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**Thinking about taking on a Planting Curate**

**in Ipswich Deanery in the summer of 2023?**

**Notes for St Margaret’s PCC**

**Background**

When the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich put in a large bid to the Church Commissioners in 2019 for the funding to run the ‘Inspiring Ipswich’ project it had to show that it was contributing substantially so it set aside the funds for six full-time, church-planting curates during the life span of the project (ie til the end of 2025). Three of these posts have already been used to pay for the church planters at River Church (2) and Bridge Church (1) and three are now available for Curates to start at Petertide (June/July) 2023. St Margaret’s is now being considered as a possible church which *might* like to take advantage of a Church Planting Curate. We’d like you to consider the factors below, to pray about it and to let us know by 20th February 2023 (or ideally before) if you would like to take advantage of this opportunity. If you say no, that is absolutely fine. It will not count against you in any way though this particular opportunity is not expected to be repeated in the near future. If you say yes, we will move to the next stage which is to advertise the fact that we are looking for a planting Curate. The idea at the moment is to advertise for all three posts together in one attractive Church Times advert, though we will also need to advertise through social media and our own contacts.

The timing has to be this tight because every week that passes, more curates will be placed elsewhere and we don’t want to miss the opportunity.

**Why Church planting?**

If you have not thought much about church planting before it is worth noting that no church exists without someone or some group of people having ‘planted’ it there at some stage, whether that was 4, 40 or 400 years ago. Planting churches has always been an important part of the Church’s mission though for several decades in the Church of England it went quiet. This has changed in the last decade and the Church has remembered again this essential and exciting part of its life. Sending out groups of people to start new churches or congregations is one of the marks of a healthy church and part of what it means to be an apostolic (sending) church. Statistics show that new churches often grow far faster than ‘inherited’ churches (the churches which have been around for a while) so it is also a way of speeding up our outreach to those who do not yet know Christ’s love in their lives.

Planting can happen within the boundaries of our parishes or (with appropriate permissions) beyond our boundaries. Sometimes they focus on a particular area or demographic, depending on where God calls.

The Inspiring Ipswich Project Board has been thinking about this and talking to your Priest-in-Charge- in-waiting with the idea of searching for a Planting Curate who could plant/start a new congregation at St Margaret’s (in the church, hall or school) at a time other than a Sunday morning. The new congregation (or it could be more than one) would be focused on reaching out to children, young people and families with the thought that St Margaret’s could become a beacon for children and families in your part of the town. This would be building on the inspirational work already being done at the Rise and Shine service, led by Helen PT and others.

In time St Margaret’s could become a place where there is something for every child and teenager, whether it be a ‘Starting Right’ course, Diddy Disciples, a holiday club, lunch club, after school club or children’s congregation.

And it would be for all areas of the parish, the ones well-served at the moment and the ones not so much.

**What does this offer mean for us?**

1. For your Priest-in-Charge

…this will mean that Sarah will take on the considerable responsibility for training a new Priest but rather than primarily training someone as a parish priest, she will also need to help train up the new Curate in how to start up something new. There will of course be a good amount of overlap. All priests need to learn how to preach, preside, lead, offer pastoral care, be able to take baptisms, weddings and funerals and learn about church administration, buildings and finance, for example, but church planters will be more focused on setting up a new worshipping community and so involved in more mission and evangelism, they will need to be more entrepreneurial and will need to be involved in setting new things up and training up a team. This will be a big ask for your Priest-in-Charge.

1. For your congregation

…As a congregation you will receive all the benefits and challenges which usually come with having a Curate but, in addition a group within the congregation will at some point join the new Curate to set up a new congregation which will in time become their main place of worship where they will invest their time, skills and money. They might carry on worshipping with you on a Sunday morning too but that will depend on the amount of time they can give to the church each week. It may be between 4 and 20 people who get involved. They are often key, much-loved members of the congregation but as they step out in faith into a new congregation what often happens is that, by God’s grace, others step up to fill their roles and stretch out their wings and step up their giving too. Some of these people might be part of your existing congregation and some may be people you don’t even know yet.

