**Minster Community Formation Proposal: Guidance for the Coordinating Group**

The Coordinating Group is tasked with writing the Minster Community Formation Proposal. This proposal emerges from the work done by individual churches and Working Groups, through discernment and discussion.

The Proposal is a foundational document for the Minster Community. It is more than a description – it is a statement of intent. It forms the basis for each PCC to formally decide to be part of this Minster Community. In doing so, each church is signing up to this understanding of who you are and commit to where you are going.

The Proposal will inform the work of the Minster Community Ministry Team and will be returned to within your first Minster Community review, which takes place after approximately 12-18 months.

The over-arching question for those crafting the Minster Community proposal is:

How well does this proposal enable and equip people to respond to our 3 Key Questions: how are you growing numbers of disciples, how are you growing in depth of discipleship, how are you growing in loving service of the world?

**The Minster Community 2A in Formation**

*This is a foundational document that will be returned to within your first Minster Community review (after approximately 12-18 months). It is more than a description – it is a statement of intent. PCCs are asked to sign up to this understanding of who we are and commit to where we are going.*

*A summary of this document may be produced for local use, but the PCC needs to vote on this full proposal.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Process: highlight current stage  | Date   |
| In local development  |   |
| First draft for PCC and Joint Archdeaconry Mission Committee consideration and feedback  |   |
| Final version for PCC commitment and Joint Archdeaconry Mission Committee consideration and recommendation to the Bishop and Trustee Board.   |   |
| Final version progresses for consideration and approval by the Bishop and Trustee Board  |   |

**INTRODUCTION TO AND SUMMARY OF INFORMATION AND COMMENTS AVAILABLE TO MINSTER 2A COORDINATING GROUP FROM STORYBOARDS, CONVERSATION PROMPTS AND OPEN MEETINGS FOR CHURCHES IN PROPOSED MINSTER COMMUNITY 2A,**

**to be read in conjunction with separate formal summary of proposal:**

The proposal is that, subject to agreement by individual PCCs, the parishes and associated church schools listed below under Heading 1, will form a Minster Community [MC], currently known as 2A.

Parishioners in the relevant churches will be invited to suggest to the Coordinating Group a formal name for the MC, the ultimate decision resting with the Bishop.

The 2A Coordinating Group notes that the Minster Community initiative was approved by Diocesan Synod in response to financial pressures in the diocese and a desire to better equip local churches for ministry and mission in a rapidly changing culture and society.

The proposal is intended to show how the clergy, churches and congregations in the proposed MC may be enabled and equipped to respond to the Diocese’ 3 key questions:

* How are you growing numbers of disciples?
* How are you growing in depth of discipleship?
* How are you growing in loving service of the world?

The intention is that the different churches, their stipendiary and other clergy [non-stipendiary and other PtO], lay ministers, church officers and other members of the congregation should support one another in providing worship, pastoral care, outreach and community engagement across the proposed MC, in collaboration with church schools, other Christian denominations and other local Christian organisations and initiatives.

There are a number of strengths and opportunities in the proposed MC, which should be recognised and capitalised on in addition to recognising difficulties, anxieties and challenges.

The A42 runs north to south through or in close proximity to many of the above parishes, facilitating ease of independent transport around the MC, although it should be noted that public transport links are poor.

There is a diversity of styles of worship and theological perspectives within the proposed MC and a recognition of there being no “one size that fits [or should fit] all”.

There are several church primary schools across the proposed MC and a focus on engagement with schools and other work with children, young people and famiies is a key mission objective for the proposed MC.

There is also a considerable amount of new building in several areas of the proposed MC, providing potential opportunities for outreach.

The development of existing team ministries in recent years has shown that, with time, thought, effort, creativity, mutual tolerance, prayer and ensuring that voices of all congregations, including the smaller ones are heard and respected, people are willing and prepared to think outside of the boundaries of their own parishes.

Currently the finances of the proposed MC just cover the cost of 4 stipendiary clergy.

There is a considerable amount of active lay ministry and activity, both licensed and non-licensed, across the proposed MC, including leading and preaching at Sunday services, leading small groups, pastoral care, taking a lead on or otherwise engaged with various community-based social and missional activities and supporting initiatives relating to our numerous buildings.

These and other factors, detailed below, suggest to the coordinating group that the proposed MC 2A has opportunities to respond to the Diocese’ key questions as follows:

Capitalise on and further develop links with church schools as well as local authority maintained schools, many of which already have good relationships with local churches.

Develop strategies to engage with people moving into the new housing developments in many areas of the Minster Community.

Share expertise and collaborate in missional, evangelistic, pastoral and social engagement projects between churches in geographical proximity or which have expertise and experience in particular areas of ministry – as already happens within some of the team ministries. It is anticipated that this has the potential to enable development of depth of discipleship within churches and to lead to numerical growth, as well as service of our local communities and engagement in mission further afield.

Maintain the existing diversity between churches, in order to model the truth that unity does not mean that everyone should be the same or should find the same approach to worship to be helpful.

