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Models of Leadership and Organisation in Anglican Churches in Rural Australia

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Preface

It is with pleasure that I commend to you, *Models of Leadership and Organisation in Anglican Churches in Rural Australia*. This Occasional Paper has been produced by the Christian Research Association and funded by Fresh Expressions Australia.

Across rural Australia, dioceses are facing significant challenges in the provision of ordained ministry and leadership. At the same time, there are opportunities and new initiatives which show that as a Church we can respond in a creative and helpful way.



Andrew +
Bishop Andrew Curnow
Anglican Diocese of Bendigo

Section 1. Introduction

The Anglican General Synod has recognised the need to develop a church that is ‘mission-shaped’, reaching out to the diversity of contemporary Australian society in an incarnational way, seeking to transform the community and call people to faith in Jesus Christ. The Synod has also recognised the need for a diversity of types of churches.

Within rural Australia, there is a wide range of organisational models of ministry in rural areas. Some are well established, while others are new and experimental. The decline and ageing of populations, together with the increasing costs of full-time ordained clergy are some of the factors forcing congregations to re-think how ministry should be conducted.

The present study provides an overview of Anglican rural churches in Australia drawing on the National Church Life Survey (2006). It also focusses on some of the quite different models of leadership and organisation operating in various dioceses. The focus of this study is on churches in smaller rural communities and looks at the following models:

- Ecumenical cooperation
- Enabler supported ministry
- Full-time stipended priest or minister
- Large area team ministry operating over multiple parishes
- Ministry leadership team

Although there are many different models present in Anglican rural churches, there is also considerable variation in openness of congregations to these models. Ecumenical cooperation, for example, may not be possible in more traditional Anglican parishes because of the centrality of Eucharist in their worship and the need for an ordained priest to preside. There is also considerable variation in the preparation considered necessary for ordination to priesthood, and the ways in

which priesthood is complemented by the ministry of those who are not ordained to priesthood.

It is time to review the different models of leadership and organisation and to ask whether one is more effective in a given context than another. What are the preferable options in rural situations where the resources are few and the numbers of people small?

At the heart of this project is the question about whether different organisational structures and leadership models, or other factors relating to leadership and organisation, contribute to differences in the wellbeing or vitality of parish life, in the wellbeing of the leaders themselves, and in the contributions that the congregations can make to the wider community.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The quantitative aspect of the study drew on the National Church Life Survey (2006) which provided a basis for generalisations to be made across the Anglican church. The qualitative aspects of the study involved case-studies. Interviews were conducted in five Anglican parishes representing a range of models of ministry in different parts of Australia.

The case-studies have sought to capture the stories of individual churches and to examine at depth the particular factors operating in each situation. Case-studies provide a more nuanced understanding of the wellbeing of churches in terms of people’s understanding of faith and how faith affects their lives and their community.

“...the need to develop a church that is ‘mission-shaped’, reaching out to the diversity of contemporary Australian society in an incarnational way, seeking to transform the community and call people to faith in Jesus Christ.”

Section 2. An overview of Anglican rural church life

Anglican Church in Australia

- second largest religious denomination
- 3.7 million people (19% of total population) identified themselves as Anglican

Anglican Church in rural Australia

- close to 1.7 million people (45% of all Australian Anglicans)
- make up close to one quarter of the total rural population

Rural Anglicans

While 3.7 million people in Australia identified themselves as Anglican on the 2006 Census, 1.6 million of them (23 per cent) were living outside the capital cities. In New South Wales and Tasmania, Anglicans constitute nearly 30 per cent of the population. In most other states, more than one in six of every person in outside the capital city identifies themselves as Anglican as shown in the following table.

While the overall population of rural Australia increased by 10.2 per cent between 1996 and 2006, the numbers of rural Anglicans has fallen in most places. Overall, the number of Anglicans in rural Australia fell 1.6 per cent.

The rural areas where populations have declined are primarily agricultural, and these are also the areas in which Anglicans have often been strongest. Anglican churches in those areas are often struggling to maintain attendances, or, in some places, to maintain worship.

Of 1,448 Anglican churches which took part in the 2006 National Church Life Survey, nearly half* can be described as being in rural areas where the population is less than 20,000 (see table below).

Rural Church leadership & organisation

Most rural Anglican churches have an ordained priest or minister, but some 71 per cent of clergy in rural settings work across three or more congregations. This is dramatically different to the pattern in regional cities and in capital cities, where leaders mostly work within a single congregation. In many places, lay people assist in leadership, taking some services and doing some pastoral work. In some places, Anglican parishes have combined with churches of other denominations.

Location type	%	Totals %
Rural area <200	12.0	
Small rural town 200-2,000	20.7	
Rural service centre 2,000-10,000	12.7	
Rural city 10,000-20,000	3.8	49.2
Regional city >20,000	12.8	
Centre & suburbs of capital city	30.0	
Location not identified	8.0	50.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Anglican Churches, 2006 NCLS Operations Survey

*This is likely to be an underestimation as it is possible that many small churches chose not to take part.

In other places, lay leadership teams are assisted by an 'enabler', a priest who works with the lay leadership rather than with each little congregation. Increasingly, a variety of options of leadership are being explored.



Analysis of Vitality of Rural Churches

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) found that Vitality was generally lower for churches in rural settings when compared to churches in regional cities or capital cities. However, it should be noted that the differences between rural and urban churches were often quite small, and the levels of variation between rural churches were greater than those between city churches.

The NCLS found that, in general a team approach was associated with greater vitality than single leadership, however, there is no clear cut distinction between the effectiveness of ordained, non-ordained or mixed patterns of leadership.

