

Guidelines for Incumbents

Pastoral Care is the responsibility and calling of all Christians. It is a natural and organic part of discipleship that comes as part of the baptismal calling to service of God in his world. No formal structure or authorisation is needed for Christians to care for one another or to offer good neighbourliness. Yet, for good reasons, parishes have sought to develop teams of lay people to assist in particular aspects of the responsibility of care given to clergy at their licensing in a given parish. These resources are offered to assist clergy and their PCCs in establishing and training a lay pastoral care team in the parish. Such a team can keep before a church community the importance of everyone's role in caring for one another. It will be up to the Incumbent to ensure that the existence of such a team doesn't encourage others to abdicate responsibility for their own calling to service as Christian disciples, but rather models and encourages Christian care as essential to discipleship.

What type of team are these resources for?

There are two main types of teams in parishes. Some are **leadership teams**, responsible for the vision for and strategic direction of ministry in the parish, and for its implementation. Others are **task-based teams** who work under the authority of the incumbent to help in specific and defined tasks that form part of parish ministry. The resources offered here are designed to resource a task-based team to help in pastoral care.

Training for a pastoral care team

This course provides resources for the forming and training of a team to assist with pastoral tasks. In due course it will be *the team* that is recognised. The team can be commissioned by the incumbent in Sunday worship if desired and resources are available for this. This course does not provide for the authorisation of an individual lay minister. Individual members of it have no 'authority' apart from their membership of the team. It will be important for you to make this clear.

These resources have been used both to establish a pastoral care team from scratch and as ongoing training for an existing team. We hope they may also provide guidelines for admitting new members to an existing pastoral care team.

Consultation about establishing a pastoral care team

The decision to set up a pastoral care team needs to be prepared for by careful consultation in the parish. This should include discussion with other ministers and key officers and a PCC discussion (and agreement which is minuted). Preaching opportunities might be used to share the idea more fully before it is implemented.

Preliminary Questions

Before setting up a pastoral care team there are some preliminary questions you will need to address:

a) Why do we need one?

It is important that you list the specific areas of your parish ministry that you could see lay members of a pastoral care team assisting with to be clear about what the tasks are. Areas to consider might include:

- Parish visiting of the sick, elderly, lonely or those in any kind of need
- In their homes or hospitals or care homes
- Taking Holy Communion to the sick (any such person must be authorised as a Lay ministry of Holy Communion after completing the short diocesan course).

- A ministry of welcome: responding to those who have filled in a card in church or visiting those new to the area
- Care for a particular group within the Church – e.g. young mums, or men
- Keeping contact with those who are on the fringes of the Church
- Assisting with care for families of those who are baptised
- Being the first point of contact for those seeking marriage
- Praying with and for those who are sick.

b) The Incumbent’s responsibilities for oversight of a pastoral care team

In agreeing to set up a pastoral care team, the Incumbent undertakes to provide oversight, supervision and co-ordination. Whilst it may not be necessary for all of these roles to fall to the incumbent personally, he or she carries responsibility for the work carried out in the name of the parish. The team is accountable to the incumbent and the incumbent is accountable for what members of the team do.

In particular the Incumbent will need to decide:

- i) Who will lead the 9 session course
- ii) How it will be delivered. Examples include:

- weekly or fortnightly over 9 sessions, led by you or by a suitably qualified lay or ordained person
- in blocks, e.g. over three or four Saturdays

iii) How will the team, in practical terms, be supervised and co-ordinated after they have been trained? Some suggestions for ongoing supervision and training are made in the training notes.

Guidelines for building a team and choosing potential members

There are various ways to do this but we would recommend that the following **principles** are observed:

• **Balance and breadth**

In considering who might be a member of such a team, seek a balance that represents the congregation appropriately. Consider male / female balance, age balance, and breadth of experience. Think across the breadth of the congregation (e.g. use the electoral role) to help guard against simply thinking of those who currently do a lot in church.

• **A Collaborative approach**

Involve members of the leadership team (at least Incumbent and Church Wardens) in discerning who it might be appropriate to invite. This should be a collaborative and consultative exercise.

• **Involve the PCC**

Other ministers, key officers or the PCC should ratify the potential invitations. We would encourage this to be done confidentially – not by a show of hands. In one parish, PCC members were given a sheet of names under consideration which they are asked to affirm or otherwise with a tick or cross. Space to make a particular comment or to suggest another name might be possible. This was returned to the Incumbent in confidence and this informed the incumbent’s decision about who to invite. In such a situation the PCC needs to understand that its role is advisory at this stage, though an Incumbent would be most unwise to proceed where significant reservations were indicated.

- **Team members should not be selected at random.**

It is probably best not to encourage open access or self-nomination to be a member of the team. You need to ensure that there is an understanding that there will be a process of discernment based on the gifts and skills needed in the team.

- **Attending the course**

At the point of inviting new members to participate in the training course, make clear that

- There is no obligation on either side that they will become a member of the team.
- Decisions will be taken about team membership towards the end of the training course.
- Participants may withdraw at any stage. Equally, in discussion it may become clear that they are not suited to this kind of ministry, or that it is not appropriate now.
- Where you are setting up a new team or inviting new members to join an existing team, no one may join the team without completing the course. It is expected that participants will attend all sessions. The maximum that can be missed without exceptional reason is 2 sessions, and what is covered in missed sessions will have to be addressed.

- **Team membership should be for a fixed term** – e.g. 3 years, though renewable

Guidelines for discerning gifts and skills needed in potential team members

These guidelines are not to be seen as formal criteria so much as guidelines to assist in giving a picture of the sort of people it would be appropriate to consider.

Consider people who:

- are respected in the Church and community – their ministry would be welcomed
- have the ability to listen in a non-judgemental way
- have a degree of common sense and wisdom that comes from life experience
- are compassionate and generous in the way they deal with other
- are involved in the life of the worshipping community and have a depth of spirituality that sustains them
- are capable of relating to a wide range of people
- are people of sensitivity who can be trusted
- are flexible enough to be willing to learn and grow and recognise their own need to grow
- are capable of working collaboratively within a team
- are able to work under authority and respect boundaries

You may have reservations about people who:

- Have a reputation for gossiping
- Seem 'brittle', insecure or unwilling to accept change
- Exude anger or resentment
- Come across as trying to be pastoral in a way that doesn't seem natural when faced with a situation of need
- Have habitually indicated unwillingness to recognise authority
- Are lone-rangers who would struggle with working collaboratively

It is probably best not to include people in the year or so after a major bereavement.

It is a diocesan requirement that all members of such a team should have an enhanced CRB disclosure.