The coordinating group recognises that there are a number of challenges to the proposed MC which will need to be addressed; these are recognised and considered below, but include how a reduced number of stipendiary clergy could be deployed across the proposed MC area, the risks of clergy burn-out, the number of historic and listed buildings with their need for significant maintenance, predominantly elderly congregations and a limited pool of volunteers, many of whom are already undertaking many roles in church life and are likely to have limited additional time to contribute to other churches.

This document necessarily does not cover every project and initiative already in place across the proposed Minster Community, partly through lack of space and almost certainly because of incomplete information. There is no suggestion that anything that has been omitted is unimportant or irrelevant to the Minster Community and the Coordinating Group would welcome being made aware of anything that PCCs feel should be included.

*…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………*

**THE PROPOSED MINSTER COMMUNITY 2A IS:**

A group consisting of the following parishes, fresh expressions of church and church schools:

* Ashby and Breedon Team Ministry [informally, Flagstaff Family of Churches], comprising St Helen’s Ashby; Holy Trinity Ashby; St Mary’s Coleorton; St Mary and St Hardulph Breedon-on-the-Hill with Staunton Harold; St Matthew’s Worthington; All Saints Isley Walton.
* Benefice of St Edwards King and Martyr, Castle Donington and St Nicholas Lockington
* Parish of Christ the King, comprising St Margarets Blackfordby and St Stephen’s Woodville
* Woodfield Team of churches, comprising St Michael and all Angels Appleby Magna; St John’s Donisthorpe with Oakthorpe and Moira; St Lawrence Measham; Holy Trinity Normanton le Heath; Holy Rood Packington; St Bartholomew Snarestone; St Peter’s Swepstone.
* St Denys Ibstock and St John the Baptist Heather.
* Norton-Juxta-Twycross, currently part of the Woodfield Team has decided to join a different MC as better suiting its geographical links.

**Church-maintained Schools:**

Burton Road C of E Ashby

St Hardulph’s C of E Breedon

Viscount Beaumont C of E School Coleorton

Newbold C of E Primary School

Packington C of E Primary School

Snarestone C of E Primary School

St Margaret’s C of E Primary School Blackfordby

Measham C of E Primary School

Diseworth C of E Primary School?

St Edward’s C of E Primary School Castle Donington

St John Moore C of E Primary School, Appleby

St Denys’ C of E Infant School, Ibstock

There are, additionally, at least 12 other local-authority maintained primary schools and 4 secondary schools in the proposed MC area – 2 in Ashby, 1 in Ibstock and 1 in Castle Donington. There is also at least one special needs school [Lewis Charlton Learning Centre in Ashby]

Castle Donington and Lockington joined the proposed 2a MC when the neighbouring MC changed its composition, which would have left Castle Donington geographically isolated from other parishes in that MC, whereas it is contiguous with MC 2a. It should be noted that Castle Donington and Lockington belong to a different Deanery [Akeley East] from the other churches in the proposed MC [North West Leicestershire].

 No one has formally left the process during the facilitated discussions but some churches have been less engaged than others for various reasons.

**Rooting our formation as a Minster Community in prayer and theological reflection:**

Theological reflection through “Dwelling in the Word”, has been a key item in various meetings pertaining to the formation of the proposed MC, with attention focussing especially on Mark 4 vs 35 – 41 and Acts 6 vs 1-7.

**Comments on Mark have included**:

A feeling of being swamped and overwhelmed by the process, as the disciples felt swamped and overwhelmed by the storm.

Identifying with the disciples’ distress that Jesus seemed not to care about what was going on, but instead was asleep.

A need to trust and have faith that Jesus is capable of bringing peace and order to things beyond our control.

**Comments on Acts have included:**

The importance of tasks being shared out according to different skills and callings, rather than being kept to a limited number of people and that this was followed by God’s word continuing to spread and the number of disciples increasing.

The incumbent clergy in the proposed MC meet for discussion and prayer every 6 weeks. At a congregational level, there is the Rooted gathering in Castle Donington every 4th Sunday to which all parishes have been invited and which a few people have recently joined from across the proposed Minster Community. We suggest that further regular times of prayer across the MC are arranged in order that as many people as are willing can participate in discerning God’s intentions for our area.

These reflections have led us to conclude that our needs in a large and geographically dispersed area differ from those of a large town or city with a denser population and where the distances between churches, schools and community facilities within the MC are much shorter and that this will reflect on how the 4 stipendiary posts should be configured. The expectation of the Diocese is that there should be an Oversight Minister, whose role is described by the Diocese as:

* “an experienced, ordained leader who, along with the bishops, oversees the mission and ministry of the churches and worshipping communities in a Minster Community (MC). They will be commissioned across the MC as a whole and will be licensed to and rooted within one or more parishes within the MC. The OM collaborates with others to see that the MC is a partnership that shares ideas, ministry and workload. By enabling the ministry team, they will also ensure the MC offers traditionally appropriate worship, sacramental, pastoral and teaching provision across all its churches, fresh expressions and schools, thus encouraging growth in depth of discipleship, numbers of disciples, and loving service of the world.”

