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Running Head: Episcopal roles in ministry development

**Knowing their people and being known by them: A changing Episcopal role within
Accompanied Ministry Development in the Diocese of Truro**

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Knowing their people and being known by them: A changing Episcopal role within Accompanied Ministry Development in the Diocese of Truro

Abstract

Using a range of qualitative data, this article presents a case study of changing episcopal roles in the Diocese of Truro, necessitated by its bishops' involvement in the innovative Accompanied Ministry Development Programme (AMD). This style of engagement foregrounds the activity specified in the ordinal of 'getting to know the people and being known by them'. Findings raise questions such as whether roles currently undertaken by the bishops could be shared among senior staff and, if not, how the role of bishops could be adjusted to cope with an ongoing commitment to engage with incumbents and parishes across the Diocese on a regular basis. These are questions upon which any diocese may wish to reflect when initiating change that requires direct episcopal support.

[123 words]

Introduction

Thirty years ago, when there were already legions of books on episcopacy, Michael Ramsey (former Archbishop of Canterbury) observed that the variety of issues discussed up to that stage had not included serious consideration of the ‘work of a bishop’.¹ While the dominant themes of some recent contributions have been on the theological, ontological and legal aspects of episcopacy,² other contributions address the deficit identified by Ramsey by focusing on more prosaic aspects of the life and work of bishops. In the latter category are Church of England reports, notably: *Episcopal Ministry. The report of the Archbishops’ Group on the Episcopate* (The Cameron Report)³; *Bishops in Communion. Collegiality in the service of the koinonia of the Church*⁴; *Resourcing bishops: the first report of the Archbishops’ Review group on bishops’ needs and resources* (The Mellows Report)⁵; and *Suffragan bishops*⁶, written by suffragans. Scholars have also addressed the deficit, from a range of different perspectives, for example: the historical treatment by Beeson, whose brief portraits of 48 bishops in office during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were complemented by commentary on the role of today’s episcopate and a plea for liberation

¹ M. Ramsey, *The Christian priest today. New revised edition* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 94, as cited by P. Avis, *Becoming a Bishop. Theological handbook on episcopal ministry* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

² For example: M. Grundy, *Leadership and oversight. New models for Episcopal ministry* (London: Mowbray, 2011); R.A. Norris, Jr., ‘Episcopacy’ in S. Sykes, J. Booty & J. Knight (eds), *The study of Anglicanism. Revised edition* (London and Minneapolis: SPCK and Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 333-348; C. Podmore, ‘The Church of England’s understanding of episcopacy’, *Theology* 109(849) (2006), pp. 173-181; J.R. Wright (ed), *On being a bishop. Papers on episcopacy from the Moscow Consultation, 1992* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1993).

³ Church of England, *Episcopal Ministry. The report of the Archbishops’ Group on the Episcopate* (London: Church of England, 1990).

⁴ House of Bishops, *Bishops in Communion. Collegiality in the service of the koinonia of the Church. An Occasional Paper* (London: Church of England, 2000).

⁵ Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York, *Resourcing Bishops. The first report of the Archbishops’ Review Group on Bishops’ needs and resources* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001).

⁶ Church of England, *Suffragan Bishops. House of Bishops Occasional Paper. GS Misc 733* (London: Church of England, 2004).

from ‘managerial’ roles in order to become pioneer visionary leaders.⁷ By contrast, the study by Davies and Guest employed theoretical constructs from sociology (social and spiritual capital) and anthropology (symbolic exchange) to report the findings of questionnaire surveys and interviews among retired bishops in the Church of England, their wives and their children.⁸ Francis, Whinney, and Robbins drew on a psychological framework to address, from both a theoretical and empirical perspective, the question of who is called to be a bishop in the Church of England.⁹ Two further volumes directly addressing the deficit that Ramsey identified are more properly categorised as ‘handbooks’: *A Bishop’s ministry*, containing personal reflections on Tustin’s experience as a suffragan bishop in the Diocese of Lincoln from 1979 to 2000¹⁰; and *Becoming a Bishop* by Avis¹¹, a helpful resource which, in Thornton’s assessment, sadly failed to live up to its title owing to lack of detailed consideration of what it actually means to *become* a bishop.¹²

One fundamental tension in the Church of England’s developing episcopal organisation is the relationship between diocesan bishops and suffragan bishops.¹³ Both are ordained and consecrated bishop using the same ordinal¹⁴, but diocesans are legally appointed as the source of church authority in a specific diocese. Varying from diocese to diocese, the diversity in functions is marked by a conspicuous difference in weight of

⁷ T. Beeson, *The bishops* (London: SCM Press, 2002).

⁸ D.J. Davies and M. Guest, *Bishops, wives and children. Spiritual capital across the generations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

⁹ L.J. Francis, M. Whinney and M. Robbins. ‘Who is called to be a bishop? A study in psychological type profiling of bishops in the Church of England’, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 34(2) (2013), pp. 135-151.

¹⁰ D. Tustin, *A bishop’s ministry: Reflections and resources for church leadership* (Rothersthorpe: David Tustin in partnership with paragon, 2013).

¹¹ P. Avis, *Becoming a bishop*.

¹² T. Thornton, ‘Becoming a bishop. Book review’ *Practical theology* 9(2) (2016), pp. 163-4.

¹³ Davies and Guest, *Bishops, wives and children*.

