

# Sharing Local Ministry

*After a cogent and concise introduction to the principles and practice of Local Shared Ministry, the Revd Beren Hartless, Principal of the Ordained Local Ministry Scheme in the Diocese of Oxford, offers new possibilities for sharing ministry that could bring new life in the deanery and beyond.*

## Setting the Scene

The benefice of St Pilgrim with Shell and Walkingstick,<sup>1</sup> which has 3 churches, (ER 119 + 44 +12) has been operating as a Local Ministry (LM) parish with a Local Ministry Team (LMT) for around ten years, since the time that parishioners from the 3 parishes nominated possible members for a new team, and the PCCs voted for the nominees. After an initial six-month long pilot scheme to establish the need and think through logistics and procedures, a LMT with 10 lay members and the vicar and

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<sup>1</sup> Not the real name of this benefice, and some details have been altered!

the curate was set up, and the team members have undergone considerable training together.

LMT members have a particular focus in one of four areas of **ministry: nurture, mission and evangelism, pastoral care, and worship**, meeting in subgroups with other people from the churches. Some of the members belong to more than one group. The LMT meets on a monthly basis but the sub-groups meet more regularly as required.

Early in the life of the LMT, the Pastoral care member of the LMT set up and trained a team of eight bereavement visitors, including some of the LMT as well as others from the church. The Mission and Evangelism subgroup works largely with people on the edge of the church community, and runs baptism and marriage preparation and confirmation classes. The Nurture subgroup organises a continuing Christian Education programme in the benefice which includes groups for children and young people, as well as for adults. Members of the congregation take up various tasks (e.g. preparing and leading intercessions, or coffee-shop evangelism) and receive training for them from the appropriate member of the LMT.

A large part of the LMT's main meeting time is given over to reflection and appraisal of their work in encouraging others to use their gifts in ministry. There are also more formal assessments carried out in a three-yearly review process, following which, up to three team members are free to stop being part of the team if they wish, and new members are chosen.

# Scriptural and Theological Foundations

Local Ministry is a term which is often misunderstood to mean that kind of Christian ministry that clergy and sometimes lay people exercise in the geographical area served by a particular church. This article will show that it actually refers to a particular way of ordering the life of a church so that it is fully effective in both mission and ministry. In other parts of the world, and in different dioceses in Britain, Local Ministry is also synonymously known as local shared ministry (LSM), collaborative ministry, total ministry, mutual ministry, indigenous ministry or the ministry of all the baptised. I will refer to it either as Local Shared Ministry (LSM) or as collaborative ministry.

LSM takes its inspiration from the writings of an Anglican missionary priest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century called Roland Allen. In his book *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?*, Allen outlined his understanding of the way that the gospel spread in the early days of the Christian church, as he noted from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. He argued that St Paul conducted his peripatetic apostolic ministry in 'teams',<sup>2</sup> and also founded churches which had local leadership. Thus, in the early part of the Church's history, ministry was seen as belonging to the baptised community as a whole, the members of which were equipped by the Holy Spirit with all the gifts necessary for the 'spontaneous expansion of the church', with leadership

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 13.2,5; 15.22; 17.10, 19; 18.19; 20.4; Phil. 3.2-3

being located in a team of elders and other suitably gifted people.<sup>3</sup> So each local Christian community was entrusted with the sacraments, mission and ministry, and apostolic leaders would from time to time visit them, and provide ongoing support, further training and continuing prayer.

In contrast, Allen noted that churches in his day (and often still today in the Church of England) were highly dependent on an 'imported' priest, academically educated and formed in a theological college or seminary, who was then expected to provide 'professional services' for largely passive lay 'consumers'. As Ephesians 4.13-16 notes, if the people of God, gathered into the Body of Christ, are to grow to maturity in Christ, all the baptised members of the church need to develop their gifts and use them interdependently. This includes leadership gifts.

