

Leominster Team Ministry Reflections

As I have worked with the team on both Rufus's appointment and now the Team Rector several reflections have come to mind about the Leominster Team Ministry.

1. Complex history - the Team has grown since 1985 and whilst that in many ways it has its complications. It now has 19 PCCs and covers over half of the parishes of the Deanery. It is actually bigger in geography and churches than some of our deaneries! It functions effectively as 3 groups Priory/Eastern/Western and my question is one of long term sustainability. The Eastern parishes are small and deeply rural and do not have the financial resources to cover the cost of a stipend through Parish Offer. In part this is offset because on paper Rufus has time given to the whole team for mission. However, this is not universally liked or accepted by the parishes because the former Rector did not consult or explain this part of his role. The Team is only sustainable in its present form because it is a team. If it is broken into a group ministry it is doubtful that the Eastern parishes would be sustainable.
2. Staffing – historically it had a Rector and on paper 3 team vicars although in practice one Team vicar post has been extinguished and going forward this is a team of a Rector and two Team Vicars. What has not been taken into account is that in my view the pre pandemic worship pattern is completely unsustainable. Historically the Team covered services with Lay Ministry and the availability of SSMs and retired clergy. Over time this pool of volunteer clergy has diminished but the pattern has not changed to recognise this. The Team needs to re-evaluate the service plan to reflect this reality. This will involve parishes adjusting times and types of service to reflect what is possible rather than what they might wish. It also means that parishes have to face the reality that they will not always see their own priest every week or even more than once a month unless there is a radical rethink on Sunday worship. In addition, the weddings, funerals and baptisms are an important part of the offering to the wider community and as the pool of ministers reduces the stipendiary clergy will increasingly pick these up further reducing their contact with church members for pastoral care.
3. Governance –The other area going forward is to examine the Team governance structures. Whilst the presenting problem has been around the handling of occasional office fees a team the size of this needs

proper structures. The administration team have not done anything wrong but the structures they are working to are not fit for purpose, having been designed for the 1985 scheme. I would recommend the urgent setting up of a Joint Council to both employ the existing administration team and transparently deal with occasional office fees to comply with charity governance rules. This can and should be done prior to the new rector being licensed. The new Rector should be encouraged by the PCCs to explore what other powers should be delegated to the Joint Council. The Team ministry will need to be reviewed once a Rector has been appointed and this is normal and good practice in Team Ministries.

The Team is actually in good health and morale overall but it needs to be realistic about what a smaller and leaner clergy and ministry team can deliver. The present models are in desperate need of reform and following Rufus's decision to leave it is even more critical that the Team as a whole should review its worship pattern and governance. The present model is simply unsustainable and change will require give and take by everyone not just the villages.

Ven Derek Chedzey
Archdeacon of Hereford

May 2021