

Shared Local Ministry: A Theological Rationale

Why the Diocese of Hereford is taking this approach, and why formation, development and support sit at its heart

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1. Purpose of this paper

In brief. Shared Local Ministry is the Diocese of Hereford's way of enabling local churches to flourish through teams of lay and ordained people serving together: Focal Ministers rooted in a particular church, Oversight Ministers leading across a benefice or group of churches, and Area Deans supporting the wider pattern across clusters of deaneries. This paper sets out why the diocese believes this is a faithful way to be the Church in this place, and why it is being built around formation, development and support rather than around structures alone. Spiritual direction, pastoral supervision and Communities of Practice are ordinary supports for this ministry, woven in from the start rather than added when difficulty arises.

The paper makes two claims, in order. The first is theological: Shared Local Ministry stands within a recognisable and faithful Anglican account of the Church and its ministry, and would be worth pursuing even in easier times. The second follows from the first: because this way of working asks people to grow into new patterns of responsibility, its heart must be formation, in the fullest Christian sense of that word. Saint Paul writes of labouring 'until Christ is formed in you', and that is the measure here.¹ Formation is more than training for tasks. It is the patient shaping of people, communities and relationships into the likeness of Christ, so that ministry flows from who people are becoming, and from prayer, before it flows from what they can do.

This paper is written for all in the diocese who want to understand the thinking behind Shared Local Ministry: clergy, lay ministers, PCC members, and those weighing what this change asks of their church. It sits alongside the Formation, Development and Support paper, which sets out the practical pathways for each role, and the strategy paper considered by Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod in July 2026. The financial case is made separately and stands in its own right.

¹ Galatians 4.19.

2. Why Shared Local Ministry: the theological ground

Shared Local Ministry is shaped by pressures the diocese has named openly: fewer stipendiary clergy, a growing operating deficit, many buildings, and small, ageing congregations across one of the most rural and dispersed dioceses in England. Those pressures are real and this paper does not minimise them. The deeper claim, however, is theological.

The whole people of God

The starting point is the Church's own understanding of itself. The Ordinal opens the ordination of priests by declaring that God calls his people to follow Christ and forms us into 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation', to declare the wonderful deeds of the one who called us out of darkness into light. Ministry begins there, with the whole people of God, called and sent. Lay ministry is a calling in its own right, given by the Spirit for the building up of the body, rather than a substitute pressed into service where clergy are scarce. The letter to the Ephesians describes ministers given 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry', and that equipping vocation runs through everything proposed here.²

Within this pattern of ministry, each role has its own integrity. Oversight Ministry is priestly ministry exercised across a wider field, rooted in prayer, word, sacrament, pastoral care and the cure of souls, with particular attention to enabling and developing the ministry of others. It is more than management or coordination. Focal Ministry is locally rooted, recognised and accountable ministry in a particular church or community; its strength lies in Christian presence, local trust, continuity and care. Area Dean ministry is connective: holding the wider life of ministry across a cluster of deaneries, supporting clergy and local ministers, and attending to where ministry is flourishing and where strain is hidden.

An ancient charge, freshly ordered

Ordained ministry remains essential within this life, and again the Ordinal points the way. Priests are charged to 'share with the Bishop in the oversight of the Church, delighting in its beauty and rejoicing in its well-being'. Oversight belongs to the priestly office itself; it is a recovery, rather than an invention. A priest's ministry is given for the Church's unity, teaching, sacramental life, pastoral care and faithfulness to the apostles' witness, and it is exercised most fully when it blesses, orders, encourages and sustains the ministry of others. One theologian describes this as a widening circle: God's blessing moves outward from Christ, through the whole baptised people, into the communities the Church serves. Another describes ordained ministry as the work of ordering relationships so that many callings hold

² 1 Peter 2.9; Ephesians 4.11-12; Common Worship: Ordination Services; John Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Leicester: IVP, 1979).

