

South Central Regional Training Partnership (SCRTP)

Pioneer Forum on Ordained Pioneer Ministry

The SCRTP Pioneer Forum gathered pioneers, training incumbents, pioneer enablers, Diocesan Directors of Ordinands (DDOs) and vocations advisers from across the region to engage in a constructive conversation around ordained pioneer ministry. The conversation explored pioneer selection, training and deployment. It was facilitated by Jon and Tammy Oliver, pioneers from Southampton with input on pioneer priesthood from Paul Bradbury (SCRTP Pioneer Hub Co-Ordinator) and on OPM issues from Dave Male (C of E National Adviser for Pioneer Ministry).



Graphic record of the day (by Tammy Oliver)

Changing the Landscape for Pioneer Ministry

The conversation explored the journey from initial sense of calling to deployment to pioneer incumbency post. Throughout the conversation issues were raised in relation to structure and culture within the established churches represented.¹ There continues to be a lack of understanding and value felt by pioneers, a sense that the structures still do not encourage pioneer ministry and that the culture of the structures still constrains the freedom for the kind of innovation and creativity that pioneers bring. **'Until the structures change pioneers have to play the game', 'Loosen the structures to enable play', 'Need for more permission givers in all structures'.**



Creative responses to this included:

- the creation of a Pioneer Bishop
- More education of the distinctive nature of pioneer ministry throughout the church
- recognising the 'gift of not fitting in' as a gift to the church and honouring that.

¹ We represented 5 Dioceses of the Church of England and 1 Methodist District

² *Voicing a Vocation*, Rev's Dr Sally Myers, Sept 2017, available on request from C of E Ministry Division, Church House, London

- Each Diocese should have a church planting strategy in which pioneer ministry plays a key part
- Each Deanery to have a pioneer champion.

Pioneer Vocations

"Pioneers are people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit's initiatives with those outside the church; gathering those around them as they seek to establish new contextual Christian community"

(Church of England working definition)

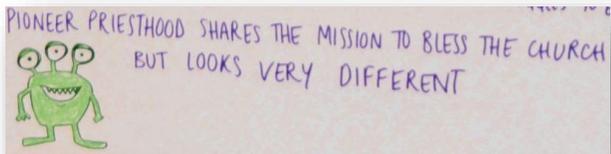
Paul Bradbury argued that the call to pioneer priesthood *"is a particular call to bless the church and enable its flourishing in contexts where the church either does not exist, no longer exists, or struggles to exist. Pioneer priesthood is a distinctive calling within the one ordained priesthood. Pioneer priesthood is a distinctive gifting, where gifts of innovation, entrepreneurialism, listening, discernment and team building are key."*

The creation of a single Pioneer Panel accessed before training or within the first year of training has increased vocations to ordained pioneer ministry. However, there continue to be sticking points for pioneers seeking ordination to the priesthood. Recent research for Ministry Division in the CofE point to cultural barriers in the vocations process which may well have a bearing on pioneer candidates.² This research coined the phrase 'BAP-speak'³ to describe a language many candidates feel they have to learn in preparation for selection conference. This sense of a cultural gap that pioneers need to bridge resonated in the conversation with a number of suggestions for tackling it: **'Make pioneer**

³ BAP is the Bishop's Advisory Panel, the panel within the CofE that selects candidates for training for ordination.

panel and BAP the same' or 'have dedicated BAPs for pioneers', 'Refresh BAP advisers', 'appoint BAP advisers who are pioneers or supervisors/enablers of pioneers.'

