

IM Focus: Summer 2018 The genesis of Interim ministry in the Diocese of Liverpool

The Diocese of Liverpool is among those pioneering interim ministry and it is already proving advantageous as the church faces increasing challenges of low numbers in attendance, funding, and available clergy.

In 2014, the Revd Chris Jones was coming towards the end of a 16-year incumbency in Ormskirk, a market town in the north of the Diocese of Liverpool. He was not ready to retire but could not see himself taking on another incumbency before retirement, so he started exploring with senior colleagues the possibility of a shorter ministry helping a church experiencing problems. A sabbatical followed in the USA where Chris visited the Diocese of Virginia – one of Liverpool's link dioceses – and other places, investigating the well-tryed US model of Interim Ministry. This model used the 'five tasks' approach to IM: exploring heritage and history, lay leadership development, connections with the diocese and community, mission and identity, and future vision. He reported back to Liverpool on the how the model could be adapted.

Liverpool's Director of Learning and Stewardship, Steve Pierce, gathered a small 'task group' who were undertaking short-term posts in the Diocese and they considered how the model had the potential to address:

- Turnaround situations
- Pastoral disruption or breakdown, significant conflict or pastoral trauma
- Significant change on the horizon
- Following long incumbencies
- Helping a church to die with dignity

In 2015, The Ven Jennifer McKenzie then joined the diocese as Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancashire, from the Diocese of Virginia. She had experience in the Episcopal Church both studying and serving in interim ministry roles, and became the diocesan lead for interim ministry, working with the task group to explore the circumstances in which IMs could be appointed, and they generated the defining characteristics of interim ministry in Liverpool, as follows:

- Time scale: typically for 12-18 months.
- Focus: while attending to the liturgical and pastoral duties of parish ministry the primary focus is the transition, the neutral zone of a church in vacancy.
- Shared ownership: successful interim ministry depends on shared ownership between congregation, interim priest and the diocese.
- Process: interim clergy lead the church through a five stage process of 'holy conversations' which explore, typically: Heritage; Leadership; Connections; Mission; Future.
- Outcomes: the interim minister thinks and works backwards, his or her ministry being informed by some established outcomes and working to realise those goals.

As the model has developed there have been longer-term appointments with a more transitional focus, and also shorter term, high-impact appointments, and the development and application of IM in different situations continues.

Liverpool has observed some emerging benefits from IM to be:

- Assisting churches in vacancy by undertaking the core liturgical and pastoral tasks of parish ministry
- Maximising the potential of a vacancy to be a time of growth, creative thinking and planning.
- Addressing difficult issues where they are identified: money, governance, pastoral breakdown, personality clashes.
- Facilitating creative reflection and forward planning by parishes in transition to the appointment of a new priest.

There is an ongoing programme of IM appointments. Three interims are now licensed in the diocese and are available where needed. Chris himself has been involved with four churches operating with a three-year license from the bishop as an Intentional Interim Minister. Other interims have been used for periods of six months to five years across all four archdeaconries. Interim Ministry has also been a feature of the deanery transition project, Transforming Wigan.

The diocese has found IM to be a creative and effective model of parish ministry which richly compliments the ministry of the 'settled' pastor. Serving for a limited period of time under a Bishop's letter of appointment which captures clear goals, the interim minister blends the central tasks of parish ministry with a focused attention on the established goals, and leading the church through a structured process of review and forward thinking which is recognised by the congregation. But the greatest challenge in making interim appointments is a lack of available trained interim clergy: a challenge Liverpool are addressing by exploring training and seeking out potential candidates. Liverpool believes this is not a stopgap but a vital important ministry that helps churches and parishes discern the right future for them under God.

For further information contact:

The Ven Jennifer McKenzie, Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancashire, Diocese of Liverpool

T: 0151 705 2154 E: jennifer.mckenzie@liverpool.anglican.org

Web: <http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/About-The-Diocese>