



A toolkit for Deaneries

Deanery Funeral Administrator Scheme

In 2016, Kingston Deanery set up a Deanery Funeral Administrator Scheme to make booking a church funeral more straightforward for funeral directors and to encourage funerals in church. Kingston Deanery's experience is outlined below so other Deaneries or groups of churches can benefit from the learnings from this initiative.

Kingston Deanery Funeral Administrator Scheme

Our rationale

Acknowledging the decline in the number of church funerals (and for the purposes of this paper that includes both funerals conducted in church with a later burial/cremation and services conducted at a cemetery or crematorium by an Anglican priest) it was felt that church funerals needed to become the default choice for Funeral Directors (FDs) once again.

To achieve this we wanted to offer a scheme which would make booking a church funeral the easiest option for FDs. So it was important that any scheme would remove any actual or perceived barriers - clergy not returning phone calls, unavailability for a particular time or date, the mystery of Parish boundaries. Note: The one barrier which the scheme does not address is the unwillingness of some clergy to agree to the type of funeral which the family are seeking e.g. choices over music, readings etc.

It was hoped that the scheme, along with some more active marketing to FDs of the advantages of church funerals (including especially the pastoral care which can continue long after the day of the funeral) would lead to an 'increased market share' for the church and accompanying mission opportunities.

The scheme

A Deanery-wide pilot was established, the objective being to make it as straightforward and easy for a FD to arrange a church funeral. Now, with one phone call to the Deanery Funerals Administrator (DFA), the FD can be assured that either the appropriate parish clergy or if necessary an out-of-parish priest or qualified reader will be available to take the service. The DFA knows in relation to each parish whom they should contact to take a funeral and, where appropriate, in what order.

The DFA is remunerated by a retainer fee for 2 hours work per week at the London living wage and then he receives £10 for each funeral which he arranges. The weekly payment remunerates the DFA for being available on a mobile phone during usual office hours and also for his marketing and administration work. This is funded by a contribution from each parish of £100 a year and the scheme also attracted some initial funding from a Diocesan mission fund. The £10 per funeral is deducted from the amount of the Funeral fee due to the Parish. Thus the costs are spread between the entire Deanery but also borne by the individual parish which conducts each funeral.

The job description and person specification are attached. The scheme also now has a limited website to advertise itself and this is clearly an area which should be developed. <http://www.kingstonchurchfunerals.com>

Unforeseen benefits

The scheme has proved particularly helpful during vacancies when there would either be more pressure on churchwardens and parish administration staff to find clergy to take a funeral or more likely the church would lose out entirely on that particular funeral. As the scheme was set up it became clear that all fees should be dealt with through the DFA as are the returns to the Diocese. Parishes are asked to confirm the submission to the Diocese but are not required to submit one in their own right.

Things we wish we'd known then

Unfortunately not all the churches in the Deanery are part of the scheme mostly to do with an (unsubstantiated) fear of losing direct contact with the FDs or the families. The DFA is only involved with booking the priest so the usual contact over the arrangements for the funeral e.g. Orders of Service, meetings with the family continue as before. The fact that the scheme doesn't cover all the churches in the Deanery and that the FDs are covering an area beyond our Deanery boundary (and indeed in our case into the next Diocese) does make life more complicated. FDs move around a lot and it is a constant struggle to try to ensure that FDs know about the Scheme and how it works. The importance of communication - with parish administrators, parish treasurers, clergy new to the Deanery, new FDs and new staff within each FD office. It's a constant challenge.

Is it working?

It is very difficult to assess its success. There have been teething problems but these have been worked through. Some FDs are very much in favour, others are not so quick to express a view either way. After an initial year it was recently agreed by Chapter to continue the scheme for another year. If the scheme was adopted more widely and so became better known by FDs across the Diocese this would be a great benefit, as would a network of Administrators.

Two final points

It is essential to have the right person for the role of the DFA since an unusual range of skills and understanding is required. We decided that unless we did find the right person we would not go ahead with the Scheme.

If we could educate the FDs to ask grieving families the question 'Would you like a hymn or a short prayer at the funeral' and respond to a 'yes' by booking a church funeral rather than asking 'Did the deceased go to church' and when the answer is 'no' book a funeral celebrant this scheme might not be necessary!

Job Description for a Deanery Funeral Administrator

- to make initial contact with all relevant Undertaking firms in the area, to build relationships with them, ensure that they have the DFA contact details and understand how Christian funerals in the area are arranged under this system
- to foster an ongoing relationship with them including making regular contact with those who do not use the system very much and to ensure that an appropriate level of literature is available to them

- to sensitively consider other places where the ministry of the church to the bereaved might be publicised (care homes, hospices, hospitals etc) and to pursue them in an appropriate and careful way
- to receive requests from Undertakers for funerals and as soon as possible (target within a day), find a suitable minister and inform the Undertaker of who will take the service
- to ensure that payment is received from the Undertaker after the funeral
- to pay fees to the relevant church immediately
- to pay relevant fees to the Diocese on a monthly basis
- to keep clear and accurate accounting for all monies
- to keep up to date records of all contact details for ministers in the scheme

Person Specification

- efficient, organised, hardworking and patient
- sensitive, friendly, warm, a sense of humour
- good computing skills, familiar with the internet, able to produce simple publicity material
- able to manage simple accounting and to keep adequate records
- willing to be “on call” (mobile - provided, landline and email) between 9am and 5pm every weekday
- sympathetic to the aims and objectives of the Christian Church

Remuneration and leave

- The DFA will be given a basic pay of £20 per week in lieu of the work they will do generally updating records, contacting Undertakers, producing publicity materials, promoting the church’s ministry to the bereaved, administering fees, and for being “on call” 9am-5pm Monday to Friday
- The DFA will be paid a further £10 per funeral that they administer.
- The DFA will receive 4 weeks annual leave plus bank holidays.

Compiled by the Revd Helen Hancock for the Deaneries Advisory Group, July 2017