



# A Deanery Development Facilitator

## A STORY FROM NORTH BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

*Beverley Hollins has recently completed a five year term as Deanery Development Facilitator in a deanery in North Buckinghamshire on the edge of Oxford Diocese. This briefing is compiled from Beverley's reflections in her own words on why the appointment was made and how it worked out in practice.*

## INITIAL EXPECTATIONS

"When I came to the role five years ago, I was given almost a blank sheet of paper. The deanery was wanting to do something about development and training, and I think they were thinking about stuff they would love their vicar to do. But vicars don't have time – given that in the deanery there were six incumbents with 23 churches between them.

"The Area Dean had a very strong vision about getting churches to work together more closely – co-operation between churches.

"I started by asking 'what is your vision for where you want the deanery to go?' 'In five years time, what do you want it to be like?'

"Part of their response was about working together; part of it was about 'bums on seats', because that's what churches always want, and part of it was about who they were as 'church' – which seemed a good thing to work with."

## THE ROLE SPECIFICATION

**To identify and help resource self-sustaining areas of ministry and mission within the xxx Deanery, building on existing foundations.**

Key elements are

- **Identifying areas of potential for greater collaborative working whilst recognising what can be done better at parish or benefice level**
- **Resourcing different aspects of parish work and the building up of teams or networks as appropriate**
- **Discerning and bringing out gifts and skills in people and helping them to grow and develop**

- **Encouraging the deanery to think creatively, try fresh ideas and explore new ways of 'being church'**

## WORKING TOGETHER?

"The deanery's vision of working together more closely as churches was a source of frustration. I couldn't help them to achieve that vision in the way they had wanted. But I did perhaps help them to understand in a different way what it means to work together.

"It comes down to the fact that people won't travel – and I don't think it's just a problem in rural areas. Even travelling from one end of the benefice to the other puts off a lot of people, let alone the deanery.

"I found that this wasn't an age-related thing: it was true of teenagers as much as older people. We really thought that work with young people would bring them together, particularly because this deanery only has one secondary school (although it has two campuses). But even with a lively vibrant young congregation in the main town, youngsters in the next door village two miles away are still not coming. It's not necessarily that parents won't bring them, but rather inherited attitudes: 'We want it in our village'."

## FOCUSING ON THE LOCAL

"A service in church X 'belongs' to church X even though it might be organised by a wider group of church people.

"Incumbents were willing to engage across benefice boundaries; the lay people weren't. Vicars were saying to their young people 'It's a wonderful thing that's happening; I will provide you with transport and I will be there'. I found it strange, because they were meeting their friends, people they went to air cadets with, all sorts of things – but not church. It is fascinating that church is so identified with the local community.

"So I worked with this – exploring what it meant to be local church, what the **missio Dei** is."

## BUILDING GOD'S KINGDOM RIGHT HERE RIGHT NOW

"*Building God's Kingdom right here right now* became something of a slogan for our work. We discovered that

the 'right here right now' really is very, very local. Doing things together is therefore about developing a training or a mission strategy that enables the local."

## 'THE NATURE OF CHURCH'

"So I wrote a course for local congregations which was called **'the Nature of Church'** – using the four Biblical images of Church, 'the Bride of Christ', 'the Body of Christ', 'The Light of the World' and the Pilgrim Church – thinking about relationships with God, with other church members, and with people beyond the church, and then working towards the Kingdom of God. Here's this great image of what church is about. What does it mean right here right now?

"The course designed for people to work things out in their place. There was no 'story-telling': "Over there they do ..." It was about 'What do we do here in this place?'

"As I led them through this process, the question for them was 'what was God calling them to do? What in their community would they need to focus on to be church?' I might then suggest other training resources they could use. Sometimes it then became possible for two churches with similar needs to come together for a specific piece of learning."

## SIZE MATTERS!

"The deanery contains a mix of congregations from the very tiny ('feudal' with as few as two or three attending), right up to three churches who would expect more than 100 attending (three services on a Sunday). There are no 'mega-churches'.

"It was much harder working with the bigger congregations, getting them to think about who they were and what church is in their place. It has taken a lot longer, although we've seen two congregations turn themselves round completely.

"Five years ago (as they would now admit) one church was not a church at prayer. "We're the town church" they'd say – but essentially they were a club, a social group. So they were challenged: 'Are you a church at prayer, a group of disciples?'