¹⁴ Archbishop’s Council, *Ordination Services. The Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop*. <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/bishops.aspx>

responsibility between the two offices (as set out in the Mellows report).¹⁵ *Suffragan Bishops* summarised the suffragan ministry using the term *helper*¹⁶: ‘a ministry of helping the people of God to be the people of God, in ministry, and mission, and in their discipleship of Christ’.¹⁷ The office bestows on suffragans both the responsibility and privilege of carrying out the essential work of ministry, in support of the ministry of the diocesan. There may be area schemes for suffragan bishops or they may oversee sector ministries.¹⁸ The greater freedom flowing from their fewer formal administrative responsibilities may enable suffragans to engage in pastoral work among the clergy,¹⁹ and give them ‘the time to get to know the people of God, and to be known by them, and to share that knowledge with a diocesan bishop as they share together in the ministry of oversight within a diocese’.²⁰

The differences between diocesan and suffragan bishops were raised repeatedly by Davies and Guest’s interviewees, who often expressed ‘some unease over the theological and managerial distinctions they felt it necessary to make’.²¹ An ‘extra pair of purple gloves to help when the bishop was away’ was a bygone description of the suffragan role voiced by one interviewee.²² Another had overheard a diocesan say to his suffragan: ‘When I’m not in the diocese you are me, when I’m there you’re nothing’²³ (an anecdote also featuring in the

¹⁵ Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York, *Resourcing Bishops*, pp. 23-4, and 229-30.

¹⁶ The authors of *Suffragan bishops* chose the term *helper* to capture the suffragan ministry on the basis of Bultmann’s translation of *paraclete* (the epithet used of Christ in St John’s Gospel) (see Church of England, *Suffragan bishops*, p. 15). Their rationale for favouring *helper* over the recognised language of *servant* was that ‘helper implies more than being a servant. It includes within it helping another person or community to become something, to grow, to be true to his or her calling, and that “nurturing” role is not necessarily in a servant’s brief’ (p. 16).

¹⁷ Church of England, *Suffragan bishops*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Tustin, *A bishop’s ministry*.

¹⁹ Beeson, *The bishops*.

²⁰ Church of England, *Suffragan Bishops*, p. 18.

²¹ Davies and Guest, *Bishops, wives and children*, p. 70.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Suffragan Bishops report).²⁴ The more common portrayal of suffragans in the study was captured by the words of a different interviewee, who underpinned their description by the Pauline metaphor of the body with many parts (a New Testament understanding of the varieties of ministry within the Body of Christ also mentioned in the Mellows Report²⁵): ‘a bishop is a bishop is a bishop ... there is a difference in role and responsibility [but] that is not a theological difference and that is not a differences in the nature of the ministry at all’.²⁶ Yet another interviewee suggested that a suffragan is ‘particularly useful when given a distinctive brief to develop a particular aspect of diocesan organisation’.²⁷ Grundy also made this point, noting that many suffragans are appointed to a specialism that gives them freedom to use a particular talent in office.²⁸

The study by Francis, Whinney, and Robbins also speaks to the distinction between diocesans and suffragans.²⁹ The authors mapped different aspects of the episcopal role, as conceived within the ordinal of the *Book of Common Prayer 1662* and *Common Worship*³⁰ and within Canon C18,³¹ against psychological types. The *Book of Common Prayer* ordinal and Canon C18 both suggest a call to tasks drawing on the strengths of the STJ profile (i.e. a profile that privileges sensing over intuition, thinking over feeling, and judging over perceiving, in order to effect tasks such as ‘offer to God your best powers of mind’, ‘teach the doctrine and refute error’, ‘confront injustice and work for righteousness’, ‘teach the doctrine

²⁴ Church of England, *Suffragan bishops*, p. 19.

²⁵ Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York, *Resourcing bishops*, p. 23.

²⁶ Davies and Guest, *Bishops, wives and children*, p. 73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁸ Grundy, *Leadership and oversight*, p. 98

²⁹ Francis, Whinney and Robbins, ‘Who is called to be a bishop?’.

³⁰ Church of England, *Common Worship. Services and prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000).

³¹ Archbishop’s Council, *Canons of the Church of England. Section C. Ministers, their ordination, functions and charge*.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/canons/section-c.aspx>

of Christ as the Church of England has received it'). The *Common Worship* ordinal provides far greater detail than the *Book of Common Prayer* ordinal and places an added emphasis on the outgoing nature of the office. This suggests a call to tasks drawing on the strengths of the ESTJ profile (that is, also privileging extraversion over introversion, in order to effect tasks such as 'leading God's people in mission', 'knowing their people and being known by them', 'proclaim the gospel boldly', 'make your home a place of hospitality and welcome'). Their survey of 168 active or retired bishops (72 of whom had served or were serving as diocesan bishops, 70 as suffragan bishops, and 26 as assistant or area bishops) revealed higher proportions of extraverts, sensing types, and thinking types among all the bishops compared with the established profile of clergymen³² and a higher proportion of feeling types over thinking types among suffragan bishops in particular.

Against this background, the present article offers a case study of a diocese where the job description for the post of suffragan bishop in 2013 included the notion of the bishop as 'agent for change in discerning the priorities for ordained ministry in the future' which in practice meant working with the diocesan bishop in setting up and overseeing a ministry development programme. The field of study is the Truro Diocese, UK, which in 2014 launched the diocesan-wide Accompanied Ministry Development programme for incumbents and their parishes. The case study is of particular interest because it highlights a changing role for the bishops in offering some of the 'accompaniment' that is foundational to the programme and which brings to the fore the call in the *Common Worship* ordinal for 'knowing their people and being known by them'. This particular call was singled out by

³² As reported by L.J. Francis, C.L. Craig, M. Whinney, D. Tilley and P. Slater, 'Psychological typology of Anglican clergy in England: Diversity, strengths, and weaknesses in ministry', *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11 (2007) pp. 266-284.

Suffragan Bishops as synonymous with the suffragan office, given its lack of jurisdiction as compared with the office of diocesan bishop.³³

In the two sections that follow, we profile the Diocese of Truro and describe the Accompanied Ministry Development Programme. We then describe how the two bishops have engaged with the AMD Programme, how they reacted to the demands made of them, and how this change in role was perceived by incumbents and parishes. Finally, we discuss the short and long-term implications of this sort of change in episcopal role for Truro Diocese and the Church more generally.

