healthy team, new incumbents of Local Ministry benefices are given extra, active support for the first 18 months into the appointment by the benefice’s Companion and the Local Ministry staff (see Recommendation 1.6); and that the present 18 month review be prefigured by a carefully-facilitated 6 month review into the tenure of a new incumbent in a Local Ministry benefice (See Recommendation 1.7). Whilst this may appear to be unnecessarily managerial for incumbents who may themselves be highly-skilled facilitators or have come with experience in other Local Ministry benefices, we believe it represents best collaborative practice by the diocese.

Collaborative Ministry

Given the changing landscape of ministry per se, we suggest that the Local Ministry scheme has much to offer the diocese in all its parochial or benefice appointments. In particular, the existing Diocesan Guidelines for Local Ministry as found in the manual are sound as undergirding principles and are widely recommended to every benefice in the diocese as useful principles in any manifestation of shared leadership (See Recommendations 3.4 and 3.7). We also recommend that collaborative ministry per se should be an explicit part of each Ministerial Development review, as the diocese seeks to respond with imagination and vigour to the challenges facing the Church of England at this point in time (see Recommendation 3.6).

Recommendations

1. For the LMDGs, Incumbents and Benefices

- 1) That LMDG members seize the opportunities for localised regional support and sharing of best practice offered by a newly-formed Lay Forum.
- 2) That incumbents seize the opportunities for peer support and sharing of best practice offered by a revitalised licensed ministers' meeting.
- 3) That Local Ministry benefices and their incumbents actively encourage vocations to specific lay ministries, to Readership, and to ordained ministry from amongst their members.
- 4) That a Companion and an incumbent be given a specific mandate to develop a mutual relationship outside of team meeting times, such as exists with a mentor, critical friend or other external consultant.
- 5) That a Companion work with any existing licensed ministers and the LMDG to strengthen and maintain the energies of an LMDG during a vacancy.
- 6) That new incumbents of Local Ministry benefices are given extra, active support for the first 18 months into the appointment by the benefice's Companion and the Local Ministry staff.
- 7) That a carefully-facilitated review take place 6 and 18 months into the tenure of a new incumbent in a Local Ministry benefice.
- 8) That LMDGs and incumbents are expected to use the four-yearly review cycle as a positive, critical opportunity. This to include: a time for renewed commitment to corporate prayer and times of retreat; of strategic review of leadership purpose and function along the lines of the models listed in this review; as educational renewal; and as a time for renewed missional drive in association with a Mission Action Plan.
- 9) That mutual reporting between an LMDG and the PCCs to which it relates happen as a matter of course and as a part of building a healthy benefice.

2. For the Diocesan Local Ministry Staff

- 1) That Local Ministry diocesan mechanisms be extended to include other forms of lay-clergy team ministry.
- 2) That the Local Ministry Forum in its present state be disbanded.
- 3) That a strategic focus group of no more than five people be established in order to work with the diocesan Local Ministry staff in achieving the aims of collaborative ministry and Local Ministry in the diocese.

- 4) That a Forum for lay members of LMDGs be established, open to members or representatives of all the Local Ministry ventures in the diocese. Meetings should either be replicated in different regions or deaneries, or move between them in rotation; such meetings to be made available at least termly in the diocese.
- 5) That the scope of the annual Celebration Day be broadened to include those benefices who have developed their own form of lay-clergy collaborative leadership.
- 6) That the incumbents meeting be expanded to include other licensed ministers, including Readers, working with both Local Ministry and other forms of collaborative lay-clergy team ministry. In addition:
 - The inclusion of Companions should be considered.
 - The agenda should include specific topics of mutual learning or sharing, of direct relevance to Local Ministry and collegial ministry matters.
 - To be facilitated by a diocesan Local Ministry staff member or other Diocesan Support Staff person.
 - This group should either be replicated in different regions or deaneries, or move between them in rotation; such meetings to be made available at least termly in the diocese.
- 7) That the Companion scheme receives urgent attention from diocesan Local Ministry staff in order to establishing Companions as the norm in any Local Ministry benefice. This to include:
 - Consultation with the Lay Forum and the Incumbents Meeting to develop guidelines for the matching of Companion to LMDG and incumbent.
 - Training for Companions.
 - Support meetings along the same lines as the Lay Forum and Incumbents Meeting.
 - A review of each Local Ministry benefice to ascertain the need for an on-going Companion, however long the LMDG has been in operation.
- 8) That the Local Ministry staff work closely with the emerging Diocesan School of Ministry to design regional, local training events, utilising the wealth of material already available in the Local Ministry Manual and online as well as other diocesan training events and training material from other related church organisations.
- 9) That the Local Ministry Manual be made easily available on-line.
- 10) That the diocesan Local Ministry staff review their time allocation for implementing the recommendations of this report.

3. For the Bishop's Council

- 1) That the Diocesan Secretary make available to Parochial Church Councils, incumbents and Local Ministry Development Groups the relevant legal material that enables LMDGs to exist as part of the legitimate leadership structure in a Local Ministry benefice.
- 2) That Ordained Local Ministry should no longer be offered as a vocational option in the Diocese of Hereford; that the ordination and designation of Ordained Local Ministers be formally discontinued, and that the Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod find a way whereby existing OLMs be transferred, or re-licensed, as Self-Supporting Ministers.
- 3) That the findings concerning Readers in Local Ministry benefices and their experiences alongside commissioned lay leaders feed into the wider conversation in the Diocese pertaining to the role of the Reader per se.
- 4) That Local Ministry and collaborative ministry should be embedded and highlighted as part of the clergy recruitment process into the diocese and in all parish and benefice appointments.
- 5) That in benefices where the incumbent has resigned and where an LMDG is already in existence, particular care is given in crafting the "Statement of Needs" and with the subsequent appointments process.
- 6) That collaborative ministry in general should be an explicit part of each Ministerial Development review.
- 7) That the existing Diocesan guidelines for Local Ministry are sound as undergirding principles and are widely recommended to every benefice in the diocese as useful principles in any manifestation of shared and collaborative leadership.
- 8) That the Bishop's Council, in conjunction with the Local Ministry staff, develop a code of best practice, to be observed when working alongside Local Ministry benefices where significant dysfunction is evidenced.
- 9) That the imminent re-vamp of the diocesan website take into account the need for lay ministers and incumbents to easily and quickly access material that pertains to them.

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