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**Focal Ministry**

**An exploration of the nature of focal ministry.**

**September 2022**

**Theological Reflection**

*‘He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.’ (Ephesians 4:11-13. NRSV)*

The Church exists as **universal and local** –a real expression of the body of Christ in the local congregation as part of the wider church. In the Church of England, this is expressed through the mission communities, through parishes, chaplaincies and other expressions which together make present the life of Christ in a diocese, incarnationally in their particular places.

In the Church of England, we are already seeing increasing variety in church worship, structure and leadership (both ordained and lay). Being both rooted and reactive, these are local expressions of the Church’s commitment to place, to community and its **mission to serve and reach all locally with the good news of God’s love in Christ.**

The model of ministry we have inherited in shared memory of *‘one parish, one church, one Vicar’* has been key to the Church of England’s distinctive approach to mission and ministry. **This is no longer sustainable in its ‘remembered’ form**[[1]](#footnote-1) and this presents us with both challenge and opportunity. Most parishes already share, or will soon share, their incumbent with at least one other, changing something of the shape of that presence and ministry whilst affirming its nature.

Pastorally, most would agree that congregations benefit from the continuity and presence of a key church leader. Complex patterns of congregational attendance, combined with incumbents leading multiple churches, make the role of a **person who ‘holds the continuity’** crucial. This identifiable leader, who is in touch with pastoral need and can identify resources and new mission opportunities, has been linked with Church growth potential in research and on the ground.

The inspiration for **Focal Ministry is grounded firmly in our remembered tradition,** in a desire for growth and mission in local churches, and is a key part of our vision for Mission Communities. Recognising the variety of peripatetic ministries seen in the New Testament and early church, Focal Ministry is a complementary, settled pastoral ministry rooted in a specific community affirming the local and wider church in leadership and structure. The role is grounded in both our tradition and in our future together.

**Focal ministry is bold and different.** It is not simply a matter of, *filling the clergy gaps* - it is a courageous response to the call to be ‘church for a new world’. With contextual variance, the focal leader (clerical or lay) will embody the local, faithful and committed presence of Church and will endeavour to ensure that the voice of each local church is heard and valued, contributing to the vision and mission of the wider church being lived out locally, alongside others doing the same in each Mission Community.

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper aims to set out further clarification of the nature of focal ministry, drawing on the work of the Focal Ministry Task Group, current research and conversations on the ground.

Understanding of focal ministry emerges from a theological and ecclesial base as expressed in the Theological Reflection. It is also unashamedly contextual, and the tension between what is common and what is to be determined contextually, is reflected below. This document reflects some of theological considerations behind the shape of focal ministry as it was an important part of the process.

What follows is in anticipation of the outworking of detail, process and issues arising. An outward facing information leaflet will be produced at a later date.

**What’s in a name?**

This paper refers to the generality of **‘focal ministry’** and the individual role of **‘focal leader’**. This is in recognition of both the focal role as located with a person and that focal ministry is open-ended and highly contextual. The terminology reaffirms that although all are called, some are called to specific ministries. As complimentary expressions they reflect a variance of terms already in use on the ground adding definition to these, whilst also affirming previous use.

**Who the focal leader might be, what they might do and other considerations at this stage in the process, are given further shape below.**

**Focal ministry is**

* Focal ministry is **a new way of working, building on our remembered tradition**, to release missional agency and new energy into our churches, to enable more ministry *‘as we would want to’* in the present and to seek out new opportunities and ways of working for the future. It is a*‘commissioned and accountable service’* **[[2]](#footnote-2)**
* Focal ministry should be viewed with reference to **role** and not to ecclesial status. A focal leader is the personal focus of a broader open-ended ministry, with a variety of expressions locally. As with the Kingdom, *it is a now but not yet* – a work grounded in what we have, but looking forward to where and how we want to be.
* Theidentified focal leader may **be someone at any level of authorised ministry or none,** and there will potentially be one for every worshipping community or ministry.
* Identified focal leaders will have some **gifts and calling in common, but focus and skills in difference.**

**Focal Ministry is not**

* **A way of affirming or dissolving perceived clerical/lay difference.**

Focal ministry is best viewed as opportunity to encourage new involvement, releasing clergy and laity alike – collaboratively for mission, service and growth.