The Diocese of Truro

The Anglican Diocese of Truro, in the far south-west of England, was formed in 1876 from the Archdeaconry of Cornwall in the Diocese of Exeter. Although a relatively young diocese, the Christian faith has been alive there since at least the fourth century AD (more than 100 years before there was an Archbishop of Canterbury); and Cornwall had its own Bishop at St Germans until the latter part of the tenth century. The 15th Bishop of Truro, the Right Reverend Tim Thornton, was appointed in 2009 and resigned in 2017. Until the arrival of the 16th Bishop of Truro (expected in early 2019), the suffragan Bishop of St Germans (the Right Reverend Dr Chris Goldsmith, appointed in 2013) took the helm in the Diocese.

Covering 1,390 square miles, with a population of 553,000, the Diocese is one of the least populated in the Church of England and at the 2011 Census had one of the smallest Christian populations of all the Church of England dioceses.³⁴ Church attendances (Sunday, weekly, and at festivals) declined faster over 2009-13 than in the rest of the Church of

³³ Church of England, *Suffragan bishops*.

³⁴ Church of England, Research & Statistics. *Statistics for Mission 2015*, p. 19.
<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3331683/2015statisticsformission.pdf>

England.³⁵ The need to address this decline has been recognised for some time, and is reflected in the diocesan mission summary: ‘Discovering God’s Kingdom, Growing the Church’.

The Diocese takes seriously reflective and evidence-based practice. In the context of the diocesan development plan 2016-18,³⁶ the commitment to such practice underpins initiatives such as ‘Oversight Ministry’ (with funding from the Church Commissioners, and supported by a learning community) and ‘Never Alone’. Experience and learning on Oversight Ministry (a distinctive way of exercising ministry with and through others) has been shared at a national conference.³⁷ Never Alone seeks to create and promote a culture of mutual support, encouragement and collaboration among clergy.³⁸ The Diocese has provided the field of study for recent research on other topics too: the contribution of retired clergy to supporting and sustaining ministry in a rural diocese,³⁹ mentoring in first incumbency,⁴⁰ and opportunities that church visitors find for personal prayer and reflection.⁴¹

³⁵ Archbishops’ Council, Research and Statistics. Statistics for Mission 2013.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2112070/2013statisticsformission.pdf>

³⁶ Diocese of Truro, *Confidence in the Gospel. Development Plan 2016-18* (Truro: Diocese of Truro, 2016).

³⁷ Diocese of Truro. Oversight Ministry: What we have learnt.

<http://www.trurodiocese.org.uk/2017/03/oversight-ministry-conference-2017-what-we-learnt/>

³⁸ As reported by W. Stuart-White, J. Vaughan-Wilson, J. Eatock, J.A. Muskett and A. Village, ‘The experience of isolation among rural clergy. Exploring differences and solutions’, *Rural Theology* 16(2) (2018).

³⁹ L.J. Francis, J. Rolph, P. Rolph and C. Windsor, ‘Rural Ministry and Retired Clergy: a Research Note’, *Rural Theology* 11(1) (2013), pp. 57-59.

⁴⁰ T. Neal, ‘Mentoring during first incumbency: A case study exploring the role of retired clergy’, *Rural Theology*, 13(2) (2015), pp. 135-141; T. Neal, L.J. Francis and U. McKenna, ‘A Survey on Mentoring, First Incumbency, and the Role of Retired Clergy: Listening to Bishops’, *Rural Theology* 15(1) (2017), pp. 39-47.

⁴¹ T. ap Siôn, ‘Lighting candles and writing prayers. Observing spiritual practices in churches in rural Cornwall’, *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (2018), pp. 54-74.

Accompanied Ministry Development (AMD) in the Diocese of Truro

The Diocese of Truro invested in AMD with the aim ‘to encourage Christian communities to flourish’. All incumbent clergy of the Diocese and the parishes in which they minister were expected to commence the Programme between 2014 and 2018 (grouped into seven cohorts of 12). The Programme seeks to *accompany* rather than direct churches because the Diocese recognizes that different churches will flourish in different ways.

To achieve its ends, AMD focuses on five themes (God’s People, God’s Reconciliation, God’s Good News, Living for God, Worshipping God), which form the core subject matter of five four-day residential Clergy Colleges and parish activities (the Parish Programme) in the formative first year. AMD is launched in parishes at an introductory event led by one of the bishops, to which members of the congregation/s are invited. The first phase of AMD includes structured opportunities for participating churches to reflect on congregational strengths/weaknesses and community needs using the specially designed ‘Our Church’ survey tool and also at a ‘Healthy Church’ event.⁴² During at least the first phase of AMD, each incumbent is accompanied by her/his own AMD Advisor and the pair meets regularly, in particular to reflect upon the Colleges. Advisors are drawn from clergy and lay people in the area who are considered to have some experience and ability in supporting clergy and/or parishes. Each incumbent is encouraged to form a Ministry Development Team (MDT) of leaders in the parish, if they did not have one already. For the purposes of AMD, this team acts as a bridge between the Colleges and Parish Programme and usually meets after each College for prayer, input on the College theme, and discussion about implications of the theme for the local parish (possibly with facilitation by the Advisor). Driven by the assumption that parishes thrive when there is both an excellent priest and shared leadership,

⁴² R. Warren, *The healthy churches’ handbook. A process for revitalizing your church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012).

the diocesan strategic plan includes an objective to ensure that an MDT is in place in at least every benefice.⁴³

Plans for future activity in the parish/benefice are developed after the College phase by the MDT against the background of the Programme themes, congregation strengths and community needs. These plans are agreed at a Bishop's Conference, attended by the one of the bishops, the incumbent, the MDT, plus others as necessary, and various diocesan representatives. The Conference is a conspicuous opportunity for a bishop and diocesan colleagues to encourage and challenge those involved and to suggest links and resources to help plans succeed. The central diocesan team supports the implementation of mission initiatives that are agreed locally and recorded centrally. Progress is reviewed by bishops after six months and (if requested) subsequently on an annual basis.