Our reflections have led us to conclude that the other stipendiary posts should be configured as follows:

* a growing faith minister with oversight of work with schools and other initiatives with children, youth and families
* a minister with oversight of mission and engagement with the new housing developments, including fresh expressions of worship.
* a minister who will have oversight regarding our buildings.

These are strategic roles and will involve liaising with, developing and enabling lay ministers and other members of congregations across the MC to deliver initiatives in these areas; it is neither feasible or appropriate that they will be directly involved with the majority of initiatives. It is important that these roles are understood as key to the delivery of the mission of the Minster Community.

Each minister will be rooted within one or more geographically-related areas in order to develop relationships with local communities and schools and have a sense of local needs and priorities, as well as feeling that they have a spiritual home, while working collaboratively together with the other stipendiary, PtO and lay ministers as a mutually supportive team.

**Growing in relationship together in the following ways:**

Growing in relationship across the proposed MC is at a very early stage and is mostly taking place through the organised facilitated events related to the development of the proposed MC.

For the proposed MC to be successful as a vehicle for Ministry and Mission, it will be necessary for it to be based on mutual trust, openness and respect for difference and to be rooted in godly relationships. These take time to build, as has been the experience within existing team ministries, and it remains the case that even in long-standing teams there may be continuing tensions and difficulties in maintaining a sense of unity and common identity.

As the proposed MC develops, the following are likely to promote growing in relationship [note several of these suggestions are already in place in some of the existing teams and can be further developed]:

* Arranging joint acts of worship, times of prayer, Lent and other study courses and social events.
* Arranging meetings between members of congregations who have specific roles [e.g Church Wardens, treasurers] or common interests [e.g. youth work, care of buildings, outreach]
* Learning from Castle Donington’s initiative and arranging visits between churches.
* Actively promoting and inviting members of other congregations to services and events.
* Ensuring that robust systems are set up within the proposed MC so that there is clarity about what clergy and church services are available, who is responsible for arranging services and that there is felt to be a reasonably fair and equitable distribution across the proposed MC.

The coordinating group believe that it makes no sense to put new or additional structures in place that would interrupt existing long-standing relationships within teams. Rather, any future arrangements should honour and build on the foundations already established. The proposed Minster Community has many different expressions of culture, theology, geography, socio-economic demographics, worshipping styles and preferences rooted in many years of tradition. It is vital that the minster community process does not “throw the baby out with the bathwater” and impose change that simply causes people to disengage from a local church setting that has been precious to them in both good and difficult times. Therefore, it is proposed that the foundation of the minster community process is rooted in joint prayer and worship which can be organised and led locally in line with local preferences but open to all to build relationships and trust.

**Engaging in this process together:**

The degree of engagement in the MC formation process is difficult to establish. The Conversation Prompts, now close to 18 months old, indicate a general willingness to engage in principle with the MC process. However, not all churches are actively engaged, some being unable to identify parish representatives to participate in the process. At a number of meetings, participants have consistently stated that they do not know, do not understand or do not feel informed about the process or how it is progressing. Even members of churches which have had clear processes for updating the PCC and congregation have stated their frustration over not knowing how things are going. This appears to be inherent in the model we have been asked to adopt, which is one of an on-going process of discernment as to how the proposed MC should take shape, and it is therefore not possible to give clear answers at present to many questions.

Anecdotally, there is a considerable amount of anxiety and even suspicion about the MC process which this lack of information does nothing to alleviate. Smaller churches are anxious that their already limited schedule of services will diminish further in a MC model and that their voices will be overshadowed by those of larger congregations. The larger churches have tended to express a willingness to engage with and share resources and expertise with smaller ones, but have also expressed concerns about how much their volunteers are already doing and that they may not be willing or able to take on more. Churches in vacancy tend to be hopeful that the process will lead to them having a consistent relationship with a minister.

Overall there is a concern that reduced numbers of stipendiary clergy will result in a falling-off of attendances at services and decline in both church members and income, especially as there will inevitably be less availability of clergy for Eucharistic services.

**OUR GEOGRAPHY AND CONTEXT:**

*2a. A summary of the insights that have emerged in relation to the geography and what this says about where you are now.*

These are the summary findings from the Geography and Context working party:

The area covered by the proposed MC is considerable, much of it is rural and is centred around 3 market towns [Populations in 2021: Ashby 16,491, Castle Donington 7,346, Ibstock 7,615]. Demographically it is a predominantly white area but with significant numbers of eastern Europeans, many of whom will have a RC background.

The parishes fall broadly into three groups according to size.

Holy Trinity Ashby has a worshipping community of around 120 and St Helen’s Ashby has a worshipping community of around 100.

Worshipping communities of around 60, includes St Edward’s Castle Donington, and Appleby Magna with Swepstone and Snareston.

Worshipping communities of around 30 with some of the smaller rural parishes such as Isley Walton and Lockington having fewer than 10.

