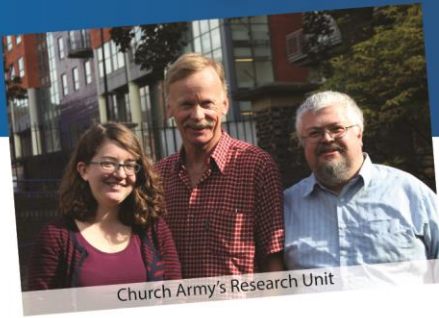


snapshots

stories from the edge

by Church Army's Research Unit



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Why this topic matters and finding ways forward

Pioneer ministers (ordained and lay) are still fairly new in the Church of England, so we are all on a learning curve. There are questions around different stages of working with them. Perhaps the easier questions have been around how pioneers are identified and selected. We may also have made some progress on how they are trained, though they don't always agree with that and some argue for pioneering to be the lens through which all training is provided rather than being an added ingredient to an existing curriculum. But how best to deploy pioneers has been the hardest factor to get right and where the rub with the existing system has been the sharpest.

Since 2011, a small group of us have been working on understanding and **mapping the key relationships** in their deployment, including between the pioneer and the person they are licensed to, usually a parish incumbent. In 2014 we held a second conference on this topic, called *Who let the dogs out?* at Wydale Hall, the York diocesan retreat house. It was attended by a small group of Ordained Pioneer Curates and their Training Incumbents. The first conference two years earlier had been mainly attended by Training Incumbents.

Issue 5: Good practice in deploying and working with pioneer curates



Liz Williams, Bob Hopkins, George Lings, Gavin Wakefield, Ali Dorey, Mary Hopkins

The conferences explored with both parties what they thought was most helpful, both in their particular contexts but also more widely. A number of key points were identified, including that the conference should be written up and shared with others, in order to help the Church of England move towards best practice and to reflect on the current experiences of Pioneer Curates and Training Incumbents. It led to the writing of this issue of Snapshots by Ali Dorey and George Lings, in consultation with the other members of the conference planning group, Bob and Mary Hopkins, Gavin Wakefield and Liz Williams.¹ We hope that it will help the Church of England (and possibly other denominations) to enable good pioneer ministry to continue and grow.

¹ Bob and Mary Hopkins lead Anglican Church Planting Initiatives. Gavin Wakefield is Director of Training, Mission and Ministry in York Diocese. Liz Williams was widely drawn upon to teach supervision skills in the Yorkshire Regional Training Partnership, Methodist Church and Cranmer MA course.

Our experience has been with Ordained Pioneer Ministers (OPMs) in Anglican curacies. That has provided the focus of this document but we are aware that it is not the whole story. Many of the points below may also apply to lay pioneer posts, or pioneer posts in other denominations.

The document uses a timeline for its shape; it starts with the time we call pre-curacy, works through the curacy itself, and on to post-curacy.² In each section there are suggestions for good practice relevant to the various parties involved. They arise from the current experience of those who participated in the conference, and from the broader thinking and experience of the planning group. We long that what we have recorded here will support healthy and sustainable mission and an equally healthy development of the ventures begun under OPMs' ministries (some of which are young churches).

It would be helpful for readers to realise that there are **several concurrent elements** at any given stage:

- what is happening for the OPM
- what the people in their mission context face
- changes for the Training Incumbent (TI)
- the life of the parish congregation

What is happening in the wider diocese and ecumenically can be significant as well. We hope the learning distilled here will be beneficial in terms of pinpointing key actions to make the most of the gift that God offers to the Church through the pioneers he is calling at present.

Our perception is that there seems to be a lack of established good practice around the setting up of pioneer curacies and for processes that handle well the challenges which their arrival and influence may bring. This deficiency also fails to ensure that the communities they pioneer and develop will be supported and enabled to flourish and grow after they leave. By contrast we note that the most recent documents and DVD clips in this area on the Church of England website date from 2011 and most of these deal only with the selection process.

² For any non-Anglicans, curacy is the name used for the first post of the newly ordained, working in an assistant role, but with the understanding that it is 3-4 years of further on-the-job training.

