

Interim Ministry Regional Conference 13th May 2019

Notes from the Round Table Discussion

Jonathan Cain's group

Following inputs from Andy Jolley and Keith Wassall we were asked to reflect on the following questions:

1. What do we see in our own situation?
2. What is different?

We started with some brief introductions from members of the group.

Alex from the Diocese of Chelmsford. ½-time central role and ½-time interim minister, 2-year post with the objective of helping the parish prepare a Parish Profile for what comes next. Alex is also writing a dissertation looking at interim ministry in relation to Holy Saturday.

Helen from the Diocese of Durham. Full-time interim role in conjunction with her husband. In the final year of a 3-year posting across four parishes, following a process to help the parishes prepare for what comes next in a diocese that is chronically under-resourced.

Jennifer from the Diocese of Liverpool (archdeacon). Jennifer comes from the Episcopal Church in the United States and has significant experience of IM. Co-edited the Supplementary Guidance for Bishops on Interim Posts and is currently engages in reimagining Wigan.

Liam from the Diocese of Leeds. Just commenced a 3-year interim post in a distinctive Anglo-Catholic parish following the retirement of the previous incumbent after 47 years in post. Key objectives for the post include strengthening links with the deanery and diocese and preparing the parish for what comes next.

Philip from the Diocese of Lichfield. ½-time central role and ½-time interim minister. Into a second 6-month interim posting covering clergy vacancy and illness.

Jonathan from the Diocese of Leeds (note-taker). 2/3-time interim role in combination with some self-employment. 3-year posting as interim-Vicar with a key objective to explore lay leadership and imagine a parish church without a vicar.

It was noted that four out of the five interim ministers live outside the parishes where they are serving.

Members of the group recognized much of what had been presented in the morning session in their own situations. There was some variability in the way that the interim posts had been presented in the parishes. Most reported a level of anxiety in the church

communities, which is perhaps understandable, but it was suggested that part of the IM role was to ensure that anxieties were located in the correct place.

There was some discussion about spiritualities and temporalities and the fierce association in the culture of the church between the church and the role of the vicar. There is felt to be little understanding in parishes of the distinction between vicar and priest and this is a complexity in interim roles and in contemplating any kind of change.

It was felt that the skills and approach of IMs would be a valuable commodity for the church going forward and that the church needed to find ways to value interim ministry. This would have implications for clergy and lay training (interim ministers could be lay) and potentially for terms of service, e.g. housing arrangements.

Mary Bradley's group

As I mentioned on the day, the majority of comments from the discussion group I was in were fed back and written up by Tracey on the flip chart.

One topic of discussion, which may not have been recorded on the flip chart, concerned the need for regular reviews, whether with one's Archdeacon or in some circumstances the Vicar of one's "holding church"; every 3 months was one person's experience. The group agreed that this was important, especially as IMs often have to "hit the ground running".

Julie Bacon's group

We went round the table introducing ourselves and our experience of IM.

Harry Steele – Sheffield diocese - has been an IM for 3 years; currently works half-time in the diocese, half-time for LYCIG. Licensed to the Bishop. Is in his second post looking after 4 churches, and is ready to move on – but a moratorium on recruitment in the diocese means that there is currently no-one to hand over to. Highlights the problem of succession planning.

Fiona Pennie – Liverpool diocese – ordained 4 years after a career as an optometrist. Had an unsatisfactory curacy as a self-supporting minister and moved into a 12-month interim post after 2 ½ yrs. The parish where she served as IM is now back in vacancy and she has been told that she cannot go back there. The interim ministry finished abruptly and unsatisfactorily. Highlights the importance of finishing well.

Phil Ashby – Bristol diocese – self-supporting minister in his third IM post. In the first 2, he served alongside the incumbent for 12 months, then supported the parish(es) through the vacancy, and then left. In the 3rd post, he started after the incumbent had left. He is licensed to the Area Dean. In the first post, the role involved forming a new united benefice from 6 parishes. In the second post, he accompanied an incumbent for the last 12 months of a 3 year appointment who had not delivered on the objectives of that appointment.