The suffragan bishop oversees the AMD Programme. Under the leadership of the diocesan Director of Ministry (the initial Director of AMD), the Head of AMD (appointed in July 2015) is responsible for the Programme's effective delivery, supervising both Clergy Colleges and the Parish Programme. The Archdeacon of Cornwall (one of the Episcopal College⁴⁴) has a key oversight role in relation to the second phase of AMD. He attends Bishop's Conferences and, together with the Head of Church Growth Development (and other members of the diocesan Parish Support Team, as necessary), will help parishes/benefices prepare for that important waymark on their AMD journey.

When the AMD Programme began, the staff of the Diocese thought that it would be useful for the Church at large if the Programme's implementation and effectiveness were monitored in order to discover what aspects were most useful and whether the outcomes

⁴³ Diocese of Truro, *Confidence in the Gospel*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ The Episcopal College comprises the two bishops, the two archdeacons, the cathedral Dean and the Diocesan Secretary. The College shares *episkope* and models a collegial way of working. At the College's monthly meetings business is preceded by activity that will grow members as disciples.

could be better understood and predicted. The St Luke's College Foundation funded a 30-month research project to evaluate the overall Programme. The data reported in the present study were collected as part of this wider research project. Employing other data gathered during the project, we have reported elsewhere on the capacity of action learning within AMD to ameliorate a sense of isolation for rural clergy.⁴⁵

Method

Procedure

Data collection for the overall project took place between March 2015 and May 2017. For the study reported here, we draw on three types of qualitative data: written documentation, interviews, and observations of meetings.

Written documentation, supplied to the research team by the Diocese, included an archive concerning the planning and implementation process for AMD (notes of working party and Advisory Group meetings, reports of focus group consultations, Programme calendar, etc.), and copies of all information provided to participating incumbents and parishes (*AMD Programme Guide*, a guide to the Bishop's Conference etc.).

Semi-structured interviews (typically lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each and following an interviewer protocol) were conducted with a total of 102 participants/stakeholders. All interviews were digitally recorded and followed standard protocols approved by the University ethics review process. Participant interviewees included incumbents (drawn from six cohorts, at different stages of the Programme, many individuals being interviewed at or near the start of the Colleges and again at the fifth

⁴⁵ J.A. Muskett and A. Village, 'Action learning sets and social capital: ameliorating the burden of clergy isolation in one rural diocese', *Action Learning: Research and Practice* 13(3) (2016), pp. 219-234.

College) and parish MDT members. Stakeholder interviewees included members of the Episcopal College, AMD staff, AMD Advisors, and Clergy College Chaplains.

Observations were carried out at a total of 20 AMD events encompassing introductory meetings/events in parish, Bishop's Conferences and twelve-month reviews. For each, the consent of participants was secured beforehand (in the case of a Bishop's Conference, the incumbent typically consulted her/his MDT and secured agreement during one of their regular meetings). An observation protocol was followed (covering demographics, physical setting, the event, interactional patterns, verbal and written content, and meaning), as suggested by Thumma⁴⁶ and comprehensive field notes were written discretely (usually from an unobtrusive position on the sidelines of the meeting).

Analysis

Close analysis of the documents and participant guidance enabled the researchers to build up a picture of the rationale for the Programme, its structure, processes and content. Audio files of interviews were transcribed in full. Biographical data were subsequently redacted from transcripts. Manual content analysis was conducted on all transcripts. The field notes of observations formed the basis of 'vignettes' written up afterwards to create a detailed permanent record of the events.

Results and discussion

Episcopal engagement with AMD

One of the most significant changes to emerge from AMD has been the nature of episcopal oversight in the Diocese. Although the appointment of the suffragan bishop was predicated

⁴⁶ S.L. Thumma, 'Methods for congregational study' in N. T. Ammerman, J. W. Carroll, C. S. Dudley and W. McKinney (eds), *Studying Congregations. A new handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 196-139, at pp. 200-201.

on the post being largely dedicated to the establishment and oversight of the ministry development initiative, both bishops have had crucial roles at all stages of the Programme from the outset. The notion of accompaniment, whatever else it might imply, has in part been a way of helping incumbents and parishes to feel that the bishops in the Diocese know their people, are known by them, and relate to them in more personal ways. The building of these relationships is intended to help bishops and people to understand more clearly the challenges faced at grassroots level, and to allow bishops to be more directly part of the process of overcoming these challenges.

Throughout the AMD Programme, the bishops engage with incumbents and visit parishes at specific points within the College and post-College phases, as well as being involved behind-the-scenes in processes such as selecting cohorts and matching incumbents and AMD Advisors. The various points of interaction are listed below (Table 1). The meetings are obligatory and are junctures at which the bishops can find out in detail what is happening on the ground in the Diocese and also offer support, wisdom and encouragement to those to whom they owe the duty of episcopal service.

– Insert Table 1 about here –

The original aim of AMD was to have 7 cohorts of 12 incumbents, allowing 84 benefices to take part in the Programme, thus ensuring that virtually all the incumbents in post over the five-year period were included. In practice, for various reasons, a few incumbents did not see the process through to the end and some cohorts were less than 12-strong. Using the AMD Programme calendar (produced in January 2015) and cohort size it was possible to estimate the potential and actual annual number of episcopal contacts from 2014 to 2018 (Figure 1). The estimate does not include sessions that bishops might have led

at Colleges, nor the time spent (particularly by the suffragan bishop) in managing staff who run the Programme, nor in diocesan meetings about the Programme that bishops attended. We also estimated what might be required on an ongoing basis (beyond 2018) assuming one AMD-like cohort started every other year and half the benefices in the Diocese requested an annual review each year. The numbers in the chart also show *maximum* contacts had all the cohorts been at full strength (12 members) and all parishes continued on the Programme to at least the first annual review.