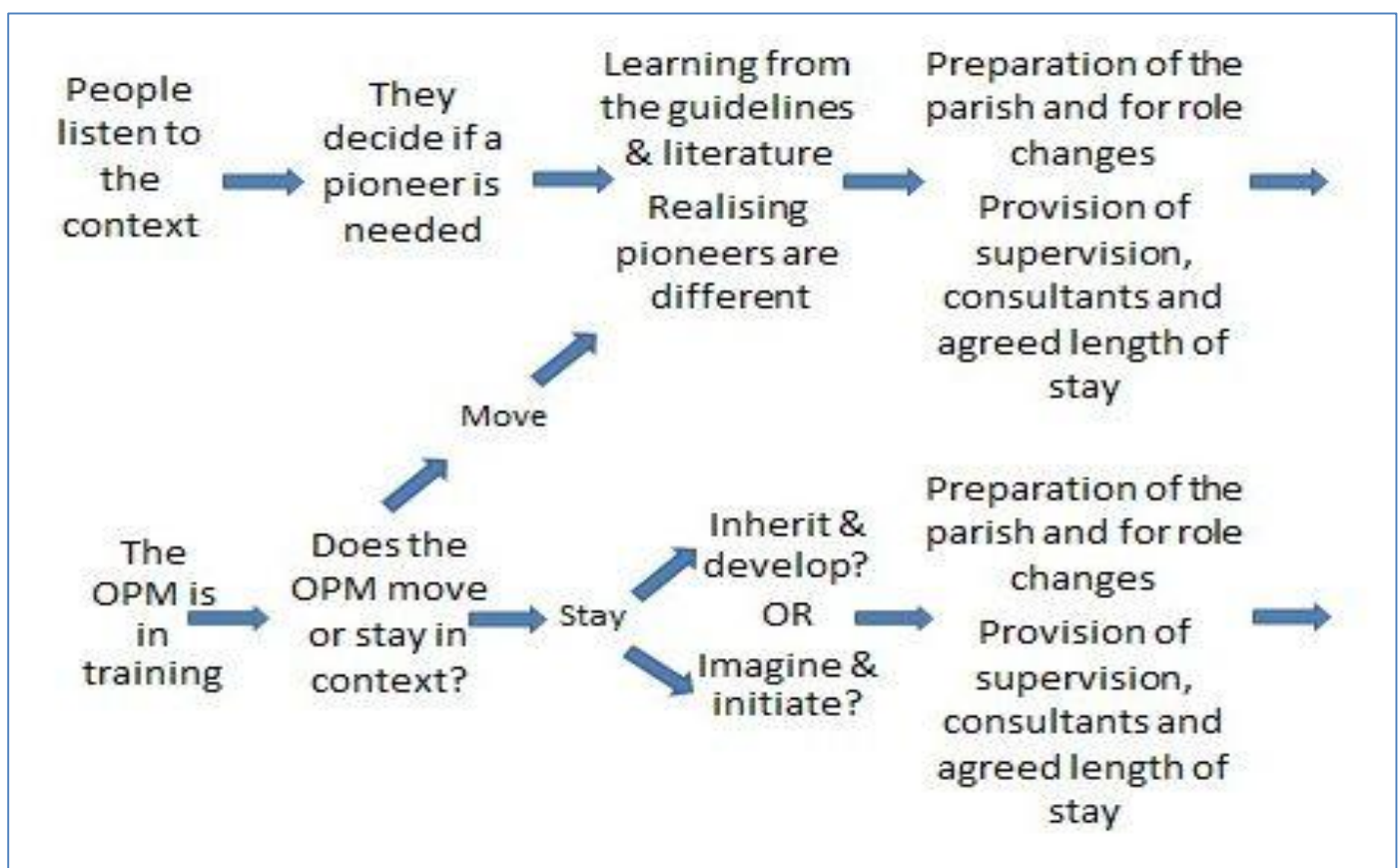
1. The pre-pioneer curacy stage

1.1 Some preparation by incumbent and parish

We are sure that good preparation is vital. Fortunately there are resources to consult, as this whole process involves a paradigm shift. Historically, we in the institutional church have tended to think ministerially and **we are learning to shift to thinking contextually**. That is a change of focus, process and content. Development would then be assessed by fruitfulness in those ministered to, rather than growth of personal qualities in the minister. It is good to note there are now some signs of this shift.³

These are on the Anglican Church Planting Initiatives (ACPI) website. The relevant article is dated 6th May 2009 and can be found on: http://www.acpi.org.uk/Joomla/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=3&id=7&Itemid=49 Sections 1-8 deal with the background and training; sections 9-12 tackle the area of deployment.

There are also books and booklets that will help bring clarity about what a pioneer is and how they tend to work. For a biblical foundation and a sketch of what they are like, other pioneers have commended chapter two of *Pioneers 4 Life*.⁴



If they have not done so, we recommend that the potential Training Incumbent (TI) reads the *Ministry Division Ordained Pioneer Ministry* guidelines before agreeing to take on a Pioneer Curate.

This approach is unpacked by Dave Male in a Grove Booklet which could become standard reading in any parish considering having an OPM.⁵ Other resources that use different language but have marked similarity include *Journeying Out* and other works by Ann Morisy.⁶

³ One such is the recent Resourcing Ministerial Education document GS 1979, *Resourcing Ministerial Education in the Church of England* A report from the Task Group, Bishop Steven Croft, Sheffield, January 2015.

⁴ D. Male (ed.), *Pioneers 4 Life* (BRF, 2011), Chapter 2 by G. Lings, 'Looking in the mirror: what makes a pioneer?'

⁵ D. Male, *Pioneering Leadership* L14 Grove Leadership (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2013).

⁶ A. Morisy, *Journeying Out* (London: Morehouse, 2004).

By definition **an OPM is not called to be parish vicar** in the traditional sense. Rather, their call is to initiate things, quite probably a fresh expression of Church (fxC). Part of the Church of England selection criteria for pioneers makes this explicit. This role will be as part of a mixed economy in which churches old and new are both valued. It is helpful if the TI understands that gaining experience of running an inherited parish church well, while important, will always be seen as second priority for the OPM. Thus having a pioneer curate will be a different experience for the TI from having a 'normal' curate, let alone gaining a second pair of hands rather like his or her own.

It is **vital that the TI takes these differences** on board before agreeing to take on a pioneer curate.

At the *Who let the dogs out* conference, one of the training incumbents spoke honestly of how unprepared he now realised he had been to receive a pioneer curate. He confessed that although he wouldn't think of a curate as 'an extra pair of hands' initially, he had had expectations that, as time went on, the curate would inevitably share the load of parish funerals and baptisms. On the conference he faced the dawning realisation that this was not at all what his pioneer curate would be focusing on, and beyond taking a few occasional offices, it would be unlikely that they would ever share the load in this way.

Our experience suggests that it is essential that the TI **talks through these differences** and their implications with the receiving parish(es), if necessary repeatedly, in advance of the OPM's arrival, especially if the congregation(s) has had more traditional curates in the past. Then it is more likely that mistaken expectations for a traditional pastoral and teaching ministry from the incoming curate are identified and resisted. Also, expectations that are helpful can be set, being realistic and not messianic.

The TI will need to bear in mind the future need to champion the OPM and the likelihood of having to protect him/her from criticism that could come from any inward-facing kind of parochialism. In the preparatory process the TI becomes an advocate for pioneer ministry, within the totality of a mixed economy, and for this curate's pioneering role before she or he arrives.

It may be helpful to run, or get some opinion-forming people from the parish onto, an *msi/msm* course to prepare the ground well.⁷

In our experience, where the pioneer curacy has worked best, the TI has been aware of, and willing for, **an increase of workload**. This can be in terms of overall supervision, and by taking opportunities to receive training themselves about pioneering and cross cultural mission. Even accomplished vicars may well lack cross cultural training or experience.⁸ They may need to learn more about supervision of pioneers both in advance and during the curacy.

1.2 What is happening for the pioneer?

There are **two different scenarios to consider**. It will involve the discernment of whether the ordinand is to remain working in their context after ordination or whether they should be deployed elsewhere. The paragraphs that follow explore both routes. This choice will partly be affected by whether they are in full-time residential training, on a local course, or in context-based training. However, we doubt that should be the ultimate criterion.

We do not exclude the possibility of their continuing to serve in the place in which the call came or where they are at present. We resist the dogmatic instinct of some to deploy them elsewhere. The 2005 Guidelines for OPM identification, training and deployment, itself concurred in respect of self-supporting ministers that "this presumption should be reversed".⁹ We think this should apply across the board for all kinds of pioneers.

In any event, pioneer ordinands will be in pre-ordination training. Where their curacy will be, may still need to be confirmed. This will not apply to those who by designation, such as Ordained Local Ministers, will return to their context. In the

⁷ These acronyms stand for *mission-shaped intro* and *mission-shaped ministry*, both courses are available from the Fresh Expressions website

<https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/training>

⁸ S. Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism* (London: Canterbury Press, 2010), would open some of these issues.

⁹ G. Kuhrt (Chair), *Guidelines for the identification, training and deployment of Ordained Pioneer Ministers*, section 9.

past, placing them has not always been easy and sometimes occurred at the last minute. We recommend that the choice of location and set-up of their curacy be worked out and confirmed a number of months before their ordination, as with any other curacy. In our experience, it is usually helpful for the pioneer ordinand to be actively involved in negotiating the location and some of the details of the post.

Staying where they are already placed

Sometimes the ordinand is already living in, or on placement at, where they are to stay for their curacy. If that is a church operating in inherited mode,¹⁰ it helps for the pioneer ordinand to reflect with the training incumbent/leadership team on how their role will develop and change in response to their diaconal/priestly vocation once they are ordained, as well as how they will exercise a pioneering ministry to begin new work. Their pioneering instinct will naturally be to imagine how that context could be developed further in mission and what might be started as a result. They may be less aware of the need to reflect on how relationships, perceived roles and acquiring a public persona will change and develop once they are ordained and take on diaconal/priestly roles.

