*Clergy Role Description*

**Diocese of Durham**

*Role description signed off by:* Archdeacon of Auckland Date: April 2025

To be reviewed 6 months after commencement of the appointment, and at Ministerial Development

Review, alongside the setting of objectives.

• **Details of Post**

*Role Title:* Interim Minister, Upper Weardale, Rural Mission Lead,

and Assistant Area Dean

*Name of benefice:* Upper Weardale

*Deanery:* Dales Deanery

*Archdeaconry:* Auckland

*Initial point of contact on terms of service:* Diocesan Secretary

1. **Role Purpose**

**The vision of the Diocese is 'Blessing our communities in Jesus' name for the transformation of us all'. Within this the four core priorities are to:**

* **Energise Growth**
* **Engage with Children, Youth and Young People,**
* **Challenge Poverty and**
* **Care for God’s Creation.**

**These are outlined and expressed in the Diocesan Mission Strategy, 'Renewing Pilgrimage'.**

**General**

* To share with the Bishop in the cure of souls in this Benefice, in line with the Diocesan Vision, Priorities and Plan described above.
* To be Interim Minister of this parish, having regard to the calling and responsibilities of the clergy of the Church of England as described in the Ordinal, the Canons, national safeguarding policies, and all other relevant legislation, and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy 2015.* Specifically, the Vicar must give due regard to safeguarding policy and practice.
* To work with the PCC towards the development of the church (both the people and their building) so that the church is sustainable and effective in mission.
* To ensure that a high standard of worship, preaching and pastoral care is provided so that people are enabled to live as disciples of Christ.
* To nurture discipleship and develop the ministry of all God's people, through training, cooperation, delegation, support and example, so that they take more responsibility for the mission and ministry of the parishes; to seek to identify potential future leaders and ministers.
* To encourage all church members to participate in generous giving for the mutual support of one another across the diocese, and the wider Church of England.
* To collaborate within the deanery in mission and ministry and, through the Deanery Plan, participate in the shaping of ministry as resources and opportunities may require. (See further under “Role Context” below.)
* To be proactive and persistent in seeking the fullest degree of ecumenical cooperation wherever possible.
* To be the Rural Mission Lead for the Diocese of Durham, developing and sharing good practice for Rural Ministry and Multi-Benefice Ministry

**Specific**

* To be **Interim Priest-in-Charge of the four churches / three parishes of the Upper Weardale Benefice**, leading them in mission and worship.
* To develop the missional vision of parishes and the benefice, enacting and building on the Mission Plans drawn up in each parish after the Vacancy Audit Process (VAP).
* To actively promote further cooperation in mission, ministry and governance between the parishes of the Benefice, working with the PCCs and JPCC (Joint Parochial Church Council), open to further changes in governance if these will be beneficial.
* To explore cooperation with Wolsingham and Thornley, with the permission and cooperation of their current Priest-in-Charge. (*Note*: s*hould these parishes become vacant, there is an expectation, in line with the Deanery Planning process, that one minister will serve both these parishes and the current Upper Weardale Benefice; the Interim Minster needs to develop relationships and shared working with this likely future goal in mind.*)
* To enable the people of the churches to grow as disciples, helping the churches to become better at discipleship-development in and through their worship and activities.
* To encourage and enable lay ministry, recognising the vocation of all God’s people and identifying, celebrating and nurturing the gifts that God has given his people.
* To seek to develop local focal leadership with missional intent in every church in the benefice (whether lay or ordained).
* To continue and further develop ecumenical missional cooperation.
* **To be Rural Mission Lead for the Diocese of Durham**, drawing together and leading a diocesan rural Mission Task Group which will identify, develop and share good practice for enabling rural churches to thrive and to grow. See below under “Role Context” and the separate document on this aspect of the role.
* **To be assistant Area Dean**, taking local responsibility for the churches of Weardale (**with the possibility of – and openness to – becoming Area Dean** at some future point.)

**3. Key Contacts**

* Churchwardens and members of the PCCs.
* The Joint Parochial Church Council.
* SSM clergy, Readers, retired clergy, and clergy who have been assisting in the vacancy.
  + Rev Heather Ross SMM Associate Minister
  + Rev Michael Baldwin Assistant Curate
  + Revd Dr Alastair Prince Diocesan Vocations Strategy Development Adviser
  + Rt. Revd David Stancliffe Retired with PTO
  + Rev’d John McHale Retired with PTO
  + Rev’d Philip Greenhalgh Retired with PTO
  + Rev’d Sandie Barton Retired with PTO
  + Rev’d Kate Bruce RAF Chaplain with PTO
  + Mrs Paula MacLeod Reader in training
* The Area Dean and Lay Chair of the Dales Deanery Synod.
* Ecumenical colleagues, including
  + Revd Bruce Sawyer Methodist Minister based in Stanhope
* Headteachers of the local schools,
  + Stanhope Barrington Church of England Primary school – Deb Cross
  + Rookhope, Wearhead & St John's Chapel Primary Schools – Executive Headteacher Sarah Hodgkinson
  + Frosterley Primary School - Executive head teacher Clare Carr
  + Wolsingham School (the local Secondary school) – Nick Mitchinson
* Local elected members and community leaders
  + Mrs Anita Savory & Mr John Shuttleworth – Durham County Councillor
  + Angelina Maddison – Weardale Area Action Partnership
  + Mrs Joan Carrick – Chair of the Stanhope Parish Council

**4. Role Context**

Both the Benefice and the Diocesan contexts need to be understood here:

In the Benefice of Upper Weardale, a few years ago there were seven parishes, each with a church. The church in the very small village of Rookhope closed in 2014, and St Michael and All Angels in Frosterley held its last service in March 2019. The incumbent then sadly died in post in 2016. A new incumbent was licensed in 2020, just before the Covid lockdown, but they also suffered ill health and left in 2023. Westgate church was closed in 2024.

