

Interim Ministry – Review of Learning 29th Sept 2016

Chair: Rt Revd. Peter Hill

Attendance: Revd Christopher Brown, Revd Canon Ann Easter; Revd Helen Gheorghiu Gould; Revd Susan Iskander; Revd Dr Elizabeth Jordan; Revd Canon Dr Roger Matthews, Revd Pat Mossop; Revd Christopher Owens; Revd Penny Sayers; Gary Wilson.

1. *Our approach in Chelmsford – sharing of practice:*

Participants shared their Interim Ministry (IM) context:

Ann Easter: New role in St Martin's Plaistow. Familiar with the parish for 36 years as Area Dean and as a colleague of the incumbent. At the stage of listening and allowing them to get on with it. Would be interested in a job description and understanding of the task for IM, which is there to 'hold you' in the IM role.

Christopher Owens: Retired 9 years ago. Has provided cover support to local parishes during vacancy and noted the possibility of 'doing more' during these periods. Now working in partnership with wife, Ann Easter, on supporting St Martin's Plaistow.

Susan Iskander: Past appointment at East Hanningfield part-time to tease out current issues and prepare the parish for a lay focal minister appointment.

Elizabeth Jordan: Previous experience in Lichfield offering IM during a vacancy, to explore issues which resulted in the loss of a succession of priests. EJ completed her PhD study on Lay and Ordained leadership and produced a paper on IM. She noted at the time that nationally Bishops were looking for IMs to address issues during vacancies, but Common Tenure rules did not allow for short-term appointments.

Pat Mossop: Active Retired, currently supporting St Margaret's Barking through transition. First came across IM in Massachusetts, where IM was a matter of course instead of vacancy. As a business person he could see the sense in continuity. Completed IM in Cyprus, and has always addressed conflict situations so is familiar with the tools and practice of IM, particularly the importance of 'looking back, thinking about the future, building up lay participation'. IM is a listening ministry, requiring IMs to be 'credible, solid, trustworthy'.

Roger Matthews: Came across IM in the USA where it is a distinctive ministry and has been aware of the benefit of IM and the limitations imposed by Common Tenure. Turnaround project offered an opportunity to appoint people. He had anticipated they would appoint some really experienced people, but he has come to a realisation that it is not about length of experience in ministry but disposition and skills. Isn't every incumbency an IM? Isn't it about reflecting on how we lead and shift a parish from one place to another, with the attitude: 'Who are these people and how can I be with them in such a way that they can become what God wants to make them?' These must become skills for all ministers, but we also need transition ministers to turn a situation round for a fixed term.

Penny Sayers: Newly appointed as Area IM for Maldon and Dengie. Spent 6 years at Beacontree South, building up the congregation and helping it to be more representative of the community. The turning point was Growing Healthy Churches, with Charlie Kosla. The church witnessed growth and started to welcome lots of children. Her learning was that you keep working with people for as long as it takes to shift and disentangle things.

Gary Wilson: Methodist background initially in South Hornchurch. Worked for NatWest Currently working with wife Alison on a Turnaround lay appointment at St Cedd's Barking, where they have served for 11 months. It has been a steep learning curve but they have been supported by staff at All Saints, Woodford Wells. Outrageous hospitality is the keynote of everything they do. They have focused on demonstrating good leadership and on identifying new, younger leaders, working on vision, changing worship and encouraging families and young people. Gary felt they really lacked skills and training for the role but have borrowed a lot from industry and support of home church.

Bishop Peter: Restrospectively can see he has worked in IM in all the places in which he has been an incumbent, firstly in a Nottingham mining parish and subsequently a total transformation in another parish. He is an initiator not a sustainer, which IMs mostly are, and need to be aware of. IM needs a project person who is secure in their own identity and able to hold the congregation, hospitable. He was never interested in going into a big settled parish but in being an initiator. As an Archdeacon he lead vacancies processes and IM tools were part of that; engaging with vision and resolving conflict.

2. *Why IM now?*

Bp Peter noted that IM was a moving target, some of it was financed by the Church Commissioners. When we started out the criteria for IM was a parish/place where there was a high level of dysfunctionality, which arose from a number of features including poor leadership, lack of growth, consistently poor share, problems with buildings, conflict.

IM is currently applied in a number of ways:

Turnaround – a longer-term transformational project;

Short-term – helping with key issues such a governance.

But there can be combinations of both.

We are also looking at models where IMs work in multiple parishes such as South Harlow Covenant, Maldon (where Penny will be part of the Area Team) and Newham, where Area Dean Jeremy Fraser will serve as a 'Turnaround' Area Dean. Nor is it wholly about ordained ministry – it may include lay people with appropriate skills. The duration is not always fixed but may need to remain flexible.

Nationally we are ground-breakers in the UK. We have the funds from the Church Commissioners and we have to show it works. We are being monitored and it is necessary to understand the impact of what we are doing. If we are demonstrating progress the Church Commissioners may give us more money.

Nor do we want a single model, nor is there a possibility that it might only be one person but a team of lay and ordained working together on the pastoral and developmental tasks. It is about having a mixed economy of lay and ordained, appropriate resources and housing.

Though the rule is that IMs were not supposed to become the settled minister, there were causes in which discontinuity can be unhelpful. The importance of good handovers was discussed and overlapping appointments where required to allow succeeding ministers to interact with the IM. More needs to be done on planning vacancies and putting in place liturgy which supports endings and beginnings.

3. *Supporting Interim Ministry.*

Congregations:

Are congregations prepared? There were huge sensitivities around these issues in discussing needs with congregations. Once it becomes a norm there will be less of a sense that congregations are in 'special measures' and 'require improvement'.

It is a high risk process so needs careful thought and planning. We need to work with congregations to identify the work which needs doing. More specialist help is needed in more desperate situations.

IMs need:

- A clear brief (working agreement) and some indication of time-scale – though some difficulty in having need for short term role with long-term listening.
- Communication with congregation from those who made the appointment about goals and targets and expectations ('a contract with the parish') – though difficulty if previous priest is living close by.
- Good relationships with local leaders – avoid the hero language and develop real partnership.
- Support and supervision from outside the parish – of another church, or of Area Dean/Archdeacon.
- Mentoring to improve reflection on situations.
- Recognise that change is exhausting and there is a need for management and oversight to support IMs and process.
- Openness to the spirit – one you go in, you may face a situation which is different to that you anticipated. There is a need for flexibility.
- Easy access to such tools as Appreciative Inquiry, Congregational and parish audit, Family Systems.
- We might need to use CMD resources differently and reimagine appropriate CMD resourcing for IM.
- How can SSM and active retired clergy be used in IM?

4. *Making Connections*

- Practitioners would appreciate maintaining this network.
- Further meetings should be organised quarterly (January).
- They would appreciate time to review training needs and work towards a toolkit for IM.
- Resources needed: cases studies, theological reflection, book list, research papers.
- There is a need to connect with CMD staff especially on mentoring and coaching.
- Put a paper before Senior Staff Team on IM.