– Insert Figure 1 about here –

Most contacts would involve travel and at least two hours with an incumbent, usually at a parish. At the peak of the Programme, with new cohorts starting and older cohorts having Bishop’s Conferences or follow-up reviews, around 70 contacts a year were estimated, though this figure would have been over 100 had all cohorts been at full strength and completed the Programme. This number falls as cohorts work through the Programme, but on an ongoing basis, with just half the benefices wanting review and one cohort every other year, the estimate was of somewhere between 60 and 80 meetings a year. This ongoing commitment would rise and perhaps double if all benefices had an annual episcopal review, especially if alongside that a new AMD-like Programme was introduced that also required episcopal support.

Bishops’ involvement from an incumbent / benefice perspective

Greater contact with bishops can be a two-edged sword for clergy and parishes. On the one hand it sends an important signal about how valued people and places are to the Diocese.

This was expressed many times at interview. For example, an incumbent spoke of the initial meeting with the suffragan bishop and Head of AMD in the following terms:

It went very well. Very well. I was impressed that they met a lot of my reservations. I articulated them because that's the best thing to do; and they recognised them and they wanted to try and deal with them in a positive way, as far as they could... It was a good meeting. And it left me feeling good because I'd been listened to.

In relation to the bishops' visits to introduce AMD to parishes, similar comments were made at interview by several clergy. The same was true for the 12-month review meeting and an incumbent spoke about feeling valued there:

The crucial thing for me was: You're not on your own. You've got support... I shall go home from this now feeling very supported ... the willingness is there, the understanding is there and they've heard what I've said.

On the other hand, the idea of someone coming to look at what you do, and perhaps find you wanting, can be daunting and stressful. A Clergy College Chaplain spoke at interview about the level of anxiety he/she had detected:

They worry about the Bishop's Conference as some kind of threat, as if they're being examined... But generally there's nothing to worry about. The bishops talk about supporting you, not threatening you.

This was corroborated by what incumbents said at interview, particularly (but not only) in the early cohorts, where there was some fear that they were being 'checked up on'.

There's one or two people said to me in one of the parishes: 'Well, what more can we do that we're not doing now?' ... I think initially it was the anxiety about the Bishop's Conference.

Another incumbent told how it had been necessary to reassure the parish about the purpose of the Conference:

I don't want them to feel this is a kind of: Now the Diocese is telling you to do something that you're not already doing, because you're a bit of a failure ... You know, it can feel a bit like that, can't it.

Yet another incumbent found that MDT members were so anxious about the prospect of the Bishop's Conference that they started to offer apologies for absence (even before the actual date was announced). An MDT member from an early cohort said that when the team heard about the Bishop's Conference fairly late in the process, they felt threatened by it:

There was going to be this Bishop's Conference and then it sounded like [incumbent] was going to be assessed as well as to the success of it, which seemed a bit, I don't know, it just felt – it was actually threatening. That was the word.

Programme leaders and bishops were aware of this sense right from the start of the Programme.

The Bishop's Conference was sometimes a moment when incumbents and MDTs needed some reassurance because of a feeling that not enough was being done in the parish.

A senior member of staff said:

They're very nervous about the bishop seeing, you know: Gosh this is all we can manage. This is all we do. So, it's been a confidence-giving exercise.

An MDT member put it like this:

Some of the [clergy] to begin with were very intimidated I think, especially if they've been around a long time, or they've got churches where they don't have ... the people.

One incumbent was concerned that work already begun in the benefice would be ignored, but this fear was allayed when they met the Bishop.

Some of the difficulty with a few incumbents in early cohorts may well have been because they thought they were being assessed by bishops, and that the whole process was continuing professional development by another name, using a ‘mechanistic’ approach to respond to perceived ‘failures’ and remedy the situation.⁴⁷ It is difficult to overcome that sort of attitude, especially since it cannot be denied that if everything was as it should be and all parishes were already flourishing Christian communities, there would not be Programmes designed to achieve this end. Perhaps part of the difficulty may also lie in the parish approach to authority. In his landmark study *The Dynamics of Religion*, Reed viewed congregations as oscillating between the need for dependence and the desire for independence:⁴⁸ a tension which is played out in the relationship between congregations and bishops.⁴⁹ Describing the reasoning behind the introduction of the Bishop’s Conference, two people involved in the design of AMD from the outset highlighted independently the issue of accountability. One of the Programme leaders spoke about the importance of holding incumbents/parishes to account and pointed out that this may never have happened before. But there was a positive side to it:

What’s been really interesting is the Ministry Development Team people who’ve gone with the priest to the Bishop’s Conference have really valued that [accountability] as well. Because actually they’ve seen the bishop’s been human. They chat and whatever. And it’s been really positive experience. So, it is about accountability, but it’s also about actually feeling we’re all in this together.

⁴⁷ N. Evans, *Developing in Ministry. Handbook for effective Christian learning and training* (London: SPCK, 2012).

⁴⁸ B.D. Reed, *The Dynamics of Religion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978).

⁴⁹ Grundy, *Leadership and oversight*, p. 109.

It was noticeable that the bishops worked very hard to reassure incumbents when they met with them. What had seemed initially as perhaps over-prescriptive uniformity of requirements evolved as the Programme progressed to allow more local flexibility and a greater sense that this was a process of affirmation and support not judgment. The introduction (from Cohort 3) of a private one-to-one meeting with a bishop prior to the Bishop's Conference undoubtedly helped the situation by enabling incumbents to talk freely about any challenges they faced without their MDT listening.

Bishops needed to tread a careful line between recognising and praising the current situation in a benefice, and encouraging (perhaps rather firmly) change and growth. In the early days the degree of challenge may have been overemphasised. In subsequent cohorts, affirmation of the status quo and tolerance of relatively unambitious mission initiatives seemed to be the prevailing mood, though in the most recent cohorts we sensed that incumbents and parishes felt the balance was about right. Indeed, one of the bishops recognised that the initial balance may have been skewed in the wrong direction. However, he was keen that the pendulum should not swing too far in the opposite direction.