* **The elevation of some gifts over others.**

Focal ministry is a collaborative commitment to the expression of Kingdom values within local place, acknowledging that all receive gifts from the abundance of God’s generosity, for the good of the Church.

* **An implication that remembered patterns and ministerial structures have failed.**

Focal ministry is an element of our transformation journey. It is determined action towards reinvigoration of God’s church: relieving those who are overburdened, releasing more leaders and identifying new missional ministry – affirming what we have yet acknowledging realistically that some things have, of necessity and as re-balance, to change.

* **An aspiring cleric role**

Focal ministry isrooted in a conviction of the ministry of the whole people of God within which call and gifts will be different, but complimentary and necessary for the flourishing of all.

**Who might be a focal leader?**

As a role and not an ecclesial office, focal leadership may be taken on by anyone, lay or clerical. At a time of encouragement to all God’s people to consider afresh their own calling and place in God’s church, focal ministry affirms existing activity and the hope of drawing others into new roles, *‘with a distinct focus on growing, nurturing and serving the wider parish community’* (ALM selection criteria).

The following discussion clarifies the personal profile of focal leaders, the role and considerations surrounding discernment, training, support and review mechanisms. Where possible, a move has been made to clarify sufficiently to enable moving forward whilst leaving some elements more open, to reflect both the fixed and the flexible, contextual nature of the role.

**Who chooses?**

The identification of potential focal leaders will primarily sit with incumbents along with Mission Community leaders, in discussion with key players in church communities and PCCs, whose local knowledge will be crucial in encouraging people to see themselves in this role.

Candidates for focal leadership roles may be obvious or need further teasing out, and where necessary, this will be done with reference to and support from Area Deans, and Lay Chairs.

Whilst Focal Leaders are being identified DTSOs, ALMs, Churchwardens, and Readers will also *‘play key roles in supporting the Mission Community formation and developing Mission Community* plans’ (Mission Community Guidance 22). In line with the ethos of focal ministry, whilst the role may be taken by a cleric or those already in any of the above roles initially, the ultimate goal over time, will be **to raise up someone new or into new areas**. The action of the Mission Community will be to cover all the roles and functions necessary in their locality and consideration of where the needs and gaps are at present should be influential in the appointment of a focal leader.

**What might a focal leader look like?**

The profile of a focal leader may be defined personally in terms of ***Foundational characteristics*** and ***Particular gifts*** and, in role, in terms of ***Core ministry*** and ***Particular ministries.***

**Foundational characteristics and core ministries** will be to some extent already identifiable in a potential candidate whereas particular gifts are potentially endlessly varied. Some particular gifts are clearly visible within the foundational characteristics outlined below and represent particular and visible outworking of those.

**Particular ministries** emerge from the combination of gifts and identified local character and needs. A focal leader may have other ministries in addition to the focal ministry role, or may concentrate solely on this area. At the end of their time as the focal leader, although this role will cease, potentially particular ministries may continue.

**Focal Leader: Personal foundational characteristics**

The focal leader will be **someone who loves God:**

* A person **passionate about their own faith**, committed to discipleship – their own and that of others, a life-long learner, whatever their stage of faith based on the understanding that discipleship is the foundation for ministry.
* A person who is able to talk about what their faith means to them, and to **draw others in** to the conversation.
* A person who is baptised and confirmed, or in preparation for.
* A person who is prayerful, with a personal spirituality pattern and who has a desire to ***‘join in with what God is doing’***
* Someone who takes seriously the importance of their own spiritual growth.