If they are to stay and become responsible for a pre-existing initiative or a fresh expression of Church (fxC), the ordinand will need to think through being a leader who follows someone else, and not being a founder. Here they will act more as imaginative developers and enablers, rather than 'blank canvas' pioneers, and this can be a cause of frustration and even a mismatch with their gifts. This option should be explored carefully, with open eyes.

As they are likely to become the leader of a future fxC, pioneers need to think in terms of four key relationships: with God the Trinity who guides, inspires and directs mission; with those who are not yet Christians; with those called to become the initial group of the new church; and with the wider Church.

In this last mentioned relationship, pioneers need to be aware of their responsibility for how this young church relates to the wider body of Christ, and in particular its sending church and other local expressions (inherited and fresh), including other denominations. These relationships will

become increasingly important if the pioneer curate continues to work in the same context once they are ordained.

Pioneers moving to a new context

Ideally the background should include the following dynamics:

- A team of people in the parish with a particular remit to develop mission in that parish (who are aware of a wider mission than the parish boundaries if the diocese and deanery recognise this need)
- This group should be aware that pioneering development in mission is more likely to be by beginning what does not yet exist, rather than by extending what already is
- This group will be discerning under God points of connection with de-churched and non-churched local people or in wider networks
- These people will be working on developing these relationships already, although they can expect that the OPM will bring expertise to help them develop these more deeply

There is a danger, however, that if all these develop too precisely, the pioneer will arrive to meet a settled plan to which they are not party and their bold imaginative gifts will not be used.

The ideal is not always possible, but with an excellent TI having experience of pioneer dynamics, this could be sufficient in a context that is genuinely needy although less well-prepared.

The parish may also be asking questions about the need to provide priestly functions for an existing fxC. It may be that the existing clergy do not have the capacity to perform this function in the fxC as well as in the inherited church, or they neither have the training in cross-cultural mission, nor the capacity to explore more pioneering approaches to leadership of the fxC.

This need alone is insufficient reason to appoint a pioneer, but could be part of an overall job description as long as it made clear the aim is for further additional fxC. Clarity is needed over what proportion of time is to be spent on resourcing the existing fxC and what time is available for new work. The danger is that the pressure of serving what already exists trumps, enabling the birth of what might be created.

¹⁰ There is no agreed settled term. We have chosen 'inherited' as honouring history and avoiding being drawn into any false pastoral versus missional dichotomy.

1.3 What is happening for all parties

When the need for an OPM, able to move things forward (specifically including starting new things), is identified, then the group puts together a Working Agreement. This document offers a framework and guards against likely dangers, and will need to include a basic role description and person specification. This should be with support from the potential TI, and from a Diocesan Mission Advisor and/or Area Dean and Archdeacon, as appropriate. **Two dangers to avoid** are: asking for too wide a role, and asking for connections to be made with too many different groups of people.¹¹

In our experience, the most positive examples of pioneer curacies are the ones where careful work was done by the diocese to work out arrangements for the supervision of the pioneer once they were ordained. Where needed, this could include two sources: a TI able to ground and champion the pioneer and train them in aspects of ordinary ordained ministry, and a Pioneer Supervisor, who can train and act as a consultant to the OPM in terms of the pioneering elements of their role.¹²



It is vital that these two people do not become a source of competition, or conflict, to be played off against one another by a manipulative pioneer. In our experience, it is advisable for the supervision arrangements to be in place and agreed by all parties, including the pioneer, before ordination. If supervision provision is inadequate for whatever reason, this may be a significant indication that the context is not suitable for a pioneer curacy.

¹¹ These dangers were identified in an unpublished report written by Revd Bob and Mrs Mary Hopkins in reviewing some pioneering projects in Lichfield diocese.

¹² G. Kuhrt (Chair), *Guidelines for the identification, training and deployment of Ordained Pioneer Ministers*, section 9, saw this as standard practice.

If the receiving context is a parish church with limited or no experience of fxC, it would be worth considering **if the Pioneer Supervisor could act as an external consultant** (from within or outside the diocese) who could help the congregation to begin to understand the more recent thinking about fxC and their mission. The TI may not be the best person to do this, although whoever provides this would need to be able to work well with the TI, the pioneer and the congregation. It would be helpful if such a person could continue to be available to the congregation through at least the first stages of the curacy, to help support the work of the pioneer.

The length of the curacy will need to be considered carefully and agreed to, alongside whether it is full- or part-time, stipendiary or self-supporting. If it is a part-time curacy, it will take the OPM longer to work through all the Ministry Division requirements for the training of pioneer curates.

In adverse mission contexts **the classic three to four years is totally inadequate** to learn the context, create what is needed and see that it begins to be sustainable. Wherever this parameter still operates it should be challenged. Many contexts take seven to ten years for all of this to have begun well and not left too early.

2. During the pioneer curacy

2.1 Overall expectations

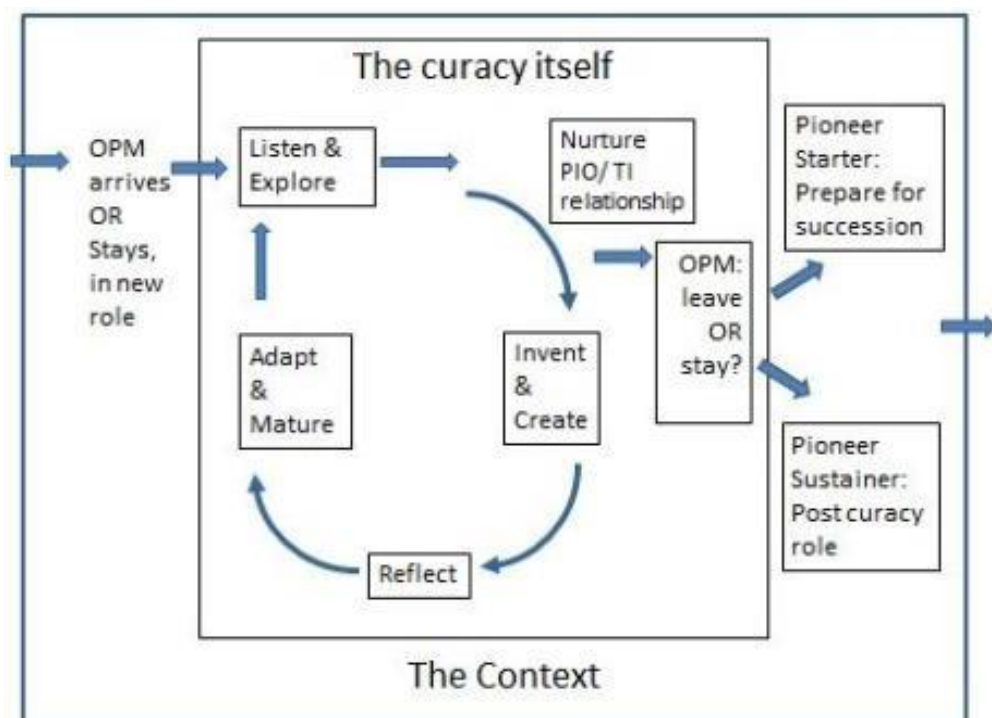
As always, the key to good mission is about being adaptable and responsive to what is happening in the mission context, which will vary from context to context. Within this, it is helpful if both TI and OPM are aware from the start that how they think and approach ministry are likely to be significantly different. They both need to expect to have to exercise patience and grace with one another accordingly, particularly in the early stages of the curacy, but also in an ongoing way.