The proposed MC includes 2 large benefices, one of 7 and one of 8 churches and 2 smaller benefices of only 2 churches each.

There are generally good road networks across the geographical area but poor public transport connections. The A42 connects many of the parishes, meaning it is relatively easy to move from one end of the community to the other by car but not by public transport.

Significant number of schools with which to engage, including several, predominantly church schools, in the small, rural communities [see separate section].

Significant new housing developments.

Substantial number of buildings to maintain [see separate section].

**Map of Minster Community 2A**



*Note that Staunton Harold is not included on this map; it is included in the parish of Breedon on the Hill but functions as an independent congregation.*

Elderly and geographically dispersed congregations, some in very small village settings. Very few churches have a regular cohort of under 18s and many have congregations aged entirely over 70.

Significant housing developments planned over the next 20 years, notably Isley Woodhouse with up to 4,500 new homes to the south of East Midland Airport and in Ashby, with associated new schools, businesses and community resources.

Parishes have historically been deeply rooted in their local community for worship and outreach.

*2b.* ***How could the challenges and opportunities identified in this data shape the future mission and ministry of your Minster Community?***

**Opportunities**

The rural parishes have significant cultural and geographical similarities and would benefit from sharing of resources and expertise – this could include faculty and grant applications, safeguarding oversight and development of lay-led and more diverse worship, with the potential to appeal to a broader age group, given the new housing developments which are likely to attract families and provide opportunities for engagement and outreach. The larger churches in Ashby and the other two towns are engaged both independently in various initiatives as well as working collaboratively with other churches and Christian organisations but it is envisaged that they will also share resources and expertise across the wider Minster Community.

Several churches in the group attract large numbers of weddings and baptisms because of their age and location, providing significant opportunities for community engagement.

The gradual withdrawal of shops, pubs and other community facilities from many rural locations provides opportunities for parish churches to rediscover a role at the heart of village life.

**Challenges**

Challenges include developing mutually supportive connections between the churches, noting how deeply rooted several of them are within their own local communities. The proposed Minster Community must take account of these strong senses of local identity as well as the constraints of geography and transport links and recognise that a model appropriate for a denser town or city population will need to be adapted for a rural community.

***2c. What steps need to be taken to reach this point? What questions remain?***

Recognise and ensure the rural culture is maintained with emphasis on local parish life for ministry and mission.

Potentially employing an admin resource to support faculty applications and grant funding across the MC.

Ensure that clergy and lay leadership are deployed in such a way as to meet the worship and mission needs of so many small rural parishes, some of which have large housing developments planned on their doorstep for the future.

Develop new opportunities for worship (Clergy and lay led) to appeal to a wider cohort of population not currently well-represented in existing expressions of worship.

**OUR DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION:**

***A summary of the work done by the Discipleship and Mission, New Communities and Growing Faith working groups.***

The current landscape of discipleship and mission within the Minster Community reflects both resilience and strain. While there is evidence of faithful engagement and creative adaptation post-COVID, the overall picture suggests a network of churches that are stretched, under-resourced, and in need of renewed strategic direction and support.

***Current Shape of Discipleship and Mission***

Post-COVID Recovery and Worship Patterns
The impact of Covid 19 left some churches with a continued reduction in attendance, although others have experienced growth both in usual Sunday services and also in a range of new expressions of worship such as Breakfast Church, Messy Church, and engagement with schools which are emerging as areas of growth. The rise in attendance at St Helen’s Choral Evensong, following its combination with a short concert, shows that creative liturgical combinations can attract new people.

A significant proportion of the initiatives described below are lay-led, with potential for greater lay leadership and involvement in several areas.

**Engagement and Outreach**There is a sense of willingness of strong community engagement across almost all churches, despite significant variation in resources and size. Outreach is often social in nature, it is fair to say that some churches struggle to move beyond social connection to intentional discipleship, maybe due to overstretched resources and ageing congregations or attitude to what discipleship means in our changing social environment.

**Midweek and Small Group Life**About half of the churches provide midweek groups, which offer valuable discipleship spaces. Still, participation is uneven, and there is an expressed need for more accessible, lay-led gatherings beyond Eucharistic services.

**School Connections**The working groups highlighted significant missional potential through school partnerships, particularly church schools and collaborative youth work.

**Spirituality and Worship Style**Worship across the Minster Community is typically “middle of the road,” with a blend of traditional and informal services. The primary worship offering remains Sunday Holy Communion, with additional services on festivals and occasional weekday gatherings.

**Challenges to Mission and Ministry**

Small, ageing congregations and reduced numbers of clergy

Over-reliance on small numbers of volunteers

Pressures of buildings maintenance diverting attention from spiritual growth

Clergy stretched over wider geographical areas

Lack of new worshipping communities as formally defined

No shared or structured pathway for growing discipleship beyond Sunday worship

**Reflections and Recommendations:**

***Strengths***

Strong existing community and school engagement, much of which is lay-led.