It also showed that Churches organised as single congregations with their own office bearers showed the highest levels of vitality. When people were taking responsibility for their own worship there was a stronger sense of vision, greater innovation, and more willingness among members to share their faith, than when they were part of a cluster of churches and administered from elsewhere.

However, other differences in organisation, the extent to which the church was led by ordained or lay people and the extent to which it was working ecumenically with other churches, did not make any difference to the level of the vitality of the church.

Section 3. The case studies

Case Study 1: Stipended full-time ministry St John's, Bairnsdale, Diocese of Gippsland

The Community

Bairnsdale is approximately 300 kms east of Melbourne. The town serves the whole of East Gippsland, a diverse area of lakes, farm land, forests and mountains, and is the gateway to a number of tourist activities. There is also some small-scale manufacturing. With its pleasant climate and comprehensive services, Bairnsdale has become a popular place for retirement.

According to the 2006 Census, Bairnsdale had a population of 11,300. Most people were of Anglo descent, apart from a Koori community of around 500 people. Approximately one person in four identified themselves as Anglican. However, most other Christian denominations were also represented and around ten churches served the town.



St. John's Parish, Bairnsdale

St John's Parish has a full-time rector. Indeed, the parish has a history of strong leadership from its rectors. Since the coming of its most recent leader, the congregation has responded to his vision and ideas and, subsequently, many new dimensions in the parish's ministry have been developed.

There are two Sunday services and a regular, shorter weekday service. A recently started monthly 'contemporary service' has attracted a new group of people. A healing service is also held monthly. A number of guest or special services have been held as well as services for other groups within the town. An effort is made to ensure that a wide range of people participate in worship services in Bairnsdale. On the Sunday of the case-study, about 70 people attended 9.30 am service. Most of the participants were over 60 years of age, and just a couple of younger families with children.

The rector was assisted by a pastoral care group, a dozen members of which were licensed by the Bishop as 'Pastoral Assistants'. The church has a strong program of outreach activities, including an outreach centre. The parish supports the chaplain at Bairnsdale Secondary College and a breakfast program for students. It distributes food parcels to people in the area, including some people in the Koori community. There is a strong emphasis on the church being a welcoming community.



The parish has a strategic plan for the next five years and is actively considering employing a youth minister. The annual report included a set of specific 'performance indicators' for the next 12 months. The rector saw himself as a leader, motivator and facilitator.

Having a full-time, professional leader can give attention to the development of the life of the church as a whole. While there were many active, retired people contributing to the life of the church, their energies were focussed by the leadership provided by the rector. There were a number of committees responsible for various aspects of the church, along with a variety of small task groups. However, these committees were functioning well partly because of the motivation and coordination provided by the rector. While people were affirming of lay participation in ministry, they valued the professional leadership that the rector provided.

Case Study 2: Ecumenical cooperation

Central Mallee Cooperative Parish

A Joint Anglican/Uniting Church Congregation, Diocese of Bendigo

Church centres at Ouyen, Underbool, Walpeup, Patchewollock

The Community

Ouyen is one of the key townships in the Mildura Region and is now part of Mildura City LGA. It is located at the point where two highways cross, one between Mildura and Melbourne, the other between Adelaide and Sydney. For tourists, there is easy access to a number of National Parks. Health services and aged care facilities are comprehensive and continuing to develop.

Many of the soldiers who had fought in World War I came back to take up the government's offer of properties under the Soldier Settlement Scheme. Ouyen is in a low rainfall area where the main agriculture is cropping and sheep.

According to the 2006 Census, the total town population was 1,061 and declining gradually. The population was ageing and nearly one person in four was retired.

Several little towns were served by the parish. In 2006, Patchewollock had a total population of 322, Walpeup had 115 and Underbool 217 people.

About one quarter of the population identify with the Catholic church, 22 per cent with the Anglican, and a similar proportion with the Uniting church. Most others described themselves on the Census as 'no religion' or did not answer the question.



Central Mallee Cooperative Parish

On 22 May 1994, the Central Mallee cooperative Parish (Victoria) of the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia was inaugurated. It included congregations in the towns of Ouyen, Walpeup, Underbool, Patchewollock, Tempy and Mittyack with a total catchment population of 3,000. There are now no worshipping congregations in Tempy and Mittyack.

At the time of the case-study in 2008, the Cooperative Parish was served by a full-time minister of the Uniting Church. There was an agreement that the leadership would alternative every 5 years: Uniting and Anglican.

While people retained their identity as Anglican or Uniting, they worshipped together each Sunday. The basic outline of service catered for the mix of denominations. For example, there was a choice of Communion 'wine' (port or grape juice, chalice or individual cups), acknowledging both traditions.

The Parish catered for two age groups at Sunday school, which was held every second week in Ouyen. There was also an Ouyen Christian Youth Group. The ecumenical

arrangement meant that a full-time minister could be employed. This would not have been possible for either denomination independently. Some compromises had been necessary, but these were handled sensitively by the minister. People of both denominations appreciated the leadership that was offered.

There was an awareness that, even working ecumenically, there could come a time when they were not able to maintain support for a minister and that lay-leadership might be necessary. "Eventually, we will meet in homes and be used to taking services," said one lay person. The Parish's ordained minister provided aids for lay worship and was holding lay training days to prepare them for that time. The Mallee is a unique place, the people said. People adapt, are resilient, and open to change.

Case Study 3: Enabler supported ministry

Anglican Parish of Circular Head, Diocese of Tasmania

Church centres at Smithton, Stanley, Forest, Marrawah

The Community

Circular Head is located in the far north-west corner of Tasmania. The area is well known for its natural beauty, attracting a number of tourists each year. Circular Head has a cool temperate climate, regular rainfall and is one of the most productive regions in Tasmania. Major industries of this region include forestry, dairying and other types of farming, vegetable processing and fishing. Continued growth is predicted for Circular Head.