together as one body.³ The shift from the minister who does everything to the minister who enables others to flourish is a deepening of the priestly calling, and an honest account will also name its cost: something real is relinquished, and something vulnerable is taken up.⁴

The language of oversight has deep roots. The Book of Common Prayer, in the Ordering of Priests, addresses those to be ordained as 'Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord', and charges them 'to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad'. A watchman keeps watch over more than one house; the word itself carries the meaning of oversight, and the charge to seek dispersed sheep could have been written for this diocese. The 1662 rite is equally clear that such a ministry exceeds human strength: the will and ability to fulfil it 'is given of God alone', and those ordained are bidden to pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit. From Cranmer's Ordinal to Common Worship, the Church of England has consistently described priesthood in terms of watchfulness, stewardship and care exercised across a scattered flock, sustained by grace and prayer. What the diocese proposes is a fresh ordering of that ancient charge for the present time, and it stands in a long line of such orderings. The office of rural dean is itself of medieval origin; it fell largely into disuse after the Reformation and was revived across the Church of England in the nineteenth century, as part of the wider renewal of diocesan life, when the Church last faced the question of how to hold dispersed parishes together with too few hands.⁵ The Area Dean develops an old office for a new season; it does not invent a new tier.

The same continuity holds for lay ministry. The Church of England admitted its first Readers in 1866, restoring an ancient lay office to meet the pastoral pressures of that century, and licensed lay ministry has been part of the Church's ordered life ever since.⁶ Local, recognised, accountable lay leadership under episcopal authority is therefore an inheritance rather than an innovation, and the Focal Minister stands within it. Commissioned by the Bishop, accountable to an Oversight Minister, and formed through a serious pathway, the Focal Minister is the latest expression of something the Church of England has done, in different

³ Graham Tomlin, *The Widening Circle: Priesthood as God's Way of Blessing the World* (London: SPCK, 2014); Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

⁴ Stephen Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church*, 2nd edn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

⁵ The Book of Common Prayer (1662), *The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests*. On the medieval office of rural dean and its nineteenth-century revival, see Arthur Burns, *The Diocesan Revival in the Church of England c.1800-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); see also 'Rural Dean' in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶ The office of Reader was formally revived by the Convocations of Canterbury and York in 1866; see 'Reader' in Cross and Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. edn (2005), and the historical material of the Central Readers' Council.

forms, for a century and a half: trusting lay people with real and visible responsibility for the life of a local church, held within the order and care of the wider Body.

Three ministries, one body

This account can be recognised across the breadth of Anglican tradition. An evangelical voice hears in it every-member ministry and the equipping of the saints. A charismatic voice hears the recognition and release of the Spirit's work in local churches, held within Anglican order and accountability. A sacramental voice hears a deepening of the Church's life of priesthood, word, sacrament and episcopal order. A rural theology of place insists that ministry is always embodied somewhere: in villages, market towns, schools, farms, churchyards, local histories, griefs and relationships, where faithful local presence is itself a form of witness.⁷ Other voices ask necessary questions about power and recognition: whose calling is noticed, whose labour has been taken for granted, and who is overlooked because they do not fit a narrow image of confident leadership. Shared ministry therefore depends on accountable trust: clear boundaries, safe practice, proper review, and the humility to recognise that power can be misused even in local and familiar settings.⁸

The wider Church has recently reflected on this at national level. The General Synod's work on trust and trustworthiness concludes that trust in the Church is rebuilt through consistent, accountable behaviour over time rather than through structures alone, and its accompanying theology recovers the New Testament insight that faith itself, *pistis*, means trust: relational, mutual and formed in community.⁹ Shared Local Ministry is designed on the same conviction. Roles are commissioned publicly, accountability is clear, review is regular, and trust is treated as something the Church builds through faithful practice, not something it assumes.

Is this just managing decline?

