*Clergy Role Description*

**Diocese of Durham**

*Role description signed off by:* Archdeacon of Auckland Date: 31.08.22

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:* Priest-in-Charge of the Escomb Group and

Creation Care Officer (0.33 FTE)

*Name of benefice:* “The Escomb Group” (Escomb Church; Etherley, St

 Cuthbert; Hamsterley, St James; Witton-le-Wear, St

 Philip & St James

*Deanery:* Auckland

*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 these parishes, in line with the Diocesan Vision, Priorities and Strategy described above.
* To be the parish priest of these parishes, 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 parish priest must give due regard to safeguarding policy and practice.
* To work with the PCCs towards the development of the local churches (both the people and their buildings) so that the churches are 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. Where there is a Shared Ministry Development Team, to work with it as described in the SMDT agreement.
* 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.
* To be proactive and persistent in seeking the fullest degree of ecumenical cooperation wherever possible.

**Specific**

* To help the PCCs and the congregations to continue develop their vision and their approaches to mission and ministry, showing leadership in this area while working collaboratively.
* To continue to help the churches and their congregations to work well together, developing their relationships with one another. (This may lead to consideration of the structural arrangements and an open exploration of alternatives.)
* To enable people to grow as disciples, nurturing new and established Christians and helping the churches to become better at discipleship-development in and through their worship and other activities.
* To encourage and enable lay ministry and leadership, recognising the vocation of all God’s people, identifying and developing the gifts that God has given his people.
* To develop in particular ministry among children, young people and families.
* To work well with local schools and colleges.
* To be creative and innovative in leading worship, including further development of all-age worship, whilst also being mindful of the needs of those who value existing, traditional forms of worship.
* To provide spiritual leadership in all churches and chair the Joint Steering Group.
* To work alongside the PCC in continuing review their buildings and the usage of them and to support, encourage and enable any consequent reordering of those buildings to better serve the mission of the church.
* To establish an effective town centre ministry to the civic, political, institutional, commercial and social life of the town, making the most of the opportunities to do this provided by the location and historic role of St Aidan’s and St Cuthbert’s.
* To value and develop the missional potential of the ancient church of Escomb, as a place valued by worshippers, pilgrims and tourists.
* To work as Creation Care Officer (0.33 FTE), sharing with the Diocesan Environmental Officer in developing the Caring for God’s Creation (CFGC) priority throughout the diocese. While the DEO may ask the CCOO to share in any aspect of this work, the focus will be on enabling parishes and schools to develop their understanding of caring for creation as mission, and take positive practical steps in their care for the environment.

**2. Key Contacts**

* The Churchwardens and members of all four PCCs.
* The Lay Reader (Escomb) Accredited Lay Minister-in-training (Hamsterley), and local retired clergy.
* Ecumenical colleagues, especially Methodist colleagues in Hamsterley.
* All schools in the parishes and to which children as parishioners go, and their Headteachers.
* Civic leaders and the Local MP.
* Clergy of the Deanery, the Area Dean of Auckland and the Archdeacon of Auckland.
* As CCO (0.33 FTE), the DEO, Diocesan Environmental Champion, Archdeacon of Auckland, Secretary of the DAC, and local Environmental Champions.

**3. Role Context**

The Escomb Group of churches have navigated a long vacancy with great resilience. Since the group last had a minister (2019) one of the (previously) five churches has closed. The Steering Group have ensured that services are well organised and well led, and the PCCs have engaged very thoroughly with our Vacancy Audit Process (VAP, referred to as “the Prioritisation Process” in the parish profile).

The VAP process requires serious reflection on the mission of churches and their sustainability. It led to the creation of a role which is full-time while including an element of support for the Diocesan Care for God’s Creation priority – something which fits well with work in this area in these parishes. The Bishop’s Leadership Team believed strongly that a full-time role with some diocesan commitment would be far more effective for the parishes than the alternative of a part-time role.

It is essential that the minister who takes this role leads in a determinedly collaborative manner. There are excellent, proactive lay leaders in these churches. They are realistic about the demands made upon a minister licensed to multiple parishes, and do not expect that priest to be able to operate as if they had a single parish. They will work and with and support the new Priest-in-Charge very well – as long as the minister is able and willing to work collaboratively. A priest who does not want – for example – to discuss openly how their limited time should be used best to enable the growth of the churches, or review worship and activities with a view to improvement and development, will frustrate the lay leaders here greatly; that won’t work.

