

Qualitative Panel Study Wave 2

Moving in Power

Transitions in ordained ministry

March 2021

LIVING**ministry**



The Living Ministry Research Project

Aim

Living Ministry supports the work of the Church of England's Ministry Council and the wider church by providing ongoing, in-depth analysis to help those in dioceses, theological education institutions and the national church understand what helps ordained ministers flourish in ministry.

Objectives

- To gain a better understanding of the factors that enable ordained ministers to flourish in ministry;
- To understand how these factors relate to ministerial education and continuing development;
- To understand how these factors vary according to person, background, training pathway, type of ministry, context etc.;
- To understand how ministerial flourishing changes and develops over time and at different stages of ministry.

Methods

- A ten-year, mixed-methods, longitudinal panel study, launched in 2017;
- Focussed qualitative studies reporting on specific topics or perspectives.

Reports and resources

Findings from Living Ministry are disseminated to dioceses, theological education institutions, the national church and associated organisations to inform understanding and good practice. In particular, as well as supporting the work of the Ministry Council and the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee, Living Ministry analysis has informed and continues to contribute to the General Synod initiative to promote and support clergy wellbeing through the 2020 Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing. Research reports and practical resources are available online at <https://www.churchofengland.org/living-ministry>.

Panel study reports

- *Mapping the Wellbeing of Church of England Clergy and Ordinands* (2017)
- *Negotiating Wellbeing: Experiences of Ordinands and Clergy in the Church of England* (2018)
- *Ministerial Effectiveness and Wellbeing: Exploring the Flourishing of Clergy and Ordinands* (2019)
- *Moving in Power: Transitions in Ordained Ministry* (2021)

Resources

- *How Clergy Thrive: Insights from Living Ministry* (2020) is a book drawing together key findings from Wave 1 with reflective questions for clergy, senior clergy and diocesan officers. It is available in print and online along with a range of accompanying resources.



Moving in Power

Transitions in Ordained Ministry

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With a commentary by
The Very Revd Dr Frances Ward

Living Ministry Qualitative Panel Study Wave 2

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Executive summary

Background and method

This report presents qualitative findings from the second wave of the Church of England’s ten-year Living Ministry research. The report explores how periods of transition are experienced by ordinands and clergy. Revisiting those who took part two years earlier in Wave 1, we examine changes and continuities in the five aspects of their wellbeing comprising the Living Ministry wellbeing model: spiritual and vocational wellbeing; physical and mental wellbeing; relationships; financial and material wellbeing; and participation in the life of the church. 72 people from four cohorts took part through individual and group interviews. Their stories were analysed using a framework matrix approach in the light of data collected previously in Wave 1.

Transitions

Ordinand to curacy

The transition into curacy affects all aspects of wellbeing. Curates may feel financially better off but experience cashflow problems between their last grant and their first stipend. They and their families feel the loss of support structures while negotiating new working patterns, relationships and rhythms of prayer. Some feel fulfilled vocationally while others struggle with managing multiple identities. The transition can be particularly difficult if it falls during a key school year for children.

Curacy to next post

The transition out of curacy can feel pressured for stipendiary ministers and demoralising for self-supporting ministers who struggle to find a post. A move into incumbency requires a step-change in responsibility, often leading to increased workload and isolation but also vocational fulfilment. Continued key relationships and access to support structures within the local and diocesan context are critical to wellbeing, as is a proactive approach from the individual and the diocese.

Transitions between posts

Beyond curacy, transitions are usually less pressured and require less change in level of responsibility. Improvements in wellbeing, however, may be because the clergyperson is leaving a difficult situation where their wellbeing was previously neglected. Improved wellbeing often relates to an increased sense of authenticity in one’s role, whether based on tradition, supportive and non-restrictive relationships, fulfilment of vocational aspirations, or a better fit of job.



Approaching retirement

For stipendiary clergy, the move towards retirement can cause anxiety several years before as they weigh up when to retire, financial provision, and how to spend their last years of stipendiary ministry. For self-supporting clergy, retirement is more fluid. A wish to retire and reduced capacity for work may conflict with practical, emotional and relational difficulties in laying down ministerial responsibilities while remaining in the same local church.

