

Context Ministry Update July 2020

1. Introduction

A core to the reimagination of ministry under People and Places are the three categories of Oversight, Context and Local. They bring a distinctive element of Christian thinking about ministry into focus. Through them we hope to reflect core truths about the identity, calling and purpose of ministers and ministry, and thus enable the CofEB family to be fit for missional purpose in the 21st century.

Context Ministry (CM) is distinctive in two ways:

1. Scope. As complimentary to Oversight and Local ministry, CM is focussed on a particular calling or missional need within the oversight area. Context ministers will not hold primary oversight of an area or congregation. They are more likely to be lay-and will hold the Bishop's authorisation. Their role encompasses a brief for ministry in a particular context, often expressed by a particular age group or educational setting, industrial sector, faith group, cultural heritage, social context, community need etc.

2. Spread. We envisage every oversight area, and the parishes within them, having some element of CM. CM is locally discerned and deployed and is a funded ministry, paid for and allocated through the Common Fund (CF). Rooting locations in the CF formula and population ensures that CM will be spread across our region according to where people are, not according to what people can afford. It is positioned as a prophetic resource for all our people.

The highest aspiration for CM in our planning was for was for 27 Full Time Equivalent across CofEB, if there was a 100% response to the Common Fund request. We always knew this was a bold 'stretch' target, though getting even half way there would be a very significant step.

We have learned that when we talk about CM as part of P&P, we are talking about a distinct category of ministry. There are many contextual ministers, paid and volunteer, in churches and Christian agencies, chaplains and others, across our diocese. It is helpful to maintain this distinction given the different funding streams, patterns of accountability and theological frameworks are different. Both CM and contextual ministry are valued, both are complimentary, though not the same thing. There will be other schemes which are contextual in nature but are not P&P CM e.g. the Children's and Families Missioners funded by the Church Commissioners falls into this distinction.

2. Planning pre-COVID19

Prior to the emergence of COVID19 at the start of 2020, our Bishops and governance bodies had prayerfully decided that we could deploy £100,000 worth of CM in each new Deanery for the next three years. This is a significant faith-commitment by the ministry of the CofEB family. It does mean that because funding for CF was not 100%, in the 2020 CF Contributions from parishes, it is not possible allocate individual parishes CM on a 'we get what we paid for' basis. It was decided that a deanery

allocation is a fair and most meaningful way of allocating this support for this first cohort. Many parishes have generously given to CM in their CF contribution, but not every parish will have a context minister working 'for them, in their parish, every week.' Strong participation in deanery discernment by all should mean that an agreed strategic deanery deployment for the first cohort is a powerful expression of our mutual generosity and support. Such decisions will need to be well communicated to maintain confidence in CM. Our aspiration is that CM will prove of such value that over the years and as we get ever closer to that 100% target the more CM will be seen visibly in every parish.

It is for each deanery to discern their CM on the basis of the Transforming Church Action Plans (TCAP) at parish and deanery level and thus local communities should receive ministry which meets both actual need and missional opportunity. There has been a good take up of TCAP, however a number of factors have meant progress towards Deanery TCAPs is slower than originally hoped and therefore discerning CM is not yet possible in most places.

At the start of 2020 the P&P board engaged with developing guidelines for how deaneries should go about their discernment task and how the funding would be applied along with the technical aspects of employment and oversight of such ministers.

The most recent development pre-Covid19 Crisis has been the forming of Deanery Project Teams as the way local discernment and decision making about P&P has local shape, power and reality. Each new full-time Dean will prioritise the creation of the team which will offer capacity and leadership to the deanery, complementary to Synod and Chapter, as the whole discerns both Oversight Areas and Context Ministry. A definitive description of these Teams and how they work and relate to Area Dean and Deanery has been developed and is being circulated to enable every new Deanery to have a team within 2-3 months of their full-time Dean starting in role.

3. COVID19 Impact on P&P and CM Planning

As the COVID19 crisis has developed several things have become clear:

1. The nature of all our ministry and mission is undergoing profound change, including: ministerial identity and tasks; patterns of worship and outreach; the place of digital ministry within the whole; patterns of loss, change and grief; the nature of any worship event, group ministry or outreach in the new world of infection control and social distancing; social needs for food and support; and a projected sharp economic downturn with impacts for employment, prosperity and income for households, businesses and, not least, charities and churches. There will not be a return to 'business as usual' and we do not yet know what the 'new normal' is.
2. Planning horizons are becoming much shorter. Confidence has been severely reduced and it's very hard now to know where a parish will be in November in terms of membership, ministry, mission, resources etc, let alone 3-5 years' time.
3. The funding model of the wider church will now have to change with accelerated pace. We are having to review our sustainable numbers of clergy, and thus how our new CF formula will need to flex over the next few years to account for the impact of the crisis.
4. People and Places is the right sort of plan at the right time. Having taken courageous steps in previous years to develop a sustainable, prayerful, consistent and fair approach to minority, deployment

and resourcing, rooted in our Transforming Church vision, we are in a better place for it. We do not anticipate having to take drastic, crisis management in relation to clergy numbers because we now have an agreed pattern of how we deploy people. Although that may need to flex, we are working hard to try and sustain what we can.