Creativity and innovation in some congregations (e.g., Breakfast Church)

Dedication of clergy and laity despite significant constraints

Deep local embeddedness of congregations in their communities

***Opportunities***

Develop lay leadership to reduce pressure on clergy and enable more frequent local discipleship

Establish shared mission hubs or pooled expertise across parishes to support initiatives like Alpha

Streamline governance and building management, allowing congregations to focus on people over property

Enhance relationships with non-church schools to broaden reach

Create more flexible forms of worship and gathering, especially in lay-led formats

***Challenges***

Balancing maintenance and mission, particularly with heritage buildings

Supporting clergy well-being and realistic workload expectations

Encouraging collaboration across PCCs to prevent duplication and share successful models

Ensuring fair and meaningful access to Holy Communion and sacramental ministry in every community

**Conclusion**

This appraisal highlights a Minster Community where faithful witness continues under strain, but where the seeds of hopeful renewal are visible. To sustain and grow discipleship and mission:

A realignment of priorities is needed—less focus on survival and more on Spirit-led growth.

Recognising the strategic importance of the 4 stipendiary roles within the MC and ensuring that the post-holders have adequate time to develop these responsibilities and provide direction and training to those implementing local initiatives.

Diocesan-level support in training, resources, and collaborative planning could make a critical difference.

Crucially, lay involvement must be empowered—not simply to plug gaps, but to fully share in the ministry and mission of the Church.

**SCHOOLS**

***(A summary of how schools are engaged in the leadership and missional life of this Minster Community. Identify any key opportunities and challenges. What are the next steps?)***

* There have been no discussions to date between the coordinating group and the various church schools in the proposed Minster Community. However, clergy are represented on all church school governing bodies, as are some members of local congregations and there is significant engagement with schools both C of E and secular across the proposed Minster Community. ***It should be a major priority for the MC to build on these existing relationships.*** This should include continuing to develop ministry by both clergy and lay people going into schools and also developing opportunities for families and young people to engage in church life and appropriate expressions of worship outside schools as a discipleship priority. Reconciling this with the tradition and preference for services of Holy Communion within several of our churches may not be straightforward, but if the Minster Community is to grow (in numbers) then new expressions of worship that fit culturally with young people and families will need to be developed and prioritised to build on the work that is already being developed in schools. Some parishes may, therefore, need to see a reduction in numbers of services of Holy Communion in order to free up clergy to lead other forms of worship in which they can engage and build relationships with a younger population who might be more likely otherwise to commute to services in other localities or denominations.
* It is relevant to note that several schools are already part of networks which don’t coincide largely with the MC. Eg Breedon is part of the ‘Be Skilled’ network which includes schools from across all the other MCs in Area 2. Viscount Beaumont is part of RISE so there is no Governing Board there but a Committee and RISE extends beyond our MC.
* An important anecdotal observation is that among people who particularly value Eucharistic services, there is a tendency not to attend non-Eucharistic services, especially those aimed at children, young people and families. This can influence the extent to which those coming to these services feel welcomed and integrated into the wider life of the church and depletes missional and discipleship opportunities. It would be constructive to encourage congregations to see church services not just as means for their own spiritual encouragement and blessing but also as missional opportunities through building welcoming relationships by attending services that may be outside of their usual preference.
* There is scope to further develop existing initiatives such as Open the Book, visits of Key Stage 1 and 2 children to churches as part of the National Curriculum, Messy Church and Breakfast Church and for expertise and experience to be shared across the proposed MC. Within Ashby the expectation is that existing collaboration with Ashby Youth for Christ will continue, especially in developing links with the secondary schools and supporting their out-of-school activities.
* In developing the Minster Community, it will be essential to clarify the extent of existing relationships between the schools and the parish churches with which they are linked. Head teachers and representatives from the Boards of Governors will then need to be involved in discussions about how the Minster Community proposals might relate to them, what they can contribute to the development of the Minster Community and how they can be active participants in its leadership and mission.

**OUR MINISTRY:**

***(A summary of the insights that have emerged from People and Ministry element of the Storyboards, Conversation Prompts and relevant Working Groups.***

 Limited information was available from the storyboards and conversation prompts, given that it was almost a year old, may no longer be accurate and the forms were completed differently by each parish or church. It has been difficult to clarify exactly where non-stipendiary clergy and others with PtO as well as licensed lay ministers might minister across the patch, including what they are prepared to do, with what frequency and where. .

To the best of the knowledge of the working group, there will be the following ministers in the proposed MC from June 2025 onwards

Stipendiary clergy 4

Clergy with PtO – number to be confirmed.

Lay Ministers 9

Locally appointed minister 1

Unlicensed lay worship leaders

Vergers 2

Paid administrators 1 part time [+1 part-time vacancy]?

Other ministries/initiatives represented across the proposed MC, the majority of which are lay-led and some of which include or are led by other denominations, include pastoral care [including locally commissioned pastoral care teams], Open the Book, small groups, Alpha courses, children and youth work, choirs and worship groups, social media pages, café church, warm spaces/drop-in venues, CAP, food bank, Street Pastors, heritage activities, eco-church groups, an allotment and knowledge and expertise regarding IT, PA systems, grant applications and buildings. This is not an exhaustive list.