Some will ask whether all this is decline management dressed in theological language: fewer clergy, so lay people are asked to fill the gap. The danger is genuine, and the wider Church has named it plainly. Where focal ministry is offered as a quick fix, without serious formation and support, it drifts into maintenance and eventually fails the very communities it was

⁷ Stott, as note 2; New Wine England; Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (London: SPCK, 1972); Andrew Rumsey, *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place* (London: SCM Press, 2017); John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

⁸ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Mowbray, 1996); Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys, *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2019).

⁹ Trust and Trustworthiness in the Church of England, GS 2457 (General Synod, July 2026), including the theological commentary by Professor David Ford.

meant to serve.¹⁰ The safeguard is the shape of this proposal itself. Formation, spiritual direction, pastoral supervision and Communities of Practice are built in as ordinary supports from the beginning, with honest review at every stage. The Ordinal itself teaches why: those being ordained are told they cannot bear the weight of this ministry in their own strength, 'but only by the grace and power of God', and are charged to pray. What is true at ordination is true of every ministry described in this paper. A church that asks people to carry new responsibility, and then leaves them to carry it alone, has misunderstood both ministry and grace.

The chapters that follow show how this theological claim takes practical form: in the formation pathways themselves, in the change they ask of people beneath the structures, and in the supports that hold ministers over time.

3. The pathways as the living practice of Shared Local Ministry

Shared Local Ministry is formed over time. It is renewed, year by year, as the Church notices callings, prepares people for responsibility, supports them in practice, reviews their ministry and learns from what emerges. New Focal Ministers will come forward each year. Oversight Ministers will grow into the practice of priestly oversight, especially where the inherited pull is towards doing everything personally. Area Deans will learn, in practice, how to hold the wider life of ministry across clusters of deaneries. Local churches will be helped to recognise callings, share responsibility and understand the place of Focal Ministers within the ordered life of the Church.

The Formation, Development and Support Pathways give shape to that work. Each pathway follows a common rhythm. It begins with foundations: clarifying calling, role and relationships, and grounding the ministry in prayer before anything else is asked of it. It continues through practice: growing through the everyday exercise of the ministry itself, with support and shared reflection, because these roles are learned by being lived. It deepens over time, attending to the more demanding aspects of each role: conflict, safeguarding, local change, and sustaining worship, care and mission across the years. And it never simply finishes. Ongoing support continues for as long as the ministry does.

Three supports run through every pathway as ordinary provisions for ministry, rather than remedies for difficulty. Spiritual direction keeps ministry rooted in the life of prayer from which it flows. Pastoral supervision gives a regular, structured place to reflect honestly on practice, boundaries and judgement; Focal Ministers receive this through the supervision of their Oversight Minister. Communities of Practice gather those exercising the same ministry

¹⁰ David Heywood, 'A Theology for Focal Ministry', davidheywood.org (2025).

so that experience is brought into prayerful reflection and wisdom is shared rather than carried alone. Alongside these, regular review gives the minister, the local church and the diocese a disciplined way of noticing what is being learned, what is becoming strained, and what support is needed next. Focal Ministers also belong to the wider diocesan Lay Ministry Network, supported centrally and through the Area Deans, so that focal ministry is connected to the whole breadth of lay ministry across the diocese rather than standing apart from it.

Each pathway honours what a person already brings. Oversight Ministers arrive with priestly formation; the pathway builds on it rather than repeating it. Many Focal Ministers will already hold another authorised or licensed role; the pathway attends to the particular responsibility of focal ministry, which is new even where much else is familiar. Area Deans take up posts with no settled template, and their formation is honest about that.

These pathways sit within wider diocesan provision, and the boundaries between them are deliberate. An Into Incumbency programme bridges the final phase of curacy and the first years of incumbency, and offers a refresher for experienced incumbents. It provides the practical working knowledge of ministry: governance, legal responsibilities, PCC and charity obligations, buildings, safeguarding processes and the other disciplines of running a parish well. Because that ground is covered there, the Oversight Minister pathway is free to concentrate on what is distinctive to oversight itself: the shift from doing ministry to enabling it. Shared Local Ministry assumes practical competence is provided for, in the right place, rather than skipped.