This can bring great joys as healthy churches are sending churches who regularly start new things, but it may also bring a sense of loss, even if the church plant meets in the same building.

If you are used to seeing the same group of people every Sunday and suddenly some of them are not there, it can be hard. And if you end up being one of the planting team it can be tremendously exciting but also an anxious time. Will we meet expectations? Is this really where God wants me to be? How will we make this sustainable after the curate has moved on? All of these things throw us back onto God.

You will also be expected to contribute in some way and this will need to include paying the expenses of the Curate for at least three years and the costs of setting up the new congregation(s). Typically elsewhere churches raise between £5k-£50k from generous giving to help their new congregation to thrive. In return, of course, the hope is that you will have the joy of seeing many people enjoying a life of faith in your parish who might not otherwise have had this opportunity.

Lastly, as with all funding pots in the diocese from 2023 onwards, you will only be considered for this post if you have a parish plan in place or you have a clear plan for going about this which has been delayed for understandable reasons. In your case, we know Sarah is keen to work with you on this.

1. For the Curate who comes

…this too can be an exciting as well as challenging time. They will be learning how to be a Priest (which can be stretching at the best of times) and naturally they will want to serve your existing congregations well but at the same time they will have to keep an eye on setting up a new congregation of people who are not yet followers of Christ so their focus will be somewhat divided.

In addition, they will be thinking about money and people.

In terms of time frames we think it will look something like this:

**Year One: Summer 2023 – Summer 2024**

 The focus in this year will be on it being a diaconal year, learning the basics of being a deacon, getting to know the area, the people in the area and the congregations of the church, whilst also building relationships with the school and existing families in the church.

**Year Two: Summer 2024- Summer 2025**

 The focus in this year will be in starting a new worshipping congregation and creating good structures and relationships within it. There will also be a good deal of time spent learning what it means to be a priest.

**Year Three: Summer 2025 – Summer 2026**

 The focus in this third year will be in growing the new congregation, training up more leaders and helping it to become sustainable. Less time will be spent in this year in the Sunday congregations though you may still be learning new things, taking occasional offices etc.

**What is expected?**

Whenever someone starts a curacy there is a long list of expectations that have to be met before they can be ‘signed off’ and take the next step, usually to become a Vicar. In addition to this traditional list (which will be slightly shorter for a Planting Curate), there is an expectation from the Diocese and Inspiring Ipswich Project that each Planting Curate (with a team who helps them) will set up a new worshipping congregation which by the end of the three years has at least 30 people who are not currently Christians who see it as their church and who are worshipping regularly at it and seeking baptism/confirmation.

Our experience is that in order for this to happen this may involve helping 100 or so (sometimes a lot more) un-churched or de-churched people to explore faith in one way or another, with a proportion choosing to follow Christ, but of course God has His own ways and there are always surprises.

What is clear is that making new disciples needs to be the intention from the beginning, so the curate will need to gather around them a group (small or large) who share that goal and who want to give it their best shot. We don’t just want big congregations but genuine disciples and explorers being equipped to follow Christ. A second goal, equally important from day one, will be how to make the plant/new congregation sustainable when the Curate moves on, so either money will need to be found to ‘employ’ a new leader or lay people will need to have gained the confidence after three years to lead it without an ordained leader, though Sarah may offer ordained oversight even after the plant has been sent out.

None of these things are easy so a lot of support is needed.

**What support will there be?**

In addition to diocesan initial ministerial training and the support of Chapter it is also expected that the Curate will take advantage of specialist church planting training, come along to the Deanery’s Missional Leaders’ Lunches and the Deanery’s Church Planting Fellowship. A spiritual director and Mentor will also be offered and the Archdeacon and II team and project board will be closely involved in the design and implementation of the plan.

**What sort of church plant would the Diocese and Project like to see?**

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is committed to ‘Growing in God’ so we will be looking for a church plant/new congregation which is looking to grow numerically, to grow younger, deeper and in influence in its local community.