Power dynamics

A key theme identified from the data is the power dynamics around and beyond moments of transition. Two implications of these are discussed: power that affects agency and power that influences identity and self-worth. The key power relationship discussed by participants and therefore in the report is with senior clergy, particularly bishops. The power of bishops lies at least as much in their office—characterised by unequal relationship and deference—as in their personal will and they embody multiple dimensions of power, including traditional, legal-rational and charismatic power. They make key decisions—especially regarding ordinands and curates—and hold strategic, financial, vocational, spiritual, pastoral, professional and moral influence. Especially at times of transition and crisis, clergy may be or feel dependent on their bishop for guidance and/or permission to continue or to move. Bishops can use their power to enable or to constrain and to affirm or to criticise; however, by doing either they may reinforce paternalist structures of dependency. The Wave 1 finding of the importance to clergy of being known, understood and valued by their bishop must therefore be held in tension with the desire not to undermine agency and self-worth.

Summary of good practice

These are drawn from the experiences of Living Ministry participants as described in this report and do not represent an exhaustive list.

For the person in transition

- Pay attention to continued and new support structures and networks, including which to continue from the previous situation (e.g. contact with IME 1 or 2 peers; links with a TEI; spiritual direction; support from family, friends and previous colleagues); how to develop new sources of support relevant to the new role and context (e.g. new colleagues; local community groups; local church networks; mentoring; coaching); and which to protect and nurture (e.g. time with family and friends).
- Take time to prepare families emotionally as well as practically for a move.
- Consider how to access preferred ways of worshipping, if these are different from the new ministry context.



- Develop a range of sources of support and feedback, considering what is beneficial and what each source provides, e.g. spiritual direction, mentoring (formal and informal), buddies, informal peer groups, facilitated groups, coaching, family and friends.

For TEIs during IME 1

- Provide:
 - a solid grounding in spiritual habits and practices;
 - theological and practical reflection on ordained ministry and leadership;
 - time-management training where appropriate, e.g. for those already juggling multiple roles.
- Consider how best to support, practically and emotionally, ordinands struggling to find curacies.
- Consider the implications of formal processes for the wellbeing of those involved, and how best to support and care for them.
- Consider the feasibility of continuing relationships with alumni where appropriate.

For diocesan officers and senior clergy

- Ensure diocesan-owned housing is adequate and ready in time for moving day.
- Address cashflow difficulties between the end of training grants and the start of curacy stipends, especially if curacies are delayed.
- Offer practice-based time-management support for new curates, including mentoring.
- Consider how best to support, practically and emotionally, ordinands struggling to find curacies and curates struggling to find their next post.
- Facilitate or encourage personality profiling and discussion of working relationships between curate and training incumbent (and the wider team where appropriate) from the start of curacy.
- Consider what kinds of support the person moving is likely to need and what can be offered to provide this, e.g. facilitated groups; buddying; mentoring; coaching; counselling; and ongoing accompanied vocational discernment.
- Ensure clergy receive pro-active, periodic contact to check how they are doing, especially during the first weeks and months of a new post and as clergy approach retirement age.
- Consider the situation and needs of families during transition periods, including regarding schooling, encouraging family time and connecting clergy spouses as appropriate.
- Invite clergy to connect and participate in the diocese early on following a move, e.g. through clergy conferences, bishops' social or study invitations, and discussions with CMD or wellbeing officers.
- Consider wellbeing issues during recruitment processes.
- Consider the implications of formal processes for the wellbeing of those involved, and how best to support and care for them.
- Offer practical and vocational support to those approaching and transitioning into retirement.
- Encourage and offer a range of sources of support and feedback to provide for different needs.
- Promote transparency and good communication, with those in senior roles demonstrating appropriate vulnerability.



- Manage expectations, especially around expectations of bishops and appropriate sources of support.
- Question the use of paternalist language and practices.

For parishes

- Ensure housing is adequate and ready in time for moving day.
- Consider the situation and needs of families during transition periods, including regarding privacy, expectations and family time.
- Consider wellbeing issues during recruitment processes (also the responsibility of patrons).

For the national church

- Address cashflow difficulties between the end of training grants and the start of curacy stipends, especially if curacies are delayed.
- Promote transparency and good communication.
- Consider the implications of formal processes for the wellbeing of those involved, and how best to support and care for them.
- Manage expectations where appropriate and support dioceses in doing so.
- Question the use of paternalist language and practices.