At an annual review and a Bishop's Conference, observations revealed how the episcopal presence can be a legitimating agent in the facilitation of change (see Grundy, 2015, on this aspect of an oversight role). Examples included liberating lay people to take the lead in the absence of their incumbent (when the easy option would have been to disengage from the process) and applying unique leverage to elicit volunteers in support of several labour-intensive mission initiatives which the incumbent alone could not bring to fruition. The latter example occurred at a Conference attended by a visiting bishop (from a sister Diocese in Sweden) who was clearly impressed by what he had witnessed.

When it worked well, episcopal contact was greatly appreciated by both incumbents and parishes. One incumbent said:

It's a great thing to get the Bishop alongside the local church, agreeing a plan and working a plan for growth.

An MDT member interviewed shortly after their Bishop's Conference was extremely positive about the nature of the encounter:

A bishop and an archdeacon being involved in it – it's certainly no bad thing, because it does say to the people ... Look what you're doing is really important....our leaders are down at grass-roots level talking about the nitty-gritty of what parish life is about. I feel that the whole of the diocesan organisation hasbecome much more pastoral, very much more approachable. I think there's been a difference in emphasis.

One of the Programme leaders summed up the situation saying there would cease to be any reason for a priest to say that they or their parish were not known by the bishops:

Some of the things we heard early on in the Programme, or I heard, was: 'Oh well, the Bishop doesn't really know my parish – the bishop doesn't really know me'.

Well, there should be no excuse for that now, because actually one of the bishops will have met with the clergy person; and one of them ... will have done the Bishop's Conference, and will have come to introduce [AMD].

The bishops' perspective on their involvement with AMD

We spoke with both bishops more than once, and they were always very positive about AMD as a whole, and keen to be a full part of the process. On the specific issue of fitting the demands of AMD into their schedules, it was clear that this created pressure at times. Bishops are always busy, so extra demands meant dropping some commitments or working much longer hours. 'It kills my diary', lamented the suffragan bishop wryly, after describing in turn each type of meeting that the bishops have with incumbents/parishes participating in the

Programme. ‘And Tim’s as well’, he added. But he was satisfied that the commitment reaped rewards: ‘I think that it feels like it’s making a difference ... I feel more connected with our clergy’. Another senior member of staff admitted that the schedule for 12-month reviews was already slipping due to the ever increasing obligations, with multiple cohorts in play at one time and parishes from the earliest cohort already onto a second annual review. Nevertheless, the view was that episcopal presence was crucial:

That’s one of the real learning points. Having the bishop is what’s made all the difference. It’s the Bishop’s Conference, Bishop’s Review that gets them to the table, and then when they’re at the table, makes them feel valued.

The level of the bishops’ engagement with AMD and its impact was a point that was also raised in interviews with the Bishop’s Chaplain and AMD Programme leaders, who confirmed the challenges it was posing to the already busy schedules (which typically involved meetings in hourly slots from 8 o’clock in the morning, when visitors might join the bishop/s for prayer at Lis Escop [the diocesan bishop’s residence], until 8 o’clock in the evening, or beyond). One of the leaders attributed the high rate of participation in AMD to the outstanding level of commitment to the Programme shown by the bishops. Speaking of the high level of episcopal engagement in AMD, another Programme leader said:

I think it’s a massive commitment on their time. But I think it’s absolutely invaluable. And I would like to think... it has changed the dynamic within the Diocese... Certainly the one-to-one [meetings] – [the bishops] really like those, because they are getting to know the people and hearing what’s going on well, and what’s not going so well.

Questions raised by AMD about the bishops' role in the Diocese

These findings raise two key questions about the role of bishops in the Diocese of Truro. The first question to ask is whether what the bishops have undertaken in AMD requires a specifically *episcopal* presence, or how far this might be shared among different Episcopal College members or other senior staff in the Diocese. The second question to ask is how diocesan life could be organised to enable bishops to maintain the direct contacts that AMD has facilitated and the greater sense of connectedness that flows from such contacts.

The first question relates to the wider theological and ecclesial issue of the place of bishops within the overall ministry of the church, an issue that has preoccupied Anglicans and others for many years. The tension is partly about whether bishops in this context can truly be an equal part of the AMD team, or whether they will always have a unique and irreplaceable role by virtue of their office. This kind of tension has echoes even in the ministry of St Paul, exemplified in his relationship with the church at Corinth. On the one hand he eloquently expounds the notion of different but equal ministries in the model of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12), and is at pains to point out the equality of those who act as apostles: 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow' (1 Cor 3:6). Yet he is not above stressing his unique and privileged position: 'Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel' (1 Cor 4:15). While Paul wrestled with this issue in a very different context from the Church of England today, it does nonetheless show that being the 'first among equals' is never an easy line to walk.

Pickard discusses the episcopate specifically in relation to collaborative ministry, and notes that Anglican models derive partially from the territorial model that goes back to the fourth-century bishop Cyprian and partially from the apostolic model that derives from

Irenaeus.⁵⁰ Bishops represent the unity of geographically local churches (the Cyprianic model) and the historical unity of the apostolic faith (the Irenaeian model). He suggests that the management models that drive the work of bishops today are an inevitable response to the Cyprian model, and indeed are necessary to make the current diocesan system work at all. His argument is that this form of ecclesiology makes it virtually impossible to create a truly collaborative form of ministry that is based on the pastoral commission that bishops are given at their ordination. The current diocesan system tends to stress the representative and authoritative roles of bishops, which may be delegated but which can never be truly shared. While Pickard longs to see such models re-birthed into ones that more thoroughly embed collaborative ministry, others might insist that bishops must always retain roles that others cannot fully share.

