

Rationale of the Local Church Pastors Scheme 2021

In 1996, the Revd Dr Nigel Collinson, then the President of the Methodist Conference, introduced the concept of “a pastor for every church” to the Methodist Church. In an article in the Methodist Recorder on 14 November 1996, he concluded that “‘a pastor for every church’, coupled with the genius of the Methodist circuit and Connexional system, would give us a base for our local churches to become effective.”

Building on that idea in 2014 a small group met in the Lincolnshire District to explore the possibilities of a scheme that would appoint and accredit local church pastors around the District. They came up with the idea of volunteer local church pastors, responsible to the circuit leadership team. Interviewed, trained and commissioned through the District, this was seen as a pioneer project that could transform the life of our mainly rural circuits and churches. It also tapped in to the rich seam of volunteers’ life and faith experiences.

Now in 2021, role outlines, volunteer agreements and a training plan have been formulated and will be shared with circuits who have expressed an interest in the project, and have indicated that they have possible candidates in mind. The applicants will meet with a Discernment Panel appointed by the District Council, and successful volunteers will begin their training, provided largely by District expertise and practitioners. Their training modules will include sessions in pastoral theology, relationships, safeguarding, personal safety, listening and communication skills and bereavement awareness, amongst others. Later modules, as the role is taken up, will explore conducting funerals, baptisms and extended communion, and managing volunteers, with more training planned throughout their three year agreement with their circuit. These training sessions can also include volunteers other than the local pastors who wish to share a particular theme.

On satisfactory completion they are to be recommended by the Discernment Panel for approval by Synod, who in turn will arrange a District Celebration to affirm this area of local ministry, and already applicants for the next round of training are being recruited.

The District continues to be excited about the whole project – it is an embodiment of the declared intention of the District to be serving the county, and connecting locally. It is also a good time to relaunch the scheme in 2021, as we explore how the church will be post Covid and how we fulfil Our Calling.

Revd Dr Terry Nowell
LCP Convenor of Oversight Group