Acronyms

CHARM	Church's Housing Assistance for the Retired Ministry
CMD	Continuing Ministerial Development
DDO	Diocesan Director of Ordinands
FTNR	Full-Time Non-Residential Training
FTR	Full-Time Residential Training
IME	Initial Ministerial Education
MDR	Ministerial Development Review
PCC	Parochial Church Council
PTNR	Part-Time Non-Residential Training
PTO	Permission to Officiate
SM	Stipendiary Minister
SSM	Self-Supporting Minister
TEI	Theological Education Institution
TI	Training Incumbent



1. Introduction

Transitions are times of change and uncertainty, endings and beginnings. They may be required or chosen, full of excitement or dread. Whether they involve uprooting to a whole new location or taking on a fresh role in the same place, transitions between roles have implications for all aspects of wellbeing. This report, the second qualitative study in the longitudinal Living Ministry research, explores how clergy experience four transitions: from Phase 1 of initial ministerial education (IME 1) to curacy; from curacy to their next post; between posts beyond curacy; and into retirement. Listening to participants for the second time, two years on from first hearing their stories, we consider the impact, both positive and negative, on new and continuing relationships and responsibilities and the implications for different aspects of wellbeing.

A key theme identified through analysis of the data relates to the power dynamics evident within and beyond these transitions. Drawing on sociological perspectives, we examine how power, particularly that held by senior clergy, affects the capacity of clergy to make and act on decisions, and how it affects their sense of identity and self-worth. We also consider how such power relationships might be disrupted in order to enhance the agency of clergy and reduce their dependency on bishops in particular. Complementing the sociological analysis is a commentary by The Very Rev'd Dr Frances Ward, reflecting theologically on issues of power and responsibility and advocating a move from a hermeneutic of suspicion to a hermeneutic of trust.

Method

The Living Ministry longitudinal study is mixed methods, with the qualitative panel drawn through stratified random sampling from the 761 respondents to the first survey.¹ In Wave 1, 85 people participated in the qualitative study. In Wave 2, 13 of these participants were not able or declined to take part, leaving 72 participants across all cohorts (those ordained in 2006, 2011 and 2015 and those who started training in 2016). As in Wave 1, these took part through individual or group interviews, the latter based on cohort. Data collection was conducted by two researchers² between October and December 2019.³ Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Framework analysis was undertaken, employing coding based on the domains of wellbeing that form the basis of our conceptual approach (see below); themes identified from the Wave 1 analysis; plus further analysis relating to points of transition.

¹ See the Wave 1 report, *Negotiating Wellbeing: Experiences of Ordinands and Clergy in the Church of England* (2018) for sampling details.

² I am grateful to Dr Naomi Maynard for her assistance in conducting interviews.

³ This was before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK.

Interviews consisted of two parts. The first, on which this paper reports, asked participants about their current wellbeing and changes in the two years since the Wave 1 interviews. In the second, reported in a separate paper, participants were asked to reflect on any matter relating to their ministry that was currently or recently on their mind, with a view to understanding their approach to the issue and the things that shaped it.