In the general area, the population was growing only slowly, and in some parts, declining. However, Smithton, the principal town, had approximately 4,000 residents and was thriving. The town has a hospital and new high quality aged care facilities.

There were many churches in Circular Head, a number of which were Brethren, Anglican and Catholic.



Circular Head Anglican Parish

In terms of church ministry, much has changed over the years. Stanley, Forest, Irishtown, Roger River, Smithton, Mawbana, Marrawah, Redpa and Montague all once had independent churches. Now they were all part of one parish and the parish council was made up of two members each from Stanley, Forest, and Smithton, three from a Contemporary Worship Team and one from Marrawah.

Over the years, the circuit for the rector had increased in size. Rather than employing someone to take many services each Sunday in a range of locations, an 'Enabler' had been appointed to work with local ministry teams. The idea had been to appoint a ministry team in each location, ordaining some so that they could take Eucharistic services. The Enabler would work with the teams rather than serve all the tiny congregations. At the time of the case-study, there were two other ordained people who were taking services along with several other team members who were not ordained.

Most team members had completed a Diocesan Ministry Certificate course. In terms of post-ordination training, quarterly seminars were found to be very helpful, bringing collaborative ministers together with theologically trained ministers. However, the major challenge of the team model of ministry has been the requirement of training which has deterred some people from taking up the challenge. Those who had met the challenge had found it deeply rewarding. They felt they had grown personally through the training and the experience of serving.

The ministry team members were supportive of each other. The current Enabler's support of the team was much appreciated. There was also full support from the congregations as it had come to accept this style of 'enabler supported ministry'.

Three or four years ago, the Contemporary Worship Team began in Smithton. They take two monthly services with attendances of around 40 to 50 people, including many children and a number of youth. There has been a new feeling of vibrancy for a number of older members attending. People, young and old, from other churches come along, too.

The implementation of the Enabler model of church ministry also helped congregation members feel less isolated from the Diocese. They were very thankful for the work of the Enablers. The Enabler supported ministry model offered ongoing opportunities for life as a parish.



Case Study 4: Large area team ministry (multiple parishes)

St Paul's Anglican Church, Cobar, Diocese of Bathurst

The Community

Cobar is in north-west New South Wales, 300 kilometres north-west of Dubbo and about 100 kilometres south of Bourke. The town is on one of the routes from Adelaide to Sydney via Broken Hill and is a popular stopping place. Cobar is full of motels.

Since the nineteenth century various minerals have been found in the area including gold. However, mining has had its ups and downs in Cobar. The sheep properties around Cobar are large because the rain is relatively light and stocking rates are low.

According to the 2006 Census, there were 4,918 people living in the town of Cobar. The local government area of Cobar covers some 46,000 square kilometres and contains just 5,198 people. Since 2001, the population has been relatively static. Ninety-three per cent of the population in the area was born in Australia, including 530 Indigenous people.

Thirty per cent of Cobar's workforce is involved in mining, but only 10 per cent are now in agriculture. Sixty per cent of the work-force is involved in providing a range of services in the town.

In Cobar, there are a number of churches, including Anglican, Uniting, Catholic, Baptist and a Pentecostal group. Of the 5198 people in the local area, 36 per cent described themselves as Catholic, 23 per cent as Anglican, with smaller proportions of other denominations. At the time of the case-study, two people in the town were employed by the churches: a Baptist lay pastor and a Catholic priest.

St Paul's Anglican Church

The 'Company of the Good Shepherd' was revived (formerly Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd) in 2002 and is led by Bishop Peter Dannaher. It is described as a 'body of people, men and women, ordained and lay, married and single, who make a commitment to ministering in the North West and other parishes in the Diocese of Bathurst as designated by the Bishop of Bathurst'.

There are seven people in the Company of the Good Shepherd, including Bishop Peter, who work in seven parishes between Bourke and Dubbo. The ways in which these parishes operate varies from one place to another, but, there has been a gradual movement to centralise finances for parishes.

Among these seven people are both stipended and non-stipended people. Some work full-time in ministry while others have occupations such as teaching or farming. The members of the Company meet every

six weeks face-to-face. They covenant to pray for each other daily. As well as having prime responsibility for a particular parish or faith community, they all work across the area and support and care for each other.

The training required of members of the Company is worked out on an individual basis. All have done 'EFM' as a minimum. The members are licensed to ministry only within their diocese for three years at a time after which the license may be renewed by the Bishop. The Bishop and some local members see some real strengths in local people taking leadership, as they relate well to their local communities in a down-to-earth way.



None of the seven people lived in Cobar, but someone from the Company led the Sunday service at least every two weeks. Often Bishop Peter Dannaher came himself. Two licensed lay readers at Cobar shared in the leadership of most other services. In both of these people were out of town, the local people would meet, pray, share some devotional thoughts with each other and sing some hymns. One way or another, they would hold a service. Most of the attenders at St Paul's were in their 70s or older. Attendance could be as low as 12 people, yet, on special occasions, such as baptisms, the church could be overflowing.

The team ministry provided by the Company of the Good Shepherd had several advantages. The team members were well supported by each other and they could cover for each other as the need arose, such as in the case of funerals. On the other hand, it could mean that there was no one person to take responsibility for developing the vision for the future ministry of the church. However, the members of St Paul's were determined to 'keep the doors open'. In this regard, their ownership of church life and their persistence in maintaining it was evidence.

Case Study 5: Ministry leadership team Springsure Anglican Parish, Diocese of Rockhampton

The Community

Springsure is situated in a valley 66 kilometres south of Emerald and 300 kilometres west of the city of Rockhampton in central Queensland. Farming has developed in the region, and more recently mining has contributed to economic activities. Tourists are attracted to national parks in the area. There are limited facilities in Springsure and less in Rolleston, 70 kilometers south.