Reading the Ministry Division *Ordained Pioneer Ministry* guidelines together, and jointly agreeing how they affect mutual expectations, will help. Both parties should be rigorous about the balance of time spent between inherited and pioneering work for the OPM in the Working Agreement. Observing past experience suggests that it is too easy for the OPM to be sucked into the needs of the 'inherited' congregation(s). The guidelines comment that: "It is then important that they are not pressed into becoming ministers of existing churches but are deployed in pioneering contexts."¹³ The balance should be weighted towards healthy development of what has been started as time goes on. This balance needs reviewing, at least once a year.

Authority and expertise

TIs need to be aware from the start of a pioneer curacy that while as TI they are in authority and in many ways are mentor and trainer to the pioneer curate, in the pioneering itself, it is likely that the OPM will have the expertise and take the lead. A good TI will be able to delegate this leadership and celebrate the different gifts of the OPM, while retaining oversight. This will involve allowing the OPM to receive the praise when things go well, but carrying the overall responsibility as TI when things do not go so well.

Our experience is that both the TI and the OPM can expect their missional instincts, approaches and ideas to be developed, changed and informed by what happens in context and by



one another. Even though their major focus will be on pioneering work, it is essential that OPMs recognise that the pioneering work is still under the general oversight of the TI. Appropriate boundaries between all parties in any leadership team(s) need to be established from the start of the curacy and maintained carefully. If a Pioneer Supervisor is appointed for the OPM, then establishing and maintaining clear boundaries is crucial at the start of the curacy. The TI is in overall authority regarding the curacy, but the TIs should view the pioneer supervisor as a source of experience and advice regarding their OPM and their work.

Chester diocese appointed an OPM curate to continue being on a deprived estate, with the local vicar as TI. The diocese, aware of their lack of expertise in pioneering, followed the guidelines and appointed a national Fresh Expressions team member as Pioneer Supervisor. Early on it became evident that this supervisor had to fully respect the TI's overall authority in the parish and over the OPM. Moreover strategy and ideas for pioneering that emerged in supervision had to be checked for misunderstanding, and an agreement had to be reached on what could happen on the OPM's authority and what needed consultation, in order to avoid conflicts and loss of trust.

¹³ G. Kuhrt (Chair), *Guidelines for the identification, training and deployment of Ordained Pioneer Ministers*, section 1.

Priorities shifting over time

Experience suggests that the time balance between pioneering and working with the inherited church should be expected to change throughout the curacy. This will shift as the context is read, a team forms, relational contacts are made in mission, and when the young fxC comes to public birth and continues to develop its missional and ecclesial life, an expression of church which will be distinct from, but connected to, the parish church. This affects expectations and therefore needs regular communication.

An example of such forward planning follows but **it should not be taken as right for every context**, nor slavishly followed. For that reason we have put 'stages' not 'years'. Nor have we assumed that the split should start at 50/50. This proportion of time given to traditional work was suggested as a maximum figure and has been widely taken as a normal starting point. In some contexts it might be much less.

- a 50/50 split between pioneer ministry and traditional parish ministry in stage 1
- a 60/40 split in stage 2, to build on the foundations being laid
- a 70/30 split in stage 3, to develop the life of the young church
- an 80/20 split in stage 4, still to develop the life of the church, but now including specific preparing of the lay leaders for the pioneer's departure
- a fifth stage of planned handover and departure could model giving less time to the fxC

2.2 Arrival

The initial Working Agreement needs to reflect this kind of progression, but should be revised and adapted by the TI and OPM together, in the light of how things are evolving. Both OPMs and TIs may find it difficult for the OPM to set aside a good proportion of time for the first stage of the pioneering work, because **the initial task is usually one of listening to the context** and discerning, rather than carrying out lots of action. However, our experience suggests that this is a vital phase in pioneering work. A good investment of time initially usually reaps rewards later on (see section 2.3).

Living in the mixed economy

It is important that the OPM respects the need to learn the full range of tasks relating to ordained ministry, although it should be understood that they will undertake less practice of these over

the course of the curacy. We suggest that the TI needs to expect the OPM to take longer to gain necessary parish experience than a traditional curate.

Experienced OPMs have told us that some traditional aspects of their training helped to equip them for their pioneering work. This was particularly over the deepening of their pastoral and communication skills, and training regarding their public roles. OPMs have often noticed the new opportunities that come with a clerical collar to bring faith in God and prayer into conversations with people who don't normally engage with Church. OPMs also noted that taking occasional offices gave them credibility in the community.

Experience (shared at the conference and more widely) suggests that OPMs should build in **time and space for meeting with other pioneers** to encourage, support and learn from one another, and also to engage in specialist training for pioneers. Dioceses may not be able to provide this specialist training, so it is important that they access national training and support. Examples include: the *Break out Pioneer Gathering*, Pioneer Hub at CMS, Church Army contacts, the Centre for Pioneer Learning, and the Fresh Expressions team (they list a growing number of less formal regional pioneer hubs on their site). In our experience, pioneer curacies flourish best when diocesan officers and the TI are supportive of this and make space in Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Phase 2 training programmes for OPMs to attend major national conferences that serve pioneers in particular.

We recommend that the TI becomes informed about the different outcomes of IME Phase 2 for pioneers. It is helpful if the TI can work effectively with the diocesan IME officer to support the OPM with appropriate training provision and expectation. Some IME officers will need to catch up with the needs and aspirations of OPMs.

The key relationship

One of the foundational principles that emerged from the conference was that TIs and OPMs commit to a Christ-like relationship with one another and establish clear basic values: honesty, patience, loyalty, and commitment to deal positively and appropriately with conflict between them (as in Matthew 18:15-20). They should both aim to practice the virtues of love and grace, humility, honesty, serving, listening and investing relationally. For both of them it may require saying 'yes' sometimes to requests and 'no' at other times.

To support the above, there was a strong recommendation that both TI and OPM prioritise prayer and seek self-awareness. Our experience suggests that pioneer curacies work best when both TI and OPM have worked hard to establish and constantly clarify their distinctive roles and responsibilities. We recommend that both try to own each other's visions for the work they are doing, working out how their ministries interrelate in an ongoing way.

One TI/OPM relationship had several stressful conflicts in the first 18 months, not least as the OPM had been sent, not requested, so there had been no detailed agreement about OPM involvement in parish routines like (PCC)and services, or how differences should be resolved. These were further stretched when the confident extrovert OPM assumed the right to say 'no' to the TI's requests that seemed beyond her understanding of her commitment to parish agendas. To the uncertain introvert TI this seemed like insubordination. Fortunately, with the external supervisor's help and goodwill on both sides, they processed these mismatches of expectations and made a good working relationship.