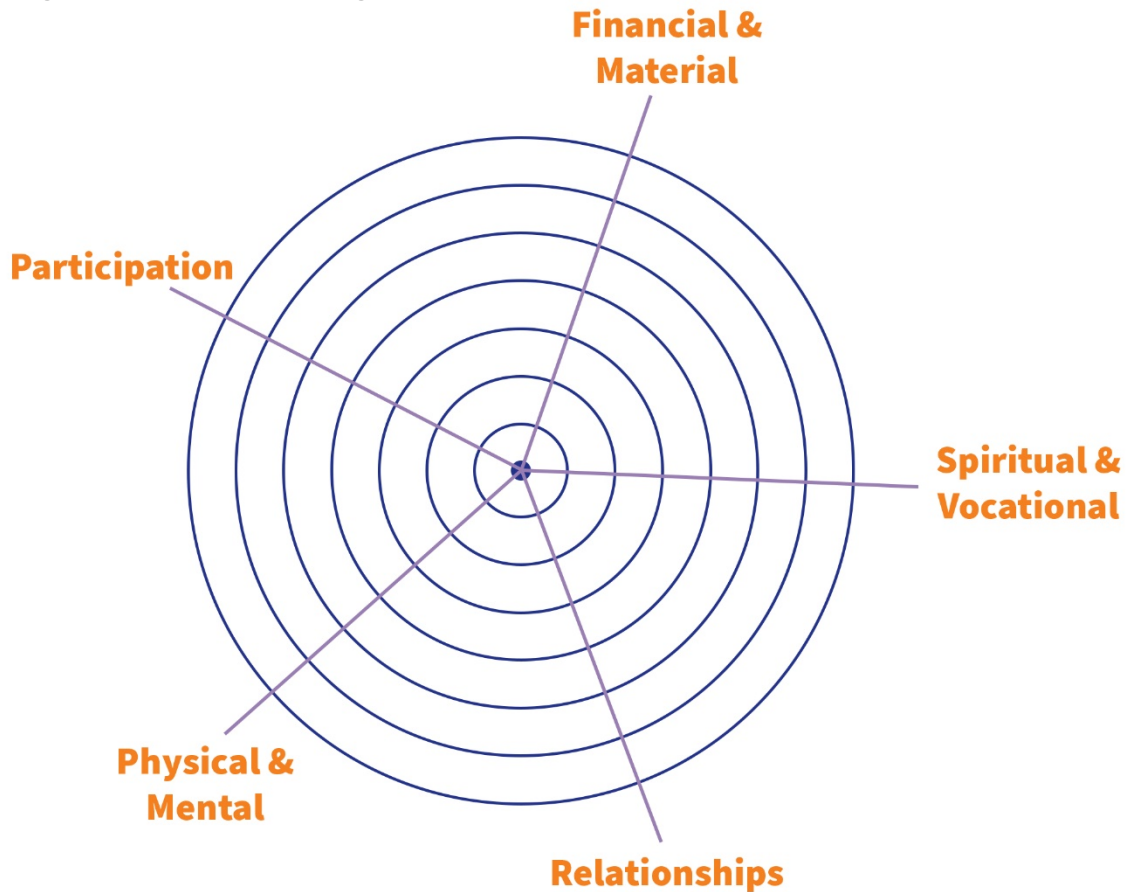
Living Ministry takes a ‘quality of life’ approach to wellbeing, asking participants to reflect on their lives in relation to five domains of wellbeing, developed from previous research:

- Physical and mental wellbeing
- Spiritual and vocational wellbeing
- Relationships
- Financial and material wellbeing
- Participation in the life of the wider church.

To aid this reflection, participants use a ‘wellbeing map’ (reproduced below), marking for each domain where they would currently place themselves and annotating as appropriate, with the centre of the circles representing the ideal and the outside representing severe difficulty. This method provides a focus for discussion as well as a record of wellbeing during previous waves of the research. In Wave 2, participants were also given their completed Wave 1 map in order to help them reflect on change over the two intervening years.



Living Ministry Wellbeing Map



Scope

This is a study of 72 participants ordained or to be ordained since 2006. Care should be taken in applying findings to clergy ordained before this time. There is inevitably a focus on parish clergy, given that these roles make up the vast majority of our participants. Moreover, our sampling has not picked up sufficient numbers of minority groups within Church of England clergy, such as global majority people or those with disabilities, to enable these voices to be heard clearly in this study.⁴ No one was obliged to take part in the research, therefore there is an element of self-selection within the sample frame. The value of qualitative research lies in contextualising rather than generalising experience, and the following analysis seeks to understand better the complexity of the processes, dynamics and relationships that shape the wellbeing of clergy and ordinands. Individual experiences and sentiments expressed or referred to in the report should

⁴ Further focussed studies are planned to address this.



not, therefore, be understood as representing all or even the majority of clergy, although deeper patterns and dynamics identified may be more widely applied.

Throughout this study conversations have been extremely wide-ranging, covering the full breadth of issues relating to personal flourishing. For the purposes of this report it has not been possible to include every experience or perspective expressed: analysis has been limited to experiences of the participants themselves, largely in relation to periods of transition. The experiences portrayed here are necessarily self-reported and represent the perspectives of the participants: other people, such as spouses, colleagues, parishioners and bishops, will have different perspectives which we are unable to present in this report.

