

Oversight Ministry

- The oversight minister carries the overall responsibility for the ministry and mission of a benefice, delegated from the Bishop, who shares the cure of souls with the oversight minister.
- The oversight minister is generally the incumbent.
- At the heart of oversight ministry is spiritual leadership for the benefice.
- In order for that ministry and mission to flourish, one of the key roles of an oversight minister is to notice:
 - a) to see what God is doing locally, name it and join in
 - b) to see who are the people that God has given for the work of ministry and mission in the community and what the gifts of those people are.
- Seeing is the first step to identifying, enabling and equipping people to share in leadership and ministry across the benefice, including in the wider community.
- The oversight minister provides overall leadership and accountability for diverse ministries.
- The oversight minister develops a culture of vocations in benefices, praying for the rising up of vocations and setting expectations for ministry.
- It is by nature collaborative, offering ministry through and with others, building up the Body of Christ.
- Under God, oversight ministry sees, supports, encourages, resources and enables - thus enabling all the baptised to live out the fullness of their vocations.
- An oversight minister follows their own vocation and also enables the vocations of others (lay and ordained) as part of shared local ministry.

Background paper on Shared Local Ministry from 2023

Shared local ministry is part of our diocesan vision. It provides a framework for vocations to ministry roles in the local church and community and encourages every parish to have an identified shape of ministry, shared between clergy and lay ministers, that fits the local context.

A vision for ministry

All people are created by God and called to be involved in God's mission and ministry. Christians are reminded in Paul's letter to the Colossians, 'whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Col: 3.17). We are all called by baptism to shine as lights in the world - that may not be a formal named ministry, but it is a call. Some particular named ministries are commissioned and accountable; they are public ministries that represent God and the church. These ministries carry a specific responsibility for others. In the development of shared local ministry, we are talking about ministries that provide a focal point for each community. What they involve will depend on the context in which they operate and the gifts of people locally. They will come with oversight to give support and accountability so that all those who share in ministry can flourish.

Shared local ministry is the model of ministry that we are encouraging in every church and parish across the diocese: people exercising specific ministries which reflect their gifts and vocation. Working together, they will share the ministry in that community, and be focal points for a genuinely local Christian presence. Our model of church has sometimes been based on having a vicar and expecting them to do, or lead on, most things; including the things that don't need to be done by a priest. The way in which benefices are configured often puts a strain on everyone, as well as taking energy away from the local. Shared local ministry aims to release and enable both clergy and laity, so that together we can find a more joyful and sustainable model. Shared local ministry will take a unique shape in each place, fitting the context of the community. In some parishes there will be a large team, in others fewer - perhaps even one person. The combination of ministry roles will be different in every place. This approach is about finding the shape of ministry that is life-giving to the church and to those who serve in these roles.

Defining shared local ministry

Shared local ministry will take different forms in different communities. This flexibility is vital in order for benefices to arrive at a shape that reflects the local context and is faithful to God's call on each particular church. Therefore, rather than a standard definition, we define shared local ministry in terms of the elements that can be recognised in each context:

1. People in named ministry roles

The shared nature of ministry is expressed by recognising the particular gifts of those who have been called to serve in the local church. Shared local ministry means that there will be a number of people in the benefice who are serving in ministry roles. There are different categories that these roles might fall under:

- People serving in ministries recognised nationally by the Church of England, such as Readers. This also includes the ordained clergy.
- The diocesan ministry framework enables the discernment and equipping of various ministry roles – for example Local Worship Assistants and Local Lay Pioneers.
- Ministries called and authorised within the life of the parish. Examples are home group leaders and children's ministry leaders, or ministers who are employed by benefices such as youth workers.
- Roles that are recognised as part of other organisations or networks (eg. Street Pastors).

In each place, a different combination of these will come together to be the shared local ministry in that context. Exactly which roles are present will depend on the context, and on who God is calling to ministry in that community. The size and shape of the team will vary: in an urban church there may be dozens of people in ministry, while in a benefice of many village parishes, the team may be comprised of ministries in particular places.

2. A focus of ministry

Shared local ministry is about giving life to the local church and being present in the community. Shared local ministry embraces the aims of focal ministry – to have a recognised focus of ministry for the community but in Bath and Wells we are using the term Local Minister rather than Focal Minister. The Local Minister may be embodied by a named minister, or a team, for a particular church within the benefice. A local ministry may also be for communities beyond the church, eg. school chaplains or village chaplains. The focus might also be on a particular demographic, for example a youth pioneer.

3. Oversight ministry

Oversight ministry is an essential component of shared local ministry. "Oversight" means the person who oversees the ministry of others, and also has a share in the ministry alongside them. Initially, the oversight minister will be the incumbent parish priest. The oversight minister helps people to discern their calling to ministry, encourages and supports them in that ministry, and provides leadership and accountability. As oversight ministers, clergy follow their own vocation while also enabling the vocation of others, growing the shared ministry which is essential for the church of the future.

What does shared local ministry look like?

Shared local ministry will take a different shape in each place. However, as well as the three elements already described, it is helpful to think about the characteristics of shared local ministry, and what you would expect to see where it is thriving:

1. Ministering as a team

Collaboration is the essence of shared local ministry. Those who are in shared local ministry in a community will have an understanding that they are a team, working together. Once again, the shape of this will be different in each place. Frequency of meetings, forms of collaboration and the structure of a team will depend on local needs. What is important is mutual prayer and support, good relationships and collaborating wherever the opportunity arises.

2. Ministry shared with those beyond the team

Shared local ministry is defined by those in specific ministry roles. This does not mean though, that ministry is confined only to those people. All the baptised are called to be involved in God's mission and ministry, and there are many Christians who have a ministry (whether they would use that word or not) that doesn't have a formal title. Just as oversight ministers enable the gifts of local ministers, so local ministers enable the gifts of others, so that all can play a part in the ministry of the local church.

3. Growing a culture of ministry

Shared local ministry is an expression of the body of Christ. People respond to God's call, using their God-given gifts to serve the church and community, and so develop and grow into ministry. This comes from a shared understanding in the church about what it means to be the body of Christ and to value and encourage the gifts of all God's people. Local ministers encourage a culture of growing ministry in the local church.

4. Ministry integrated with mission

Mission is the church responding to God's call, reaching out to the world in love. Ministry grows out of the call to mission, and as God calls the church to mission, people respond in ministry. Shared local ministry encourages and leads the Christian community in mission, in all its forms.

Role of the deanery

The deaneries are an essential aspect of shared local ministry in the diocese. Shared deanery leadership is a great example – the DMPG/leadership team exercise a shared ministry, and the Area Dean and Lay Dean have oversight of that, as well as a degree of oversight over the whole deanery.

Deaneries also have a role to play in encouraging the growth of shared local ministry. Within the deanery's plans for mission and for ministry deployment, there are opportunities to reflect on the shape of ministry in each part of the deanery and develop things accordingly. Vacancies and pastoral reorganisation offer the opportunity for churches to reflect on their own vision for ministry, to consider who God is calling to ministry from within their church community, and how a new priest might enable that as an oversight minister. Deanery synods can be times to reflect together on these things.

Diocesan support

Shared Local Ministry is at the heart of our enabling ministries strategy as a diocese. We are committed to learning together what it means to encourage a rich diversity of ministry roles, and encourage the growth of a culture of shared ministry throughout the diocese.

The diocesan support team are available to facilitate discussions about developing shared local ministry. As part of ministry development, we are developing a framework for people exploring a calling to local ministry and for equipping them in that ministry. We will also offer opportunities to learn together about oversight ministry and how it is practised.