

Pioneer Ministry Council
Report to General Synod 2024

Following the formal launch of Pioneer Ministry in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin in February 2023, the Pioneer Ministry Governing Council was established by General Synod 2023. The Council was established to uphold and advocate for the vision of Pioneer Ministry to reach those with little or no connection to church, to oversee the delivery of its objectives and values, and oversee the processes by which employed pioneers and funded pioneer projects might receive funding and support, subject to the decision of the Pioneer Approvals Committee. As a Governing Body the Council receives reports from and provides support to the Pioneer Leadership Team, established to spearhead the new movement of Pioneer Ministry within the Church.

The Council is greatly encouraged by the actions to date with much activity over the last year , while recognising there is a significant body of work that lies ahead to grow pioneer ministry, develop the role of the Council itself, support the Leadership Team, and mobilise pioneer ministry and pioneers, lay and ordained, volunteers and employed, across the whole church.

From inception the Pioneer Movement has worked towards 5 key objectives, and the report of the Council addresses each of these in turn.

1. Governance and Leadership

For Pioneer Ministry to be credible, sustainable, and flourish it is, and will be, important to establish, embed and grow a robust governance and leadership structure for Pioneer Ministry. The establishment of the Pioneer Ministry Council and Pioneer Leadership Team are two important building blocks in this leadership and governance structure. The Leadership Team has reported to the Council, the Representative Body, House of Bishops, and the Council will report to Standing Committee, and through this inaugural and future reports, to General Synod. Through transparent and regular communication, the aspiration is that pioneer ministry will be embedded within, owned by, and provide support to, the whole of the Church of Ireland. The updates are also shared via social media and through other forms of traditional media such as diocesan magazines and the Church of Ireland Gazette.

The Council has met on four occasions, and at the time of reporting is overseeing the processes of the Leadership Team through the first iteration of applications for new pioneers and funded pioneer ministries, which have come in from across the island. This process itself is pioneering and the Council will reflect on how processes can be refined and improved for future years.

The National Director, Rev Rob Jones has visited all 11 dioceses throughout the year, meeting with Bishops , attending multiple diocesan synods, clergy and lay gatherings to communicate the vision and begin the process of implementing pioneer ministry in each setting and context.

2. Diocesan Pioneer Ministry Hubs

The vision for pioneer ministry is that it will be a ‘ground up’ movement. For this to happen, it is vital that within every diocese there is a group, or even a number of groups, of people including the diocesan pioneer ministry advocate appointed by the Bishop, who will champion, support, and advocate for pioneer ministry. These groups will be Pioneer Ministry Hubs. Shaped to serve the needs of each diocese in its own context, Hubs will grow awareness of pioneer ministry, support pioneer initiatives, enable the training and resourcing of volunteers, network with Hubs from other dioceses, and engage with the national Pioneer Leadership Team.

The Leadership Team is currently engaged with numerous dioceses to establish these Hubs, and already is seeing a range of healthy diversity as each diocese, in its own context, shapes hubs around how pioneer ministry might actually work in that diocese.

Hubs across the island are at different stages of development, but it is envisaged that each will grow to play a vital role in some or all of the following ways:

Networking

- Connect with the Pioneer Leadership Team and in particular the National Director
- Support the pioneer movement across the church through networking with other dioceses and pioneer conferences

Growing Awareness

- Encourage pioneer learning communities of pioneers within the diocese
- Advocate and champion pioneer ministry across the diocese – its activities, ministries, synods, councils and other bodies

Support, train, resource voluntary pioneers and projects

- Help deliver training and resources for pioneers at parish level
- Provide support to pioneer initiatives within the diocese

Funded Pioneers and Projects

- Support the Bishop and diocese with bringing forward proposals for funded pioneer projects and pioneers
- Support the yearly Diocesan Discernment and Selection Process for full time pioneers
- Provide local and contextual diocesan support to any full-time pioneers within the diocese (complementing the support provided by Church Army / CITI and the National Director)

Develop Funding & Resources

- Look to grow funding and resources for pioneer ministry

Whilst Hubs will play a crucial operational role in each diocese, pioneer ministry is also growing and establishing pioneer new ‘learning communities’. Learning Communities are designed to take small groups in local settings, parish (or even diocesan), through a change process to explore what it means to pioneer in their setting – what is the status quo, what is working, what isn’t, what is right, wrong, or even confusing? These communities will be made up of diverse leaders chosen by the Bishop who are committed to shared peer pioneer learning, mutual support, strategic partnership and praying for each other. A number of learning communities are already up and running studying together the book *‘Pioneering a new future- a practical guide to shaping change and changing the shape of Church’*.

3. Identify, Train, Deploy and Support Volunteer and Employed Pioneers

Much of the focus and energy in this new season has had to focus on the creation of a new selection and training process for employed pioneers.