Discussions of wellbeing inevitably involve personal and, in some cases, highly sensitive information. We are deeply grateful to all the participants in this study who were willing to share their stories and we recognise the trust implicit in so doing. Some of the accounts are unique enough in a world as small as the Church of England potentially to identify participants even with the removal of names of people, places, churches and dioceses. For this reason, great care has been taken to maintain the confidentiality of those who have taken part in the research, including refraining from telling any individual's story as a coherent whole. Specific incidents or characteristics that may allow a participant to be identified have been omitted or altered unless express permission of the participant to include them has been received. Where individuals are referred to in quotations by initials, these bear no relation to the person's name.

No research is entirely objective. As with all research, decisions have had to be made regarding the topic of inquiry, conceptual approach, sampling strategy, method of data collection, analysis and presentation. These decisions have been influenced by the Living Ministry Advisory and Stakeholder Groups; colleagues within the Living Ministry team, the National Ministry Team, and the Research and Statistics Unit; the Ministry Council; and numerous conversations with other people from a range of perspectives. Mostly, however, this report has been shaped by the author. I come to the research from my own unique standpoint as a white, female, heterosexual, lay member of the Church of England, trained sociologically and employed by the Archbishops' Council. My previous work and research, my reading of the work of others, my personal and professional relationships, my personal experience, and my viewpoint as a member of the Formation Team within the National Ministry Team all inform my knowledge and understanding of the structures and dynamics of the Church of England and the issues it faces at this particular moment in time. That is not to say the report is an entirely subjective creation: formal and rigorous methods of research, including sampling, data collection and analysis, have been employed; input from others has been sought on the approach, methodology and findings; and analysis remains faithful to the method, including only what can be identified from the stories of the participants. Ultimately, however faithfully these experiences are represented, the report is my story of their story and, through the subjective interpretation that comes with reading it from your own perspective, as a reader it also becomes your story.



2. Ordinand to curacy

Who took part?

Of those who started training for ordination in 2016 and took part in the first qualitative wave of Living Ministry, all but three returned to participate in Wave 2. This gave a total of 24 participants, seven of whom trained full-time residentially, nine part-time non-residentially, and eight full-time non-residentially (often referred to as ‘contextual’ or ‘context-based’ training).⁵ All but one had been ordained by the time they spoke to us in the autumn of 2019: three were ordained in 2018 and 20 in 2019, meaning that the majority were in the first few months of their curacy. Five were in self-supporting roles, 18 in stipendiary roles, and 15 had moved to a new house to start their curacy.

Relocation

Given that most of our participants had only recently started their new curacy roles, the majority of their stories at this stage were narratives of transition. 15 participants moved into a new house following ordination, experiencing all the physical, financial and emotional strains of uprooting and moving themselves, their families (if they do not live alone) and their belongings. This is a normal part of moving jobs and of course not at all unexpected; however, the toll it takes on physical and mental wellbeing must be recognised.

Diocesan policies on housing repairs and improvements differ and participants describe varying experiences of moving into curacy houses, regardless of whether they are owned or rented by the diocese or the parish. Some were delighted with a newly refurbished home (‘we moved to a house that belongs to the parish and it’s really great; they looked after it and got it ready for us, and continue to do stuff if we need it’), while others had to ask their diocese or parish to make changes: ‘they’d done nothing to it internally so kind of peeling wallpaper, carpets you could see the floorboards through, ... it hadn’t even been cleaned when I moved into it.’ As experienced by this participant, living standards are not only important in themselves but also contribute to setting the tone of the welcome to the parish, thus impacting levels of anxiety and initial relationships.

For many participants, the move into the curacy house is symbolic of enormous change. Following immediately on from the profound milestone of ordination, this is the moment that represents the start of ordained ministry, symbolised for some by moving out of their own property and into tied accommodation. For some of those trained residentially it is a shift from a college environment to an individual house and,

⁵ In this report, full-time residential training is abbreviated to FTR. Following convention, part-time non-residential training is abbreviated to PTNR or referred to as ‘non-residential training’. Likewise, full-time non-residential training is abbreviated to FTNR or referred to as ‘contextual’ or ‘context-based training’.



for a few, the first time they have ever lived alone or managed a house. Diocesan grants to cover moving expenses are appreciated, while some (for example those coming straight from a college room to an unfurnished five-bedroomed house) have more need of them than others. The appropriateness of the specific house for the individual or family moving into it also varies. Where houses are already owned by the diocese or the parish, there is little scope for matching accommodation to the needs or preferences of the occupant, although adjustments may be made where possible. A single person may therefore ‘rattle’ in a large house, while a family may feel squashed into a smaller home than they are used to. In some cases, the diocese or parish may choose to rent out a large house in order to provide a single person or small family with smaller accommodation.