Mixed opinions on the first question were heard at interview, with some senior staff being adamant that, when it came to occasions such as Bishop's Conferences or annual review, it was the conspicuous presence of a bishop that was essential. This viewpoint was based mainly on the sense of gravitas and support emerging from having a bishop present, but also because bishops (especially the diocesan) are people who are most likely to have a handle on what is going on across the whole Diocese. Bishop's Conferences are important in developing networking opportunities and building a common wealth of knowledge across the Diocese, and this occurs in part because bishops have a vast reservoir of information about which parishes are doing what (and with what degree of success), and know who to contact for specific help. The Diocese took steps to capture this sort of knowledge in a formal way so it could be readily accessible and not dependent on any particular individual. Nonetheless, bishops per se might be crucial in the Conferences because of their unique access to information about what initiatives are happening across the Diocese.

⁵⁰ S. Pickard, *Theological foundations for collaborative ministry* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 179-180.

The opposite view was also put forward in one interview: the collegial approach to senior leadership in the Diocese inferred the possibility that it need not be a bishop who meets with incumbents initially or at later stages in the AMD Programme. Sharing roles among the Episcopal College may be necessary during a Vacancy in See, but might also be something that the Diocese would want to do as a matter of principle rather than necessity. Such interchangeability⁵¹ would ease episcopal workloads. However, archdeacons already have their own specific duties; and something important may be lost if responsibilities in the AMD Programme shift within the Episcopal College. Although it might seem sensible to have bishops make contact only when incumbents or parishes start the Programme (leaving others to do the Conferences and reviews), this risks losing the opportunity for bishops to build valuable long-term relationships with individual clergy and parishes, which is the great advantage of sustained contact over a period of two or more years. It is precisely the change from rare, sporadic and sometimes ominous visits (for example, when problems arise – ‘it’s usually firefighting that brings the hierarchy, isn’t it!’ said one incumbent at interview) to regular and frequent contact that changes the dynamic of the episcopal role in the Diocese. One solution might be for the bishops to take only a proportion of incumbents/parishes and see them right through the process, but this risks creating a two-tier system, with some places having even less episcopal contact than before.

Another local solution to ease pressure on episcopal diaries would be to hold a greater proportion of the bishops’ AMD meetings centrally and make incumbents and MDTs do the travelling. The benefit is that it would reduce the amount of time the bishops spend on often lengthy excursions by car. In the present pattern of activity, many of the encounters take

⁵¹ ‘Interchangeability of posts’ was the way *Resourcing bishops* referred to the scenario when a Diocese would find it helpful in certain circumstances to appoint an archdeacon instead of a suffragan bishop, or the reverse (see Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York, *Resourcing bishops*, p. 159).

place in parish, where incumbents and parishioners are on familiar territory and able to offer hospitality to their Episcopal College visitors. The extent to which MDT members might be daunted by the notion of venturing onto the unfamiliar ground of Lis Escop or be reluctant to travel there from distant parts of the Diocese is hard to quantify. One of our observations was of an annual review at Lis Escop, where the priest met the bishop alone because MDT members were not keen to make the journey on that occasion. One of the Bishop's Conferences we observed took place at Lis Escop; and on that occasion most of the MDT members travelled together in one car and none seemed phased by the unfamiliar surroundings. There is no typical Bishop's Conference, not least because the incumbents/parishes have been allowed to set the agenda. One observed Conference that seemed especially unusual took place within a multi-parish benefice and involved the party meeting at one village church (around which greater community activity was developing), driving to a mission church (where development plans offered a range of exciting opportunities for enhanced service to the community) and then driving to the Rectory for the more formal presentation of mission initiatives by MDT members. Something important would have been lost had this meeting taken place at Lis Escop. Ideally, use of central venues for a greater proportion of AMD meetings should not close off possibilities for imaginative encounters in parish.

Reduced contact with parishes might happen if/when the Diocese moves to a more universal 'oversight' model of ministry, with senior clergy of incumbent status taking oversight of a number of clergy and their benefices. One senior member of staff suggested bishops might then meet regularly with oversight ministers, but not necessarily with those in the relevant cluster. While this might make sense in terms of judicious use of limited resources, it steepens the hierarchy and may lead to the distancing of parishes from their bishop(s) and exacerbating a sense of isolation.

The solution here is not all-or-nothing in terms of bishops and their contacts with clergy and parishes: bishops will always have contacts with parishes that are part of traditional roles (for example, Visits in Parish, and infrequent ritual events such as Confirmations). Yet there is a need to decide on a broad strategy of whether or not the bishops have *particular* episcopal roles in ministry development that cannot be shared by others. If their current AMD roles can be shared then the task would be to ensure that all the Episcopal College and other senior staff are fully prepared to enable them to do what bishops do on the Programme at the moment. Incumbents and parishes would also need to be helped to understand that there is complete equivalence between senior diocesan staff in this role. This might be difficult to achieve; and even among senior staff there is a feeling that a better option might be to enable bishops to gain the time to sustain these direct contacts with incumbents and parishes in the long run.

This raises the second question of how diocesan life could be organised to enable bishops to maintain such direct contacts and the greater sense of connectedness in the Diocese that flows from them. While high levels of contact were just about possible in the short term, it created problems in other areas. Dioceses need to be aware of their duty to ensure the well-being of their bishops: simply adding another layer of work on top of existing tasks may not be an option. The notes of a Focus Group convened as part of the planning process prior to the introduction of AMD revealed a concern about the workload of senior staff as early as 2013: how were *they* going to be accompanied, and what would they stop doing to accommodate the additional work? One solution suggested by one of our recent interviewees was to review the diocesan committee structure, which currently places heavy demands on bishops and senior staff. Statutory and ad hoc committees are important arenas for deliberation and an essential part of the functioning of modern diocesan governance; yet, multiple memberships are time-consuming and certain individuals may shoulder a

disproportionate administrative burden. Of course, relieving the burden of committee work through governance reform is not a novel idea. Anxieties about growing administrative burdens, increasing ‘introversion’ (more time on church business and less on community engagement), and the precarious balance between ‘*leading* the Church and *running* the Church’ were expressed in *Resourcing Bishops*.⁵² Beeson was also concerned by the pastoral and administrative workload demanded to maintain the Church’s corporate life.⁵³ He argued for decentralization and devolution of budgetary and other realms of authority to deaneries: ‘where the organisation of a diocese, including its synodical structures, stands in the way of reform’, he wrote, ‘this should be altered to meet the new requirements’.⁵⁴ In an essay published by the Foundation for Church Leadership, Brown made a plea for bishops to be released from hindrances that prevent them ‘getting out and alongside – and even knowing – those they serve’.⁵⁵ Notably, the desirability of ‘setting bishops free from all the numerous committees, financial bodies and supervisory administrative duties’ had surfaced more than half a century ago in the landmark Paul Report.⁵⁶

