



The Minister's role in larger churches

TN6 Training Notes series: Leadership

These notes were first published on the website in August 2001 and last updated in July 2023. They are copyright © John Truscott. You may download this file and/or print up to 30 copies without charge provided no part of the heading or text is altered or omitted.

Ministers do not usually have effective 'job' or 'role descriptions'.# Technically, many are 'office holders'. But when they lead a larger church this lack of a framework for their ministry can be especially dangerous.

The following is an outline of a possible role description. It assumes a church with a staff team and a congregation of above-average size. To avoid making it too general this outline is given for an Anglican incumbent, although it will not be difficult for other denominations to make the necessary adjustments to fit their own situations.

This role description should be used simply as a basis for the writing of a specific one for you / your church. Such a document, used in appropriate ways, could have many advantages for the Minister, all other leaders and the church membership. It should bring clarity to a role that is often not as clear as it needs to be.

The role description

Heading

The Vicar/Rector of (name of church). *(Date – and date for review.)*

Purpose of this position *(here is just one idea for a possible purpose – but Anglicans may prefer to base the purpose on the Ordinal – see Training Notes TN78 on this website)*

To lead (name of church) in its people's growth in:

- their relationship with God through Jesus Christ,
- their love for one another,
- their witness to the world.

Most CofE clergy now have 'Role definitions', but how effective these are, especially for those who lead larger churches, can be questioned.

Relationships

The incumbent is responsible to the Bishop of (diocese) with whom (s)he shares the 'cure of souls' within the parish.

(S)he acts as the leader of the church staff team, works in close liaison with the Church Wardens and is ex-officio chair of the Parochial Church Council. (S)he is a member of the Deanery Chapter and Synod and of the local Fraternal.

(Add other links which may also exist: eg. chair of Governors of a church school, trainer of a Curate, and much more.)

Responsibilities

- 1 To maintain his/her own spiritual growth, particularly by giving time to prayer and the study of the Scriptures. Also to engage heart and mind through wide reading in areas of theology, spirituality, etc. and to develop ministry skills through regular training.
- 2 To develop and then hold the church to the agreed vision. With other leaders, to determine priorities and to develop strategies to enable the church to work to that vision. Within this, to ensure that the church keeps appropriate forms of outreach high on its agenda.
- 3 To oversee and, with others, to develop the ministry of the Word of God through both preaching and teaching in all appropriate forms (in church services, small groups and one-to-one).
- 4 To hold overall responsibility for the leading of public worship, for the ministry of the sacraments, and for intercession for local and national concerns and God's world-wide work.
- 5 To lead the staff team, managing individual members in their delegated responsibilities, building up the team and pastoring them and their families.
- 6 To develop lay ministry by overseeing the appointment, nurturing, management and training of Readers and all other lay leaders, enabling them to develop their distinctive gifts and ministries.
- 7 To ensure that the decision-making processes of the church through staff team, Church Wardens, PCC, Standing Committee, and action and other groups are carried out effectively, with each body having a clearly understood role.
- 8 To serve the parish (and appropriate networks) by ensuring that Christ is proclaimed by word and deed, that pastoral needs are met, and that 'occasional offices' are conducted in an appropriate manner.
- 9 To ensure the church undertakes its responsibilities within the deanery and diocese and to undertake other specific and agreed responsibilities as incumbent (eg. school governorships, local chaplaincies, synod membership).
- 10 To take proper care of him/herself and his/her family through adequate time for rest, recreation and family life (or, as appropriate, with friends) as an example to others. To be involved in some activity with those who have no church allegiance.

Exclusions

The incumbent is NOT expected to make the following a priority:

- routine administration of the church and parish;
- routine visiting and pastoral care which can be carried out by others;
- areas of ministry in which (s)he is not specifically gifted and where work can be delegated to others;
- areas of ministry not felt to be priorities at a given time.

The incumbent may, however, hold certain responsibilities in other areas of Christian work (eg. diocesan boards, national councils). All the above is to be read within the context of the canons of the Church of England.

Notes

Delegation

To lead a larger church, the Minister has to realise that a different style of leadership is called for. It is not possible to do everything that his or her counterpart in a small church may carry out. Whole areas of ministry have to be delegated to other members of staff (in addition to the involvement of laity in every area of ministry). So the management of the staff team becomes an important element of the leader's ministry. Hard choices have to be made about priorities.

The list of exclusions is given so that the Ministers of larger churches do not feel guilty at delegating these items. They should beware of doing very much in these areas if this means that their priorities in ministry are neglected. For some, the temptation is to get back to the style of ministry they were used to in a smaller church and fail to offer proper leadership.

Expectations

But the danger of failing to delegate may come from other people rather than the Minister him or herself. I frequently come across larger churches where church member, usually but not always those who are older and who have seen a solo style of leadership in the past, assume that their (I use the word deliberately) Minister is the one 'Go-to' person.

The most obvious example is members of the congregation who do not consider they have had a home visit unless the Minister has been. But there are many other examples: church office-holders and members who approach the Minister for their views on areas of ministry which are headed by other staff, or who report trivial matters such as a broken window or a missing key. There will be church members who see their standing as depending on their ability to contact and receive a reply from the Minister.

Once Ministers give in to such expectations, the pattern is affirmed and the contacts continue. So knowing ones priorities and then firmly adhering to them, even if this makes one unpopular, is essential.

The order of the ten items

Some may wish to adjust the order of the ten items. The deliberate order shown is:

- spirituality (1)
- vision (2)
- teaching/preaching (3)
- public worship (4)
- developing others (5,6)
- decision-making (7)
- parish, deanery and diocese (8,9)
- care of self (10).

Others may feel that items 1 and 10, though important, do not belong on this list. They are put here to stress that the responsibilities of spiritual leadership cover more than just the more obvious 'work' areas.

Related documents

A job description only has value in its application. Two other documents should normally be associated with it.

The first is a '**person profile**', normally associated with the search for a new Minister but just as helpful as a check for the Minister him- or her-self. Scripture includes clear guidelines for the kind of people to be entrusted with spiritual leadership (eg. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

The second is a list of what may be termed '**medium-term aims**'. Whereas the job description is reasonably fixed (although it should be reviewed for minor changes on a regular basis), it is helpful to have a list of specific aims for a given period (such as a year). These show specific priorities within the scope of the job description for the period in question. Such a list should change from year to year.

Other Training Notes on a similar theme

TN78 *The role of a church leader*

This takes the Anglican 'Ordinal' and reworks it into a role definition format for a Minister. This applies to all sizes of church, not just larger ones.

TN87 *What to look for in your leaders*

This checks out some key Scripture passages before listing items to take into account for a person profile. This applies to all leaders in any one church, not just the Minister.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN6. They cover one aspect of a possible event for Ministers on self-management. For a more general treatment of this topic, see Article A6, *Job descriptions*. For a related issue for larger churches see TN50, *Should the staff lead the church?* and note TN78, *The role of a church leader*, TN87, *What to look for in your leaders*, and TN112, *Set my leaders free!*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running a self-management event for you.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN6 under Leadership (with a link to Structures).

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325 Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>