A selection process has been agreed with the House of Bishops and a new guidebook published which is being implemented through every diocese, as part of a pathway of discernment for those exploring vocation and calling to reach those with little or no connection with church. A meeting between the Leadership Team and Diocesan Director of Ordinands confirmed how the exploration of vocation to pioneer will sit alongside and complement the exploration of those considering ordained or lay reader ministry within the church. The

selection process for pioneers is not to a pathway that will lead to ordination. It is to a period of deployment into a pioneer ministry project and training that will run concurrently from the first day of deployment. It is envisaged that some pioneers may, in the years that follow, discern a call to some form of ordained ministry, and this will be a separate pathway of discernment towards Ordained Local Ministry or some form of transfer into stipendiary ministry according to the appropriate protocols at that time.

To complement the Selection Process for pioneers a process has also been established for the development of pioneer ministry proposals that may seek financial support from the Pioneer Ministry fund established and kept under review by the Representative Body.

As mentioned above a new guide book, accessible both in print and online, provides more information on how pioneers may be discerned, how proposed ministries might receive funding, how recruitment & appointment will work, and what happens once deployment and training begins. At the core of all discernment, development, recruitment and deployment, every new pioneer and every new ministry will be:

- **Missional** – reaching those with little or no connection to church.
- **Contextual** – working within and culturally appropriate to a particular community or locality and context.
- **Ecclesial** – growing a new community of faith over time.
- **Formational** – developing disciples and not just gathering a crowd.

It is envisaged that the first cohort of pioneers to be deployed and trained in new ministries approved for funding will commence in September 2024. The deployment will last for up to 5 years with training delivered part-time, alongside deployment, during the first 3 years.

Training – Certificate in Pioneer Ministry

An extensive body of work has been undertaken to develop a new training course for the (UK) Level 4 Certificate in Pioneer Ministry. This will be run by our key training partner, Church Army, supported by the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, and validated by Durham University. This is a three-year programme of part-time study focused on formational learning with the core emphasis on evangelism and forming new communities of faith within a pioneering context. The Training Team includes seven teaching staff with a wide range of experience and specialism, from communication skills to pioneering, from biblical studies to contextual evangelism, with training taking place through residential weekends based in both Sheffield and Dublin, as well as online training.

Pioneer Ministry Gathering – Autumn 2024

Whilst much energy has necessarily been given to the development of this course and the processes for selecting and identifying pioneers and pioneer ministry proposals, the broader aspiration is for pioneering activity to happen at every level of the Church. This cannot be a movement that simply produces a limited number of funded pioneers for a specified period of time. Through the Hubs and Learning Communities the vision is to mobilise people everywhere for pioneer ministry. Learning from one another will be vital and to that end arrangements are being made for a National Pioneer Ministry Gathering in the Autumn of 2024 to encourage, inform, and be inspired for the work of pioneer ministry across the Church.

4. Establish and support new pioneer communities and churches

The establishment of the Governing Council, Pioneer Hubs and Learning Communities and the first cohort of funded pioneers and pioneer projects all represent new networks and communities committed to reaching those with little or no connection to church. The creation of these new projects or ministries, in part funded by the Pioneer Ministry fund, which will help grow pioneer communities and churches that are missional, contextual, ecclesial and formational. The Council and Leadership Team look forward to supporting these new initiatives and to working across all dioceses to create new communities of faith contextualised for their setting in the years that lie ahead.

5. Integration of Pioneer Ministry into the culture and structures of the Church of Ireland

Everything that has been reported is evidence, and representative, of a commitment to growing pioneer ministry as a ministry *of* the Church of Ireland. Every diocese, parish, chaplaincy and activity of the church was once something that was planted and new. Pioneer ministry seeks to work within and alongside these expressions of ministry as together we seek to reach those with little or no connection to church.

The Bill for Pioneer Ministry before Synod 2024 seeks to recognise pioneer ministry and pioneer ministries within Chapter V of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland. This will enable new ministries to be fully recognised as a part of a diocese or parish, and for those pioneer ministries that need to be self-governing with concomitant obligations relating to charitable registration, financial and property management, and safeguarding, will ensure that the Constitution is the proper Governing Document of the ministry.

Summary

It is clear that much work has been undertaken with plenty more exciting activities and work ahead to further develop and grow pioneer ministry across the Church of Ireland as we all work collectively. The Council is greatly encouraged by the shared will to support and resource Pioneer Ministry across all levels of the church – General and Diocesan Synods, House of Bishops, Representative Body, Standing Committee and the Theological Institute – and expresses its sincere gratitude to everyone, and to the Pioneer Leadership Team as together we seek to reach those with little or no connection with church.

For more information, please go to www.pioneerministry.org or email the National Director, Rev Rob Jones at rob@pioneerministry.org.