

Ministry Forum Report

The Ministry Forum met in Dubai on 4 December 2013. Some contexts for the Meeting were set out initially. These included the following.

The context of this being a time of more general strategic planning for the future sustainable development of the diocese, particularly as evidenced by the work of the Planning Group who would be reporting to the Standing Committee imminently, and whose work would be debated in some form at Synod 2014.

The context of an upcoming Synod whose key theme was to be Ministry.

The context of the need to make necessary decisions affecting people currently in training for ordination in a way that would not be one-off, but which might set a template for similar decisions in the future.

The context of a diocese unlike any other, geographically widespread and with few central financial resources.

The areas which needed attention from the Forum are set out, for the sake of illustration, by comparing our situation with a presumed perfect situation in an established and well-resourced diocese.

In a perfect situation, a culture of vocation would prevail in the diocese. People would come to church expecting to find tools for discernment as to what God was calling them to be and do. Lay members of congregations as well as clergy would see a role in identifying vocations in others. Clergy would make sure that the congregations put a high priority on this area by means perhaps of special days or events. There would be high quality printed and web material produced by the diocese available for seekers . Learning Groups for those considering vocation would provide a nurturing base and opportunity for fellowship.

There would be a clear understanding of the process for asking the wider church to test vocation, through a network of vocational advisors, and a DDO. A transparent and rigorous selection procedure, demonstrating best practice in its field, would make recommendations about training for candidates selected. There would be routes available for residential full time, non-residential full time and mixed mode part time packages of training geared to individual needs funded by the diocese.

After ordination the bishop would deploy the new Curate to the place best suited for her in terms of her gifts, the availability of a good training incumbent, and the experiences which a particular place could offer, for further training. A curacy would typically last three years after which time the bishop would be able to commend the trained priest to a vacant parish with confidence, and would hope that the parish were prepared to accept her on his recommendation after interview. She could then look forward to being part of the ministry in a diocese which placed a high premium on continuing ministerial development, and in which she would want to stay and minister for a considerable period.

Those offering for other ministries, such as Reader, would follow a similar course, with bespoke materials, planting a strong sense of both the distinctiveness and the connectedness of the particular ministry in question, and including continuing ministerial development and support.

At present it is clear that we fall short of this ideal in a number of ways. The recommendations of the Forum seek to repair this. Two key barriers to progress need to be overcome. One is the availability of finance. Ministerial training and support is one of the most expensive items in any diocesan budget. The other is an incomplete view of the role of diocese and the bishop, prevalent in some quarters, which is reluctant to accord them a role of authority, oversight and moderation, or see them as adding value to the work of the parishes. The Forum concluded that the best way to promote a more positive view, in terms of bringing perspective and offering encouragement, is to demonstrate how an episcopal Anglican Church can operate at best. With regard to finance, we believe that the real challenge is to present the issue of ministerial training, development and support in an imaginative way that might encourage Chaplaincies to contribute willingly to this area.

We accept that to solicit money simply for ‘diocesan work’ or for ‘the diocesan budget’ can sound unexciting. We also accept that people do like to contribute to particular areas of work that they want to support, and see the need for, and there is plenty of evidence for that. Indeed, parishes within this diocese support substantially, ministry development in other parts of the world at present. Consequently **our first recommendation is that the Ministry budget be presented to Synod separately; that it is voted annually, separately (it may vary hugely from year to year depending on particular commitments), and that separate arrangements are made for funding that budget.** Forum members from well-resourced parishes were confident that this approach would produce new funds sufficient to support this work. Presently the work is funded partly from the diocesan budget and partly by virtue of generous bursaries from the Endowment Fund. If there were to be a separate budget, parish contributions to the diocesan budget would of course be less. It would be fair in those circumstances to ask all parishes to be associated with the Ministry budget. The exact details of the best model for this would be worked out between the Finance Director and Treasurers, once the principle is agreed.

The most pressing issue facing the Forum was the fact that we have ordinands in training for whom, in present circumstances, we cannot guarantee a training post after ordination. We believe this to be both morally indefensible, and economically profligate. The problem is that, unlike bishops in other parts of the Communion, our bishop has little or no opportunity or authority to deploy personnel. The recruitment of clergy has developed as mostly a local affair, and this has affected both conditions of employment and deployment patterns. The Forum noted that this is beginning to change, but there needs to be something different in place to accommodate an ordinand who will complete initial training and hope to be ordained in the Summer of 2014. Again, this boils down to the availability of the money necessary to fund training posts, and an understanding that it is a legitimate duty of the bishop to oversee proper training by appropriate deployment.

Accordingly **our second recommendation is that the funding of training posts should be wholly or substantially funded from within the Ministry budget, and that the identification of such posts is a matter for the bishop, in consultation with appropriate training incumbents.** The commitment of the diocese would be for three years, mirroring the basic contract period for stipendiary clergy. Curates would be paid a proportion of the Parish Priest's stipend, according to local costs of living and other negotiable circumstances. At the end of three years, priests would be free to apply for vacant posts in the diocese.