At the time of 2006 Census, Springsure had a population of 830 people and Rolleston 217 people. Springsure is the largest town in the Bauhinia Shire and is the centre for much of the Shire's administrative activity. Overall, the labour force included 36 per cent in agriculture, mainly in beef, grain and cotton production, and 10 per cent in mining.

Springsure has four churches: Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Assemblies of God. None of the leaders of the churches was engaged in full-time ministry. Ecumenical cooperation has been encouraged and the involvement of lay people welcomed.

The Anglican Parish of Springsure

The parish reached the point where they could no longer afford a full-time priest, although a priest living in the area was still available on a half-time basis. In 2005, they adopted a 'ministering community' concept, emphasising whole community involvement. This model has been adopted in several parts of the Rockhampton Diocese.

Encouraged by the Bishop, three people were appointed to the 'Ministry Leadership Team'. This team has the responsibility of 'the rector' in leading the ministry of the church in cooperation with all members. The team members have some areas of individual responsibility: worship, pastoral care and Christian education; community service and mission; and leadership and administration.

Each church (Springsure and Rolleston) has a committee of four elected members and a warden. The committee, in consultation with the Ministry Leadership Team,

is responsible for worship, pastoral care and the maintenance of the property.

A Parish Council is appointed to lead and manage the activity of the Parish overall and meets monthly. The Council is made up a group of people who are elected or appointed, the members of the Ministry Team, the wardens, treasurer and secretary.

This leadership model encourages equality so the tradition division between lay and clergy had softened. Most of the members of the church appreciated this and saw the importance of taking greater responsibility for the life of the church.

The members of the team affirmed the team experience and felt supported by each other. They met together regularly and together served the congregations in the two centres of Springsure and Rolleston.

The Bishop was supportive. There was an annual diocesan retreat. Every six weeks there were meetings for the whole deanery and twice a year, there was a Saturday ministry workshop. Leaders also affirmed support from the Cursillo movement. The members of Springsure and Rolleston affirmed the Ministry Leadership Team. There was a stronger sense of shared responsibility for ministry and sense of belonging. However, the success of the team was seen as partly the result of personalities of its members.



Springsure Anglican Church has an average attendance of about 30 people. A service had started on Sunday evening for young families in the town. Most of the people attending this had not regularly attended the service previously. Many had been contacted through the play group. It was felt that the Ministry Leadership Team had given stability to ministry. It was also felt that it was more sustainable than ministry under a single person.

Section 4.

Models for rural churches: Strengths and challenges

This section will seek to draw out some of the implications of the models of rural ministry which were explored through the case studies. It will compare the strengths and challenges of each of the models of ministry. The following commentary should not be taken as a commentary on the case-studies themselves.

Full-time Stipended Priest

There are many strengths associated with the traditional model of ministry, in having a full-time stipended priest working in one (or a few) parishes. This is the model to which most Anglican churches aspire, or to which they look back with nostalgia.

Strengths:

Focus—the full-time stipended priest is able to focus solely on the ministry of the church compared with many non-stipended leaders who either have another occupation to earn their income or are retired.

Skills—the full-time stipended priest has been trained in ministry and most bring considerable experience of ministry with them. Their professional training means they are able to teach and bring guidance and, together with their experience, they are able to offer wise advice, ideas and help congregations develop vision.

Authority—within the Anglican Church, stipended priests generally have considerable authority—they are seen as official representatives of the church. This is seen as important when doing pastoral visitation. The authority of the stipended priest often means that they are able to motivate people. Local people will take their suggestions more seriously than they would from a local person.

From Outside the Area—the stipended priest usually comes to the church from outside the local area. As such, they can bring extra skills which local people do not have. They are free of the local relational networks and, therefore, will be seen as better able to maintain confidentiality in pastoral matters. They can take risks in what they say to their congregations or in pastoral work—it is easier to have a prophetic role if you come from outside the community.

Challenges:

Finances—full-time stipended priests cost a lot of money and many rural parishes are simply unable to afford a person. On average, if a parish is depending on the giving of its attenders, only those parishes with around 100 attenders contributing each week are able to support a full-time priest along with a set of buildings and sufficient resources for the priest to exercise effective ministry.

Availability—in many places, availability of priests is a problem. In some places, there are insufficient numbers of trained people available to fill vacancies. Some clergy are reluctant to go to remote places for ministry. Increasingly, clergy must take into account the careers of their spouses or the educational needs of their children in accepting settlements.

Relating to the local community—because clergy come from outside the community they do not necessarily understand local issues and culture. Many full-time stipended clergy have been trained in a world of ideas and concepts which do not relate readily to the pragmatic ways of thinking and concerns of those who attend their churches.

Responsibility for ministry—there is the potential that local attenders will leave ministry to the priest rather than taking responsibility for it themselves. While some priests may be able to develop vision and motivate people to be engaged in ministry, others may prefer to take full responsibility for ministry rather than encouraging others. Young people, in particular, are often not looking for a ‘professional’ to do things for them. Indeed, the professional may be more of a hindrance than a help to their worship.

Support—local people have their own long-developed support systems in the community. Clergy move around a great deal and so it is important they have support structures suitable for them.

Most Anglican priests serve several worshipping communities and, while the above strengths and weaknesses apply to such situations, serving several congregations may also mean:

- long periods of time are spent in travel; and
- the priest only lives in one community and is a visitor in the others.

Ecumenical Cooperative Ministry

Ecumenical cooperative Parishes are made up of churches of different denominations. The process in forming such a cooperative often begins by putting together a Covenant of Cooperation.