Adrian Thorp – Durham diocese – sharing a role as interim priest with his wife Helen across 4 parishes, 2 large and 2 tiny. The post did not start well – the parishes were told that they had the choice of this couple approaching retirement, or no-one. When they asked directly if they were seen as a problem, they were told ‘no’, even though this was not true. They have had very little support from the diocese – they asked for a mentor, but this hasn’t been put in place. In their first year they took the history of the place; in the second they addressed areas of conflict; in this third and final year, they are helping the parishes to articulate a vision for the future. They are aware of a lack of succession planning for their departure.

Tracey Raistrick – Leeds diocese – after being ordained deacon in 2015, helped to manage pastoral reorganisation during her curacy. A neighbouring parish became vacant, and she was licensed as incumbent for 3 years (with possible 3 yr extension) to assess the viability of the parish. The neighbouring ‘super-parish’ has a very mixed demographic; her parish is primarily white British. She is looking at how to revitalise the parish, and what its future might be. Opportunities include a lot of occasional offices.

Julie Bacon – Leeds diocese – ordained in 2014, licensed as an IM for 3 years after a 3 year curacy during which she had a 3 month placement in a dysfunctional ‘united’ benefice. Her post was created to try to learn lessons from a neighbouring benefice which was put together poorly and where the new vicar had to spend all her goodwill very quickly in rectifying the problems. She is priest-in-charge of two parishes with three churches which had both had long-term incumbents who left/retired within 6 months or so of each other – the parishes had been earmarked for pastoral reorganisation, and she is steering them through this. She has been very clear with them that she is there for 3 years only, and is keen to ensure a proper exit strategy that does not leave them in a further vacancy.

Tony Evans – not ordained, Tony lives in York diocese and is an expert in secular interim management. After a 20-year career in the corporate world (working for Cortauld’s, Mars, Digital Equipment and McKechnie PLC), in 1994 he started to work as an interim manager. He works at Managing Director/Chief Executive level, and has had 15 assignments at companies ranging in size from 100 or so employees to 10,000. Throughout his career, he has benefited from the investment put into him in management training. Working in teams is the key – no individual can be highly skilled in all necessary aspects of the job. Assignments are typically 9-12 months (though range from 2 to 22 months). Language matters eg ‘Assignments’ rather than ‘jobs’ or ‘posts’ or ‘roles’.

The value of the work that Tony has carried out in these assignments is currently estimated at £940m.

As an interim manager, Tony’s relationship with the client is ‘peer-to-peer’ rather than the more usual ‘master-servant’ relationship that characterises most employment contracts.

Not all interim managers work at his level. Those working at lower levels often have to rely more on influence and persuasive abilities rather than positional authority. This may bear a closer resemblance to IM, where clergy are working with volunteers rather than employees.

Some other points that emerged during the discussion:

- We discussed the lack of management training for clergy, during both pre- and post-ordination training.
- It was suggested that all clergy would benefit from training on conflict resolution.
- Harry commented that he starts by assuming the worst, and that everyone in the church will quit their positions of responsibility. He has a team of 5 that he brings with him who pick up those jobs so that the church can continue to function. This helps avoid anxiety for the IM about how things will be kept going, but raises questions about how to withdraw that practical support effectively by the end of the interim ministry.
- A key element of the IM role is being a non-anxious presence – so how can IMs address/resolve their own anxieties in order to offer this? (A support team such as Harry's may be one way)
- What pastoral or mentoring support is available to IMs? Some have prayer partners or groups – often from before starting the IM rather than specifically set up for it. Not many people seem to have mentors.
- Adrian said that he had been helped by a reminder to keep focussed on the big picture, and not to get distracted by the day-to-day or detailed things.
- Tony said it was easy to find comfort in focussing on minutiae rather than the big picture, and that it was essential for resist this temptation.