This rhythm keeps Shared Local Ministry from two failures. It is saved from casual voluntarism, in which willing people are left to work things out alone, and from clerical delegation, in which lay people are handed the tasks the clergy can no longer reach. Local ministry is discerned, formed, commissioned, supported and reviewed. It belongs to the Church, held within episcopal oversight and the common life of the diocese, rather than to individual enthusiasm or local convenience.

4. Formation: into the likeness of Christ

Training remains necessary. People deserve role clarity, theological grounding, safeguarding competence, practical skill and confidence in local processes, and the pathways provide them. Formation, though, asks for more.

Shared Local Ministry reshapes judgement, identity, authority, trust and responsibility. These are formed slowly, through practice, reflection, supervision, feedback, prayer and accountable relationships over time. This is how adults actually change. We grow when experience is honestly reflected on, when settled assumptions are allowed to be questioned,

and when new practice is attempted among trusted companions rather than alone.¹¹ A ministry is learned in the company of others who share it, which is why the Communities of Practice matter so much. And because much of what ministers learn is learned informally, in the middle of the work itself, the pathways build in regular places where that learning can be noticed, tested and consolidated rather than lost.¹²

Three examples show why this matters. An Oversight Minister may understand the role description and still feel personally responsible for keeping everything safe, faithful and effective; where reflection and support are lacking, that leads to over-functioning and exhaustion. A Focal Minister may be properly commissioned and still feel exposed in a community where relationships are close and expectations unclear; where formation and support are thin, that leads to hesitation, confusion or overreach. An Area Dean may be clear about their remit and still be pulled into holding too many local problems personally; where a Community of Practice and review are absent, the role becomes unsustainable.

The deepest reason, though, is theological rather than practical. Saint Paul labours 'until Christ is formed' in the churches he serves, and Christian formation has always meant more than the acquisition of competence. It is the patient shaping of a person into the likeness of Christ: their prayer, their character, their way of holding authority and bearing responsibility, their capacity to love the people entrusted to them. The pathways serve that shaping. They train people for tasks, and beneath the tasks they help ministers notice the habits and anxieties that drive them, grow in self-knowledge before God, and inhabit their ministry from a deepening life of prayer. A diocese can commission roles quickly. Christlikeness is formed slowly, and the pathways are built for the slower work.

5. The change beneath the structure

Clear role descriptions will help, but they carry only part of the change. Shared Local Ministry asks clergy, lay ministers, local churches and diocesan leaders to hold responsibility differently, and that deeper change will be tested whenever anxiety rises.

The presenting anxiety may be financial. It may concern clergy numbers, vacancies, local fragility, church buildings, Sunday provision, safeguarding, standards, identity, or the fear that small churches are being left behind. These concerns are real, and they deserve to be heard carefully rather than managed away. Under pressure, though, communities and

¹¹ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

¹² Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, *Learning to Make a Difference: Value Creation in Social Learning Spaces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Michael Eraut, 'Informal learning in the workplace', *Studies in Continuing Education* 26, no. 2 (2004), pp. 247-273.

institutions tend to return to familiar habits. Clergy over-function. Congregations become dependent. Area Deans are pulled into rescue. Diocesan leaders feel the pull to hold things more tightly. Focal Ministers become either overburdened or under-supported. People can end up doing much the same things under new names, and the change dissolves.