Combining resources can also mean finding strengths in other ways, apart from being able to afford full-time stipended clergy. The following points are general and would apply to formation of cooperative ventures of various kinds.

Strengths:

Larger units of ministry—these have several strengths: being able to afford a full-time stipended priest, a greater sense of strength and a boost to morale, and make possible a greater range of mission projects.

Rationalisation of resources—rationalisation of resources, such as buildings, so that resources can be used more effectively and may significantly reduce financial stress.

Relate more strongly with the community—combined churches can often cooperate with secular parts of society more readily than can individual denominations. For example, local councils are more likely to respond positively and cooperatively to initiatives of cooperative churches representing a large section of the population than to individual denominations which represent small sectors of the population.

Stronger witness to the Christian faith—cooperation between different denominations is a powerful witness of the church, demonstrating that the various churches are truly combined in their aims and objectives.

Challenges:

Dealing with denominational differences—the challenge for cooperating churches is dealing with the differences in the denominational traditions from which they have come. Among these differences will be:

- rules and regulations, such as who can preside at Eucharistic services, and
- different practices in regards to worship, such as use of the Prayer Book and the use of wine or grape juice for the Eucharist.

Reducing the options for worship—cooperation may reduce choice in the way people want to worship, but it can also free resources to make possible new services with different styles that increase choice.

Increased complexity in accountability—it can be difficult for cooperative parishes to report to two or more different systems and leaders.

Processes of merging—the processes through which the cooperative church is established may be difficult. Compromises must be made with which some people will not agree. There is a danger of losing people.

Enabler Supported Ministry

Enabler Supported Ministry (ESM) involves the calling of local people into leadership teams which are supported by an ordained person. The ordained person acts as an ‘Enabler’ of the teams rather than as a priest of the congregations. An Enabler is a clergy-person (usually stipendiary) appointed by the Bishop to be a companion to a parish (or group of parishes) as it develops ESM. Regular visits to the parish to encourage, train, mentor

and evaluate their mission and ministry are part of the Enabler’s role.

A Local Ministry Support Team is a group of baptised people identified and called by the local church to lead them in ESM. The Team is made up of people with spiritual maturity and gifts of leadership. The Team does not undertake all of the ministry: its role is to encourage all members of the congregation to discover and use their own particular gifts for ministry in the life and mission of the church.

An Ordained Local Minister (OLM) is a member of the Local Ministry Support Team who is ordained as a deacon or priest. All OLM’s exercise their ministry as part of the Team. OLMs function as priests solely within the ESM parish in which they serve and are not licensed to act as a priest beyond that context. Nevertheless, the Anglican order and ethos, including the three-fold order of bishops, priests and deacons, remain fundamental to the model.



Strengths:

Stipended priests are used efficiently—the model means a change in the role of the stipended priest so that they focus on ‘enabling’ the teams (teaching, mentoring and providing guidance for local leaders) rather than serving the congregations.

Ordained local priests relate well to their communities—they tend to have a down-to-earth ministry rooted in their own communities. Because they know people, they are often asked to assist with personal rites of passage such as baptisms and funerals, for example.

Increase in number of leaders—having a number of local priests (plus their spouses) has several advantages:

- easier to cover all areas of ministry, such as worship services, pastoral visits and funerals,
- spreads the leadership so that if people object to the personality or gender (as in not accepting women priests), there are other people who may be able to exercise leadership and pastoral care in relation to them,
- makes it easier to cover crisis situations, such as road accidents and bush fires, and

- increases the variety of skills within the leadership than could be found in one person.

Leaders are supported—leaders are well supported, by being part of a team, and through the enabling process.

Enabler can be mediator—the enabler can act as a mediator from outside the parish providing a valuable source of dispute resolution. The enabler can often see the ‘bigger picture’.

Growth of leaders—ordained local ministers have often indicated that they have grown significantly in faith because of taking on leadership roles.

Shares ministry—the ESM model means that ministry is widely shared and does not become the sole responsibility of the priest. In theological terms, it is often more effective than traditional forms of ministry are in engaging the whole people of God in ministry.

Lower costs—less financial pressure without stipendiary costs.

Stronger relationships with dioceses—when ordained local ministers are relating directly with dioceses, the relationship is not mediated by the stipended priest.

Challenges:

Lack of time and focus—ordained local ministers often have a number of other commitments such as jobs, family, and other community responsibilities, which make them ‘time poor’ and spreads their focus.

Lack of training—the use of ordained local ministers means that people are taking responsibility for ministry without the extensive training and experience that is usually undertaken by stipended priests.

Availability of suitable people—it is not always easy to find suitable people to be ordained local ministers. Aging congregations may make it increasingly difficult to find suitable people.

Effectiveness of collaborative leaders—collaborative leadership may mean there is less direction on a day-to-day basis. Problems may be averted more quickly if there is a single leader, and it may also be more difficult to develop a strong sense of vision.

Acceptance of ordained local ministers—some people may be slow to accept the leadership and the authority of ordained local ministers.

Limited ministry experience—less experienced ordained local ministers may have a greater tendency to maintain the forms of ministry they have always known. It is often easier for a person coming in from outside the local community to propose fresh ideas and new ways of developing ministry.

Area Team Ministry

This model involves a team of stipendary and non-stipendary priests and, sometimes, some non-ordained people serving a group of worship centres. Some of these people are ‘ordained local ministers’ as in the ESM model, licensed to serve only with the local area. Team members may have a particular parish on which they focus, but also have responsibilities to ministry in the wider area.

In this model, the ministry provided by the team is complemented by ministry provided by local lay people as, for example, Lay Readers.