Also, past experience suggests that good communication between TI and OPM may be more difficult than in a traditional curacy. We recommend that the TI and OPM keep talking and working through issues as they arise. We recommend that regular staff meetings (initially on a weekly basis) and supervisions are prioritised to make space for this. Although pioneering work is distinct from traditional parish work, the two are often interrelated and good communication is essential.

Participants in the *Who let the dogs out* conference, which focused on this relationship, suggested that OPM curates and their TIs found the conference process and content helpful, and thought it should be offered nationally.¹⁴ This would need resourcing regionally, rather than by the team who in effect piloted the conference. It was also suggested that with some adaptations, the conference could help pioneers from other denominations and lay pioneers, and that it would be enriched by their presence.

¹⁴ The link person for other groups wishing to organise a similar event is Revd Dr Gavin Wakefield of York diocese: gavin.wakefield@yorkdiocese.org

2.3 Exploring and listening to context

A sharp and painful contrast has been noted by a pioneer working as research assistant to the Bishop of Sheffield. OPMs are always selected for their ability to listen, take risks and build vision, but too often are deployed by being given set tasks. She commented:

"If we want people who are going to think outside the box, then putting them into boxes after training will only lead them to break the box and cause chaos."¹⁵

OPMs need freedom to explore the parish and/or other suitable networks and to respond to and reflect on needs and opportunities as they arise, before the prospective work is narrowed down with a focus to a particular area or context. Most OPMs tend to have a lot of ideas and to be possibility thinkers, so the TI has to be patient and open, but also help the OPM to discern what is appropriate and likely to last. The OPM will need to appreciate that their level of ideas and innovation can be unrealistic and can put their TI and congregation under pressure. OPMs must be open to the sifting of ideas by others, yet not dominated by this.



By contrast to these rapidly generated ideas, we recommend that **both TI and OPM should not be overly concerned by slow initial momentum** in actual pioneering, as happens in sowings some seeds. The space this gives can provide a good opportunity for relationships in the wider community to form, for continuing to listen to the context and beginning to discern where God is already at work. It also gives time to select, test, bond and equip any start-up team that may later be sent out.

¹⁵ Hannah Smith, *Pioneer Curacies* (private report, 2012).

We have noticed that pioneers can feel that they are failing in the initial stages, in that they do not usually manage to create a fxC straight away. Yet most of the literature expects time to be devoted to these prior stages, likened in some circles to a pregnancy stage. Regular reassurance and support from the TI during this phase is invaluable.

2.4 Inventing and creating what is pioneered

OPMs need space and permission to pioneer, which will involve question of what already is and imagining something positively different from it. A valuable study of how this disturbing but essential dynamic works, and what helps and hinders it, has been written by former Church Army researcher, Beth Keith.¹⁶

In the TI/OPM relationship, a good TI needs to exercise oversight that keeps the OPM accountable relationally, without being controlling as to ideas and possibilities. This is a tension that needs to be held.

Like many OPMs, one in a northern diocese had developed a range of specific phrases and terms from previous experiences, and study which expressed their pioneering passion. This language frequently baffled the TI and parishioners. Significant humility was needed by the TI and others to understand the terms, while the OPM had to learn that what is jargon to others needs re-interpretation. Listening to and learning the local dialect applies in the mixed economy church as well as in mission.

We recommend that OPMs develop and clarify a vocabulary for mission and ministry with their TI, so that they understand each other and can share that language and understanding more widely with others in the local church and any prospective team that may be sent out.

It can often be the case that the discernment of the pioneer, and what they begin to present to others, is only understood by a few people in the existing local church(es). This is not new, as demonstrated by the surprises and conflicts to which the book of Acts bear witness.

¹⁶ B. Keith, in J. Baker and C. Ross, *The Pioneer Gift* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014), Chapter 7, 'To pluck up and pull down to build and to plant', pp. 117ff.

Two examples would be the shock of converts happening in Samaria, and the profound changes surrounding the arrival and legitimacy of Gentile Christians. In these contexts, the TI will need to follow the example of the Apostle James at the Council of Jerusalem and speak out wisdom to the issues and support for those who, like the OPM, are striking out in unfamiliar yet fruitful ways.

In this stage of the pioneering, part of the pioneer's task is finding those called to be part of the group, which at this stage is almost private, growing together to become the core of the future infant church. Those new to Christian faith and thus not yet steeped in church culture and language can be valuable members of the group.

The size of this group will depend partly on discerning callings and gifting, and partly on context. The rock to avoid is too large a team that disregards context and imposes its own patterns on those to whom they go. The whirlpool to steer clear of is too small a team to resource the style of the young church community that will suit the context. We now know much more about how the fxC can form and also about how different kinds of them fare, including their strengths and weaknesses.¹⁷

2.5 Adapting and learning on the job

In relation to what is pioneered

From the outset the OPM and TI need to anticipate that **there will be both failures as well as successes**. TI and OPM will need to reflect together theologically and pastorally on both, including communicating what is learnt to the wider congregation. An open door that then leads to a dead end may well feel like failure, yet with discernment becomes a potentially helpful narrowing down of focus for the future.

Pioneering is often risky and things usually do not happen exactly according to plan; sometimes they do not work out at all. This should not engender a cavalier attitude, airily 'letting a thousand flowers bloom' while having little regard to the human relationships involved. This takes humility and wisdom to process, guarding against it being allowed to divide the TI and

¹⁷ Two suggested resources are: the Guide on the Fresh Expressions website: www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide; The Church Army research into 500+ examples across 10 Church of England dioceses: www.churcharmy.org.uk/fxCresearch

OPM. Rather there needs to be a process of constant discernment, carried out with humility and wisdom, as to what to pursue and what to abandon. Taking risks will put pressure on the relationship between the TI and OPM, which needs to remain open and honest to prevent unnecessary conflict. At the inception stage it is helpful if the TI acts as an advocate for the OPM curate and for their pioneering ministry. This may include defending ideas and actions before the PCC, deanery and even diocese.

Our experience is that it is helpful if TIs are prepared to take the initiative in relationships with those in wider church structures. An important example is that if it becomes clear in context that the curacy should be lengthened, the TI makes representation to the bishop and diocese about this, in order that what has been begun can be handed over well to the successors in leadership.

We recommend that both TI and OPM actively **think about how the ongoing life of what the OPM begins can be supported after he/she is no longer there**. This needs to be in mind from the start and is assisted by building shared leadership, ideally alongside the indigenous laity. It is progressed by investment from the very start in the kind of discipleship which grows character, thinks in terms of apprenticeship and expects to give away responsibility to that young church. It will also involve growing and adapting how the young church operates as the people from the context are empowered to take things forward. All this is part of good contextual mission to grow further sustainable young churches.