The focal leader will be **someone who loves their church:**

* Someone who is **faithful** and regular in public worship and private prayer and able to collaborate with other church and community leaders.
* A people-person who can relate to others, someone to whom others gravitate. A **trusted and respected member** of the worshipping community.
* A team player, who is collegiate and collaborative. A person who has potential rather than necessarily a track record. Someone able to see potential in others and to encourage, enthuse and enable others in teams within their worshipping community. **A leader by example.**
* Someone grounded within their church community, who values the beliefs and structures of the Anglican Church and also **open to new possibility**.
* Someone who can ***‘hold the continuity’*** in Church life, who is respected and known by congregation and leadership, and willing to take on the privilege of being the **visible *‘face’* of church** in the community.
* Someone who, within the wider Mission Community vision, **can be the voice of their congregation** and ensure that its distinctive character is celebrated.
* Someone aware of the need for pastoral care and mission – who acknowledges the **need for welcome, love and care** for all in ways which reflect the Gospel.
* Someone who has an expectation that all should and can **grow in discipleship** and enthusiasm to see this happen.

The focal leader will be **someone who loves their local community:**

* Someone who has **deep roots locally** and realistically understands their community.
* Someone **who is able to make links between their faith and the world** beyond church.
* Someone **whose faith ‘spills over’** into daily life and is enthusiastic about church – and aware of the potential of its place within the community.
* Someone able to **make and maintain relationships** between different areas of local life.

**Focal Leader Role: Core and particular ministries**

The role of the focal leader will potentially be as different as our churches and local areas and is dependent on individual specialist gifts, church context, local character and identified needs.

The identified focal leader designate may be ideally placed for identified missional areas, have the core gifts necessary and willing to undertake further training (to be identified) in order to grow more fully into the new role. This may include for example, transference of life skills/ training into a missional environment – such as head teacher into gathering ministry teams together – or small business owner into church finance and governance.

**Core ministries**

* **To facilitate others** whilst setting a standard as a role model
* To be committed to being the recognised face of Church – to be the first port of call, inside and out, and to be a contributing **member of the Mission Community leadership team.**
* To be the **‘go-to-person’** but to acknowledge that this does not correspond to doing everything by oneself.
* To be **present and contribute** to main church Services and other events. To be involved in PCC but not necessarily chair.
* To **encourage** the worshipping community in growing, nurturing and serving, and to **enable** others.
* To encourage others in their discipleship.
* To be serious about, but generous with, responsibility! To **lead lightly**, enabling others in taking responsibility and building teams.
* To **encourage others in mission**.
* To be appropriately **collaborative** in as many ways as possible

**Particular ministries**

Particular ministry/ ministries will be context specific both to persons involved, church and local community and will involve a discernment process involving the Focal leader, Incumbent, PCC, the Mission Community Leader and any other key players in the life of the worshipping community. These may represent current church involvement or alignment with an identified mission opportunity.

In any church, unique combinations of gifts, skills, time and missional need will contribute to shape a realistic **person-centred focus of ministry** agreed by the Mission Community leader, focal leader and PCC articulated in a working agreement and subject to discussion and review.

Both core and particular ministries will be open to necessary development as the focal role develops. Development will be considered in regular ‘support and review’ meetings and suggestions regarding these, follow.

**What might ‘particular ministries’ look like?**

Gathered stories and examples will be helpful in future, to encourage and inspire others. *Potential examples might be:*

* A **church warden** who understands finance and governance, a long-time member of church – who is at home with church structures and decision making. Their experience means they understand good teams and are able to draw others in, mentoring in specialist areas where appropriate as successional planning.
* An **ALM**, who coordinates both the Toddler Group ministry and the Mothers’ Union, who gives notices on a Sunday morning and has their finger on the church pulse. Their reputation as a good listener means they are naturally sought out by people. Their pastoral ALM training means they have a good understanding of how to widely resource meeting pastoral needs.
* A **Reader** whose long-time funeral ministry means they have inter-generational contact across the church and local community. They are able to make links between community and church and could possibly extend this to include other pastoral offices.
* A **part-time administrator** in the church office who knows many people across the church and wider community and who is involved with the PTA at the local school. They are newly confirmed and eager to draw others in for confirmation too.
* A **self-supporting minister** with limited time but who is willing to coordinate, inspire and mentor others, who is also an occasional service leader.
* An **ordained person** released from the burdens of keeping a building afloat and released to concentrate on mission in the local area.