As shown in the narrative at the beginning of this article, LSM is being explored widely in Anglican parishes in the UK, and has begun to be put in place in some form or another in some of the parishes of the Diocese of Oxford.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 14.23; 15.4; 20.17; 1 Cor. 16. 15-18; 1 Thess. 5.12,13; Titus 1.5.

## Some underlying principles

*‘Collaborative ministry does not happen just because people work together or co-operate in some way. It is a gradual and mutual evolution of new patterns’.*<sup>4</sup>

In this process, there are several key principles.

### *1. Sharing of ministry*

LSM or collaborative ministry is not about the clergy doing all the ministry themselves, nor of them doing it with the advice of members of the congregation. It’s not even about a tradition of strong lay involvement but little collaboration, with lay people assisting the clergy for example, by taking part in the liturgy by doing intercessions, or administering the elements at Holy Communion, but not taking responsibility for particular areas of ministry.

It’s about everyone engaging in ministry together, and about the priest/presbyter being part of a team, the members of which together serve God and the parish by enabling everyone else to do the ministry they are called to do as individuals and corporately.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Sign We Give*: Report from the Working Party on Collaborative ministry, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 1995.

*2. Collaborative shared ministry is facilitated if there is structural recognition of the parish/benefice's commitment to it.*

LSM parishes generally place a high priority on developing 'shared purpose, aims and concrete objectives'.<sup>5</sup>

*'If the goal is collaboration, then everyone who is potentially affected needs to be involved from the beginning'.<sup>6</sup>*

In the ideal LSM parish or benefice, the vision of the whole church influences decisions about the life of the church including budgets, new initiatives and the evaluation of existing programmes.

'Input into the life of the church (is) encouraged from all directions' and all age groups, 'not a reliance upon the faithful few'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as a natural outcome of working collaboratively, consultation and corporate decision-making are characteristic of this kind of ministry.

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the following points are taken from Board of Mission, *A Time for Sharing*, (1995) Church House Publishing or adapted from Advisory Board of Ministry (1998) *Stranger in the Wings* Church House Publishing. They are enclosed in quote marks.

<sup>6</sup> Sofield and Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry* p.73

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

Local Ministry leadership teams (LMT) do not do all the ministry in the church but ensure that the Christian community has all the ministry it needs to fulfil its calling to be an effective agent of mission – and that this is seen by everyone as the responsibility of every baptised believer. The LMT's role is not just to minister in a particular area, such as pastoral care, or preaching, or leading worship, or evangelism, or administration, or strategic thinking, vision building and communication, but also to call out the gifts of others for those particular ministries which the church community together has identified as needed at that time; to model good practice including in collaboration; to help others to develop; and to co-ordinate them as ministers.

*3. Thus, local shared ministry is enabled when the gifts of all the baptised members of the church are identified and used.*

a) Gift discovery

It is important that there is some sort of mechanism for identification of peoples' gifts, as there is evidence to show that where gift-discernment has been part of the ongoing development of a parish, a greater degree of collaboration develops. This may be because affirming the gifts of others builds 'an atmosphere of mutual respect' and acceptance and helps each individual understand better their place in the wider picture.

Staff of the Oxford Diocese's training department, including the author, and the Parish Development Advisers provide help with this by offering several different processes for

identifying and developing gifts, whether natural or spiritual, and to suit different spiritual traditions of the church. Also, the diocesan Local Ministry Programme assessment process aims to help the discernment and affirmation of gifts in those called to train for leadership, by other people in the parish giving feedback to trainee ministers (lay and ordained) on the way they exercise their gifts.

b) Examples of the use of different gifts:

- 'lay participation in worship and in the planning worship'
- 'lay people involved in pastoral work and for this to be acceptable within the parish': for example, who does the visiting when the old person across the road is sick? If the clergy don't visit, are they criticised and judged?
- 'a ministry of welcome involving both clergy and lay people'. For a church to grow, there needs to be a range of different 'gate-keepers', not just the vicar, or a church warden.
- lay people preaching or running Alpha, Emmaus or other Christian discipleship and nurture groups

c) Working with peoples' areas of giftedness and passion,

... rather than expecting them to stick to the roles and tasks that they have been asked to do in the past without reflecting with them whether they are or are not particularly good at them.