Naming this risk honestly is the first mitigation. Those who study how organisations change observe that complex change depends less on plans and structures than on the steadiness and attention of the people leading it; leaders under pressure easily reproduce the very habits they hope to change.¹³ The same research offers a second insight: people may sincerely support a change while quietly holding on to what has kept them feeling safe, competent or faithful in the past.¹⁴ An Oversight Minister may be committed to collaborative ministry while still assuming that, unless the priest is central, quality will slip. A Focal Minister may be willing to serve while fearing that visible responsibility will strain close local friendships. An Area Dean may believe in local responsibility while feeling drawn to absorb every problem personally. At diocesan level, the desire for local freedom can sit alongside an understandable instinct to manage risk tightly. The Church of England's own recent research on trust reaches the same conclusion: trust is eroded less by difficulty itself than by how institutions respond to difficulty, and it is rebuilt through steady, predictable, accountable conduct rather than announcements of change.¹⁵

These are protective habits rather than failures of will or of faith. People hold on to what has helped them care for others and carry ministry in the past. And beneath the anxiety there is often grief: real things are being lost in this change, including familiar patterns of ministry, long-held expectations of what a vicar is and does, and for some parishioners the ministry they have already watched recede over many years. That loss deserves to be named and mourned honestly rather than hurried past; the Church has always made room for lament on the way to hope. The call to leave familiar security for the sake of what God is doing next runs from Abraham onwards, and it has never been asked of God's people without reassurance. Grace meets fear and grief alike; it does not shame them.

The pathways are designed with this in mind, and the mitigations are specific. Formation gives people places to notice their own habits without shame, to test new practice among trusted companions, and to grow into a different way of holding responsibility. Pastoral supervision provides the regular, honest mirror in which over-functioning and rescue are

¹³ Deborah Rowland, *Still Moving: How to Lead Mindful Change* (Chichester: Wiley, 2017); Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, revised edn (New York: Church Publishing, 2017).

¹⁴ Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

¹⁵ GS 2457, as note 9.

seen early. Communities of Practice let ministers discover that a struggle in one place is part of a wider story rather than a personal failing. Six-monthly review means strain is surfaced while it can still be addressed. And the steadiness asked of Area Deans, who will lead much of this change on the ground, is treated as a matter for their own formation and support, with external coaching a condition of the role rather than an extra.¹⁶

Shared Local Ministry is unlikely to take root where new structures are adopted while old habits of anxiety, control, rescue and dependence continue to govern behaviour. It is more likely to take root as the Church forms people and communities in a different way of trusting one another: which is, again, why formation sits at the heart of the whole approach.

6. Communities of Practice

The pathways place Communities of Practice at the centre of formation for Area Deans, Oversight Ministers and Focal Ministers, and the term is chosen deliberately. A network shares information. A support group offers comfort. A Community of Practice does something more: it gathers people exercising the same ministry so that live experience is brought into prayerful reflection, judgement is tested, wisdom is shared, and each person returns to their own context with greater clarity and confidence.¹⁷

Each of the three ministries needs this in its own way. Area Deans will carry new and demanding posts with no settled template, and their Community of Practice is where the role is worked out together rather than improvised alone. For Oversight Ministers, priestly oversight across a group of churches involves sustained reflection on authority, delegation, pastoral responsibility, sacramental presence and the development of others; the Community of Practice is where that reflection has companions. For Focal Ministers, visible local ministry can be exposed and lonely, especially where expectations are unclear or village relationships are close; the Community of Practice offers companionship and learning among others who understand the role from the inside.

Two conditions make these communities work, and both are attended to in the pathways. The first is safety: people learn from practice only where they can speak honestly about what is actually happening, including what is going wrong, without fear of judgement.¹⁸ These gatherings are therefore confidential, well facilitated and grounded in prayer, so that honesty

¹⁶ See the Formation, Development and Support in Shared Local Ministry paper for the supports attached to each role.

¹⁷ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Wenger-Trayner, *Learning to Make a Difference* (2020).

¹⁸ Amy C. Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018).

is possible and shame has no foothold. The second is regularity: a Community of Practice forms over time, through a settled rhythm of meeting, rather than through occasional events.

In a rural and dispersed diocese, these communities carry a further weight. Distance isolates, and isolation quietly corrodes both wellbeing and judgement. Gathering ministers regularly across the deanery clusters helps each one see that a difficulty in one place is often part of a wider story, which reduces shame and increases learning. And in the early years of Shared Local Ministry, when practice is still being learned and refined, the Communities of Practice guard against premature certainty: they are the settings where the diocese hears what is actually happening, rather than only what was planned to happen, and can adjust accordingly.