While this is a positive situation to work in, it will be important for the post-holder to focus quickly on how to develop the discipleship of church members, establish accessible ways for enquirers to explore faith, and nurture the further development of lay leadership. If these areas of work are not prioritised, the sustainability of the churches will be at risk in a few years’ time. Similarly, while great efforts are made to work with children and good work is done, the churches (like most churches in the diocese) need to grow in number, and as part of that growth also grow younger.

These are villages in which the local churches are valued and have resonance. The opportunities this creates need to be embraced, and a priest with the heart of both a pastor and an evangelist will be able to help local people find a real welcome in these churches which may enable them to begin a journey of faith.

The shared Steering Group work very well together, so that the “group” of churches – though it has no legal status – really do cooperate and plan as a unit. It will be worth exploring whether resources would be released by creating a single parish; the PCCs may ultimately decide this is not beneficial, but it would be good to explore the pros and cons of different structural/legal alternatives openly.

The missional opportunities provided by Escomb Church need to be recognised and realised. This is one of the oldest open churches in the country. While tourists and pilgrims are welcomed very well, how can the ministry of this place where prayer has been offered for 1400 years now enable people to come to faith and grow in faith? Similarly, for the church to be sustainable, can the love which many people (locally and much more widely) have for it be mobilised for its support in a realistic way? Establishing a Friends of Escomb Church group, at the very least to seek support for the maintenance of the fabric, should be considered urgently.

At Hamsterley bold, exciting plans for reordering are being evolved. The new minister will need to encourage this, while ensuring that that the project is primarily driven by lay leadership.

There is the possibility that an SSM (Self-Supporting Minister) curate due to be ordained in 2024 could be trained in the Escomb Group. Therefore, the new minister needs the skills and capacity required to be a good training incumbent.

As noted above, this post includes a one-third time commitment (so, effectively two days a week) to the post of **Creation Care Officer (CCO)**. This appointment is being made soon after a new full-time Diocesan Environmental Officer post has been established, as the Diocese is trying to significantly develop capacity in this area. The CCO will therefore come into post at an exciting time, and effectively help to create a team including the DEO, diocesan Environmental Champion and the Archdeacon of Auckland, who is the Bishop’s Leadership Team lead on the Care for God’s Creation priority. The focus of the CCO’s work will be the encouragement of churches and church schools in the diocese to develop their understanding of care for the environment as mission and help them take positive practical steps in this area. The CCO will work in collaboration with, and under the direction of, the DEO.

A final note on this element of the role:

The Bishop’s Leadership Team made the suggestion of a full-time role with a 0.33 Care for Creation element in the hope and belief that the Care for Creation work would not only be valuable for the diocese but synergistic with the development of mission in the parishes. Two points about this:

1) Use of time: the parishes are understandably concerned that enough time and energy will be available for supporting and developing their mission. It is therefore important to stress that the Care for Creation work will be seen as *the* specialism this post-holder will spend their time on, not one of many. It is understood and expected that many clergy have specific areas of skill and expertise which they may exercise at diocesan or wider levels. These enhance the wider church and bring life to each individual, so parish clergy have freedom to use some of their time in work that is not parochial. In this situation, if the post-holder here is to give the parishes the time they need, s/he will need to spend Sunday and the equivalent of three days a week fully engaged in the parishes, not use parts of this time for other areas of ministry. The specialism the post-holder brings will be in the area of environmental work, for which there are the equivalent of two days a week available.

2) A vision of holistic mission: Care for Creation work – across the diocese and in the parishes – is both important in itself and can enable greater engagement with children and youth, and a greater understanding of poverty and its root causes. As the church’s mission becomes more holistic and engages with the concerns of many presently not actively part of the church, the relevance and credibility of the Christian gospel in our time becomes more apparent; care for creation is in this sense vital for the possibility of renewed church growth. This vision of the importance of care for creation and the vital role it plays in holistic Christian mission will need to be embraced by the post-holder and inform their work in the parish and diocese.

*EscG PiC & ADEO RD*

 *08.2023.v02*