Following a comprehensive Vacancy Audit Process (VAP) a great deal of work has taken place to prepare the Benefice of Upper Weardale for a new minister, with the recognition that new ways of working are necessary if the churches are to reach out effectively, enable people to explore the Christian faith, and begin journeys of Christian discipleship.

There is a growing understanding that new ways of working in the communities and of gathering people socially and spiritually need to be explored. Traditional church needs to be augmented with new approaches to mission, worship, and work with children, young people and elderly people. Having said that, these are communities in which traditional Church of England parish work ought to have traction. That is, both inherited and innovative ways of being church and engaging in mission need to be pursued here; the former need to be done as well and as warmly as possible; the latter need to be explored. A number of lay people within the parishes recognise this, and will support the successful applicant for this post in both developing ways to do the known well and make experiments with the as yet unknown openly.

The Diocese of Durham – in common with all Church of England dioceses – has had to make realistic decisions about the number of stipendiary clergy that can be afforded, and this has led to realistic but complex planning at a diocesan and deanery level. Upper Weardale was not due to receive a full-time minister. However, there is a recognition that to continue the good work on sustainability, governance and mission that has begun in the Benefice since the VAP needs the support of an ordained leader. The Diocese also recognises that there is an urgent need to develop an understanding of what good practice – good mission-focussed practice – looks like in rural parishes. There is, further, a need to support the relatively newly-formed Dales Deanery, which covers a huge area, but has very few stipendiary clergy.

This post has therefore been agreed on an Interim Ministry basis, with an initial term of three years, with two major goals and one additional responsibility:

* as Priest-in-Charge of these parishes, continuing the development of sustainable missional ministry here, and pursuing the health and growth of the churches;
* as Rural Mission Lead, developing resources for rural ministry to share in the diocese;
* as Assistant Area Dean, supporting the Area Dean of the new Durham Dales Deanery, especially in the north (Weardale), as the Area Dean lives in the south (Teesdale).

The project envisaged for the Rural Mission Lead role does not presume that a blueprint for how to minister in rural parishes can be drawn up which will fit and work in all. Nevertheless, there is experience and wisdom to be drawn on locally and nationally, and identifying approaches to both traditional and new forms of mission and ministry that are bearing fruit in some rural situations (nationally and locally) is possible. The holder of this post will therefore have the task of leading on this work. They will be expected to draw together a small group of lay and ordained people to work with them on identifying good practice, presenting this accessibly and helpfully, and begin sharing the fruits of this in the diocese *within two years*of their licensing.

While precise proportions of time are not being specified between the parish, deanery and diocesan elements of this role, the post-holder and the parishes should expect that often 50% of their time will be spent on the Rural Mission Lead and Asst Area Dean aspects of the work. There will also be occasional times – specifically, when sharing good rural practice in training events – when this aspect of the role will need most of the post-holder’s time.

The post will be reviewed in the third year. There are then a number of possible next steps. If the development of mission in the parishes is continuing well, and the Rural Mission Lead work is resourcing and enabling other parishes in the diocese, a further three-year Interim term may be agreed. If it does not seem likely that a further three years of interim work can yield benefits, the post may come to an end after the initial three-year term. In due course, it is likely that pastoral reorganisation will be required here. The Interim Minister will help prepare for this future, and might – following due process – themselves become the first holder of a new, permanent post (probably with charge of more parishes). All this is possible, but cannot be guaranteed at the outset. The Archdeacon will be happy to discuss this with anyone interested to apply.

With the different elements of this post as described above, it will clearly be challenging. However, there really are huge opportunities for the mission of the church here, and work towards a new future has begun; this is also a stunningly beautiful place to live and work while trying to implement these mission-focussed changes.

**5. Person Specification**

The successful candidate for this post will

* Have a sense of **call to rural** **ministry**, ideally with a track-record of leading and enabling mission and growth in rural parishes.
* Have the skills to help the parishes of Upper Weardale continue to evolve and enact good **Mission Plans**.
* Have the **knowledge and skills in parish management and governance** to help the parishes consolidate and build on their good work in these areas.
* Be a **collaborative** leader, who knows that the church is a body, and is able to draw upon the gifts of those working and worshipping alongside them.
* Be a **prayerful** priest, who will encourage people in their prayer lives and relationship with God.
* Will **both respect tradition and be comfortable with leading change**, and have the wisdom to know when to prioritise which.
* Lead inherited forms of **worship** well, and develop new spaces for encounter with God.
* Lead **occasional offices** well, enthusiastically, and with compassion and hope.
* Be motivated and excited by the task of discerning, collating and presenting **good missional practice for rural (and other multi-parish) benefices**.
* Be a skilled **communicator** of good missional practice, and/or have the collaborative skills to work with others who will be able to present and share good practice with others well.
* Be **willing to be held accountable** for progress in the Rural Mission project as Rural Mission Lead and in parish development as an Interim Minister.
* Have the **pastoral and relational skills** to be an able Assistant Area Dean (and possibly Area Dean).

*Interim PiC and Rural Lead UW RD*

*2025.04 v02*