A number of churches within the proposed MC are open during the day for visitors and for prayer; the need for a safe and sacred space is clearly something widely valued.

Occasional offices, in terms of baptisms, weddings and funerals provide considerable opportunities to develop relationships with the local communities, not just with the key participants but with guests from within the local area.

The churches in Ashby, especially St Helen’s [as the “town” church] include a considerable amount of civic ministry and strong relationships with the town and other local councils. This includes an annual civic service, being a presence at commemorations such as VE Day, Remembrance events in town as well as in church and being the venue for significant funerals, all of which contribute to building relationships and providing missional opportunities within the town. Inevitably, people look to the clergy to be the face of the local church at these events.

Despite these multiple activities, several churches are lacking people in key roles, especially Church Wardens and Treasurers. It should also be noted that there is a tendency for the same people to be involved with many of these activities, that the majority are elderly, some feel burned out and therefore cannot be relied upon to continue to support these ministries in the longer-term. Many volunteers are also sufficiently stretched within their own churches that they have limited time to provide input or support to other churches.

This is consistent with the fact that all voluntary organisations, not just the church, are experiencing reduced numbers and availability of volunteers – this can be attributed to a number of factors, including aging congregations, the fact that younger and abler retired people often have responsibilities towards grandchildren, aging relatives or just want to explore other interests. It is no longer the case that a significant number of women of working age are based at home.

Resourcing a large number of churches and parishes with a reduced number of ministers, especially stipendiary clergy, presents a number of overlapping challenges:

* It is important that churches are able to retain their individual identities in a MC – clergy and lay ministers will need to be able and willing to work readily across different liturgical traditions and worship styles. It is important that all voices, including the smallest congregations, can be heard in MC discussions.
* Providing regular Eucharistic worship will be a significant challenge under the proposed MC model, given the reduced numbers of clergy. This will impact especially on some of the smaller congregations who particularly value services of Holy Communion. It will also be a significant challenge to provide Eucharistic services widely at major festivals, especially at Christmas and Easter. The fact that only clergy can preside at Eucharistic services reduces the availability of clergy to be present at other strategic services, e.g. all age services [note that intergenerational worship is a Diocesan priority].
* There are likely to be significant challenges around engagement under the proposed MC model. Reduced frequency of services, with many churches already having only one service per month, tends to lead to reduced engagement overall and subsequent falling membership and loss of income. As well as less frequent services, changes in service pattern, such as a reduction in Communion services can also contribute to reduced engagement – for example, during a recent period of vacancy in the Flagstaff Family, it was noted that attendance at services was significantly lower when Morning Prayer had to be substituted for Holy Communion. There is also a significant risk of resentment over being expected to contribute to the expected parish share if services are infrequent.
* The fact that clergy will be involved with additional churches for Sunday services as well as with their administration and pastoral care will reduce their opportunities to be involved with outreach, evangelism and social initiatives.
* The impact on clergy well-being may well be significant, with them being less rooted in a home congregation and with increased numbers of services to be led, as well as additional PCC meetings, pastoral care and administration across multiple parishes, especially where there are no church wardens. There is a very high risk of clergy burn-out, especially as the C of E is structured in such a way as to be dependent on clergy, both legally and in terms of congregational and non-church-goers’ expectations. Clergy need to be spiritually fed and nurtured, as much as their congregations do.
* Lay ministers may also find themselves less rooted in a home congregation if they are expected to take services across a wider number of churches.
* Existing licensed lay ministers are not necessarily prepared to act as “focal ministers” within churches and it is far from clear that there are enough people within the proposed MC who are willing and able to take on this role, which is described as “leading across worship, pastoral care, discipleship and community engagement, and develop the sharing of leadership with others by enabling the ministry of all and connecting the church with the community.”
* There is a risk of reduced connection and consequent lack of understanding and shared vision between ministers [ordained and lay] and congregations if a minister does not have the opportunity to build up on-going relationships with members of the congregation.
* Covering baptisms, weddings and funerals will become increasingly difficult to manage for local clergy – reliance on clergy with PtO reduces opportunities for outreach and building local relationships by parish clergy.
* There are significant theological differences across our proposed MC, with a Society Church and widely disparate views on Living in Love and Faith which have the potential to lead to tensions and difficulties and are likely to need sensitive handling by the future oversight minister.
* The question must be addressed as to whether we can or should sustain so many small congregations meeting in high-maintenance buildings.