Keeping relationships sweet

Experience suggests that keeping clear about who is taking the lead on different initiatives is essential, so that when a particular issue arises, both TI and OPM can discuss the issue and take appropriate action. To achieve this they will need adhere to what was agreed to about a lead. Behind this will be issues of control and power. These are aided by clarity and mutual trust. We are aware that in unhappy past examples too much control had been demanded by the TI, and in other cases the OPM had been too independently spirited.

It is helpful if OPMs and TIs can be explicit and clear about their expectations of one another. We recommend that they negotiate priorities, and be prepared to address issues in an appropriate way, if they think that agreed priorities are not being kept. In our experience, most TIs and OPMs find it helpful to regularly

revisit their shared purpose to remember why the post was set up. Wider wisdom comments that when people want to agree but are less clear about what needs to be done, then a focus on the stated vision is very helpful. Conversely, when there is clarity about what needs doing, but it is far from clear how to reach that goal, a focus on quality of relationships is vital.

It is essential for TI and OPM to be prepared to stand together for the sake of mission and unity in the local church. Our experience suggests that it is likely that people will try to divide them by back door criticism of the other party, particularly if it becomes apparent that influential characters in the local church feel threatened by change and wish to revert to an exclusively pastoral way of operating.

The effective Methodist 'Tubestation' fresh expression involved transforming an old Methodist chapel on the edge of Polzeath beach into an everyday café and community centre, with skateboarding half-pipe, and showers. The Circuit Minister (TI equivalent) worked with the two VentureFX pioneers (OPM equivalents) with the shared vision to reach the large surfing community on and off the beach. Although the pioneers were surfers, this team were open to the vision expanding and changing. So now the young church embraces surfers, holiday-making families and local folk. The breadth of serving stretches from taking a pro-surfer's funeral on the waves, to a wedding of a local Cornish couple.

2.6 Care for the TI/OPM partnership and within the diocese

Given the challenging nature of all mission contexts today, we strongly recommend that both TI and OPM practice finding their identity in Christ rather than in the mission or ministry they are engaged in. Otherwise the danger is that achievement usurps the place of identity, and in other theological terms, 'works' take the place of 'grace'. The results can include the rise of a cult of personality and are likely to promote busyness and exhaustion; successors will struggle to build on these unhealthy foundations.

Regular feedback from the OPM to the wider Church helps to keep the wider Church supportive and also develops the general level of understanding of mission in that diocese. However, **feedback should not be at the level**

that feels like continuous inspection and is significantly disproportionate either to the annual curate assessment or to the bi-annual review that usually occurs for traditional clergy.

There have been good examples of the use of advisory groups drawn from within and beyond the parish, meeting at most twice a year, giving accountability and reflection on big issues. But there have also been unhelpful *steering* groups usually consisting of other local clergy meeting more frequently and often trying to micro-manage and thus blocking progress.

Feedback practiced well could also help some OPMs to better understand the viewpoint of the wider church. This, in turn, could improve their ability to communicate positively to their parent body. This is particularly important for OPMs, because their vocation is partly about pioneering new ways to connect with society at the same time as enabling an ensuing and continuing re-imagining of the Church. All of this will facilitate the development of mission and a deeper understanding of what the Church is.

The sustained support of the wider Church will be important in terms of growing a culture of permission, a background of prayer support, a search for further pioneer vocations, and funding reflecting the diverse opportunities in the mixed economy.

3. Post-pioneer curacy

We recommend that the timing of any move away of the OPM should be determined primarily by the needs of the pioneering work, which will need considering in balance with available finance. This will be to enable local leadership to become properly embedded and equipped before they move on. This possibility, in consultation with the OPM's supervisors and the diocese, needs to occur well before the end of their curacy.

For this reason, it is advisable to realise that OPM curates may normally be in post for longer than the normal three-four year curacy. If necessary, the diocese should deploy fewer of them but for longer periods, in order to establish new work, rather than put more OPMs through the system.

However, this general comment about the needs of context needs to be balanced with awareness of the different types of OPM that exist.

3.1 Different kinds of OPM

Experience of observing a variety of pioneers has suggested that there may be distinct types, or that pioneers may fall along a spectrum, from pioneer starters to pioneer sustainers.¹⁸

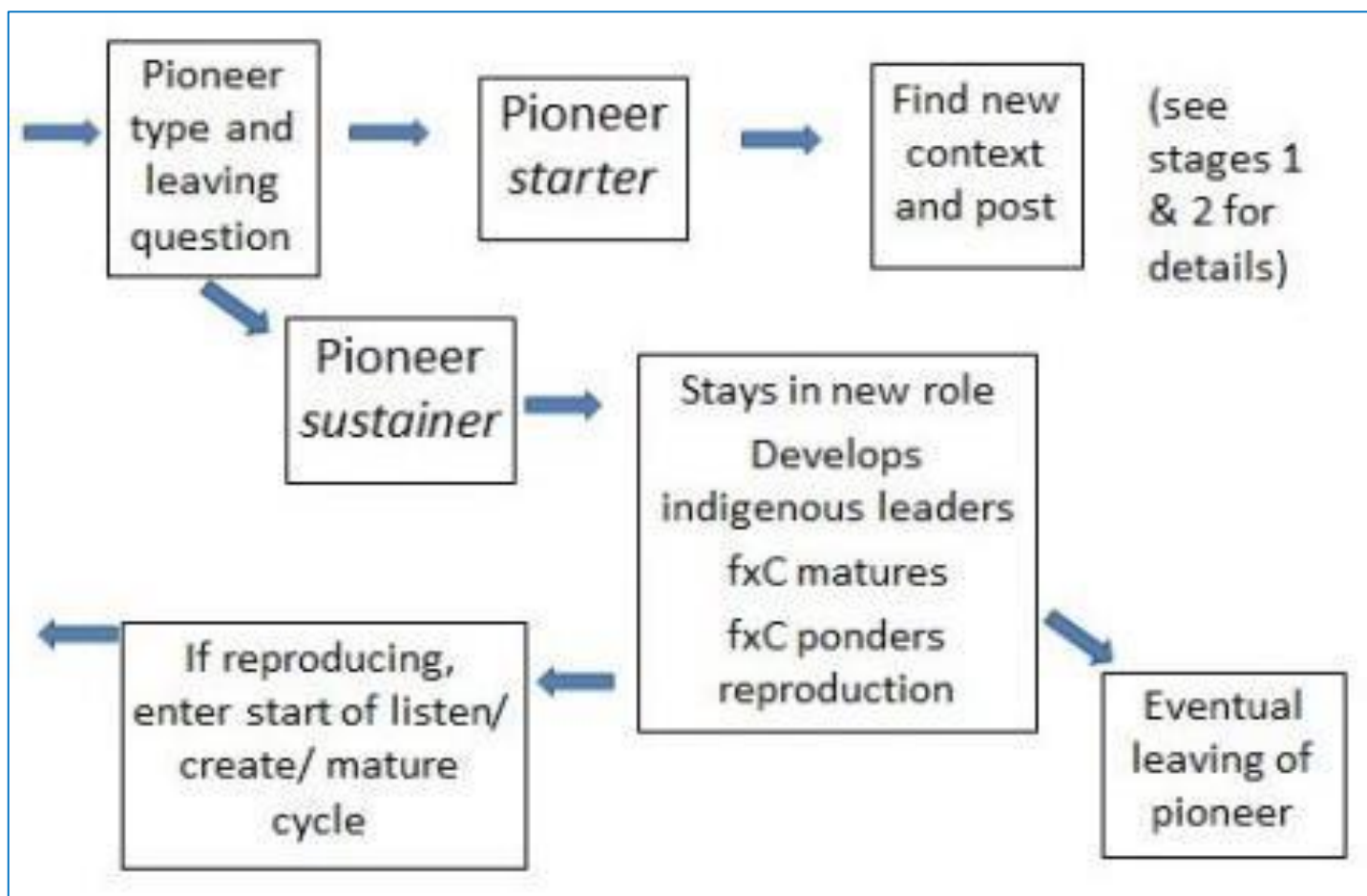
If there is merit in thinking like this it is important to discern whether the OPM is a starter or a sustainer, as explained below, for it will affect expectations, including the length of their stay. Other variables include whether they will be stipendiary, self-supporting or ordained to local ministry. Some pioneers move over time between paid and self-supporting roles.