"It was a case of moving gently, as they allowed us to try different things with them – including training small group leaders. From a church with no Bible study, they now have six home groups as well as prayer circles and all sorts of other prayer activity. The whole feel and atmosphere of that church has transformed itself. Just about now (after five years) they are getting round to

exploring the mission aspect of what they are about, what they are as church.

"We had to make disciples first before they could be witnesses. I don't think they would have had the courage before now."

"There are people who are ready to go before the congregation is – particularly perhaps in medium to small sized churches. The deanery aspect – and the availability of deanery support – has sometimes helped these people to go on and be witnesses."

## BEYOND THE CONGREGATION

"One of the things we've worked on is work with schools. A Sunday school is an option only in a very few places, but working with our local schools is vitally important. So people are sometimes able to work in the school setting when they have not been able to work in their church setting.

"As a deanery, we have developed a project called 'Spirit-level' in partnership with the local Educational Trust. This is a model for after-school clubs and several schools now have them – with no intention that it should be linked to churchgoing.

"Individual disciples who are 'a step ahead' are invited to be 'Barnabas' – 'encouragers'. A small group in one village congregation pushed to introduce a Family Service with breakfast, which others are now saying 'this is quite good!'

"The main activity outside the church building has been the after-school clubs. One village, where the main services are very old-fashioned, has a cafe church linked to Bible study groups meeting in the school. Most villages don't have village halls, so the church is often the only building that can be used. But in another place the school got too small for a new coffee afternoon initiative – so this transferred to the church.

"Fresh Expressions and renewal within the existing church are equally important – in parallel with each other."

## OVERCOMING FEAR

"There is a fear of church amongst many non churchgoers. So it is vital that church people understand their communities and their distinctive community values. It is about doing the right thing right here right now.

“A lot of young families live in the community where the cafe church is (probably because houses are more affordable) – but in other communities the cafe church style would be an excluding thing. One village is very much ‘a farming community’ (even though not too many are farmers!) so the church focuses very much on seasonal activities, Ploughman’s Sunday etc.

“It’s about knowing your community as well as knowing your church. Across the whole deanery you can’t do that, because the deanery is so very varied.”

### CONSOLIDATING AFTER CHANGE

“The Facilitator post was created as part of an ending phase after pastoral reorganisation – as part of the bedding down of the new pattern. They’re in a stable place now, and should be for some time. The deanery had the ‘nous’, not flapping and panicking, to call in some help to move forward. What I then had to do was work myself out of a job – so that they were able to go forward sustainably.

### OVERCOMING DEPENDENCY

“In terms of the deanery this has been achieved. Where I developed projects with people, I didn’t take responsibility. If the enthusiasm and potential wasn’t there, we didn’t take things forward. So it wasn’t ‘I will run this and you take it over’. It was ‘Let’s work this out together’. I did less and less as time went on, as they were able to model things from elsewhere.”

### WHAT NEXT?

“No successor is envisaged for the Facilitator – one-off funding was provided to the deanery by the diocese.

“I came with a creative role, start them off and get them thinking missionally. A successor, if the money was there, would need a different brief, taking them on to the next stage of thinking missionally.

“But actually it’s quite important that I’m not replaced. They need to do the thinking missionally for themselves if they are to be church. If you put a person in for too long you just rely on them to be a witness for you.”

### SHOULD OTHERS HAVE A DDF?

“A Development Facilitator would benefit any deanery but the deanery must be clear exactly why and what for. In my deanery they knew they were approaching a number of vacancies of posts occupied for 20 years or more. So a deanery anticipating changes of long-standing

clergy appointments might see good reason for having a Development Facilitator.”

### PSYCHOLOGY!

“A deanery has got to want a Development Facilitator and know why they want it. In this deanery not everybody immediately saw where it might all lead; so there was a lot of training involved, getting people to think missionally. But there was a core of people including the synod and all the incumbents who had caught the vision.

“I wouldn’t like to think of someone doing a job like mine who was just popped in by the bishop. You would then always have to justify yourself; you would always be the bishop’s man or woman.”

### OWNERSHIP

“When the diocese wanted some of my time, the deanery was able to say with pride, ‘this is our thing! – We’re sharing it with the diocese.’ The deanery discovered they were achieving something, and this egged them on to do more.

