

## **A Brief Commentary on Oversight Ministry**

This document should be read alongside the Oversight Minister Role Description.

### **History and Context**

The established vision of the diocese of Sheffield is “to grow a sustainable network of Christlike, lively and diverse Christian communities in every place which are effective in making disciples and in seeking to transform our society and God’s world.”

Between 2018 and 2020 an extensive consultation was undertaken about how best to realise this vision given the reduced number of stipendiary incumbents within the context of a diocese with some of the most economically and socially deprived communities in England and without the historic asset-base of other, older, dioceses.

The strategy that emerged out of this period of consultation is conveniently summarised as the 3Rs: Renewed, Released, Rejuvenated. This strategy, originally planned to take the diocese to 2025 is at present undergoing a consultation-led refresh leading us up to 2032.

As part of the original strategy, the twelve deaneries were twinned into six pairs with each pair of deaneries allocated a number of Oversight Ministers and an Associate-Archdeacon Transition Enabler (AA-TE) to help the Oversight Ministers and churches transition to the new model of ministry.

Oversight Ministers oversee mission and ministry across the Mission Areas, providing vision, direction and leadership for both existing and new congregations. Some Mission Areas are served by two or more Oversight Ministers, working collegially. Others may be served by one. This is dependent on size and context. Oversight Ministers are expected to be fully committed to collaborative teamwork at every level. Where there are existing Focal Ministry teams, they will work alongside them in the delivery of mission and ministry. Where Focal Ministry teams are not yet in place they will identify, build up and enable those teams. Oversight Ministers are expected to work particularly closely with Focal Ministers, providing supervision, support and coaching.

### **The Role of the Oversight Minister**

The term ‘Oversight Minister’ is not an innovation but emphasises explicitly what is already central to the ordinal: that those who are called to the ordained ministry are called to encourage and enable the whole people of God.

The primary purpose of the Oversight Minister in this model is to enable all the baptised to live out the fullness of their vocation, having received the light of Christ “to shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.” In this, Oversight Ministry is a further expression of our Lights for Christ initiative which is now well embedded in the life of the diocese.

This nurturing, empowering, enabling ministry is not 'one size fits all'. It takes a different shape in each local context, however the consistent emphasis is for Oversight Ministers to release the people of God to be signs, first-fruits and agents of God's kingdom in the world. For many clergy this practice will have marked their ministry for many years already.

The role descriptions of Oversight Ministers are comprehensive and generic in nature in order to articulate the range and scope of this ministry. Each role description will need to be shaped to suit local circumstances as appropriate to the dramatically different contexts of ministry within our diocese. It is important that all role descriptions are fulfilling, realistic and achievable.

The role has been shaped around four key areas:

1. *To oversee mission and ministry in the Mission Area*  
Every benefice will have an Oversight Minister who will be legally designated as a Priest-in-Charge or Incumbent. In partnership with other Oversight Ministers (where appointed), they will exercise oversight across the whole of the Mission Area. Working collaboratively with Focal Ministry teams and other leaders they will shape and implement mission through Mission Action Planning and other strategic initiatives.
2. *To resource the whole people of God for the whole mission of God.*  
Oversight Ministers have the priestly calling to be servant and shepherd, watchman, steward and guide, walking with and nurturing the whole people of God in order that confident disciples of Jesus may themselves make disciples. They will recognise that all God's people share in God's mission and will foster a healthy culture and leadership structures to ensure that all those called to ministry feel valued and equipped.
3. *To ensure mission and ministry in the Mission Area reflects the Christian faith as understood in the Church of England.*  
As with all clergy, Oversight Ministers are governed by the Canons, the Ordinal and the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy. They are responsible for the oversight of effective governance of their churches and are to ensure excellence and full compliance in safeguarding. They are to preach and teach the historic faith of the Church as appropriate to the context in which they minister and to reveal the grace of God through their ministry of word and sacrament.
4. *To identify, nurture and develop leaders of the Mission Area.*  
Foundational to the role description is a dependency upon God and the prioritising of prayer. Oversight Ministers will identify, develop and support leaders who are marked by their faithfulness, wisdom and life of prayer. Oversight ministers will aspire to be truly collaborative leaders, sharing their ministry with others and allowing space for new initiatives and opportunities to grow through the gifts of others. As part of this dispersion

of leadership, Oversight Ministers are expected to take care of themselves by paying attention to their patterns of rest and work.

### **Focal Ministry**

Focal Ministry is now well-established across the diocese. Focal Ministers are the public face of the church to their congregation and community. In congregations or community outreach projects where an Oversight Minister is not frequently present, Focal Ministers provide continuity of leadership. Focal Ministry teams are made up of a small group of Focal Ministers who provide that leadership role. The Oversight Minister works with the Focal Ministry team in developing and delivering mission and ministry in a parish as well as identifying and raising up new leaders.

### **Self-supporting ordained ministers and licensed lay ministers**

In many places SSOMs play an important part of the Mission Area leadership team. Some are Focal Ministers, leading an existing church or a new congregation. Some are Oversight Ministers. They are a vital component in ensuring the continued sacramental provision throughout the mission area.

Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) are present in almost every Mission Area. They provide a valuable ministry of word and worship. Some may be Focal Ministers but they are different ministries and not interchangeable.

### **Support and accountability for oversight ministers**

Every pair of twinned deaneries has an **AA-TE** who works closely with the Archdeacons and Area Deans to support clergy as they grow into their ministry. They provide regular support and coaching to the Oversight Ministers. They are involved in the appointment process, working with PCCs to frame an appropriate role description with clarity of expectations.

**Area Deans** continue to pay particular attention to the pastoral care of the clergy. Oversight Ministers are expected to prioritise attendance at deanery chapter and synod. Deanery Chapter should provide a safe space for clergy to share and reflect with one another.

The **Resourcing Mission and Ministry Team** based at Church House, Rotherham, is able to offer advice and practical assistance for clergy and churches seeking to implement the diocesan strategy at a local level. Oversight Ministry training is regularly provided and clergy moving from curacy or an assistant level post are invited to attend our year-long Resourcing new Oversight Ministers course.

The **Mission Area Support Team** based at Church House, Rotherham, provides practical advice and assistance on all matters relating to finance, governance and buildings.

All clergy are strongly encouraged to take regular rest days, retreats and their full allowance of annual leave. We have a structure of pastoral supervision groups set up to allow clergy to reflect confidentially upon their ministry. There is also a

network of spiritual accompaniers within the diocese. For more details clergy are encouraged to read the “Flourishing in Ministry” booklet available from Church House, Rotherham.