5. P&P has been impacted by COVID19 in terms of central capacity (TCAP, Parish Services & other staff have been furloughed), parish energy and focus and shortened planning timescales and future uncertainty (see above). The first deanery who realistically could have identified Context ministers would have done so around the end of 2020. Realistically most deaneries will not complete this task till summer 2021. Then the time taken for recruitment and appointment must be added. To be done well CM must be properly discerned so we hear the prophetic call of God and act as wise stewards of whatever has been entrusted to us.

6. TCAP and CM discernment are significantly accelerated by the provision of our full-time Area Deans. Much preparatory work has been done by existing Deans, but the gift of time and focus the new Deans have takes it forward at pace. COVID has delayed the recruitment of the last 3 Deans and thus has slowed the pace at which deaneries can develop. The last three roles will be recruited at the same time to lessen the impact of this delay. The establishment of the Deanery Project Teams will be a focal point for discernment around deanery TCAP and CM.

4. Funding and Resourcing

The funding for CM is different from other aspects of P&P in that it comes from within the diocese, not from the Church Commissioners' Strategic Development Funding. This means that it is vulnerable in any financial crisis where CofEB needs to find funds to meet unexpected need or deficit. Whilst CM funding had already been gathered, they were rightly defined as 'designated' by BDBF, rather than 'restricted'. This means that in a crisis Bishop's Council and BDBF can 'un-designate' such funds to make them available for emergency use. The COVID19 impact on the diocesan finances in 2020 is currently projected to be a deficit of c.£1.7 million. CofEB has no significant reserves or historic funds so all 'restricted' funds need close examination as we cannot carry such a deficit and continue operating.

As at June 2020 Bishop's Council has not undesignated the fund, however it has rightly discussed it as a possible necessity depending on our financial position later in the year. If funds had to be used in this way, we would have to reconfigure CM, both in terms of how much of it could be paid ministry and how those figures relate to the CF formula and population numbers.

There are some possibilities of funding support from the national church, but these are not yet clear. However, we know that our efforts at P&P have been warmly encouraged as the right direction by the national church. Given the confidence expressed in the programme with a £5.5 million grant at the end of 2019, one of the largest ever awarded, we have some hope that support might help us to keep our restricted fund for CM for that purpose. We expect to know the outcome of this by early Autumn 2020, or soon after.

If we can continue to fund CM, we will still need to reflect on how the COVIC19 crisis affects the need and focus of it. Much of that will be done at a deanery level and having the longer timetables outlined above at least means deaneries can respond to the situation as it is now and not having to drop and change previous planning. There will also need to be reflection about the overall concept and plan, given the

changed global context. We will approach the CofEB family to participate in that reflection in the early autumn.

If the funding possibilities are radically reduced the P&P Board will need to consider what CM is if it is not funded. Again, we will start that process, if needed, in the early autumn, inviting all in the CofEB family to contribute insights.

Until the autumn we will continue to refine the guidelines we had been developing and resolve the technical issues around employment. This will mean as soon as we have clarity over our strategic position and funding, we can make detailed information available to deaneries and parishes-ahead of them completing their TCAPs.

In summary:

1. We maintain our belief that P&P is God's calling to us for the shape, identity, focus and deployment of ministers across CofEB and that having a plan is a divine gift in this crisis. 'It is a model that enables **growth**, recognises and equips all God's people to be **capable** disciples and leaders. It allows us to be **fair** and generous in our distribution of resources and for a **sustainable** future to be built for all the people and places of Church of England Birmingham.'
2. The concept of CM is one that has continued theological roots and contemporary relevance to our mission and we wish to continue with it, even if radically flexed in the light of the crisis.
3. By early autumn, or as soon as the situation is clear, we will invite reflection about
 - (a) the nature of CM responding to either reduced or non-existent funding due to COVID19 impact
 - Or
 - (b) the nature of a funded CM but which will need to change in the emerging post-COVID19 church.
4. We will continue to refine the guidelines for CM, its discernment and deployment, so that they are ready as deaneries form their TCAP late 2020 through the first half of 2021. These will take account of the reflections outlined above.
5. We will continue to accelerate the recruitment of the three remaining full-time Area Deans, and their support officers, to bring enhanced capacity, support and leadership to the enlarged deaneries. This should benefit clergy and leadership wellbeing, enabled Deanery Project Teams to bring focus to local discernment, and provide the local focus for the Bishop's shared ministry to lead in mission and ministry across our communities.
6. We ask all the CofEB family to continue to pray for our shared life and mission. In particular to prayerfully hold P&P before God and our discernment around CM, that we would be ever more obedient to and shaped by the character, call and love of God for our city region and the common good of all.

Ven. Simon Heathfield
Chair, P&P Board