A **pioneer starter** will need no encouragement to network, act as a hub for relationships and engage others in evangelism. Those are their gifts. However, they will very likely need to be encouraged to find and release their successors and to discern, with their TI, when they best move on. If a pioneer starter stays in context for too long, their continual creativity can exhaust the young church, or they may become bored and ineffective.

The **pioneer sustainer** type has wider pastoral gifts, though they are sometimes less cutting edge in mission. This wider gift set means they can adapt to, and welcome, the evolving life of the young church, working well with its emerging indigenous leaders, which they should be encouraged to find, train and release, as those who will succeed them. This would make it more appropriate for them to stay longer within the same context.

Over a longer period of years some of these pioneer sustainers may find they gain a further role as **pioneer supervisors**, who by virtue of experience can offer some oversight to others in pioneering ministry.

¹⁸ D. Male (ed.), *Pioneers 4 Life*, G. Lings, Chapter 2, 'Looking in the mirror: what makes a pioneer?', p. 31. Also B. Keith, Chapter 3, 'The gift of troublesome questioning: pioneers and learning'. Here Beth Keith teases out the differences between adapters and stabilisers.



All pioneers fall within what is termed **sodality**.¹⁹ This term has been classically applied both to those in monastic orders and to cross-cultural missionaries. Catholic usage has always seen both as not only missional, but also as church; this lesson is only just beginning to be taken on board in Protestant thinking. What is characteristic of sodal church is that its members are specialists who experience a second call beyond that of the existing (modal) church. They are rigorously selected, highly committed, mobile in deployment and groundbreakers.²⁰

In spite of their identity as groundbreakers, sodal missionaries and pioneers usually grow modal churches (i.e. a young church designed to grow steadily, and to endure in the local area and culture). However, the young churches that such pioneers and missionaries grow do tend to be self-reproducing, and they may be expected to inspire or unearth sodal gifts in a few people who themselves will in time be called to move on to

fulfil a vocation to pioneering mission.²¹ It is possible, but rare in our present experience, that a pioneer will engender a whole sodal community. In this instance, the community will over time disclose a charism, evolve a rule of life and discover a process for a novitiate.

We have also found that **some pioneers discover they have been mislabelled** as pioneers, and are not sodal but in fact creative leaders within modal church. Evolving this clarity of vocation during selection and training would be best, but even if it comes later, this realisation is to be welcomed, with such a modal innovator being encouraged to find future deployment in a parish church seeking an adventurous priest and genuinely open to change. The 2005 guidelines in some ways foresaw this possibility but tended to see it as vocational development rather than initial misdiagnosis, though it could be either or both.²²

¹⁹ This term was popularised by Ralph Winter in 1974 in an eight page paper entitled *The two structures of God's redemptive mission*. This can be downloaded from various websites after a Google search of the title.

²⁰ A fuller description of sodality and modality, together with how they partner one another best, can be found on the website of Church Army's Research Unit website: www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138339

²¹ Examples would include further vocations from The Order of Mission and the groups related to Moot.

²² G. Kuhrt (Chair), *Guidelines for the identification, training and deployment of Ordained Pioneer Ministers*, section 5.

3.2 Consequences and practicalities

If the discernment is that the OPM should stay beyond the length of their curacy, it would be necessary for the bishop to re-license them appropriately. The Licence and Role Description would need to include a time frame, appropriate arrangements for ongoing supervision, line management and oversight of the OPM now they are no longer an assistant curate in training, and for housing and stipend. It may also be desirable to explore whether the fxC now needs a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO). The wording of the role description usually includes some reference to the parish, mission partnership, deanery and/or BMO in/from which the office holder is to operate. It is worth giving careful thought about the wording of the role description, particularly in consideration of the relationship between the fxC and other local churches, including any BMOs operating in the area.

The structure **of accountability needs to be simple and transparent**. This will enable the OPM and their work in mission to develop well. The framework for the working relationship between the OPM, their fxC and the local church and the ex-TI will also need to be reviewed and renegotiated, as the OPM moves from pioneer curacy into something more akin to an incumbent level post.

If the discernment is that the OPM needs to move on after the curacy to a new context, the OPM will be looking for an incumbent-level pioneering post. The Bishop of Sheffield, Stephen Croft, notes among emerging principles that: "Pioneers cannot be encouraged into non-pioneering roles. Square pegs cannot be hammered into round holes."²³ That is good advice but sadly it still happens, with damage to both peg and hole. He goes on to observe that pioneers will then move away from the Church of England and may even leave ministry altogether. Clearly this next step matters and to have good guidelines for the curacy period alone would be a short-sighted view.

Throughout their time the task for OPMs must include empowering and enabling indigenous leadership of the fxC. The ending of the role of the founder is an important and sometimes difficult transition. They will need to plan, with the TI and indigenous leaders, for a positive ending of their involvement, handing over

responsibilities and celebrating what has happened so far with the people involved.

It may be that towards the end of the curacy, the fxC is declining or coming to a natural end. In this case, we recommend that the OPM concentrates on helping people from it to engage in other expressions of Church, or at least supportive friendships where they can continue to explore life and Christian faith positively once the OPM has moved on.



3.3 What happens to the fxC ?

The journey to maturity of the young church

Ever since any fxC began, it should have been operating as follows:

- continuing to build new relationships in the context;
- devising ways in which people can be encountered by Jesus through both mission and worship;
- members that are continuously growing as followers of Christ,
- enabling and equipping indigenous leadership to carry forward all these missional and ecclesial roles.

The pioneer curate should aim to have been proactive in encouraging all this. In other words, thinking about succession starts on day one.

The diocese, local inherited church members, clergy, or a supporting mission agency, who have been directly involved and/or are supportive of the fxC, may have to help support the new local leaders (whether lay or ordained) who are being trained, especially if they are relatively new to the task of leadership. If the OPM belongs to a sodal mission agency or organisation, they may be able to help with this.