In using Ordained Local Ministers and Lay Readers, some of the strengths and weaknesses are similar to those mentioned in the ESM model. Using several local people means there are the advantages of shared ministry, of involving people who have a good understanding of the local context, but who may have a variety of other pressures on them and have limited experience and training.

The difference from the ESM model is that there is no one ‘Enabler’ working with local leaders, but instead a team that shares in the responsibility of ministry. The following are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the team approach:

Strengths:

More diverse skills—team approach to ministry can make available a wider range of skills and experience to member churches; greater specialisation is possible.

People to cover for each other—the members of the team are able to cover for each other across the various parishes they serve in terms of taking funerals, covering when one person is away, and in dealing with crisis situations.

Centralisation of some function possible—centralisation of non-pastoral functions, such as finances, can be more cost-effective and efficient. Voluntary opting-in helps congregations with regard to their sense of ownership of their church.

Support structure—the team can provide a strong support structure for its members who would otherwise be isolated in their respective ministries.

Challenges:

Relating to a variety of leaders—members of the team have to get to know a greater number of people over a larger area which means relationships are by necessity not as strong. It may also be more difficult to develop a sense of vision as the church relates to a variety of people. There can also be a lack of clarity about who is responsible for developing the vision of the church.

Team members are often only visitors—in any one location, most of the team members live

outside the local community and are thus only visitors to it. For example, they will not find it so easy to keep up with immediate pastoral needs or know what is happening in the community itself.

Lack of self-reliance—having a team to ‘lean on’ may discourage self-reliance within the churches they serve.

Eucharistic worship—when the services of worship are led by Lay Readers, it may not be possible to have a celebration of the Eucharist, which is seen by most Anglicans as the centre of their worship. Otherwise, reserved sacrament has to be organised.

Ministry Leadership Team Model

This particular model of ministry involves a team operating at local level. There is no ‘enabler’ as in the Enabler Supported Ministry model (although in the case of Springsure Anglican Parish, the bishop himself fulfilled this role.) On the other hand, the team is not ministering over a large area as in the ‘Area Team Ministry Model’. As in ESM, this model emphasises that the whole community has gifts for ministry all members of the community are responsible for the functioning of the church, and gives leadership to a small group within the church community. Teams members may have an area of individual responsibility, such as worship, pastoral care; community service, mission and so on.

This model shared some of the strengths and weaknesses of using local people as leaders in ministry. In the case of Springhurst, however, one of the leaders was an ordained priest, who had experience of ministry elsewhere, but was working in Springhurst on a part-time stipend. The other two, sharing in the leadership, were lay people.

This model also had some of the advantages of team ministries in that the members of the team could support each other in the ministry of the church.

Other strengths:

Easier to cover large parishes—shared responsibilities, especially where parishes cover large areas, means less burden on one person.

Stronger support—shared ministry can mean more support through the team.

More variety in input—shared ministry means more variety in relation to services and sermons.

More involvement in ministry—shared ministry encourages the involvement of all members in the ministry of the church.

Greater sustainability of ministry—team approach, where people are sourced from the area, is sometimes more sustainable than having a single priest.

Challenges:

Positions blurred—traditional division of authority between lay and clergy is blurred

Decision-making more difficult—shared ministry means having to make the opportunities to get together to meet, to make decisions, even when distance is problematic.

Recognition of ministry—it was not easy to encourage full recognition of all leaders as having equal status on the team. People often looked for the ‘one’ leader.

Depends on team work—there can be no effective leadership or ministry if the team is not united and supportive of each other. This is partly a matter of personality and expectation. Many clergy have expected to be single operators rather than team players.

Common Factors and Issues

Throughout this review of possible structures of ministry, there have been some common challenges and issues. Most rural parishes are made up of a number of small centres. Many of the congregations are isolated so that it takes considerable time and cost to move from one to another. Many of them are not able to afford a full-time stipended leader. In some places, even if a leader could be afforded, there are no leaders available.

Thus, one of the issues for all of the small rural churches is how to utilise the resource of the clergy most effectively? The most common solution is to have a cluster of worship centres which all contribute to the stipend and are all served by the one person. However, this often means that the priest has to travel huge distances, particularly on Sundays, and cannot reside in all the communities he or she serves.

An alternative to the clustering of congregations of the same denomination over a large area is the cooperating of congregations of different denominations within the same area. Ecumenical cooperation sometimes means that leadership can be more easily afforded. It cuts the need for travel. It means that the clergyperson can focus on the local community in which they reside. However, it will inevitably mean some compromises in the style of worship to which people are accustomed.

A third option is the area team model where the travel is shared by several people and members of the team provide each other with support that is not available in the same way for the single clergyperson. But working over a large area means that large distances must still be covered and the clergyperson does not share the life of the members of some or most of the congregations.

The fourth option for ‘stretching’ the work of the clergy is through the ‘Enabler’ model. The Enabler serves the ministry teams that operate in each local area rather than serving each of the congregations. Therefore, the Enabler would not need to travel to many churches on a Sunday. Sometimes, the various local teams might gather at a single location for study or reflection on ministry together.

The counterside of using clergy resources efficiently is the use of lay people in ministry. Many of the models do this in one way or another. As many rural parishes decline and as clergy become

Section 5. Conclusions

comparatively more expensive, it is inevitable that there will be greater use of lay people in leadership. Among the positions lay people may take up are:

- lay readers and lay pastoral associates,
- ordained local ministers, and
- members of ordained ministry leadership teams.

Two issues constantly emerge in the use of lay people in ministry:

1. How much training should be required? Some bishops have felt that similar levels of training to that done by stipended priests is desirable, even if some of that training is undertaken at a distance and studies undertaken part-time. However, the amount of training expected may be unrealistic, given the circumstances and abilities of most lay people involved.