Escaping committees is invariably an attractive option for senior managers, and it is always worth asking whether or not it is essential for bishops to be present at any particular meeting. The underlying issue is about accountability and control, and ensuring that bishops know their people and are known by them, and are kept in touch with what is going on in the diocese. A key finding here is that bishops *can* develop close relationships with incumbents and parishes where the structure of management committees is confronted with a structured demand from a development programme. This reordering is, in Pickard’s terms, about using

⁵² Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York, *Resourcing bishops*, p. 86, original emphasis.

⁵³ Beeson, *The bishops*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁵⁵ D. Brown, *Releasing bishops for relationship* (London: Foundation for Church Leadership, 2008), as cited in Grundy, *Leadership and oversight*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ L. Paul, *The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy* (London: Church Information Office for the Central Advisory Council for the Ministry, 1964), at p. 86.

the management system of the diocese to reform the management of the diocese. While he rightly argues that what is needed is a deeper and more profound death and resurrection of the diocesan model,⁵⁷ perhaps this sort of modest change is a step in the right direction that might allow a re-imagining of the episcopate.

Conclusion

The case study reported here set out to explore the new patterns of episcopal engagement that emerged within an innovative ministry development programme in one particular diocese, and how the level and nature of this engagement has been perceived by programme participants and the bishops themselves. It was clear from our observations and interviews that the sustained direct contacts between bishops and their clergy and parishes were widely appreciated and were shifting perceptions of leadership within the Diocese. Time will tell if the Programme results in sustained and positive change at the parish level. The evidence suggests that it is beginning to achieve its aims, and that this is in no small part related to a major shift in the role of the two bishops. The two conclusions that emerge from this work are in some ways obvious: what makes them unusual is that they are based on empirical evidence gathered from a case study.

First, it is specifically *episcopal* contacts that seem to effect the most change. This is partly because the signal they give to sometimes isolated clergy and parishes is that they matter to the Diocese as a whole. It is also about the fact that bishops can have unique insight into what is happening across their diocese, and can foster networks that enable parishes to be supported in efforts to bring about change. This ability to foster networks is likely to improve dramatically as bishops spend more time on the ground as part of the Programme and therefore accrue even more information. Maintaining this information centrally is important,

⁵⁷ Pickard, *Theological foundations*, pp. 187-188.

but gathering and disseminating it through the office of bishop seems in this instance to be working well.

Second, the demands of enacting change across a whole diocese mean that bishops cannot maintain some other duties. This requires strategic decisions to be made about how far dioceses manage from the centre or devolve responsibilities, and how far management is a specifically episcopal role. It should not be assumed that the direct contacts fostered by the AMD Programme are detached from diocesan management, and indeed they may be far more effective in that role than chairing committees. What the AMD Programme created was a clearly *structured* demand on episcopal resources that was able to compete effectively for episcopal time with the structured demands of other roles, at least in the short term. In the long-term, the Diocese will need to cement the changed roles by re-imagining the tasks that tend to take bishops away from their people.

Table 1. Episcopal engagement in the Diocese of Truro AMD Programme

Stage of AMD	Episcopal engagement
<p>Before Programme starts</p>	<p>At meetings with the Director of Ministry and Head of AMD, the suffragan bishop determines which incumbents to invite to join a new cohort.</p>
	<p>The suffragan bishop issues the invitation to an incumbent to join AMD (often by email, sometimes by telephone or face-to-face).</p>
	<p>The suffragan bishop is involved (with the Director of Ministry and Head of AMD) in the process of matching incumbents with AMD Advisors.</p>
<p>Before first Clergy College</p>	<p>The suffragan bishop (and the Head of AMD) meets the incumbent in parish, to explain what involvement in the Programme will entail.</p>
	<p>A bishop attends a special event in parish to introduce AMD and explain to the congregation(s) what participation in the Programme will involve for the priest and parish(es).</p>
<p>Clergy Colleges</p>	<p>College 1, session 1: The suffragan bishop prays with a new cohort and then spends the first hour introducing AMD to the participants.</p>
	<p>The diocesan bishop and the suffragan bishop lead certain sessions. The bishops occasionally drop in to join participants at meals. In particular, the suffragan bishop usually attends the Wednesday evening dinner of the final College.</p>
	<p>College 5, final session: The suffragan bishop leads ‘Prayer for the Journey’ (with the College Chaplain), before the cohort departs to</p>

	embark upon the next stage of their AMD adventure.
Second phase of Programme	Each incumbent has a private one-to-one meeting with a bishop in the run-up to the Bishop's Conference. Bishop's Conference (which may take place in parish). One of the bishops leads the 12-month and 24-month reviews.

Figure 1. Episcopal contacts in AMD in the Diocese of Truro and an AMD-like diocesan Programme

Max = contacts if all 7 cohorts were of 12 incumbents whose benefices completed their first review and half had annual reviews thereafter. Actual = estimated contacts based on the known size and outcomes of cohorts by August 2017. The estimates beyond 2018 assume a cohort of 12 starts every other year on a Programme with similar demands on bishops to the current AMD Programme.