**The following suggestions may help to address some of these concerns:**

* For centuries the C of E has functioned on a parochial model with a local building and priest as its focus, and this is ingrained into our understanding of church. There needs to be development of a clear vision of how the proposed MC2A can function well as an integrated community of parishes and what is the nature of its mission, so that this can be communicated clearly to our congregations and enable them to have a perspective that is wider than the traditional parish model with less reliance on clergy and more recognition of the potential of lay leadership, whether licensed or unlicensed.
* Working well together and across historic parish or team boundaries will not “just happen” and will take time, thought, effort, creativity, mutual tolerance and prayer. Building relationships is likely to be more constructive than merely holding team services, at least initially. Suggestions for this could include arranging joint meetings for wardens, members of current ministry teams, treasurers and those involved in youth work, in order to share experience and expertise and identify ways of working together. Social events can also have a key part to play.
* Appropriate training and encouragement for laity to become more confident in areas such as leading worship, children’s and youth work, leading discipleship groups and pastoral care.
* Counter-intuitively, it may be worth considering increasing the number of services in some churches which have only 1 service per month and adding a lay-led non-Eucharistic service. Even though most of these smaller congregations prefer a Eucharistic service, it is inevitably the case that congregations get smaller [and giving reduces] when there are fewer services. The style of these additional services should be adapted to individual situations.
* Consideration of the most appropriate days, times, schedules and frequency of services, especially those aimed at families and young people, for whom Sunday mornings, or any time on Sunday, may not be the best alternative.
* A number of our churches are open daily for visitors and for prayer – consider how this could be developed into more of a missional opportunity with appropriate literature and signage to encourage reflection and engage with questions about Christian faith, also consider having volunteers present at times to welcome and engage with visitors.
* Thought to be given to streamlining admin to reduce the burden on clergy – e.g. consider formally combining Parochial Church Councils in some settings or have PCCs working together on similar issues, training more people to apply for faculties. Consideration should be given to employing an administrator to relieve some of this burden.
* Although the 4 stipendiary posts will have specific areas of strategic responsibility, the large area and dispersed communities of the proposed MC necessitate that clergy will still need to have strong geographical links, in order to understand local needs and develop personal relationships with local schools and communities.
* Consideration of some smaller churches becoming Festival Churches. This would reduce the number of regular services held in these churches, with associated reduced weekly burden on clergy, although it should be noted that many potential Festival Churches are already having only 1 service per month. It would also facilitate these churches better tailoring their services and other activities to the local communities which they serve. However, responsibility for governance and administration, including care and conservation of the buildings and grant applications would remain with the PCC and incumbent, who would also retain pastoral responsibility. There would be a necessity for sufficient numbers of motivated volunteers from these churches and their communities to take the Festival Church initiative forward and organizing this would be, itself, a demanding piece of work.

**OUR FINANCES:**

***(A summary of the insights related to parish finances and Parish Contribution that have emerged from the Finance and Generosity element of the Storyboards, Conversation Prompts and from the relevant Working Groups. What is your financial sustainability plan? Have you factored in inflation and what this means for the cost of ministry in the next coming years? How will financial responsibility for ministry be shared across the Minster Community? What are the next steps?)***

The only financial data available to the Coordinating group on finances is parish contribution and it is recognised that this is not necessarily a reflection of parish income, but simply forms a basis for developing a Minster community budget that works across the group longer term. Looking at the Contributions for Minster group A, it would appear that currently there is just enough money available to cover 4 Full Time Stipendiary Posts, assuming the approx. cost per post is £64K, and a total parish contribution available of £249K. At the moment there are 4 stipendiary clergy posts across the Community, with a worshipping community of 783 people.

Not surprisingly the larger contributions to Parish Share come from the larger Parishes Ashby Holy Trinity, Ashby St Helens, Castle Donington St Edwards and particularly Packington (relative to the size of their worshipping community) who have historically had a financial stewardship scheme in place.

Combining all the available data the average contribution of parish share works out at £282/per year, which is an average contribution of £5.40 per member of each worshipping community per week.

There are some churches where the contribution is significantly higher than this figure, and some where it is significantly lower. If those parishes contributing less than the average were to meet the average contribution, it could result in an extra £23.4K of finance becoming available. If this could be addressed over the coming years it could be used to support the ongoing increasing costs of supporting clergy due to inflation.

[These are indicative figures and, given that some churches only have services once per month and others have more than one every week, it may be reasonable to adjust these figures to take this into account.]

These figures need to be validated by local PCC’s because they could be significantly out of data given that the data on size of worshipping community is several years old now. Therefore it is requested that PCC’s review the data and provide any updates to get a better understanding of numbers, and in particular the data for Lockington, Blackfordby and Woodville which currently is missing.

Note, there has been an agreement over the past few years between St Helen’s Ashby, Coleorton, Breedon, Staunton Harold and Isley Walton that they would aim to cover the cost of one stipend. Clarification is needed as to whether similar agreements may apply elsewhere across the proposed MC.

It is proposed that the existing contributions to parish share be maintained and for those parishes contributing less to increase their share over the next five years to support the 4 paid posts.

Annual budgets should be prepared by Treasurers for each PCC and agreed by PCC Treasurers coming together to plan and agree finances for the coming years. This is one important way in which parishes can support each other financially, ensuring the costs of maintain clergy are covered and bearing in mind other local priorities around maintaining buildings and supporting mission.