Other bishops have required minimal training but appointed people to ministry based more on their experience and leadership capacities they have demonstrated. In some situations, others have seen them as 'second class' church leaders.

There are currently few structures within the Anglican Church to provide 'professional development' for those in lay leadership positions. A few are available by correspondence, while others are organised in dioceses. The Enabler model involves on-going mentoring. In other places, mentoring occurs informally as the bishop moves around the churches. However, more comprehensive systems of training and support for lay leadership may need to be developed, perhaps crossing diocesan boundaries.

2. What level of recognition should be given to lay people in church leadership? This issue is partly theological and partly attitudinal. While some bishops are happy to appoint 'ordained local ministers', others feel that such appointments are inappropriate. One bishop, for example, said in an interview that he felt that one should either be trained and ordained as a priest, able to serve anywhere in the Anglican Church, or one should remain as a Lay Reader. He suggested that it would be more appropriate to have more non-Eucharistic services than to give local lay people with little training the role of presiding over the Eucharist.

This is an issue on which there will continue to be theological differences. It is not primarily a matter of training, for not a great deal of training is needed to preside at the Eucharist. Indeed, it could be argued that training is far more important in relation to delivering sermons! It is related to what the difference is between the priest and the lay person. That issue is rooted in theology of the church.

The Current Context

Many rural Anglican churches are struggling to survive. The results of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS 2006) show that they are much weaker than most of the city churches. In many places, church attenders are ageing and the number of newcomers is low. Few churches are growing in terms of people attending. The NCLS results also suggest that rural churches were less likely than city churches to have a 'clear and owned vision', or 'inspiring and empowering leadership', or to be open to innovation. The affirmation that people are 'growing in faith' and 'feel a strong sense of belonging' was also weaker in the rural areas. To some extent, it is likely that some of these characteristics do not 'fit' the context of rural churches as well as they do the urban churches.

In the cities, the church becomes, for many of its members, the centre of their community and, so, that is where their sense of belonging is focussed. It is important to its members that the church community changes and grows, that it has a vision. In urban contexts, the church tends to be a fragment of community, but is not embedded in the local community.

On the other hand, in rural areas the church is not *the* community. People have diverse networks and connections throughout the wider community. Their sense of belonging is rooted deeply in that wider community. The church is one segment of community: serving the community and providing its moral and spiritual foundations.

Rural people, mostly, are not focussed on a strong personal faith that is 'growing' or 'declining'—faith simply *is*. From the perspective of many of the attenders, the important dimension of the life of the church is faithfulness. Through faithfulness, the moral and spiritual foundations of the community are maintained.

While there may not be a strong vision or a strong sense of growing personal faith in many rural Anglican churches, there is a strong tradition of faithfulness. In many places that we visited, the determination to maintain the worship of the church, to keep the doors open week by week, is strongly evident.

At the same time, many Anglicans are feeling confused. Why are people not coming to the church? Why are there so few young people engaged in the faith community? People seem to be distracted by sports and other activities. In every congregation that we visited, the major concern was the future, the fact that their congregation was ageing and there was no one, or almost no one, to take over.

Signs of Hope

In none of the churches we visited was there strong evidence the church would still be there in another 20 years, or even five to ten years in some cases. Given that reality, there is a need for some radical thinking. Yet, in several of the churches there were some important signs of hope.

In Springhurst, for example, young families had been given the opportunity to 'do church' in their own way. And a number of young families were responding positively. A new worshipping community had been formed. Similarly, in the parish of Circular Head, a new style of service had been inaugurated, and a new worship team of younger people had developed to lead it. The contemporary service in Bairnsdale was attracting some new people.

It would appear that the best hope for the involvement of younger people in the life of the churches would be the development of new and fresh expressions of church life. But to get something new and innovative happening requires special people. It requires people who can give their full attention to the new project. It is often difficult for the local people to do by themselves without the experience of different forms of church life and often without the time that is needed to start something fresh. In England a new model of 'pioneer ministry' has been adopted in the Church of England. People are being trained for pioneer work, to start and sustain fresh expressions of the church (freshexpressions.org.uk).

In England and in some parts of Australia, there is considerable experimentation with styles of ministry. Usually these are occurring through the formation of new groups of people engaged in worship and involved in mission in new ways: cell churches, house churches, youth congregations, midweek congregations, 'seeker' churches and school-based churches (Gaze, chapter 4).

Changing the music and putting up a data project is not enough to save the traditional churches. Rather the expressions of church that appear to be working have required much more profound changes. While the fresh expressions of church are various, they are similar in being less clergy-centred, less centred on the traditional homily (Gaze, p.71) and they also encourage greater participation. They do not try to be all things to all people, but cater for specific groups within the community. In various ways, they are 'holy, catholic and apostolic'—they involve a journey towards God in worship and obedience, in interdependence with other parts of the church, and involvement in mission (Gaze, p75).

Maintaining & Developing Current Models of Ministry

The question of ministry is also a matter of how church life, as it exists in rural Australia, can enhance the lives

of those who are currently involved, providing support and pastoral care.

The Single Ordained Leader

The ideal has been to have a person paid a full stipend, allowing him or her to focus their lives on leading the ministry of the local church. While this continues to work well where it can be afforded, many rural churches have too few members and, therefore, do not have the funds.

The NCLS results show that it is better to have one leader for one congregation. But is it better to have one lay leader than an ordained person who serves several congregations? The benefits of having a single leader must sometimes be weighed against the considerable strengths in having a single ordained, stipended professional leader: full-time focus, substantial training in ministry, theological understanding and a professional credibility.

