



## Associate Area Deans

### 'ONE CANNOT KEEP WARM ALONE'

Jesus sets out a pattern for ministry, as he sends out the disciples in pairs, both the twelve (Mark 6:7) and also the 72 (Luke 10:1). Paul had companions on his journeys, at various times including amongst others Barnabas, Luke, and especially of course the young protégé Timothy. The Old Testament chimes in on companionship and collegiality, reminding us 'One cannot keep warm alone' (Ecclesiastes 4:11); and right from the beginning, in Genesis 1 and 2 we hear that 'it was not good for the man to be alone'.

### DUETTING IN SOLO MINISTRY

Commonly in ministry though, individuals are launched out on their own. This is particularly the case with Rural or Area Deans; especially now that the assumption that the RD 'gets a curate' is not the foregone conclusion that it once was. Amongst the senior staff in a Diocese, there is often complementarity and co-operation between the roles and personalities of Bishops and Archdeacons that greatly aids the work they do. If we continue to proclaim the Deanery as a principal mission unit within the diocese, and the primary focus for collegiality and collaboration between local clergy and parishes, there is scope for developing this sort of co-operation at the Deanery level too.

Assistant Rural or Area Deans are fairly thin on the ground, and the role is not fully worked out at a national or even local level. There is no national legal standing; they are not mentioned in the Canons, for example. Even dioceses that have some Asst RDs do not have an expenses or honorarium structure to support it. Yet in terms of practicality, gifting, and workload-sharing, more appointments of Asst RDs are currently being made. Certainly, this pattern is often found in other 'secular' vocational work situations. The medical profession has many examples, and hardly a school classroom in the country exists without the help of teaching assistant.

### HELP I NEED SOMEBODY; NOT JUST ANYBODY

So, for what purpose, and how, might having Assistant Rural or Area Deans work out in practice? Some deaneries are geographically very large, and just having someone 'at each end' can be very helpful in terms of supporting morale, and keeping abreast of local pastoral concerns. Other deaneries may not cover many square

miles, but have so many worship centres, clergy and parishes packed into a relatively small space, that it makes effective pastoral awareness very hard for one individual to manage. In another practical way, it can help sharing 'cover' during vacancies in the deanery. Then there is the complementarity of gifts and skills. Some Rural or Area Deans are superb organisers and administrators, others great carers; some gregarious, out-going and enthusiastic leaders; others gentle encouragers, or deeply spiritual guides. But given that no one individual will be all of these things at once, having another colleague with recognised authority in the Deanery team will reap considerable benefits for the deanery.

### MISSION MORE POSSIBLE

Two people sharing the responsibilities within the deanery also allows some role specialisation, perhaps a local version of some of the advisors who are based in some diocesan offices.

These 'starter' suggestions might give you some ideas for either the RD/AD or Asst RD/AD's role:

- 1 a focus on mission within the Deanery
- 2 lift the burden of most of the Deanery administration
- 3 focus as a Deanery Theologian/Adult Education trainer
- 4 facilitating work-place ministry, schools chaplaincy, or music, across the Deanery
- 5 head up a Deanery Pastoral Review

Asst RD/ADs could easily be included within the local Deanery Standing Committee structure, occasionally sharing with the RD/AD and lay chair the chairing of chapter or synod meetings. Their role would also be strengthened if they were co-opted as non-voting members of the Area or Diocesan Pastoral Committee, as RD/ADs often are.

The appointment of an Asst RD/AD also gives the scope for gaining some experience, or on-the-job training; potentially preparing a junior colleague as a future RD/AD, or for another deanery or diocesan responsibility. It is perhaps also a way of acknowledging and celebrating the valued contributions some individuals make to the vigour of a deanery – and recognising it with an

authoritative appointment, in an otherwise very flat promotional church structure.

#### FUTURE CHURCH:

An alternative suggestion for the future administration of deaneries might be the introduction of full-time stipendiary Rural/ Area Deans, without specific parish responsibilities. These could operate with a much clearer oversight, potentially a bit like a local archdeacon, as already happens in some other provinces of the Anglican Church. But this is undoubtedly the basis for another publication! In the few places where this is beginning to happen, the (almost) full-time appointment of an Area Dean across a cluster of deaneries can only work when there is an honorary 'Acting' or 'Assistant' Rural Dean in each of the constituent deaneries.

*Updated from an article by the Revd Alastair Cutting who, at the time of writing, was Assistant Rural Dean in the East Grinstead Deanery of Chichester Diocese, and a member of General Synod. He adds, "These thoughts are penned with especial thanks to my long-suffering Rural Dean colleague, Canon Clive Everett-Allen."*

#### ASSOCIATE AREA DEANS – THE EXPERIENCE IN OXFORD DIOCESE

Looking back to my time as Rural Dean of Thanet some years ago I realise that the job was very different from what is now being asked of our Area Deans in the Oxford Diocese. Some things have, of course, become easier. Email and the web have led to a much greater ease of communication and less of a need to rely on the Area Dean to act as a conduit for diocesan or episcopal news disseminating via the Chapter meeting.

However in all sorts of ways the job is very much more demanding. Working in conjunction with the Lay Chairs in the Oxford Diocese we are now looking for our Area Deans to play a significant 'Episcopal' role. The formation of deanery plans for mission and ministry, including the deployment of the clergy and other authorised and licensed ministers; the distribution of the parish share within deaneries; increased involvement in appointments and ministry reviews - all these are becoming standard expectations of them at deanery level.

Yet, at the same time, the demands of parochial life are not becoming any less and Area Deans, most of whom are serving incumbents, are not immune from these changes. Various solutions are being suggested, one of which, the appointment of Associate Area Deans, is being promoted actively in this diocese.

Other possibilities have been considered, but they have proved to be impractical, difficult to implement or of limited benefit. For example:

- Deploy extra support for the Area Dean, either priestly or administrative help. Administrative support is increasingly being provided (budgets permitting), and larger deaneries may soon be employing a full-time, part-time, or even a 'house for duty' administrator to handle the paperwork that every deanery creates. Providing priestly support, however, is fraught with difficulties, unless there are a number of deployable, flexible NSMs.
- Recruit a retired member of the clergy who would make this a focus of their continuing ministry - or, again, an NSM. In practice this has proved to have only limited application – although some retired clergy may welcome the challenge.

What has been fostered instead is a pattern of 'Associate Area Deans' and, so far, two have been appointed - one a stipendiary incumbent and the other a very active NSM with a particular expertise in Fresh Expressions of Church. These appointments have, quite deliberately, been made by the Area Dean and are not subject to wider consultation. The concern in doing it this way was to provide those appointed with a derived authority without establishing some sort of implicit, or explicit 'right of succession'. They are the appointee of the Area Dean and their term of office will come to the end with the Dean's five year licence. Time will tell whether or not they do, in fact, become 'front runners' for the succession but as much flexibility as possible has been retained, both because of the changes that come in deaneries through vacancies and appointments and because the gifts needed to be a good 'Associate' in a particular Deanery may not be the same as those needed to become a good Area Dean.

It is too early to tell what patterns are going to emerge from these appointments. Already we are benefiting from their presence at Area Deans meetings and, within the deaneries themselves, each has been given a major, discrete piece of work to tackle - in one case *training* and, in the other, *mission and ministry planning*. This seems to me a good way to take things forward and I am excited too by the pattern of collaborative ministry that can develop from it. Looking back to my days in Thanet it is exactly what I should have done as the job began to grow - but then hindsight is a wonderful thing!

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