d) Spreading out the work:



For busy people, the LSM approach generally means there is a need to limit the number of areas of ministry that each person can or should be involved in. Some churches which have developed collaborative ministry look to limit the number of roles members take on, e.g. in one church, each family was encouraged to take on no more than 2.5 roles per couple. The key principle here is that **if everyone does a little, no-one has to do a lot!**

- e) People taking responsibility for areas of ministry and for developing their gifts in these areas.

Clearly, there also needs to be some form of accountability and appraisal of those areas of ministry.

- f) Clarity of roles

Role descriptions are often useful in LSM benefices. Also, clergy and lay leaders have to recognise the fact that transition to collaborative ministry means their own roles may well change.

- g) Clergy as enablers of the ministry of others

‘Clergy who do not attempt to fill every breach in times of crisis’: Feelings of loss and ambivalence are normal when a minister is moving from being the one on whom others depend for ministry to being an enabler of the ministry of those people themselves.

- h) ‘Space and scope for personal growth of all’

... at their own pace, 'including leadership team member development and professional growth'. Experienced leaders, including clergy, need to see themselves as passing on their gifts and skills and knowledge to others.

#### *4. Collaborative, shared ministry needs to be built on good personal relationships*

This includes,

- a) 'A high level of communication, not only within the church congregation but also between the church and the community'.
- b) 'Evidence of people being valued': Romans 15.7
- c) 'A high level of trust and tolerance': There is room for people to make mistakes and to learn from them, and a '5 talent' gift is not seen as better than a '2 talent' gift.
- d) 'Mutual enablement': People help one another develop their gifts.
- e) The 'wide recognition of skills and limitations'.
- f) Church members growing in emotional maturity, with people taking responsibility for what they think and feel.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Grundy, Malcolm, *Understanding Congregations* p.60

- g) A 'desire for growth in understanding'.
- h) 'Productive ways in which the Body heals itself, including agreed conflict resolution procedures'.

*5. Shared ministry involves willingness to adapt to change and be flexible*

- a) A key to this is nurturing a self-reflective learning community.
- b) It also means having the courage to encourage and facilitate initiatives from anyone in the church, including the young people.

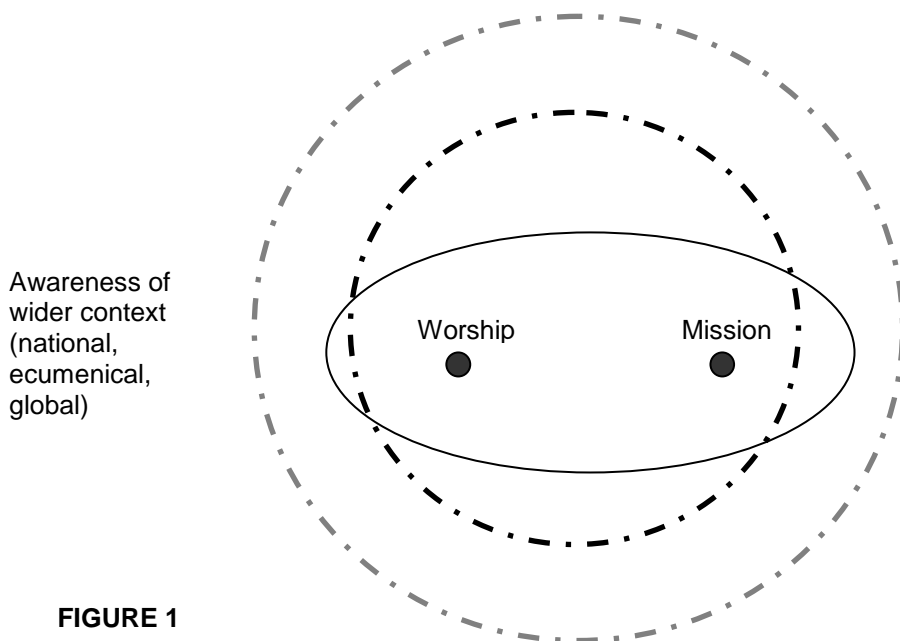
*6. Shared ministry means developing a mutual spirituality*