7. Pastoral supervision, spiritual direction and review

The pathways weave several kinds of support around each minister, because formation asks different things of people at different points, and no single relationship can hold them all.

Spiritual direction attends to prayer, discipleship, vocation, desire, consolation and desolation. It keeps ministry rooted in life with God rather than letting it be defined by function, and it is the support most easily neglected when work presses hardest, which is precisely why the pathways treat it as ordinary provision rather than a private extra.

Pastoral supervision provides structured, regular reflection on ministerial practice itself. It helps ministers notice their own patterns, attend to boundaries, reflect on how they hold authority, and consider what faithful action requires in situations that are rarely simple.¹⁹ Area Deans and Oversight Ministers receive this from trained supervisors; Focal Ministers receive it through the supervision of their Oversight Minister, which holds together pastoral support, practical oversight, accountability and continuing formation in one relationship. The value of this practice is now recognised well beyond this diocese. The General Synod's recent work on trust identifies pastoral supervision as a practice that unites accountability with support, and commends its strengthening across the Church.²⁰ Hereford's decision to build supervision into these ministries from the outset, rather than adding it later, reflects the same conviction.

The diocesan Accompanying Programme offers relational support to new incumbents through the transition into a post, giving them a trusted companion in the early years. And regular review, held six-monthly for each of the three ministries, provides a disciplined place to ask what is working, what is becoming strained, and what may need to change. Review is

¹⁹ Schön, as note 11.

²⁰ GS 2457, as note 9.

how the minister, the local church and the diocese together consider whether a role is being carried healthily and whether further support or adjustment is needed. It is a discipline of noticing, rather than an examination to pass.

These supports matter more, not less, in a diocese like this one. National research following clergy over ten years of ministry has found isolation and loneliness among the most persistent challenges to clergy wellbeing.²¹ In a dispersed rural diocese, that finding lands close to home. Shared Local Ministry multiplies the number of people carrying visible responsibility in scattered places, and it would be careless to do so without also multiplying the relationships that hold them. The supports described here, together with the Communities of Practice, are how the diocese keeps faith with the people it is asking to serve.

They also help the whole Church learn. Themes surfacing in supervision, insights from review, PCC feedback and the life of the Communities of Practice will give the diocese a truthful picture of how Shared Local Ministry is actually taking shape, place by place, and where it needs to adapt.

8. Learning from other dioceses

Hereford is working within a wider Church of England conversation. Several dioceses have developed forms of Oversight and Focal Ministry over recent years, and their experience, both encouraging and cautionary, has shaped this proposal.

Sheffield is furthest along the road. Its material describes Oversight Ministry as resourcing the whole people of God for the whole mission of God, and it has given sustained attention to Focal Ministry formation, support and review. The diocese has now authorised more than a hundred Focal Ministers, which suggests that where the roles are taken seriously and supported well, people do come forward.²² Sheffield's context is more urban than ours, so its experience translates only partly to a dispersed rural diocese, but its insistence on formation and review translates entirely.

Lincoln offers the closest rural comparison, and a lesson worth naming plainly. Its focal ministry material gives careful practical attention to support, review, safeguarding, wellbeing, prayerful presence and the continuing visibility of the Oversight Minister.²³ Lincoln has also found it necessary to review and reset aspects of its approach in a second phase. Far from

²¹ Living Ministry, the Church of England's ten-year study of clergy flourishing; see especially the qualitative findings published in 2025 on isolation and wellbeing.

²² Diocese of Sheffield, Focal Ministry resources.

²³ Diocese of Lincoln, Focal Ministry booklet and technical guidebook.

being an argument against the model, that experience is an argument for building review in from the start rather than discovering the need for it later, which is what Hereford's six-monthly reviews and staged evaluation are designed to do.