“A facilitator is only any use when people are ready to say ‘we want to get on with some mission’. They may not know how, and they may need to discover how God is with them calling them to it from the outset. A facilitator will then work with them and hopefully leave them much more able to respond to God and with a plan.”

### AN ECUMENICAL DIMENSION?

“I came in with a background as an ecumenist.

“The key question is always ‘what is the mission in this place?’ And so the question is how all Christians are meant to be engaging with it.

“In one village where there was a Baptist Church, the parish church gained a vision of things to do outside the church and immediately went to the Baptists and said, ‘do you agree this is right for this village; if so, can we do this together?’

“The town churches have learned to say, ‘there’s a piece of mission work needed here; what can we do together?’

“The youth Congregation was very much an ecumenical project. It was a project that finished when that group of young people moved on and the next generation needed something different. The replacement (s) is being worked out by the churches together, even though what results

may be a number of different initiatives in different fields being pioneered through different traditions.”

## THE DEANERY AS A MESSENGER FROM THE DIOCESE

“There is a potential danger in the way the deanery is perceived, especially by lay people, when the deanery is set up as the messenger on behalf of the diocese, bringing messages such as ‘your share has increased; your number of stipendiary priests is going down, etc’.

“The deanery, however, can exploit that management thing and take it a different way. ‘The diocese is asking us to do these things. How can we tackle these things together?’

“Oxford diocese has to use deaneries for management. But this can be exploited if the deanery holds on to its right to do the theology. I have been given a right of entry into the parishes – but only because people have discovered they can have fun and do theology.”

## DOING THEOLOGY

“The deanery cannot afford to lose sight of its potential for doing theology together. One of the most powerful things in energising what has happened here has been that we have done theology – within synod, through the Nature of the Church courses across the deanery, in the parishes doing their theology in their own place.

“It’s a practical theology (although few would use that language about it). “We’re going to look at this Bible story, and we’re going to work out what it means for us.” Later you can tell people ‘don’t let anyone say you’re not a theologian!’”

## THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF A DDF?

“After sitting through endless kind words at my leaving service, when I eventually got to the microphone, I was able to say ‘Actually you achieved all of this. You called me; you wanted to do mission; and you did it with me. Now I’m going, but God and the mission are not.’”

## SOME KEY OBSERVATIONS

- **The ‘bottom up’ nature of the DDF appointment. The deanery has to want it.**
- **The localness of ‘church’ if it is to be truly embedded in the community.**
- **The need for every local situation to be addressed on its own terms.**

- **An absolute focus on ‘right here right now’.**
- **The need for a deeper exploration of ‘the nature of church’**
- **The time it takes for discipleship development – focusing on prayer and a sense of God’s presence – before people are ready (i.e. have gained the confidence) for mission engagement.**
- **The default ecumenical dimension to mission engagement in the urban context.**
- **Doing theology without naming it.**

## THE NATURE OF CHURCH

Beverley Hollins’ course on ‘The Nature of Church’ is available on the Parish & People web site under Resources, or at:

[http://www.oxford.anglican.org/documents/336-living-faith-study-courses/view-category.html?ascdesc=DESC&or derby=dmdate\\_published](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/documents/336-living-faith-study-courses/view-category.html?ascdesc=DESC&or derby=dmdate_published)

## COULD YOU USE A DEVELOPMENT FACILITATOR?

### A FACILITATOR WILL NOT (DIRECTLY)

- Add ‘bums on seats’
- Raise money for the diocesan share

### A FACILITATOR WILL NOT (EVER)

- Restore the glory days
- Make life easier!

### BUT A FACILITATOR CAN ...

**... do things your clergy would love to do, but don’t have the time.** Unlike the specialist resource personnel employed by the diocese, Deanery Development Facilitators can address the mission and training needs of every congregation *in the round*. They can spend time with each local congregation and help Christ’s disciples to grow their own sense of God at work in their communities and in their daily lives. Deanery facilitators will only be at their happiest when they have worked themselves out of a job!

## FIRST STEPS

- **Choose the right time**
- **Know what you aspire to**
- **Get backing from every parish**
- **Agree the role description that is right for you**
- **Sort the funding for a time-limited appointment**
- **Start advertising!**