LSM benefices and parishes have prayer at the heart of all they do, and look for people gifted in intercession to commit to supporting the different areas of ministry and those who are involved in them.

- a) There is a high degree of attentive listening to God and receiving and reflecting the life of God.
- b) Mutual spiritual ministry and pastoral care are offered on the LMT and throughout the church.
- c) There is a bias to the poor.

- d) Christian generosity is evident in 'healthy' financial giving.

*7. The whole church takes seriously the 'breathing in' and breathing out' of a worship centred/mission orientated approach to church life – see Figure 1.*



So the whole worshipping community revolves around the two poles of the ellipse of its life, as seen above: 'breathing in' in worship, and 'breathing out' in mission. This is

because ‘*The purpose of collaborative ministry is to enable the Church in mission*’.<sup>9</sup> What happens on Monday to Saturday is as important as what happens in church on Sundays, and in a collaborative ministry church, everyone knows it. The church must not be inward looking, or it will die.

#### 8. *In summary,*

- a) ‘Collaborative ministry is a way of relating and working together which expresses the communion which the church is given and to which it is called.
- b) Collaborative ministry brings together into partnership people who, through baptism and confirmation, as well as ordination .... have different vocations, gifts and offices within the church.
- c) Collaborative ministry begins from a fundamental desire to work together because we are called by the Lord to be a company of disciples, not isolated individuals.
- d) Collaborative ministry looks different in different places. This reflects the diversity which is a fundamental tenet of creation’.<sup>10</sup> It demands conscious commitment to certain values and convictions, i.e. recognition of ‘shared

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<sup>9</sup> *The Sign We Give* p.35

<sup>10</sup> *The Sign We Give*: Report from the Working Party on Collaborative ministry, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 1995.

but differentiated responsibility for life and mission of the Church' as following on from baptism; understanding of complementarity of different vocations and gifts; willingness to be mutually accountable.<sup>11</sup>

- e) Collaborative ministry is committed to mission. It is not simply concerned with the internal life of the church. Rather it shows to the world the possibility of transformation, of community and of unity within diversity.

## **New Possibilities for Sharing Ministry**

### *1. In Parishes*

In New Zealand, Local Shared Ministry parishes, also called 'units,' do not have a vicar. Because of this, LSM units do not pay a full parish share, and are only required to pay ¼ of the share of parishes which have stipendiary vicars. Instead, they are each provided by the diocese with a part-time Enabler who lives outside of the area, often some distance away. The Enabler works with the parish-based LSM teams from up to 4 LSM units, and his/her role is carefully defined, mainly comprising support and training for the team, not the whole parish, with a degree of oversight.

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<sup>11</sup> *Come with us session 4.2*

In the Diocese of Auckland, all the Enablers are stipendiary priests. They are deployed, and trained by the Bishop's Chaplain for LSM and supported by her and the team of Enablers, which themselves model LSM.

This system has not yet been set up in the Diocese of Oxford, but potentially, it could be done, and the Registrar has expressed willingness to facilitate parishes and benefices who want to move in this direction.

## *2. In 'Fresh expressions' of church – including network-type churches*

There are numerous examples of new kinds of church which have developed out of networks, such as a gathering of people in a pub to study the bible and pray, or people who have come together to sing Christian choral music and anthems and to study their spiritual significance and pray and support one another, or a Saturday afternoon gathering of parents and their young families, or a regular meeting of a railway club or a bowling group which has half an hour prayer and praise linked to it. Some are network churches, often with a gathered, eclectic membership, and may be structured around monastic principles and rules of life.