All of these could be recognisable focal leaders: each an agent of mission in their local church; each an accountable, commissioned **part of the Mission Community leadership team** with access to support, resources and necessary training; each working within, (and partly supported by) mixed teams of clergy and lay people, representative of locality and ministries represented.

**Training**

The potential variety of focal leadership shapes will require similarly varied support, review and training structures. Foundational characteristics of focal leaders (identified at length above) may be honed through training, resourcing and support but cannot be taught. The outworking of the focal leader role will bring to light training needs some of which will be appropriate for the many, and some will be more particular.

It is helpful to reiterate at this point that Focal Ministry is a **new role** and one for whom diverse experience and broader skills may be brought usefully to the table. **That a focal leader will be unique is part of the certainty.**

Clergy are specialists in their field, however, the challenges brought by working within new teams and in facing new mission initiatives in church and community, will without doubt require similar consideration by clerical focal leaders as their lay counterparts. Reflection on context, resourced by existing skills and augmented by new learning resources and team perspectives, will be helpful in identifying any development needs.

Individually defined resources will be the best fit for some, however, **reflection and learning will be needed for all.**

**Training principles**

*What follows represents thinking on principles and patterns for the resourcing of those in focal leader roles – specifics will be developed as we progress, in anticipation of and in response to, identified needs.*

* As part of our Christian calling to be life-long disciples, the challenges of growing, nurturing and serving call for regular, prayerful and reflective engagement with scripture, our experience and our context – individually and collaboratively across our teams, **learning and living this learning, together.**
* Clerical and lay focal leaders will be invited to reflect at intervals upon similar structured contextually-based questions, each leader drawing upon their own perspective, experience and specialisms, **to facilitate reflective learning and action.** This may happen individually, although a combination of individual and reflection with others would be best.
* Training and learning may be hugely significant for some at the beginning *(or usefully as part of an exploration of the role)*, however, ongoing reflection and learning will be crucial for all on the focal ministry journey – consequently it is appropriate that **training will be flexible and contextual**. In some cases, training needs may be met locally.
* Focal leaders will be expected to agree **individual learning goals** with the Mission Community leader: focussed on their particular church community but also with regard to resourcing Mission Community health in a broad range of areas. These areas will be aligned with identified Mission Community goals.
* **Foundational training** will be made available to those new to this kind of ministry and then subsequent learning to ensure that growth continues in ways appropriate to the focal leader and demands of the role. Initial conversations suggest that resourcing and affirming in immediate identified skills will raise confidence and perceived ability in some areas. It seems best to incorporate broader learning, firmly grounded in contextual concerns.
* There will be identified focal leaders who are acutely aware of perceived lack in the knowledge and skills they feel essential for the focal role, whereas others will feel more confident in what they bring to the table. It is envisaged that structured reflection on individual church context and identified wider missional needs will provide **perspective and definition** to the essential/ desired learning required.
* Learning will continue to be supported throughout time in post and focal leaders, as they grow in experience, or fruitfulness in specialism, will be encouraged and expected to **contribute in appropriate ways to the learning of others.**

**Training patterns**

It is envisaged that a Foundational Focal Leadership module will be helpful to communicate further the vision for focal ministry to Focal Leader Designates and to others exploring the role. Proposed content could be partially aligned with the content of the ALM Leadership module and grounded in potential role and specific context. This could be delivered flexibly.