There remains something a little unsatisfactory about the deployment process at that stage. Forum members were of the view that there should be some greater possibility of positive discrimination in favour of candidates nurtured and trained within the diocese than exists at present. After all, that is the rationale behind the whole process – that we do have at least some priests that have come through our own ranks. So **our third recommendation is that in future appointments, the bishop is first approached for advice about appointments and the availability of local/serving diocesan clergy, and that his advice is taken seriously.** This is not just an issue for Curates seeking a first post of responsibility. It affects all diocesan clergy who may wish to move within the diocese. We believe the adoption of this recommendation will help the kind of retention that will strengthen the diocese and help build its clerical identity.

The Forum was clear that the diocese has a responsibility to develop its own resources for training of all kinds, and was aware that there are considerable human resources at present available here. It recommends that those resources be brought together in a way that can enable a more efficient and coordinated result, and so, **recommends the establishment of a theological educators group.** In the first instance its members would be appointed by the bishop. Its role would be to assess training programmes and to monitor delivery of them in a coordinated and consistent fashion across the diocese. At present the diocese is using Exploring Faith as a default course. There was enthusiasm for continuing this, now it has been newly accredited; and given the accrediting university's willingness to recognise a Cyprus and Gulf faculty, who would be involved both in delivery and in the possible production of additional contextually useful resources. There was also a readiness to consider other programmes alongside that, including the one used in the diocese of London, and programmes deriving from well-regarded theological institutions in the Indian sub-continent. The Forum noted that proportionate to our size we are in fact well blessed with people qualified to be part of such a group. The costs for the group together with any course fees payable, would be legitimate demands on the ministry budget.

However, human resources are not sufficient on their own. **The Forum recommends that library facilities be set up at appropriate locations in the diocese, concentrating on texts that are essential or desirable for the pursuit of courses agreed by the theological educators group.**

The forum expressed confidence in the current mixed mode arrangements for training non-residential but full time candidates for ordination. Bearing in mind, the need for mentors, assessors and tutors, as well as spiritual directors, necessary for putting together a mixed mode course, **the Forum recommends that a statement of diocesan needs accompanies all future clerical appointment profiles, and that these ministry training needs are considered for inclusion.**

The forum noted that the diocese does now have a pool of trained selectors and a robust selection process, in which it has confidence.

The Forum considered a number of management issues. It is usual for a diocese to have one Director of Ordinands(DDO), who is the field worker or executive officer of a diocesan Ministry Committee. At present the diocese does not have such a committee, and it has one DDO in each archdeaconry. This has proved confusing to outside agencies and led to uncertainty about how and where decisions are made. **It recommends that in future there is one DDO for the whole diocese. It also recommends that vocational advisers be appointed in each archdeaconry to work closely with the DDO. Following the experience of this forum, it was further recommended that a Bishop's Advisory Group on Ministry be formed, chaired by the bishop, with members selected by him, representing various ministry interests and constituencies.** This group would meet very occasionally. The executive archdeacon would, as at present, be responsible to the bishop for the smooth operation of diocesan policies in this area.

It was considered important that the diocese does its best to promote a culture of vocation. Vocation days and similar events are to encouraged, and the production of material that can be put into people's hands about possible areas for ministry should be undertaken. There was some discussion about the definition and distinctiveness of some ministries, bearing in mind the need to model an Anglican polity, and that was related to discussion about the mix of ministries that the diocese needs, ideally. Reference was made to the mission development questionnaire, which saw parishes putting a high priority on increasing the number of ministers in specific categories. It was recognised that this is a substantial though necessary task, related to that of the planning group, and it was prioritised for further work and study. As a first step, the forum accepted that the development of some form of ordained local ministry, as evidenced in other provinces, is **not** a route we want to follow.

The forum was convinced of the value of continuing ministerial development (CMD) for all forms of ministry. It welcomes the developing review culture, and **recommends that a covenanted commitment to some form of CMD should be part of each Review agreement.** It believes that in some circumstances, sabbaticals can be considered as part of that, but asked that precise guidelines be drawn up for the granting of sabbaticals for clergy.

Recommendations:

- 1. that the Ministry budget be presented to Synod separately; that it is voted annually, separately (it may vary hugely from year to year depending on particular commitments), and that separate arrangements are made for funding that budget.**
- 2. that the funding of training posts should be wholly or substantially funded from within the Ministry budget, and that the identification of such posts is a matter for the bishop, in consultation with appropriate training incumbents.**
- 3. that in future appointments, the bishop is first approached for advice about appointments and the availability of local/serving diocesan clergy, and that his advice is taken seriously.**
- 4. that a theological educators group be formed, with members to be nominated by the bishop.**
- 5. that library facilities be set up at appropriate locations in the diocese, concentrating on texts that are essential or desirable for the pursuit of courses agreed by the theological educators group.**
- 6. that a statement of diocesan needs accompanies all future clerical appointment profiles , and that these ministry training needs are considered for inclusion.**
- 7. that in future there is one DDO for the whole diocese. It also recommends that vocational advisers be appointed in each archdeaconry to work closely with the DDO.**
- 8. that a Bishop's Advisory Group on Ministry be formed, chaired by the bishop, with members selected by him, representing various ministry interests and constituencies.**
- 9. that a covenanted commitment to some form of CMD should be part of each Review agreement.**