

An example MDR with a Diocesan Reviewer, for an incumbent of four rural churches¹

Review of the past 18 months

1. Your life of Discipleship:

What sustains your life of discipleship in Christ?

As an introvert, I love to have space to read. Read, read, read: the Bible, but also a variety of theological books including classics and more recent books. Regular, disciplined contemplation is the motor for my spiritual life, complemented with structured intercession, the daily office and now an annual 10 day retreat under the direction of my spiritual director. I am clear and boundaried, and believe this is helpful within the church context.

What disrupts your life of discipleship in Christ?

Some people can live cheerfully with chaos and indiscipline. I know I can't do this, and for all our sakes, in addition to my day off (Monday), the parishes know I have set aside Wednesday afternoon and Friday morning for contemplation, reading and prayer – indeed they often send me prayer requests, knowing that these will get concerted attention on Wednesday afternoon and Friday morning. This is only disrupted when my periodic “overthinking” leads to me wasting these precious times by worrying about things (which does no one any good).

2. Your life of vocation

What informs your continuing vocation?

I see my call as to serve the community through clear direction, teaching, divine worship, and through a life of contemplative prayer. I also have a calling to be a wife and (step)mother

How might your vocation continue to develop; what could support that?

I long for others in the churches to explore prayer for themselves rather than expect me to “say one for them”. Perhaps my vocation as a contemplative might extend to resourcing the spiritual life of others.

3. Safe and healthy cultures of your ministerial context

Reflecting on your most recent safeguarding training, what leadership behaviours have you developed and implemented over the last 18 months that have encouraged safer and healthier cultures in your ministerial context?

I had forgotten what I wrote after leadership safeguarding training, and needed to ask the safeguarding team to retrieve my forms and remind me. My action plan concerned safer recruitment to the parent and toddler group and schools-work “Open the Book” team (now implemented in full) and ensuring the PCC were up to date with safeguarding training (not yet implemented)

¹ based on a real example from *Evaluating Ministry* (Jill M Hudson, Alban Institute)

How might these be further encouraged; what could support this?

I need to make sure PCC do this. To be honest, my heart sinks when I think of it – the PCC is an elderly group of people who don't like coming out in the evenings, don't read books, resent the reorganisation that created one united parish a decade ago, don't see themselves as leaders in any significant way, and don't like using computers.

4. Your day-to-day ministry

How were you called to your current role?

I've always known this will be my final professional role. After an incumbency in a new town context (lots of energy but a transient population) I needed something more stable for the final decade, and have relished the opportunity to discover rural life. My husband semi-retired from a very demanding role in the NHS when I was licensed here, and the chance for the two of us to discover the joy of country walks, country pubs and country friends together was very attractive. I'm glad to be able to say our expectations have been surpassed.

Overall purpose of role – what do you understand to be the main purpose of your role – this could be from your 'charge', the ordinal, the parish profile, etc.

I cherish the words of Anthony Lilles: "Priesthood is a joining of Head and Heart, of truth and holy desire, of wisdom and joy, of contemplation and action. It has the quality of music. The interplay of these relations evokes moments of elation and heartache so intense that time and space can no longer limit it. This music moves us into great silence, an openness, a receptivity. The mysterious harmony of these sacred relations reconstitutes those who will join its strain."

5. Improving wellbeing

'For any minister, their wellbeing is the interplay of whatever mental health, physical health, spiritual health, financial, structural and relational factors contribute to that minister's sense of settled joy and fulfilment'. Dr. Liz Graveling (Living Ministry Project)

Reflecting on the above statement, what's missing to support your wellbeing? what tools or development would help you etc.

I thank God that I do feel "settled joy and fulfilment". If there's one thing missing, it is relational – although I have good friends, they are not in a church context (either here or elsewhere), and I don't feel that relationships within the churches (eg among PCC members, or with others who attend) are particularly strong – or if they are, they don't include me.

What's possible for your wellbeing? aspirations for the future and how you hope to develop

I probably need to spend some time getting to know the church members on a social level.

6. Looking forward by looking back

Reflect on the last year to eighteen months, paying particular attention to any objectives/priorities set at your last MDR with Senior Staff.

Did you set yourself objectives/priorities at your last MDR with Senior Staff? If so please share them below.

I set three objectives: to restart youth with children, families and schools; to recruit some lay people for authorised ministry; and to have an annual retreat

Reflecting on these objectives/priorities:

What has been life-giving? what has gone well, achievements and success

The annual retreat has been life-giving, and I have now added two 5 day silent “mini-retreats” each year in addition to it. I have loved enabling the Open the Book and Parent and Toddler groups to get underway.

What has not been life-giving? what hasn’t gone well, obstacles, frustrations etc.

I have not managed to unearth the gifted people for authorised ministry whom my objectives and priorities 18 months ago suggested were there. This may partly be because I have not got to know the congregations on a meaningful level, though to be honest I’m not sure I have the energy to do so.

Towards the Future

7. What needs to happen next?

Reflecting on your conversations covering sections 1 through 6, what needs to happen between now and your next Senior Staff Review in 18 months’ time to move your journey forward?

It was good to meet with Anne. Her enthusiasm for contemplative prayer, clear, principled leadership, and work with schools and families was enormously encouraging, and she rightly identified a call to be a wife and stepmother as vocational. Our conversation largely focussed on what she herself has recognised as a lack, both in terms of wellbeing and ministry, of warm relationships with fellow-Christians, especially within her local ministry context. Anne has perceived a need to have several “one to one” conversations a week with members of her churches, focussed both on getting to know them as people, and on “talent spotting” their gifts – this may lead to helping some people (including, perhaps, some members of the Open the Book and Parent and Toddler teams) to exercise a ministry of governance via PCC or a ministry of preaching, spiritual companionship or pastoral care through an authorised ministry. Anne is an introvert, so it’s important that this is not done in a way that requires Anne to be vulnerable to groups of people, and does not expose Anne to emotional exhaustion. Becoming part of a small group or learning community, perhaps with colleagues from her theological college, would also be a helpful counterpoint to the way most of her close relationships are with people, including her husband, who are wonderfully supportive but do not share her faith.

As we spoke, we were both keen not to lose the sense that Anne’s life of contemplative prayer might extend to resourcing the spiritual life of others, perhaps by herself training as a spiritual companion. However, at this point we felt that forming warm relationships with fellow-Christians, especially in the churches in her care, was so great a priority that formal training in spirituality might need to be postponed to a later date. Indeed, Anne is so committed to these warm relationships, that she is even willing to scale back her plans for silent retreats, to give more of her attention to forming these relational bonds.