The mode, method of training, and content are all under review as the nature of local roles becomes apparent. A critical balance will need to be maintained between core and common content for all, and the meeting of more particular needs. However, and wherever delivery happens, training will be practical and accessible *(without necessarily being theologically light)* – drawing upon action learning sets, mentors, peer support, theological reflection and practical resourcing.

Long term focal leaders will be invited to participate in the local training of others, sharing skills, experiences and new perspectives – to draw other specialists and trainers into a pool of expertise for the future, **to make training and experience sharing sustainable.**

**Focal Leader working agreement and review**

An initial working agreement, drawn up in consultation by incumbent, focal leader, with input from PCC, other key players in local church ministry teams will outline agreed time commitment, expenses, role and initial schedule of support, review and training requirements and any other identified elements. Assistance in this may be given by Area Deans, Lay Chairs if necessary. It is envisaged that the shape of the working agreement will be similar to the ALM equivalent, although different in content.

It is important that all players commit to pray for each other, support each other and be as collaborative as possible.

**Safeguarding, Support and Pastoral care**

In a climate of necessary change in church life, increased collaboration in teams and new patterns of worship and ministry - exemplary practice with regard to well-being, support, pastoral care, safer recruitment and safeguarding should be paramount.

**Safeguarding**

All identified focal leaders will be expected to undertake appropriate safeguarding training and fulfil DBS requirements. This is mandatory. Good practice in recruitment will be followed, following safer recruitment policy and clear working agreements will outline expectations, accountability and responsibility – on all sides.

The application process will include discernment conversation, a short application form with reference request, an induction programme, working agreement, identification of review and support mechanisms and a learning plan. The process of application reflects the significance of the focal leader role, however, local involvement in the process will keep the net wide.

It is envisaged that it will be the responsibility of the focal leader’s parish and PCC to ensure that their DBS is kept up-to-date. Participation in ongoing Safeguarding training, renewal of DBS and accountability to the Mission Community Leader is part of ongoing development and expectation for this kind of role, and is taken seriously.

**Support and Pastoral care**

Support and pastoral care needs will vary from person to person. Clerical focal leaders may have their own support networks already in place but will be encouraged to access a variety of different support options as might suit their needs. Support for focal leaders will be proactive in the encouragement of good practices and use of existing and new support networks in advance of their being needed, and reactive in the sense that not all eventualities can be predicted. Suggestion of avenues of support for focal leaders are gathered under location, and are no way exhaustive or exclusive.

**Support may be found:**

* **from within church community**

This could take place via different routes: in the course of regular conversation with a potential support group drawn from church community, regular meetings with others involved in leadership in the church or discussions at PCC etc. Although it is acknowledged that the efficacy of the support is dependent on the functionality of the networks and teams on the ground.

* **from within the Mission Community**

Regular catch-up meetings with Mission Community Leader and other focal leaders across the local area.

* **from beyond the Mission Community**

Conversations with the Lay Chair or another representative, a spiritual companion, ALM Chaplain or Focal Ministry ‘equivalent’ (a post which may emerge from existing Focal Leaders as time progresses).

* **from the focal ministry officer** and other Lay Ministry Team members at Church House. Beyond the Mission Community, the focal ministry officer will be the first port of call for support - which could then be offered from a variety of sources.
* **from peers in focal ministry** via specialism led support/ context cell group and contacts made more widely via groups such as the Vocations Support Group.
* **Via the Coaching Programme** initially set up for clergy but the hope is that this will be broadened to include lay people.
* **from more formal structures** regarding confidential support or grievance etc. Area Deans and Lay Chairs will be involved in any of the above where necessary.

**Spiritual growth and health**

It is expected that all focal leaders will be able to access routes to necessarily resource their own spiritual well being and growth. What is needed will be ascertained in conversation with the Mission Community leader.