Finances

For most participants, the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of initial ministerial education has affected financial and material wellbeing positively. Participants previously supported by a training grant find that the stipend is not only higher, but also paid monthly instead of termly and therefore easier to manage. Some highlight the positive impact an improved financial situation has had for their family as well as themselves: ‘in terms of our family situation, I’d say we’re slightly more comfortable than we were, so the pressure seems to have eased a little bit.’

Several, however, report cashflow problems between their last grant (paid in advance) and their first stipend (paid in arrears), and the few whose curacy took longer than usual to arrange found themselves in financial difficulties while they waited: ‘We just totally ran out of money ... we had no warning until the day before it didn’t come in.’ Decisions about housing are negotiated with family as well as dioceses and potential curacy contexts, and rules about this vary between dioceses. While curates are normally required to live in the house provided in the parish unless they have express permission of the bishop, some curates request to stay in their own homes and commute into their parish rather than submit their family to further upheaval. A minority, for whom it is not possible or desirable for either the family to move or the curate to remain, face the prospect of moving into a curacy house without their family. Those who have moved from their own home into tied housing are mostly able to rent out their property, which can be offset against mortgage payments even if it provides no net profit. Stipendiary ministers who stay in their own home are likely to receive a housing allowance in place of accommodation.

The picture is different for self-supporting ministers. While their income is likely to have been higher than full-time ordinands, they continue to support themselves into ordained ministry which, for some, means maintaining full-time employment. This involves negotiations over time and energy: while, as we saw in Wave 1, some self-supporting ministers place strict boundaries around their paid working time, others find themselves cutting their paid working hours as they grapple with the fuzzy working boundaries of ordained ministry.



Workload

The busyness of curacy is a common theme in the accounts of the curates, affecting all aspects of wellbeing. Some of this, as we saw in Wave 1, is the nature of the job itself: the workload will remain or intensify and the transition is not just to a new job, but also to new levels of demand. This proves a challenge regardless of the kind of training curates have experienced during IME 1 and, when asked to describe an issue related to their ministry that had been on their mind recently, a quarter of the 24 participants talked about workload and time management. However, the nature of the challenge varies by mode of IME 1 training. While residentially trained curates may find the transition from a highly structured college environment to the more fluid context of curacy challenging, they also report a sense of vocational rightness now they are doing the job they have been training for: ‘it makes more sense being in the place where I’m kind of called to be. Rather than, in college ... you’re always talking about not being in college.’

Contextually trained curates have already spent three years immersed in local church ministry. On entering curacy, they too find that the structure provided by their college disappears, while the practical ministry aspect intensifies. However, for these participants, curacy represents ‘a different type of busy’ that does not necessarily feel like a big leap: moving from juggling college and context to an increased workload within just one space. The experiences of curates trained part-time non-residentially depends largely on the extent to which they are employed in work outside their curacy role and whether they are entering a full-time or part-time ordained role.

For these recently ordained curates, along with the role itself, much of their busyness is attributed to entering a new environment and a new job. It takes mental and emotional as well as physical energy to get to know a new location, a new role and new people, especially when one feels inexperienced: ‘it still feels very new and at times confusing and at times unsettling because I still walk into so many situations where I think, I just don’t know how to do this.’ Several curates report their diaries being overwhelmed during their first few weeks, full of church meetings; deanery chapter and synod; local ecumenical meetings; IME 2 training sessions; diocesan events; and numerous introductions to people at all levels:

it feels a bit like you become a curate and you get thrown into all these different groupings from deanery synod to deanery chapter to- I was at a diocesan Evangelical fellowship last week and then you’ve got Churches Together in the town as well. So it feels like you get thrown into all these different meetings, networks, and ... it’s good but ... it’s a bit kind of exhausting actually. (SM⁶)

A self-supporting curate describes the desire to say yes to everything at the beginning of his curacy, combined with a lack of awareness of his limits by others, leading him to work double the number of agreed hours:

⁶ Throughout the report, SM is used to indicate a stipendiary minister and SSM to indicate a self-supporting minister.



that's partly me being reluctant to say no to something which is the first time ... So it's partly my fault, but I would say that nobody else within the church asking me to do things and so on, whether it be the training incumbent or the area dean or the churchwardens or even the various volunteers in the church, obviously none of them is saying does B have time to do this thing I'm asking him to do, they're all taking a positive approach which is quite right, ... but obviously in the first six months that means it's just there's so much going on.

