

Towards a fully pioneering diocese: a 'how to' guide

Introduction

This document was written to inform the strategic thinking around the future of pioneering in the Diocese of Bath and Wells and has been amended to be generic to other dioceses where fostering pioneering has been part of the mission strategy. It is written in the light of the Everyday Faith initiative and the move in some places towards focal ministry with its emphasis on fully acknowledging and endorsing the gifts and ministries of lay people. Its thrust is found within the 2020 vision for the Church of England which affirms the importance of a mixed ecology of church and the need to reach new people in new ways. The term pioneer in this document includes all the forms of pioneering across the pioneer spectrum.

Where pioneering has been given space within a diocese and begun to influence the culture, it is important to diffuse and embed pioneering into the structures. Pioneering is a long-term investment. If we trust God to lead us counter-intuitively in times when urgent short-term solutions are demanded, the grassroots movement of the Holy Spirit will increasingly take the weight off the strategic load – which cannot do the deep work of culture change – and by degrees help us find our way to 21st century church of God's imagination.

Definition of terms

The C of E has a definition of pioneers but pioneering is a gift that can open up in all kinds of ways. The two main aspects of the gift are: a) innovation and b) cross-cultural mission. You can have innovation without cross-cultural mission, but cross-cultural mission depends on innovation. Some of the ways the pioneer gift opens up are: cross-cultural, contextual mission to those beyond the normal reach of our churches; establishing Fresh Expressions of church such as Café, Messy and Forest Church; church-planting; social or missional entrepreneurship with a kingdom focus; creative and contextual ways of sharing the gospel in the public space; liturgical exploration and experimentation; and structural, pastoral, building, management or financial innovation. 'Pioneer' will often be a person's main vocation but the pioneer gift can be found in many others.

Presuppositions

Pioneering is a movement of the Holy Spirit given to the church at this time for a specific purpose, as with other significant movements of the past. This is an essential prophetic movement of positive disruption and is of equal value to the call, charism and competence to lead, sustain and enable the existing church.

How does the diocese become fully pioneering?

The recommendations below encompass learning from what has and hasn't worked in the Pioneer Project¹, useful practices from other dioceses with a strong pioneer element, extrapolation of what might happen in the future based on existing evidence, and intuition.

¹ Bath and Wells' Strategic Development Fund project

Summary of recommendations:

1. All leaders are trained as pioneer advocates
2. All church leaders including focal ministers and oversight ministers have training in the processes of collective spiritual discernment, contextual mission and growing a new worshipping community
3. A senior leader – archdeacon or bishop - has responsibility for Diocesan-wide pioneer ministry and training. Support can be offered by others – DBF staff and/or grassroots pioneers.
4. There are Diocesan enablers for all four types of pioneers on the pioneer spectrum either through support staff roles or voluntary ‘champion’ type roles
5. In advance of any parish-based postholder leaving their post, the PCC is encouraged to explore the options for a new postholder with a pioneer brief or other contextually appropriate creative options for the parish
6. Full and part time paid roles are available to lay pioneers
7. At least one full-time lay or ordained pioneer post is established in each deanery with designated time in their role description to foster pioneering in the deanery. Every deanery has a lay pioneer champion
8. Full-time stipended ordained pioneers are expected to foster pioneering in their locality and may have oversight of lay pioneers
9. Investment is continued in training and developing lay pioneers from all backgrounds
10. Informal programmes of networked support for lay and ordained pioneers leaders is maintained and developed
11. Pioneers have the opportunity to be authorised or commissioned at local, deanery and diocesan level in parallel with other vocational routes
12. A diocesan post is created to foster mission entrepreneurship
13. A spirit of innovation is actively promoted; innovation is celebrated, even when it fails
14. An accepted pathway for training is established for ordinands, readers and nationally recognised pioneers where the medium of the learning aligns with the anticipated mode of ministry and mission in a post-Christendom church
15. All members of the Vocations Team are trained in all aspects of pioneer vocations
16. An extensive and varied modular training offer in all aspects of pioneer mission and ministry is developed to go alongside the offer for the wide diversity of other vocations

The amplified version:

1. All leaders are trained pioneer advocates

As we try to develop new mental models of what church can be, pioneer advocates are vital. This role is held by people in leadership in the existing church. This group understands the theology and practice of pioneering and is trained in the skills and practices of pioneer advocacy. The posture and processes of pioneer advocacy are key to pioneering being fruitful, as advocates ‘hold the space’ in a costly way for the new to emerge against the strong gravitational pull of the safe and familiar. Leaders need to belong to communities of practice in pioneer advocacy or to enable a group they are already part of to become a community of practice as a subset of their other work.