Contributory elements within this might be:

* Sunday off patterns
* Personal spirituality review
* Sacred space/ retreat options, including virtual retreats
* Annual lay leader retreat
* Annual Focal Leader event – with worship, workshops, resources and celebration
* Encouragement in and facilitation of healthy working patterns and life balance, including consideration of personal spiritual health as separate to role
* Encouraged patterns of worship and prayer locally or further afield, with other focal leaders

**In conclusion**

It is important to reiterate that as we embark on the focal leadership journey there will necessarily be elements of clarification, reassessment and review. What has become apparent is the vital part that the Mission Community leaders will play in the discernment and support of focal leaders and the management of ongoing effective Mission Community teams and also that further training and support in these areas will be helpful.

Transparency in working relationships, flexibility and collaboration in teams will be essential in enabling transitions and communication to be managed and the expectation of a culture of immersion in prayer and worship is assumed.

The journey into focal ministry is an exciting and essential one but not one without its challenges.

**FAQs**

**There are no potential focal leaders in my church**

In churches where focal leader candidates are not obvious, options may be:

* **Identification of what is lacking** i.e. person or skills. Focal leadership may be taken on by people who have some of the identified skills and characteristics, and can be grown, mentored and developed appropriately.
* Use of skills assessment or discipleship material
* A Mission Community leader- led conversation with gathered church to identify needs, alongside what might be required to realistically to meet these at even the most functional level. Making the task more manageable may help to identify someone who might fulfil a portion of the role or be a mentor to another. It may be a case of **doing focal ministry as we *can* on the ground, not envisaging *what we can’t.***
* Focal ministry could happen in **teams of those with complementary skills**, supported from the wider Mission Community.
* In extremis, a focal leader could be brought in from a neighbouring church,
* although this is not ideal - bearing in mind elements of required local community knowledge as outlined above.
* Area Deans and Lay chairs and Mission Community leaders will be invaluable as a resource in these instances.

**I have too many potential candidates**

Conversations with the Mission Community Leader and other key players may help negotiate the identification of focal leader sensitively. Appreciation of the nature of the role, and prayer may be instrumental in clarifying the best choice. Honest and sensitive conversation may reveal a cluster of avenues of other more appropriate ministries that might be undertaken.

**Will focal leaders be commissioned in their role?**

Focal leaders will be commissioned in their role, for a three-year period, subject to annual review and safeguarding requirements. The format of commissioning is yet to be determined although local participation and acknowledgement feels important and appropriate, as does recognition from further afield.

There is potential for commissioning to also include acknowledgement of all parties in the support of the focal leader and the broader role that the wider worshipping communities have in growth, nurture and mission.

**The role of focal leader is a focus of an open-ended ministry – representative of much, but not do-er of all.**

**How long will a focal leader be in post for?**

See above. **For three years.**

The collaborative nature of the role means that there can be necessary **successional planning**, seeing others mentored and drawn into leadership. The constancy of not just the focal leader role itself but from one focal leader to another may offset some reduction of numbers in church (as per national research) by providing continuity in the instance of vacancy.

Successional planning is a hopeful by-product of collaborative ministry but identified candidates will still be required to go through the identified focal leader application discernment and application processes.

Lay focal leadership may also open up a need for **ongoing vocational exploration** and potential for leaders to move into other, ministries lay or ordained. Putting a three-year time period on post keeps focus, affirms collaboration and succession in ministry previously lacking in some areas and whilst opening up the potential of exploring other ministry options.

**Where do I go with further questions?**

Initially questions should go to the Focal Ministry Officer at Church House, although questions will be addressed more broadly as issues arise. Questions and issues raised will be vital as we work together, prayerfully, to firm up what focal ministry looks like.

*Draft paper compiled by Beverley Angier Focal Ministry Officer, based on the work of the Focal Ministry Task Group. 1/09/2022 BeverleyAngier@manchester.anglican.org*

1. This model has become increasingly stretched for reasons set out in earlier papers on our Transformation process. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Kingdom Calling (churchofengland.org)](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Kingdom%20Calling%20Web%20Version.pdf) p.44 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)