We are also part of the wider Church of England and we would also be happy to see a project which helps the Church get nearer to its ‘three priorities and six bold outcomes’:

**The Church of England’s Three Priorities are:**

* **To become a church of missionary disciples** where all God’s people are free to live the Christian life, wherever we spend our time Sunday to Saturday.
* **To be a church where mixed ecology is the norm\*** – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new churches and new forms of Church to our parishes, cathedrals, schools and chaplaincies.
* **To be a church that is younger and more diverse.**

\*the mixed ecology describes the flourishing of church and ministry in our parishes, and in other communities of faith through things like church planting, fresh expressions of church, and chaplaincy and online.

**The Church of England’s Six bold outcomes are:**

1. A church for everyone through:
2. **Doubling the number of children and young active disciples** in the Church of England by 2030.
3. A Church of England which **fully represents the communities we serve** in age and diversity.
4. A pathway for everyone into an accessible and contextual expression of church through:
5. **A parish system revitalised for mission**so churches can reach and serve everyone in their community.
6. Creating **ten thousand new Christian communities** across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital.

Planting churches is a little like planting in your own garden. Not every plant likes your soil and not every plant wants to be in the sun. In the same way not every model of church planting will work in every neighbourhood. The new posts must deliver something distinctly separate from the existing/inherited church (though they can intertwine) to count as a plant - so will we help them build a detailed model/plan. The Inspiring Ipswich core team, aided by the Inspiring Ipswich Project Board will be there to help you find a model which has a good chance of working in your area.

**How will this be monitored and evaluated?**

The Inspiring Ipswich Project Board, chaired by Bishop Mike, will keep a close eye on the progress and will want to see the plans early on and ask rigorous questions about the proposed ‘design’ of the plant. Is it likely to fly? Is it inspiring and compelling? Is it realistic? You will also regularly be asked how you are doing and you will join all the other clergy in the deanery in having regular ‘measuring mission’ conversations. In addition, there will be an annual review with a panel from the Project Board. For churches and individuals where this level of rigour is new, this can be exhilarating but also nerve-wracking. It is meant to be the former. It is designed to stop you wasting time going down dead ends and to help your new congregation to be the best it can be.

Just as with fresh expressions of church, there will be an expectation that the new congregation meets the ten criteria put forward by George Lings with a ‘yes’ to each of the questions below:

1. Is this a **new and further group**, which is **Christian and communal**, rather than an existing group modified, adapted or changed?
2. Has the starting group tried to **engage with non-church goers**? There was intention to create a new congregation not to do an outreach project from an existing church. The aim expressed inculturation - heling the Christians sent out to start the congregation to understand a culture and context and adapt to fit it, not make the local/indigenous people change and adapt to fit into an existing church context.
3. Does the community meet **at least once a month**?
4. Does it have **a name** that helps give it an identity? An active search, not yet yielding a name, is allowed.
5. Is there **intention to be Church**? This could be the intention from the start. The key is that it is *not* seen as a bridge back to ‘real church’, but as Church in its own right.
6. Is it **Anglican**? ‘Anglican’ here means the Bishop welcomes it as part of the diocesan family, not whether it only uses centrally authorised worship texts, or has a legal territory (parish).
7. Is there some form of **leadership** recognised by those within the community and also by those outside of it?
8. Do at least the majority of members (who are part of the public gathering) see it as **their major expression** of being church?
9. Are there **aspirations for the four creedal ‘marks’ of church, or ecclesial relationships:** ‘up/holy, in/one, out/apostolic, of/catholic’? We see the two dominical sacraments (communion and baptism) as a given consequence of the life of a missional community which follows Jesus, but not the sole or even best measure of being church.
10. Is there the **intention to become ‘3-self’** (self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing)? These factors may look different in each local context, but are some marks of advancing ecclesial maturity. They are not to be interpreted as indicators of congregationalist independency, or breakaway tendencies, but of taking responsibility.

**Conclusion**

As you can tell, this is not a decision to be made lightly or without prayer. Yet, as we have mentioned, many curates have already been placed so we need to advertise for our three Curates fairly quickly. If you have any questions you can address them to Archdeacon Rhiannon. (archdeacon.rhiannon@cofesuffolk.org)

28th January 2023