Advocates are parish clergy including curates, readers, deanery leaders, bishops, archdeacons and their lay equivalents, youth leaders, key office holders in the DBF and anyone else with oversight of others where a pioneer vocation might arise.

2. All church leaders including focal ministers and oversight ministers have training in the processes of collective spiritual discernment, contextual mission and growing a new worshipping community

This should be a core module of any training package for all lay and ordained ministers so that they are aware of the possibilities of growing a new faith community and can lead, train and enable their own congregations or individual congregation members to join in with God's mission in this way if so called. This is a particular skill set and should be taught or acquired through experience and apprenticeship. All parishes should be encouraged and challenged – even required - to become pioneering within their own tradition.

3. A senior leader has responsibility for Diocesan-wide pioneer ministry and training

Leadership in pioneering across the whole of the pioneer spectrum should be located in one person with experience and expertise. This should have parallel authority at least to an archdeacon. This post should be structurally linked in with Bishop's Staff (if not a permanent member) and preferably part of the clerical branch of Diocesan leadership so that it is integrated into the everyday processes of parish structures. Other new senior appointments should look for pioneer experience and understanding as part of the role description and a balance kept between pioneer and inherited experience across the piece. Senior leaders should strive to gain as much insight into the range of pioneer theology and practice as into that of parish ministry.

4. There are Diocesan enablers for all four types of pioneers on the pioneer spectrum either through support staff roles or voluntary 'champion-type' roles

Currently in Bath and Wells there are paid enablers for pioneer adaptors (the Encourager of New Christian Communities role), pioneer activists (the Pioneer Activism Enabler), and pioneer innovators (the Pioneer Team Leader). There is currently no official enabler role for pioneer reproducers (church planters), but there is an unofficial champion in the Area Dean of Weston super Mare (Locking Deanery) and the Archdeacon of Bath. Enablers lead training events, foster networks, provide an advisory service and ensure people in all groups feel supported and included. By working together with the other pioneers types they model the unity of the pioneer body and the catholicity of the church.

5. In advance of any parish-based postholder leaving their post, the PCC is encouraged to explore the options for a new postholder with a pioneer brief or other creative options

This would be a standard part of the support package offered to parishes nearing a transition period in leadership. Dual roles (pastoring the congregation and pioneering in the community) with a designated division of hours in the role description should be explored for rural benefices where the existing congregation is small and/or elderly. A

member of the Diocesan pioneer support staff could visit PCCs before a vicar leaves or the role could be incorporated into the job description for a parish consultancy officer with appropriate training.

6. Paid roles are available to lay pioneers

In some circumstances it should be possible to pay a lay pioneer in place of an ordained person. This would be particularly in areas where the challenge to connect with a local population is significant and the routes are not obvious. Most pioneers are lay people and lay pioneers usually have a greater clarity of vision and imaginative freedom than ordained ones. Should they create and establish a new worshipping community there is a possibility of them becoming ordained at that point. It is a matter of justice that the specialist missional vocation is paid in the same way as the specialist pastoral one. Paid lay pioneer roles model the pioneer vocation to other lay people and encourage them to follow the pioneer route as it offers hope there may be some paid roles to reward their experience and the investment they have made in their own training. This also keeps a pipeline of pioneers going, although many lay pioneers will continue to work without expectation of financial reward as part of their discipleship.