Dave Male encouraged us to explore the question of how a culture might be developed that proactively spots and encourages pioneers. Structural and cultural barriers were very evident here so there were calls for **'education of existing clergy and Diocesan staff'** and **'education of Deaneries and parishes to spot pioneers.'** There was also a call for key people charged with helping to identify and support pioneers in their vocation; **'identify and coach candidates from working class/BAME/disability communities to help them navigate the process'**, **'Appoint pioneer Assistant DDO and vocations advisers.** Gaining experience is also key in developing vocations. Places and processes that enable this were suggested: **'A CEMES⁴ scheme for pioneers'** **'Local pioneer centres – places to explore and experience pioneering'**, **'Learning community exploring pioneering to raise up vocations'**, **'Practical service component for confirmation preparation eg visit to a Fresh Expression of church or mission project.'**



Ordained Pioneer Training

New guidelines for pioneer curacies in the Church of England advise that 'ideally 50% of candidates' IME⁵ Phase 2 programme should be specialising in skills specific to pioneer ministry'. With that in mind our conversation explored what the key elements of post ordination pioneer training might be. Many argued that the ethos of the training needs to change from a more didactic style. For example: **'Emergent**

⁴ Church of England Ministerial Experience Scheme – a scheme aimed at young adults exploring their vocation.

contextual learning', 'Learning communities', 'Coaching', 'Making connections with other pioneers and sharing reflecting on good practice together'.

The content of current post-ordination training does not currently cater sufficiently for pioneer ministers. The current IME provision needs rethinking and pioneer ministers consulted to provide better support and learning for this ministry. Suggestions for inclusion in a more pioneer focussed element of IME included: **'dynamics of FxC church planting', 'pioneer spirituality' 'accountability and sustainability of FxCs' 'Contextual sacramental ministry'**. The SCRTP may well be best placed to provide such training and gather a sufficient cohort of pioneer curates to form a supportive learning community. This is something we are now actively exploring.

A strong theme that developed from the conversation was the need for all ministers to learn elements of the ministry and experience of pioneering. There needs to be a much greater synergy of learning between pioneer and ministers in more traditional settings. **'All curates to do IME about cross-cultural mission and listening to context', 'Somewhere in the process all ordinands have to be exposed to pioneering.'** **'Pioneer placements for all post-ordination'**.

Deployment of Pioneer Ministers

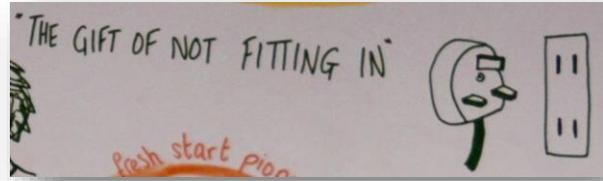
Both Anglican and Methodist structures continue to wrestle with how to fund pioneer ministers beyond ordination and (for Anglicans) curacy. The lack of certainty around future paid roles creates problems for the vocations process: **'DDOs are risk averse people with a real pastoral concern for their candidates future, pioneers are risk takers willing to trust an uncertain future.'** There is a **'dynamic between nurturing individual vocations and filling parish posts'** **'Perceived lack of posts creates a supply and demand question'**

⁵ Initial Ministerial Education – Phase 1 is training college, phase 2 is curacy.

The deeper questions concern the vision and investment of church structures: **'Why do we need pioneers in our Diocese? Answer may be more survival driven or financially driven', 'Stop making pioneering experimental and plan for the long term', 'Financial models do not match stated aims.'** **'Church-based pioneers not radical enough, needs investment from Diocese.'** **'Greater resources from Ministry Division to support Dioceses in placing pioneers in appropriate contexts'.**

Pioneer ministry is growing, with more vocations to this ministry, more bespoke training pathways for ordained pioneers, more lay pioneers training and more ordained pioneers emerging from post-ordination training looking to develop their vocation and serve within the church. Are we driven by a need to resource current forms of church or are we willing to respond to God's initiative that is calling so many people to this ministry. Might we **'allow pioneer roles to be**

formed around discerned pioneer vocations' rather than squeeze pioneers into roles that don't quite fit?



Dave Male's image for pioneer ministry was of a European-style plug being forced into a UK socket. Do we continue to push pioneers into the structures that evolved for a very different world, or do we shape our structures and investment to reflect the future missional demands of our context?

The Pioneer Forum was organised by the South Regional RTP Pioneer Hub which is supported by the Dioceses of Bath & Wells, Guildford, Oxford, Portsmouth, Salisbury and Winchester, the Southampton Methodist District and the URC Wessex Synod. The Hub is hosted by Church Mission Society.

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