Truro's work contributes a clarifying insight: Oversight Ministry is exercising ministry through and with others, rather than attempting inherited patterns of ministry faster and in more places.²⁴ That sentence names the trap this whole proposal is built to avoid. Chichester, meanwhile, is helpfully clear about what Focal Ministry is not: it is not a replacement for a vicar, not a new free-standing office, and not a licence to act apart from proper Anglican authority.²⁵ Hereford's own commissioning practice, in which the Focal Minister's commission names a local responsibility without conferring any authorised ministry beyond those already held, follows the same discipline.

Hereford's shape will still be its own. The rural, dispersed and deeply relational character of this diocese means the work must be locally formed, not imported. What the wider Church confirms, though, is consistent: this way of working is recognisable Anglican practice, and it flourishes where formation, support, clarity and review are taken seriously, and drifts where they are not. That is the lesson this paper has been drawing throughout, and it is why the pathways look the way they do.

9. Investing in people

Shared Local Ministry asks the diocese to invest in people. That investment has a financial dimension, set out separately, but money is only part of it. What is really being committed is attention, time, prayer, trust, formation and care, sustained over years rather than granted at a launch.

The pathways give that commitment practical shape. They provide the means by which callings are noticed, roles are clarified, confidence grows, practice is reviewed, and support continues long after commissioning, licensing or appointment. Structures matter, but structures do not sustain ministry. People do, and people are sustained by prayer, companionship and honest relationships far more than by role descriptions.

Area Deans, Oversight Ministers and Focal Ministers will carry demanding and hopeful work. Permission alone would be a poor gift to give them. They deserve to be formed, accompanied, trusted, reviewed and prayed for, and the local churches they serve deserve ministers who are held well enough to keep serving. To commit to the pathways is therefore a double commitment: to the people through whom Shared Local Ministry will be lived, and

²⁴ Diocese of Truro, Oversight Ministry resources.

²⁵ Diocese of Chichester, Focal Ministry resources.

to the congregations and communities of this diocese, from the Welsh border parishes to the Teme valley, among whom it will be lived out.

10. Conclusion

This paper has made two claims, and they belong together.

The first is that Shared Local Ministry is a faithful Anglican way of being the Church in this place. It begins where the Ordinal begins, with the whole people of God called to be 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation'. It honours ordained ministry as both Ordinals describe it, from the 'Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord' of the Book of Common Prayer to the charge in Common Worship to share with the Bishop in the oversight of the Church, and it orders local, oversight and deanery ministry so that each strengthens the others within episcopal care. It takes seriously both the pressures facing this diocese and the conviction that God has already called the people needed for what comes next.

The second is that this way of working becomes real through formation, development and support, or it does not become real at all. Shared Local Ministry is lived into over time, patiently and locally. It takes shape as the Church discerns callings, forms ministers, supports them in practice, reviews their ministry, and learns together from what emerges. The pathways help Area Deans grow into new posts with wisdom and companionship. They help Oversight Ministers exercise priestly ministry through enabling, blessing and sustaining the ministry of others. They help Focal Ministers take up visible local responsibility with proper formation, commissioning, accountability and care. And they help local churches recognise that ministry is not simply brought to them from elsewhere; it is discovered, formed and shared among them, as part of the life of the Body of Christ.

Review, feedback and continuing development are built in throughout. As the work unfolds, the diocese will see where confidence is growing, where support is needed, where roles need clarification, and where the Spirit is bringing new callings to light. All of this will be carried, as the Ordinal says of ordained ministry itself, not in anyone's own strength 'but only by the grace and power of God', which is why prayer runs through every pathway and every support described here.

The pathways do more than support Shared Local Ministry. They are how a diocese is formed, slowly and together, into the likeness of Christ. They are part of how we are church.

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This paper is a companion to the Formation, Development and Support in Shared Local Ministry paper and the Shared Local Ministry paper considered by Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod in July 2026.

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