Whether it should be affirmed or not, there remains a strong sense within the Anglican Church that the ordained, especially stipended, priest is 'special'. They carry an authority that other leaders do not share. Their authority is made explicit through the authority to celebrate the Eucharist in most dioceses and in visiting the sick or comforting the grieving. The ordained priest is seen as speaking with the voice of the whole Church.

Ordained Local Ministers

For single, stipended priests covering a number of rural churches, the challenges of travelling long distances and forming strong relationships with church members make effective ministry difficult.

One of the alternatives is to choose and ordain local people, usually leaders in their local area. They are given some training and then authorised to lead services, celebrate the Eucharist, and provide pastoral care, but only within their local area. Mostly, these people are not stipended, although in many cases some costs are covered. Many of them, then, are involved part-time in their churches and have other jobs, or they are retired.

While some dioceses have welcomed the contribution such people are making, others have decided against ordaining such people. Some feel this is a 'back way' to ordination.

One of the major questions behind this debate is: *How much training is necessary for people to take such leadership in a church? Do people need the equivalent of a university degree, three or more years full-time study?* What many people are looking for in their clergy is someone who will be a wise friend (Hughes, 1989, p.88) and there is no need for tertiary level training to do this. Indeed, other rural studies have suggested that tertiary training may train people out of the ability to relate well with everyday rural people.

There is no need for tertiary level training to lead services of worship, or, for that matter, the Eucharist. Many Lay Readers effectively preside at services around Australia every week. The basic materials are given in the Prayer Book and can be selected to suit local congregations.

Training does provide people with skills in understanding and articulating the faith traditions, and helps give people confidence in their ministry—although confidence also comes through successfully performing ‘on the job’.

Whether those people are mentored and supported, either through a team, or through an ‘enabler’ approach, the work that local leaders can do is enhanced. It seems that local people are less likely to burn out and their leadership is more effective.

Team Work

In a few places, a team of ordained people provide ministry over a large area. The people know each other, meet each other regularly, support and pray for each other on a daily basis. On the other hand, some weaknesses were noted in the ways that they related to local teams.

In other places, local ministry teams have been formed. Here, again, the team members support each other and are able to do much more than one person could do alone. Each of the members of the team is also able to concentrate on their own part of the ministry. That these arrangements have worked well, however, is partly because of personalities, the ability of team members to be able to work well together.

The NCLS results confirm that, in general, ministry is stronger where leaders are operating in teams. Team work shares the ministry and means that a range of people take responsibility. It also means a larger range of gifts of being drawn on in the ministry of the church.

Ecumenical Options

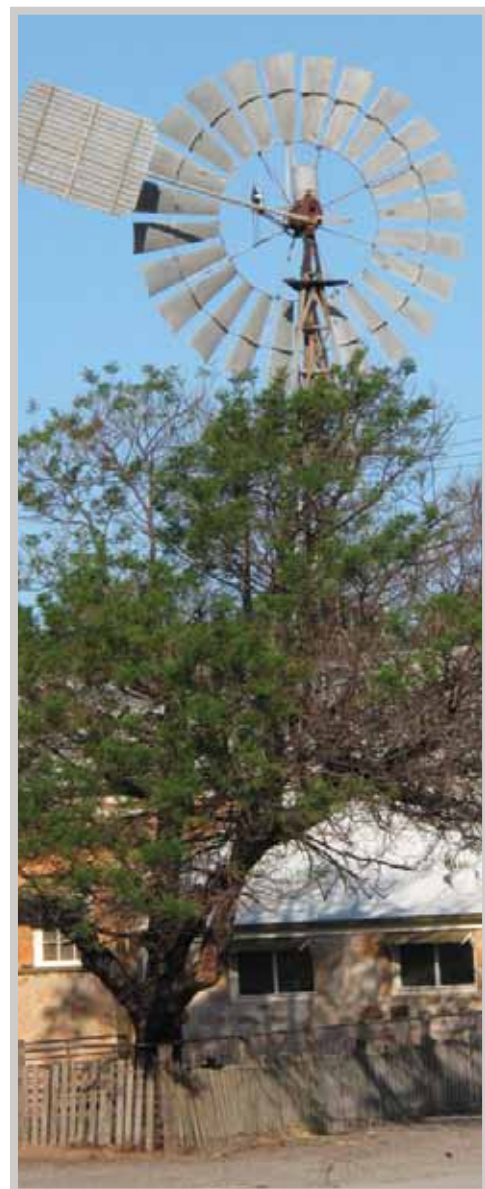
In many rural towns in Australia, it makes sense for churches to work together. While there are some differences in styles of worship, these are often not particularly significant to local people, except where the Eucharist has centrality in worship. As people engage in mission together they are able to accomplish much more than they can apart. In many places, the ecumenical support of school chaplains is evidence of this.

On the other hand, ecumenical partnerships may sometimes limit the available options for people in the local community and the formation of ecumenical partnerships can lead to some people dropping out of the life of the church. If, on the other hand, ecumenical partnerships are made not just to enable current models of ministry to survive a little longer, but for resources to be given to fresh expressions of ministry alongside the present options, then they can enhance the overall ministry of the church.

The Future

Rural ministry is about the spiritual wellbeing of individuals and of the community as a whole. It is about bringing the traditions of faith to bear on community life. While some places are deeply involved in providing care and compassion, resourcing and the practical assistance to the community, other Anglican churches are preoccupied with the Sunday service and the maintenance of the building. As a result, in many places, ministry is failing to connect with the spirit of the rural people.

The future of rural ministry depends on re-connecting with the spirituality of rural people. There are many small signs of this happening. But there are also some hindrances. In many places, people are waiting, hoping that people will come back to church. The models of leadership and organisation in the future will be those that take the church out into the community. They will take with them the traditions of faith, but will build new communities of faith as new generations respond to God’s Spirit.



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