²³ S. Croft, *Placing Ordained Pioneer Ministers in second posts* (private paper, June 2013), p. 7.

Succession planning

We recommend that serious thought be given to wise succession planning. Examples exist of the next leadership task being given to incoming traditional curates, irrespective of calling or gifting. The danger of traditionally trained clergy and/or church members from the sending church coming in to lead the fxC are that their leadership skills and understanding of cross-cultural mission may be limited, leading to the domestication of the missionary advance that has begun. This would tend to stunt the growth of the fxC in its mission field, and such a takeover leads to any emerging indigenous leaders being marginalised and frustrated.

There are many examples where a clerical founder is followed by a lay leader or leaders, usually working voluntarily and in their spare time. Recent research has shown that voluntary spare time lay leaders can be quite as effective as their professional colleagues.²⁴ However, this research was mainly on those fxC that began with this sort of lay leadership. The transition from full-time ordained to spare time lay will probably need to be accompanied by some simplification of the internal life of the fxC.²⁵

It could help if the Diocesan Mission Advisor, and/or pioneer supervisor, visits the fxC and its people during the last year of a pioneer curacy, to help the OPM to facilitate indigenous leadership, and to build supportive relationships with the indigenous leaders to ease the transition.

Ongoing links between incumbent and the fxC

Another crucial relationship is between the TI and the young fxC. The incumbent now faces the oversight of at least one more church than was true before the OPM came. The fxC will have both something of the DNA of its parent parish but also exhibit its own distinct identity. It should be growing in marks of maturity such as making disciples, taking responsibility for its money and decision-making, and engaging with the sacraments.

There are two dangers to avoid. One is excessive control by the incumbent that mitigates against

this gaining of maturity, and the second is abandonment due to other pressures of work.

A valuable parallel might be with the task of raising teenage children, in which love, trust, risk, success and failure, and willingness to adapt all have their part to play. Lucy Peppiatt, theological educator and mother who has the experience of raising four teenagers, has a list of such values to be held by wise and good parents²⁶:

- prepare their children to leave home
- strike a balance between control and freedom
- prepare children to take responsibility, to make good decisions of their own, and to form healthy relationships
- give children the freedom to fail
- adapt to the different phases of a child growing up
- delight in their children's differences (from themselves and from their siblings)
- impart values by teaching them and modelling them
- act as guides and friends throughout a child's life
- depend on their grown-up children when they need to in exercising humility and modelling teachability

The cautionary 'tale of three rectors' is salutary. The first had a releasing style and mission vision, leading to a lay-led team establishing a worshipping community in a school on a new housing estate, on the outskirts of the market town. This thrived, but when the second rector arrived, he lamented the fewer young families attending his town centre parish communion, compared to the new congregation. So he led a PCC decision to close the new plant. He underestimated the level of commitment in the lay pioneering team, and 'X Family Worship' launched the following week in the school, which flourished. The lay pioneers re-mortgaged houses and developed a million-pound, purpose-built community building, with car park, in the next phase of the new housing development. Then rector number three arrived and listened. In co-operation with 'X Family Worship', they sent out another lay team to plant back into the school they had vacated on the other side of the main road!

²⁴ See a report on the 'lay-lay' on the website of Church Army's Research Unit:

www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138464

²⁵ C. Dalpra, *Encounters on the Edge no. 54: A Spare Part* (Sheffield: Church Army, 2012). This case study of voluntary spare time leadership, in PDF form, can be ordered from Church Army's Research Unit:

www.encountersontheedge.org.uk/encounters-on-the-edge/54-a-spare-part-download.html

²⁶ L. Peppiatt, *The Disciple: On Becoming Truly Human* (Cascade Books, 2012), p. 138.

A further feature, sadly observed from time to time over the years, is that when the TI moves on, their successor has none of the previous attachment to the fxC. He/she does not know the founding story, and within a year it has been brought to an end. In the analogy of families this is akin to the arrival of a hostile stepfather. In this scenario of enforced closure most of the members at the fxC do not then join the parent church but either go elsewhere, or stop having any connection with the Church at all.



Facing death well

However, if the fxC is declining for good or inescapable reasons, it will be appropriate to help it to die well. If the decline is for unhealthy or inappropriate reasons, if possible these causes should be exposed and challenged. Facilitating a good ending and accessible ongoing support and faith development for people in the context will be the main tasks of all concerned, in either case. We know of only one book on this topic.²⁷

Conclusion

In this edition, we have attempted to capture some of the main lessons from the recent experience of pioneer curates and their Training Incumbents. We want to facilitate the development of good practice for the deployment of pioneer curacies, and the development of healthy and sustainable

contextual pioneering mission, leading to healthy and sustainable young churches in the Church of England.

We are aware that there is a separate, yet probably overlapping, task to track what would be most helpful with lay pioneers and to produce a document for that context. Church Army evangelists have long experience of being lay pioneers and recent Church Army research has indicated as many as 40% of recent fxC have 'lay-lay' leaders who are without known training or accreditation. In addition, the Diocese of Leicester have embarked down the road of intentionally seeking out the creation of lay-led fxC and licensing them. They are all examples worth following.

In relation to the ordained pioneers, we have seen that in the pre-curacy stage, **the essence is arriving at realistic and clear expectations** and the correct discernment of whether the ordinand should stay in their context or move elsewhere. When done well, either the parish will expect and welcome that the OPM comes to start something new for those beyond the local church, which will be different from what was before, but in affirming relationship to it. The art will be in the mix of giving the OPM real freedom to explore, within a mutually trusting relationship between TI and OPM. The OPM may or may not already be *in situ*, either on placement or because that is where they live.

During the curacy, the key tasks will be to listen well to the mission context, to maintain an open TI and OPM relationship, to form a cohesive, loving, appropriately-sized team, with the right gift mix for the mission task, to learn on the job and to adjust to the life of the newly-born church in the light of experience.

As the post-curacy stage approaches, it is essential to have clarity on:

- how long the OPM should remain, partly depending on whether they are starters or sustainers
- how maturity of the fxC is progressing
- what succession is planned and
- what the next chapter in the pioneering ministry of the OPM should be

²⁷ B. Gaede, *Ending With Hope* (USA MD: Alban Institute, 2002).

This picture was painted by Church Army Evangelist, Colin Brown, and is loosely modelled on an Everest base camp. It speaks volumes about the hard work done to get this far, and is eloquent testimony to how far there is yet to climb, as well as how few have embarked upon the further journey. The sharp-eyed may be able to spot climbers over halfway up the ridge.

Perhaps it symbolises the reality that there is now enough known about pioneering that horror stories can be avoided and good practice established). The problem is that these lessons are not yet widely available.

Our hope is that, by putting what we have learnt into this issue of *Snapshots*, we have taken some concrete steps towards starting to disseminate some helpful reflections from current practice. We hope that this document will prove useful for those in training to be pioneers, for diocesan and national vocations advisors and designers of IME.

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