Additional means of generating income and managing inflation could include the following:

Encourage general adoption of the Parish Giving Scheme across the proposed MC. This provided automatic increase of donations in line with inflation unless the donor opts out.

Encourage Gift Aid on donations.

Regular/annual teaching on generosity and giving coupled with information on the actual costs of supporting clergy and other expenses involved in running and maintaining church buildings and activities. This could include putting in context the expected contribution per person to the parish share, e.g. by comparing it to the cost of take-away coffee, a bottle of wine or membership of a gym. Parishes will need to understand that despite local expenses, e.g. care of buildings, insurance, payment of utilities, if the costs of 4 clergy cannot be met across the MC, the number of stipendiary clergy will be reduced.

Identifying a range of mechanisms by which visitors can donate such as Sum-Up machines or display of QR codes.

Actively promoting local fund-raising events across the wider MC.

Encouraging members of congregations to consider leaving legacies in their Wills.

Lobby the Church Commissioners to release more funding for parishes.

**OUR BUILDINGS:**

***(A summary of the understanding and insights related to church buildings that have emerged from the Buildings element of the Storyboards, Conversation Prompts and from the relevant Working Groups.***

Across the Minster Community there are 18 buildings, all of which are listed either Grade 1 , Grade 11\* or Grade 11. Some of which are on the Heritage at risk register and some of which are classed as in poor condition based in the latest QI report. Whilst the QI costs of repair are very much an estimate, the total repair costs could be as much as £2.4M which is completely unachievable for the communities using the buildings without significant input from grant application all of which take substantial resource for no guaranteed outcome. Parishes continue to have to choose between funding clergy or funding building maintenance.

There is considerable expertise within the proposed MC with regard to maintaining listed buildings, applying for faculties and applying for grants, with potential for support between churches. However, the burden of work overall is such that most churches will find it unmanageable; note comments above [2c] regarding appointment of an administrator.

Maintaining church grounds puts an additional demand on both clergy and PCCs, especially open churchyards, as only incumbents are permitted to sign off applications. PCCs are responsible for mowing the grass and other aspects of maintaining open churchyards, which can be a significant drain on finances.

The Coordinating Group has not addressed the question of whether or which church buildings should be considered for closure, but this is will become an inevitable discussion at some point in the future.

**ANY OTHER SIGNIFICANT INSIGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE IMPACTING, OR WILL IMPACT, THE FORMATION OF THIS MINSTER COMMUNITY:**

***(An opportunity to briefly share anything else of significance that would be helpful for others to know as they read and consider this proposal. For example, this might include any work already started on shared governance (e.g. Joint Church Council). If you have particular areas of the Minster Community formation proposal that you would like feedback on, please identify your specific questions here.)***

* The complexity and magnitude of he proposed re-organisation into a Minster Community has inevitably meant that there is considerable repetition in this document, as similar points are relevant under several headings.
* There are a number of issues which cannot be resolved by the coordinating group. These include:
* How stipendiary clergy will be deployed and licenses configured across the proposed MC and which requires discussion between the clergy and Archdeacon. This includes who will be legally responsible for parishes currently in vacancy, pending formation of the MC [currently some of the churches in the Woodfield Team, Ibstock and Heather, Blackfordby and woodville].
* How appointments to future vacancies will be managed, for example, will individual parishes have any say in who is to be appointed as their named minister, how will patronage be addressed?
* What will be the relationship between the Minster Community and the 2 Area Deaneries which it straddles? The current Area Dean for MC 2A is based in MC 2B. It would seem logical for the Deaneries to be brought into alignment with the Minster Communities when possible.

**SAFEGUARDING**

Within a Minster Community, the incumbent and PCC responsibilities for safeguarding remain with each individual parish. However, there are valuable opportunities to work together to support and strengthen safeguarding practices across the wider community.

All churches should have a designated safeguarding officer and ensure that their policies and practices align with Diocesan templates and expectations. It is recommended that safeguarding officers from all parishes in the proposed Minster Community meet periodically to:

Share good practice

Discuss training and resource needs

Support one another in complex or emerging safeguarding situations

Coordinate joint initiatives where appropriate

In smaller congregations, it may be beneficial for safeguarding officers to serve across more than one parish to ensure adequate support and consistency. This also creates opportunities for mentoring and developing new safeguarding officers, which will help build long-term resilience in safeguarding provision.

These collaborative efforts will not only help maintain robust safeguarding standards, but also foster a shared commitment to nurturing a healthy church culture where everyone—especially the most vulnerable—feels safe, valued, and heard.

**LIST OF OTHER REPORTS AND DATA AVAILABLE:**

***(E.g. include reports produced by Working Groups, supporting data sheets or other key documents that have informed this proposal. These will be made available on request for those who would find it useful to see the detail.)***

 Data sheet on combined finances for the Minster Community

**This proposal has been developed by the Coordinating Group:**

*(list members and their parish/benefice/fxc/church plant/school role)*

Plan to fill this in on thusday when we meet

For final draft/version only:

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| --- | --- |
| PCC / fxc / church plant / school  | Formal vote result and date  |
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