Rural Dean Role Description: with Commentary November 2019

The role of Rural Dean is based first of all on certain Church of England Canons. Other resources to which it will be useful to refer are:

* Church Representation Rules, particularly Part 3: Deanery Synods
* Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy, particularly Section 14: Care for the Carers

**Rural Dean Role Description - Notes and additions**

The Purpose of the Role

* To share with the Bishop and Archdeacon in their ministry of oversight across the Deanery
* To lead the Deanery, working collaboratively with the Lay Chair and Deanery Leadership Team, to fulfil the vision of the Deanery as “a local network of churches, inspiring, influencing and leading mission and ministry”
* To fulfil the canonical expectations of being Dean

Area Deans hold a ministry of pastoral care and leadership under the Bishop, for which their own continuing growth as a disciple and minister of Christ is essential. They share in the episcopal care of the Church both by representing the needs and thinking of the clergy and laity of the Deanery to the Bishop, and also by representing the mind of the Diocese to the people. The Lay Chair is able to share in the vast majority of the tasks and responsibilities – this should be encouraged as it enables collaboration and also reduces some of the Rural Dean’s workload.

**Primary Responsibilities**

* Lead and co-ordinate the Deanery Leadership Team, in conjunction with the Lay Chair.
* Ensure a Deanery Mission Action Plan and a Deanery Pastoral Plan (DPP) is created and implemented, working closely with the Deanery Leadership Team and Deanery Synod.
* Chair the Deanery Synod jointly with the Lay Chair
* Exercise the canonical responsibilities of an Rural Dean (see C23 of the Canons) and those expected during Parish Vacancies
* Ensure that an appropriate structure for Gatherings of Ministers is established, and take a leading role in those which involve Ordained colleagues

**Key Tasks**

Working collaboratively with the Lay Chair and the Deanery Leadership Team, you will ensure:

a) The Deanery Leadership Team meets regularly and has a membership which is appropriate for the Deanery

b) A Deanery Mission Action Plan and a Deanery Pastoral Plan is created with the full involvement of the Deanery Synod and following consultation with PCC’s; the Plan will have engaged with the three shared priorities of the Diocese

The process of developing Deanery plans will vary across the archdeaconries. The plan should relate closely to the diocesan shared priorities. It can also be helpful to use the Five Marks of Mission to inform the plan.

c) The Deanery Synod has an engaging agenda and develops a pattern of meetings which encourages involvement, creativity and meaningful outcomes; ordinarily sharing in the chairing of these meetings with the Lay Dean.

Work collaboratively with the Lay Chair and DLT to ensure the efficient conduct of synod business. Ensure that updates on finance, strategy and items from diocesan synod are cascaded down to synod and from there to parishes. Ensure that responses are sent back to diocesan synod where requested.

d) The administrative needs of the Deanery Synod, Rural Dean and Lay Chair are identified and appropriate support is put in place

See below, section 2 of Commitment, resourcing and support.

e) Participation in the mission and life of the Deanery is encouraged amongst the laity and the clergy, and that training is made available where appropriate

Encourage good practice and shared initiatives (e.g. informal clustering) between parishes. Encourage and develop gifts, skills and resources available in the Deanery. Make use of diocesan resources in offering training and enable the Deanery to provide their own.

**The following tasks are specific to the Rural Dean, and may be shared with an Assistant Rural Dean after consultation with the relevant Archdeacon**

Having an Assistant Rural Dean will provide support and cover for you, as well as helping to share the work-load. For the Assistant Rural Dean, it acts as an opportunity for personal development. For the Deanery, it provides possible succession planning.

f) Be aware of the general well-being of the clergy; informing the Bishop of any particular causes for rejoicing or concern

* Take pastoral care of yourself as Rural Dean
* Regularly visit or check-in with the clergy and layworkers in the Deanery
* Encourage clergy to take proper holiday time and time off in the week
* Support clergy and benefice during long term illness of clergy, working with the churchwardens to ensure that cover is provided
* Ensure that the bishop and archdeacon are aware of matters such as illness and stress of the clergy and their family members
* In the case of sudden illness or inability of clergy to undertake their role, the rural Dean is the first port of call for arranging cover

g) Inform the Bishop and Archdeacon of any legal or practical concerns arising from the parishes

Examples:

* vacancy and the measures taken by the sequestrators (normally the Diocesan Secretary and churchwardens) to secure ministry during the vacancy
* any minister from another diocese officiating in a way that is not permitted by Canon C8
* if a parish does not prepare and maintain an electoral roll, form a PCC or hold an annual meeting
* The rural Dean is an “interested party” for the purposes of the Pastoral Measure and will be formally consulted by the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee on proposals for pastoral change or re-organisation.

h) On occasions, to act as the ‘local’ representative for the Bishop and/or Archdeacon where issues at (i) and (j) arise

i) Ensure that the Clergy Chapter, and/or any other Gatherings which involve the Clergy, is shaped and led in a manner which serves it membership and encourages an active participation

Clergy gatherings, when working well, can be times of fellowship, study and spiritual growth. Enable and encourage the clergy to work as a team. Explore how chapter works best in your Deanery and who is involved. Are readers included? Retired Clergy? IMs?

j) Support parishes through times of vacancy which includes: the formal shared responsibility, with the Church Wardens , for the day to day oversight of the parish; attending the PCC’s Pre Vacancy meeting; advising on issues as they arise; handling applications for churchyard memorials and playing an active role on the interview day.