Such churches may not necessarily see themselves as fitting into the category of Local Shared Ministry churches, especially as the element of a geographically located 'locality' is missing by virtue of the widespread nature of the network, and yet they can operate on the same principles.

The point is that if all the baptised members of the new form of church, as in the inherited forms of church, are gifted by the Spirit of God, then the church collectively has a responsibility to enable every member to develop and exercise their gifts. So a leadership team which can facilitate this could quite naturally fall into the same category as a collaborative or local shared ministry team. It would then be important that the ministry team received support and a wider-church perspective from time to time from an outside ministry enabler of some kind, who might be a pioneer ordained minister who oversees several such network churches.

### *3. Deanery local shared ministry*

If the number of stipendiary clergy in a deanery falls below a certain level, depending on the number of centres of worship, the traditional model of vicar-led parish will be increasingly difficult to sustain. At present, in the diocese of Oxford, there are possibly one or two deaneries where this is the case.

Oxford Diocese is fortunate in that we have a large number of highly dedicated and committed non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs). These clergy act as a buffer protecting us from some of the hard decisions that may need to be made in the future with regard to the ministry of the Church of England in this diocese. This is also true of House for Duty priests, whose presence in a parish may in some cases result in the inhibition of lay ministry development. Within



many deaneries where the parish share is being assessed, collected, and used to fund the necessary numbers of stipendiary clergy and other paid ministers, difficult questions are already being asked about clergy deployment.

If we want to look beyond maintenance and survival to mission and growth, resources need to be put into the things that we see as crucial for the future. For example, if a deanery sees mission and outreach as its priority, it might perhaps recognize the necessity of paying for deanery staff that can carry this priority forward. This might mean that parish share funds would have to be diverted from paying for stipendiary clergy to funding missionaries. In such a situation, parishes which found it difficult to meet the requirements for paying the parish share could find themselves without an incumbent. Even if they have an NSM, that person may not be able to provide full cover for all the functions previously fulfilled by a stipendiary clergy person. This is the kind of situation where local shared ministry could become a valuable tool in a deanery's Pastoral Plan. Some of the stipendiary clergy in the deanery might be redeployed as ministry enablers for LSM parishes, with these parishes paying a greatly reduced share.

Isolated parishes and benefices which have had long vacancies might already be possible candidates for a full LSM approach.

## Changing the culture

It is important to recognise that helping churches to see the advantage of moving from being led by stipendiary clergy to developing full LSM involves a culture shift. Instead of viewing the church being gathered around a priest, people need to understand that the church itself is the priestly people of God, and that priestly functions can be shared throughout the congregation. It also involves helping them to see that the diocese and the bishops trust them with the ministry for their locality, and support them in this.

Some of the key issues

### *1) The drivers of change to this model of ministry*

- a) Sometimes the driver for change is purely pragmatic in that there is a need for more ordained ministers. As stipendiary ministers are in short supply, so developing a LMT and discerning gifts can take the pressure off clergy shortages. Similarly, where there is a lack of continuity in key appointments (clergy or lay), the LSM approach, with a LMT being set up, can bring about viability, sustainability and a real sense of community for a parish.
- b) For others, the idea of introducing LSM is ideologically driven by belief in the fundamental rightness of collaborative ministry as theologically and contextually appropriate; theologically, by drawing on the model of the social Trinity, or the Body of Christ imagery in the New Testament;

contextually in the recognition that in our postmodern age, subsidiarity and the devolution of power are widely affirmed.

