



The Role of the Rural/Area Dean

A BENCHMARK SURVEY

The role of the Rural/Area Dean has been changing significantly in recent decades. Job Descriptions supplied by 21 dioceses in response to a 1994 survey provide a useful benchmark against which to measure these changes.

In 1994 most job descriptions (variously described as 'instructions' or 'notes for guidance') evidently sprang from a legal and hierarchical model. However, a number of Dioceses were conscious that the job was changing and were apologetic about the outdated information available.

A TYPICAL JOB DESCRIPTION FROM 1994:-

- a) SHARING IN EPISCOPE WITH THE BISHOP
 - Knowledge of and care for the life of the parishes
 - Pastoral care for clergy, families and widows
 - Expression of the unity of the diocese of which the bishop is the focus
 - Advising the bishop on needs of individual clergy or parishes
 - Reporting of irregularities.
- b) AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ARCHDEACON
 - Undertaking Visitations and Inspections to ensure the good order of the fabric and the general welfare of the parish.
- c) A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION
 - Attendance at regular meetings with Bishop and Archdeacon
 - Passing information about the Deanery to the Bishop, and about the Diocese to the clergy and deanery
 - Liaison on matters like confirmations
- d) AS CONVENOR OF CHAPTER
 - To plan, convene and chair chapter meetings as times of fellowship, study and spiritual growth
 - Pastoral care of clergy, and ensuring clergy take proper holiday time, time off in the week etc.
 - Pastoral care of lay workers and retired clergy.
- e) AS CO-CHAIR OF DEANERY SYNOD
 - To work closely with the Lay chair to ensure efficient conduct of synodical business
 - To initiate local shared developments in Ministry and Mission
 - To encourage full payment of the Quota or Parish Share
 - Through the Pastoral Committee to formulate and implement a Deanery plan.
- f) DURING VACANCIES
 - To ensure the provision of Services

- To ensure pastoral care, particularly with and through good contacts with the churchwardens
 - To enable the Sequestrators to fulfil their roles, and ensure that the parish is aware of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure and fully understands the process of appointment
 - To take care of vacant parsonage houses.
- g) INDUCTIONS
- To work with the Archdeacon in informing the new incumbent about the parish.
 - To assist in preparing and rehearsing the service of Licensing or Induction.
 - To meet the new incumbent after three to six months to review progress and plans for the parish.
- h) AS PRIMARY LINK WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES
- A few job specifications are now including this as part of the brief or making tentative moves towards it.
- i) ECUMENICAL LINKS
- To make contacts, or ensure that they are in place, for effective ecumenical working in the Deanery area.

TRENDS AND CHANGES

Much of the 1994 job description remains valid. However, in the decades since the survey, the deanery's mission potential has been widely recognised, and parishes are being encouraged to take greater responsibility for acting together across the deanery.

The increasing strain on financial resources and reduced numbers of stipendiary ordained personnel have been two of the main negative drivers for this change of perspective.

More positively the change can be linked to a growing appreciation of the ministerial calling of the whole people of God.

Increased responsibility has in most dioceses been passed to deaneries in three main areas:

a) STRATEGY FOR MISSION:

In many Dioceses an increasingly collaborative style of ministry is being seen as both desirable and necessary.

- Team or Group ministries or 'Major Benefices' were one early consequence.
- Today the trend seems to be towards clusters of benefices or even whole deaneries working together in 'Mission and Ministry Areas' (or some similar title).

- ‘Minster’ churches are being designated in many areas.
- Most pioneer ministries and ‘Fresh Expressions of Church’ within the Church of England seem to relate to the rest of the church most naturally at deanery level.

Enabling stipendiary clergy to adjust to more collaborative working, both within their benefices, within the deanery, and with other Churches, is a responsibility falling increasingly on the Rural/Area Dean.

b) FINANCE:

- Many deaneries now have a greater say in the allocation of parish quota/shares, using local knowledge to supplement and refine overall diocesan policy.
- Deaneries are increasingly being challenged to fund the entire cost of stipendiary ministry from within the Deanery.
- Deaneries are also being encouraged to seek funding from their local churches in order to develop Deanery projects in mission and ministry.

Rural/Area Deans with their lay co-Chairs are likely to have a significant role in enabling all concerned to make painful decisions with a good grace and with mutual respect and understanding.

c) DEPLOYMENT OF ACCREDITED MINISTERS:

- Deanery Pastoral Committees are likely to have increasing responsibility for advising on ‘pastoral reorganisation’. This can include stipendiary and non-stipendiary posts.
- Specialist ‘sector’ or ‘pioneer’ ministries (lay or ordained) are now more likely to be initiated at a Deanery level than at a Diocesan or parochial level.

This is likely to form a major part of how the deanery’s strategy for mission is put into practice. The Rural/Area Dean’s role may be to identify and oversee those who have the managerial acumen to plan and support these new initiatives.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEANERY STRUCTURES

- With the clustering of benefices and reductions in the number of beneficed clergy, there is a trend towards combining deaneries into larger units. Positively this will often mean that the deanery can be made coterminous with the Local Authority Area.
- Negatively larger deaneries can mean that Chapter meetings, already augmented by licensed Readers, Ordained Local Ministers etc, cease to be a place where stipendiary clergy can gain mutual support. One solution is to appoint a single Area Dean on a substantial part-time basis for a cluster of smaller deaneries covering the Local Authority area, thus allowing smaller Chapters to continue to meet.
- A less radical solution is when Dioceses or Deaneries have made provision for extra staffing in the parish of the Rural Dean - either full-time or part-time

- Deanery Administrator posts, again on a full or part-time basis depending on deanery size, are becoming more common.

Some of these trends, and the consequent need for adjustment of the structures and revised job descriptions, were observed in a 2010 survey by Colin Hill of the Church House Deaneries Group. From the survey, it appears that the work of a Rural/Area Dean – when it is associated with a ‘full-time’ parochial appointment – typically takes up 15% of the individual’s working time. New responsibilities in relation to deanery strategies, relationships with civic structures, deployment of personnel and new initiatives will only increase the workload.

The days are long gone when the only debate was whether the Rural Dean was ‘shop steward’ or ‘works foreman’ in relation to the stipendiary clergy in their Chapter meeting!

In 2011 one newly-appointed Area Dean, with responsibility for three deaneries covering her Local Authority area, and an appropriate part-time town-centre parochial charge, is also pioneering a training programme for newly-ordained stipendiary Deacons. The role of the Rural/Area is undoubtedly changing!

THE LEGAL CANONS

- **C23** " Of Rural Deans"
- **F17** "Of keeping a record of the Property of Churches"
- **F18** " Of the Survey of Churches"

For the full text, visit <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/canons.aspx>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Discerning the mind of the Deanery

by **John Cole** (2010) £2.50

Good Listening – The Lifeblood of a Creative Learning Community

by **Paul and Jenny Rolph** (2011) £2.50

both available from www.parishandpeople.org.uk

A Request to new Rural/Area Deans

If you have been given a Job Description or ‘Notes for Guidance’, please let us have a copy – by post or as an email attachment – so that we have a record of how change is progressing.

Please send it to secretary@parishandpeople.org.uk or post it to **Revd Jimmy Hamilton-Brown, April Cottage, West St, Winterborne Stickland, Blandford DT11 0NT**

This briefing has been updated from the report prepared by the Revd Simon Brown as a result of his 1994 survey.