Assist the leaving incumbent in planning a good exit strategy, including handover for vacancy and planning for a successor. Visit the outgoing priest and ensure that the parish records are in order and they have made reasonable preparation for the initial phase of the vacancy. Attend pre-vacancy meeting with the Archdeacon, and Section 12 meeting if one becomes necessary. During vacancy, tasks can include:

* To provide pastoral care and support for churchwardens, SSMs, Readers, Recognised Parish Assistants and other lay leaders as needed
* To provide help and advice in maintaining the worship, life and work of the church, ensuring that agreed patterns of service and names of officiants are adhered to. (It is important that provision of services is realistic and sustainable for the long term, and assists the vacant parishes in making a smooth transition to a new incumbent)
* The Rural Dean is not required to produce a rota for services
* In the case of disagreement, then the archdeacon’s advice should be sought and his/her directions followed

k) Oversee arrangements for Services of Licensing, Institution or Collation and acts as a focus for the Deanery’s initial support of new Incumbents and their families

* Visit and welcome new incumbents (and family) when they have moved in, and encourage the parishes to provide a warm welcome.
* Supervise the arrangements for the Licensing or Induction Service, including taking a lead at the rehearsal before the licensing service.
* Work with the Archdeacon in informing the new incumbent about the parish.
* Provide ongoing support and encouragement for the new incumbent. Suggestion: meet after three months and six months to aid in planning and reviewing for the parish

l) Support the Archdeacon in his/her Parish Visitations

Advice will be given by your archdeacon before these are commenced and, if they have the capacity, the task can be shared with the Lay Chairs. Canon C23 requires the reporting to the archdeacon of serious defects in fabric.

Examples:

* blocked gutters
* shrubs and trees growing near to foundations
* failure to care for the churchyard, or to observe the Churchyard Memorial Rules
* repairs, additions and alterations to fabric and furnishings without a faculty
* inadequate storage for registers
* security of silver and other valuables
* failure to maintain an up-to-date inventory or terrier

m) Be aware of the Parish Finances and Parish Offers within the Deanery and, as a member of the Deanery Leadership Team, actively seek to encourage financial generosity and commitment

n) Be the local link, where appropriate, with Civic, Ecumenical and Inter-Faith partners

o) Attend regular meetings with the Bishop and Archdeacon

Rural Deans meet regularly in their Archdeaconries, usually with the Bishop and Archdeacon, sometimes with Lay Chairs; and at least twice a year meet together with rural Deans and lay chairs from both Archdeaconries.

Key Relationships

* Bishop and Archdeacon
* The Lay Chair
* The Deanery Leadership Team and Deanery Synod
* The Gatherings of Ministers, especially the Clergy
* Churchwardens, especially of parishes in vacancy

Also: readers, retired clergy, wardens of readers

Commitment, Resourcing and Support The role of Rural Dean is stimulating and stretching; it develops clergy and gives them a wider perspective on ministry. It can also be very demanding, especially when a Deanery has a number of vacancies or particular issues arise. The time commitment varies from week to week but is likely to average around 1 day a week, depending on the size and complexity of the Deanery. It is recognised that resources are required and, whilst different contexts will be able to express this in different ways, the following are being explored and considered during this period of consultation:

It is useful to have a working knowledge of:

* Canon Law
* Church Representation Rules
* Pastoral and Mission Measure

Expenses. Clear guidelines for expenses will be provided, with an explicit encouragement for expenses to be claimed

Collegiality and Collaboration. It is hoped that Rural Deans will benefit from the shared ministry with the Lay Chair, the Deanery Leadership Team, and through regular meetings with the Bishop and Archdeacon

**Time commitment: How much time will being Rural Dean take up?**

It varies widely according to what is happening in your Deanery at a particular time, but experienced Area Deans suggest it takes up, on average, around one day per week. If you are under Common Tenure, meet with your Archdeacon to discuss how your existing Role Description will need to be modified in order to accommodate the extra work-load. Ensure that your churchwardens and PCC(s) are aware of the changes. Being Area Dean will affect how you conduct your parish ministry, and this will help you to avoid unrealistic expectations from the parish. On a more positive note – it will take you out of your parish, but the benefits are that it can help to put your own parish stresses in perspective better, and will inevitably offer you and your people a wider vision, as well as develop and widen your gifts and insights.