2) *Introducing collaborative ministry can cause difficulties,*

- a) Where there is dependency on clergy, people may be confused or resistant at first, and there may need to be a great deal of patient teaching and exploring of the whole subject.
- b) There may be problems with the perceptions of people in the wider parish about the LMT members.
- c) A newly arrived clergy person may not be supportive of or appreciative of or even sensitive to collaborative ministry.
- d) Problems can occur within the LMT: Group dynamics, team and individual roles and emotional intelligence are key areas – and there is a need to recognise personal and professional boundaries and reconcile them with differing individual situations. Similarly, men and women communicate differently and can easily misunderstand each other's needs and intentions.
- e) Power struggles in a church e.g. difficulties between laity and clergy or full-time and part time clergy on a LMT, or between the LMT and a powerful longstanding and/or vociferous member of the congregation, or between the original indigenous

members of the local congregation and newly arrived people from a different spiritual tradition, can disrupt LSM. Hence, working with change and conflict needs to be a key skill, taught to all leaders.

- f) Fear among clergy and key lay leaders that collaborative ministry will leave them little to do is a barrier for some. It may be that some clergy collude consciously or unconsciously with the resistance because they will be kept at the centre.

3) *Getting shared ministry going in your local parish/ benefice*

- a) Talk to the Area Dean, Archdeacon and/or your Bishop.

- b) Communicate the vision, which involves

- i) *Getting widespread appreciation of what shared collaborative ministry would mean for your church*

Where there is a common vision developed by involving everyone who is potentially affected, there is a faster movement into LSM. So if you haven't yet started on collaborative ministry, it is vital to talk it up around the whole congregation, ensure that it is being preached about, taught, written about in parish magazines or on pew sheets etc, before launching new initiatives towards it.

Encouraging people to read articles like this, or some of the books in the reading list below may be one way forward.

- ii) *Exploring what your church is called by God to do in mission and ministry*

Some churches will already have done this as part of their deanery mission planning. Others may wish to ask those who advise on Mission and Parish Development in their diocese to help them to do this.

- iii) *Learning about the Holy Spirit and the gifts God gives to build up the church and to help it to engage fully in its mission in the world, and identifying and affirming the gifts of all.*

- iv) *Everyone having the opportunity to learn about and to understand the role and importance of a LMT as a team called to serve the whole church by building up all the members in their gifts and ministries, so that all are equipped for their Christian discipleship and calling.*

c) Getting the structures in place

- i) *Thinking through structural issues such as the relationship of the LMT to the PCC.*

- ii) *Choosing the LMT members*

This means having some kind of a 'calling' process to identify those gifted people who are being called by God to serve the church in enabling the gifts of others in the areas of mission and ministry previously identified for the church. Diocesan advisers, including vocations advisers, are always

happy to consult with parishes engaged in setting up such a process.

*iii) Formal recognition and affirmation of the members of the LMT through the commissioning or possibly even (?) licensing of the LMT*

- d) Ongoing support for parishes which are moving into shared ministry and their LMTs.
- e) Reviewing the team and its work of enabling the growth in gifts and calling of all in the church
- f) Renewing the team

#### *4) Training for shared ministry*

Part of the Diocese of Oxford's *Living faith for the future* mission strategy is the developing of confident collaborative leadership. The new diocesan Local Ministry Programme aims to train lay members of LMTs, Local Lay Ministers and candidates for ordained ministry, in collaborative ministry skills as well as in skills for practical ministry and theology. Other dioceses are likely to have similar programmes. Some of the areas that are covered in LMT training are:

- a) Servant leadership, including learning how to enable all the members of the church to discover, develop and use their gifts.

- b) Self awareness in terms of learning about temperament and learning styles.
- c) Group dynamics and systems thinking.
- d) Use and abuse of power.
- e) Understanding boundaries.
- f) Learning to implement change and deal with conflict.

Beren Hartless 2009

## Further reading

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Nash, S, Pimlott, J and Nash, P (2008) *Skills for collaborative ministry* SPCK

Robertson, D (2007) *Collaborative Ministry: what it is, how it works and why* Bible Reading Fellowship