

**Review of Children and Family worker Pioneer post**  
**Southbroom, St James**

**Context:**

In 2007 the parish of St James' Southbroom applied to the Aldhelm Mission Fund for funding for a mission post to appoint a *part-time* children and family worker. This post was to be based within St James' parish but the vision extended across the deanery; the ecumenical partnership of churches within Devizes; and the schools within the town. This application for funding was rejected for the following reason:

“As it stands, to allow this proposal to go forward would set a dangerous precedent for a justification for funding similar posts with such a parochial focus. We strongly recommend that the proposal be reworked to become a pioneer post under a Bishop's Mission Order with a clear Devizes Town or Deanery remit and an appropriate formal allocation of time for the post holder to work outside the parish of Southbroom St James.”

As a result in 2008 a proposal for pioneer ministry focused on children and families was presented, founded on the 5 marks of mission. An application was made for funding for a *full-time* post following further discussion with the Devizes deanery, partnership of churches across the town and the Board of Education. All were fully supportive of this concept of a new pioneer post which would be based within St James' but hold the brief for children and family work across the town and the deanery.

The tapered funding requested was for 5 years with two thirds given by the diocese and one third from the parish. The intention was that the post should then become self-sustaining.

This review has looked at the nine criteria (see Appendix) which were required to be met within the initial application and sets out to review the objectives met; those yet to be achieved and which require further development; and to make comments and recommendations for parish, deanery and diocese in the light of its findings.

Questionnaires were sent to the current post holder; wardens of St James'; deanery clergy; the Devizes' churches partnership and the head teachers of the schools.

**Objectives met:**

***Work with schools:***

- ≡ There has been engagement with a number of primary schools across the deanery, (extending beyond the town of Devizes itself). There is no work done specifically within any of the secondary schools.
- ≡ Weekly interactive worship within one of the schools has resulted in a 3 year curriculum written and delivered by a team which runs through from Creation to Revelation. This has been much appreciated although it does not link specifically into the school's programme.
- ≡ There is significant staff appreciation of the developing links between school and church and opportunity which this affords for trusting relationships and discussion of issues which concern staff.
- ≡ After school clubs are part of the support offered.
- ≡ The post holder is recognized to be an excellent schools worker

### ***Work within St James' church:***

- ≡ There has been significant growth in the numbers of children and families attending St James' church
- ≡ Development of activities with children has been much valued and the post holder is appreciated for her energy and enthusiasm and skill with children. Messy church and a wide range of clubs have been developed. The post holder recognizes the need for further development in Messy Church to engage with parents and the whole family.
- ≡ The integration of children from baptism through to age 11 through activities, relationship and mentoring has been an important strategic action to ensure that children stay embedded in the life of the church and this has borne fruit.
- ≡ The inclusion of children and the recognition of their contribution to the life and worship of the church has been a focus. This has served to develop the whole congregation in new ways.
- ≡ The development of volunteers working with children has been key and over 60 people are involved in this work. The post holder recognizes the need to further develop training for the volunteers in the coming year.
- ≡ The post holder is a full member of the ministry team within St James'.

### **Objectives which have not been met and require further development:**

#### ***Work which extends to the wider family.***

- ≡ Although Messy Church has opened up the opportunities with families, children of primary school age have been the focus. Work amongst parents and 'carers' has still to be envisioned and grasped.

#### ***Work within the partnership of churches in Devizes.***

- ≡ The pooling of resources, specifically in relation to schools in the town, within the church partnership in Devizes was an aspiration which has yet to be met. Responses received from the ecumenical church leaders identified that they feel little impact has been made in this area. Good lines of communication; information sharing; and the identifying of opportunities of working together in the schools has yet to be established.

#### ***Work across the deanery.***

- ≡ The response from deanery clergy has been that this post has made little impact across the deanery. They see the focus as being within the parish of St James. Requests for help or visits have not been met due to pressure of other commitments and some have felt that their situation has not been considered fully. Rural village ministry amongst children and families requires a different approach from that of a town context.
- ≡ Implementation of the diocesan strategy for children and young people across the deanery has proved difficult. Devizes' deanery was one of the original six pilot deaneries. Despite having a deanery post assigned to hold the brief for this area of work, there has been little 'buy-in' to the initiatives put forward. This indicates a number of issues. The post was formulated by a previous incumbent of St James' at a time when the deanery strategic plan was still in formation. A number of changes in personnel across both parish and deanery has meant that there has been a lack of clarity and communication concerning this post. It has been difficult to develop a

deanery 'culture'. The hoped for parish 'ambassadors' for children and youth have not been forthcoming.

## **Comments and Recommendations:**

It is important to acknowledge the excellent children's work which the post holder has initiated and developed through a team of people within the parish and across the schools. Where such work has been undertaken there is much appreciation for her skill, energy and enthusiasm.

The scope of the work has not however been as far-reaching as was hoped or envisioned and this raises questions for parish, deanery and diocese in respect of future work.

The parish needs to consider how they wish to shape the future of this post. They will be taking responsibility for the salary from the ending of the diocesan funding and therefore have the option to make this more parish-focused. However there could still be scope to reconfigure a more deanery-wide focus. It was noted in the review that supervision and strategic oversight for the post was limited and the proposed liaison group to oversee this post did not materialize. It would be essential for such a group to take responsibility for this in future. A conversation within the deanery as to whether there still is a commitment for such a post is required. Whether the post extends wider than the parish or not, the need for strategic oversight and supervision of the post holder needs to be addressed. If there is to remain a deanery / partnership element then we would strongly recommend a steering group which would include the key stakeholders to help reflect, steer, shape and offer a balanced strategic overview of the role and its ongoing impact.

The diocese is committed to developing further pioneering ministry and mission opportunities. In relation to the criteria noted below the intention is to focus on 'new work or new areas'. In order to fulfill this task there needs to be further development on the theological underpinning for such posts; a commitment to resourcing through financial strategy, training and support; and a clarity of focus and vision, especially in relation to engagement in rural communities.

Jonathan Triffitt (Rural Dean, Devizes and Incumbent of St James' Southbroom) and Ruth Worsley (Archdeacon of Wilts)

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## **Appendix**

Criteria for pioneer funding to be approved:

1. must demonstrate how the post takes forward the five marks of Mission as outlined in the diocese of Salisbury vision and strategy for 2007-2012
2. may be put forward by a parish/ benefice / group of parishes or benefices/ deanery synod or Archdeaconry Pastoral Committee, depending on context / responsibilities of the proposed post. Proposals put forward by parish[es] or benefice[s] should be supported by the deanery synod concerned.
3. must be for new work or new area
4. must be for work that is part of the deanery strategic plan[s]

5. must show vision and an indication of how the post will be sustained "year 6 and beyond"  
[assuming Pioneer posts are on a 5 year time-frame]
6. could replace an established "parish" post
7. should have measurable outcomes [and the proposal should identify who will monitor/  
oversee – in accordance with the provisions of the Bishop's Mission Order if that is the structure to be  
used for the appointment]
8. should explore possibilities for ecumenical work and outside funding
9. should identify resources required [e.g provision/location of housing / who pays expenses etc]
10. should include a recommendation on how the post should be reflected in Share  
Apportionment [to be approved by the Fairer Share review group]