7. At least one signpost pioneer post is established in each deanery and every deanery has a lay pioneer champion

The 9 pioneers paid through the Pioneer Project are called 'signpost' pioneers as they demonstrate to the surrounding deanery the nature of pioneering. In the deaneries where signpost pioneers are appointed there has been a growth in understanding and acceptance of pioneers (as well as some entrenched resistance in places). Their impact is larger in smaller deaneries. Intentionally placing a signpost pioneer in the remaining deaneries or regions of larger deaneries would help change the local culture. Finance should be put aside over 5-10 years for more of these posts, and structures set up to enable a bidding process similar to that for the Pioneer Project to encourage imaginative thinking. Strategically placed pioneers can help change the landscape towards cross-cultural mission. There are currently 4 lay pioneer deanery champions in Bath and Wells and a role description is being written.

8. Full-time stipended ordained pioneers are expected to foster pioneering in their locality and may have oversight of lay pioneers

Up to 50% of time on an ordained pioneer's role description (particularly where there is no signpost pioneer or where the role is not dual-role) could be devoted to oversight, support, coaching and training of local pioneers, and to fostering a pioneer culture.

9. Investment is continued in training and developing lay pioneers from all backgrounds

A learning programme for non-book learners is developed; a suite of online and face-to-face modules are offered to create a bespoke learning experience; Yr 2 of the CMS Certificate is piloted and offered to extend learning; funding is secured for future cohorts

of the CMS Certificate when SDF/MDF finance runs out; mentors and coaches are provided to anyone leading in cross-cultural mission or innovation

10. The current informal programme of networked support for lay and ordained pioneers leaders is maintained and developed

Pioneer Hotspots (networking spaces and first point of contact for newly emerging pioneers) are established in all deaneries; Fresh Expression Hubs are extended as new areas of emerging church are identified, for example a digital pioneering hub and an arts and faith hub; regular 'Pioneers Unite!' events are held for cross-pollination of ideas across the pioneer spectrum and to foster shared understanding; other initiatives welcomed.

11. Pioneers have the opportunity to be authorised or commissioned as local, deanery and diocesan level in parallel with other vocational routes The appropriate language and processes for this will need to be developed locally.

12. A diocesan post is created to foster mission entrepreneurship

Mission entrepreneurship designs a mission project in such a way that it has the capacity to become self-sustaining. These are often holistic projects incorporating the five marks of mission in a not-for-profit environment. They may be shaped around environmental upcycling projects, ethical business ventures, spirituality centres, or social justice initiatives. They can create a source of financial support for the individual(s) who lead it. This requires a shift in attitude from expecting that mission will be funded through charitable giving to one where interested parties can be supported in drawing up business plans, learn basic accounting, and understand how to grow a business.

13. A spirit of innovation is actively promoted; innovation is celebrated, even when it fails

A theology of innovation is developed; ideas councils are set up in deaneries and archdeaconries to consider innovative proposals of any kind, including for focal ministry posts; a pot of money is set aside for innovation funding and is widely advertised on diocesan comms channels; stories of failure are shared

14. An accepted pathway for training is established for ordinands, readers and nationally recognised pioneers where the medium of the learning aligns with the anticipated mode of ministry and mission in a post-Christendom church

A major shift in modes of training is required to enable the form and content of learning to be in line with the form and content of the mission and ministry that people are training for. Taking much from David Heywood's book *Reimagining Ministerial Formation* with its recommended engagement with practical wisdom and shift away from the academic paradigm, I recommend pathways that explore questions of gospel and culture, draw from missiology taken from overseas contexts and offer a strong creative content enabling the insights of neurodiverse, non-academic, and active learners to participate fully on an equal footing with everyone else.

15. The Vocations Team are trained in all aspects of pioneer vocations

16. An extensive and varied modular training offer is established in all aspects of pioneer mission and ministry to go alongside the offer for the wide diversity of other vocations

The diversification of the whole range of ministries promoted by Everyday Faith requires a radical re-shaping of the diocesan training offer, to enable a bespoke modular contextual pathway to be available to all comers. The training offer in pioneer mission will be part of this and will be open to all. All lay ministries including traditional internal roles such as treasurer and church warden should be required to take a foundation module in pioneer mission.

In addition to these things a reduction of the legal, administrative and other burdens that adhere to parish life would support pioneering and mission generally, as well as a dedicated generous allocation of DBF support staff going forward. As a number of the signpost pioneers see their prayer, relationship-building and practical community engagement begin to bear fruit as lockdown eases, I am excited about where we may be headed in the years to come.

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