Physical and mental wellbeing vary according to personal circumstances, such as bereavement or family problems, and the context of the curacy: for example, several participants comment that their fitness levels have increased or decreased depending on whether they were walking or driving more since ordination.

Difficult transitions

Most of the Living Ministry participants had their curacies arranged well in advance of finishing IME 1 and were able to be ordained in the summer of 2018 or 2019. As we saw in Wave 1, the process of finding a curacy can be stressful, given the fixed term of the first phase of training, and several participants describe anxiety or demoralisation over potential curacies that did not work out. Possible curacies may fall through for a number of reasons, including personality conflicts between the potential curate and TI; demand for curacies outstripping supply within a diocese; bishops' interventions; clergy couples wishing to minister together; changing circumstances of the potential parish or TI; theological differences, including to do with gender, sexuality and tradition; and unsuitability of context, such as geographical isolation. Whatever the reasons for a change of plan, potential curates can be left feeling rejected by their diocese or bishop or a local church, uncared for in terms of their vocation or wellbeing, disorientated, and anxious about the future. Although these things may be largely resolved once they arrive in post, some of the issues and hurt may be carried with them to process during their curacy. Care and support during the period of transition is essential for physical, mental, spiritual, vocational, relational and material wellbeing. Of our participants, five ended up being released by their sponsoring diocese to serve their curacy elsewhere, one at the request of the individual, who felt called to their new diocese. While the remaining four found the experience of being released unsettling, two are now extremely happy with their new situation.

Changing relationships

All but one of the curates in this study moved to a new church for their curacy. Amid the events and meetings of the first weeks and months, they find themselves negotiating multiple new relationships, from learning the names of members of their congregations to working out 'to what degree you can trust people ... how much or how little you can disclose and to who and when.' Key amongst these is the relationship with their training incumbent. We saw in Wave 1, with a previous cohort of curates, that this varies enormously, from supportive and empowering to stressful and constraining. Some of the current cohort of curates report what they describe as minor issues relating to personality, working styles or the intense nature of the relationship



with its inherent power dynamic; however, because most of the curates in the current cohort have only been in post a few weeks or months, there has been little time either for big schisms to develop or for teething problems to be resolved. This is generally recognised by participants and some have found it helpful to establish good communication and understanding early on, either through open conversation ('We're still getting used to each other, but I don't think there's any point in not talking about [anxiety] because that doesn't help anyone'), or by benefitting from organised development sessions using personality profiling tools: 'any kind of just background niggles about I'm not sure about this and I'm not sure about that to do with [my TI], when we did that [exercise] I just went, oh it's that, oh yes it's not a big deal.'

Moving to a new environment also means leaving behind established support structures, especially for the majority of curates who have relocated geographically. While fewer curates trained part-time non-residentially mention this in relation to their IME 1 experiences, several of those coming from contextual and especially residential training miss the close college community:

the nature of residential training is that people moved quite a way to get there, so very close for those years and then it's just, a void opens up and ... the person that used to live two metres around the thing, just isn't there. (FTR)

This can be especially difficult for single curates:

moving from eventually having found quite a supportive community [at college] ... you're surrounded by people and then transferring to moving into a big house by yourself ... the potential for feeling all of a sudden very isolated is huge. (FTR)

So far, most participants report intentionally staying in touch with IME 1 peers through WhatsApp groups, video calls (including for regular prayer) and short breaks away. Harder to put in place is structured contact with friends either from beyond IME 1 or from placement churches. The latter affects contextually trained ordinands in particular, whose IME 1 training was by nature based around their context church, as well as some curates trained part-time non-residentially:

I also feel a big loss, like D did, of the college and not being with people, but also as well, the people that I was on placement with. I was on placement with them for three years, built up these really strong relations and now I'm an hour away from them. ...[A]ctually being so far away from them and not having the time ... to be able to contact them and be in touch with them, I'm finding quite difficult. (FTNR)

Because many ordinands worship with their family, the move to a different church can also have an impact on the wellbeing of spouses, partners and children:

The parish where I was in for training when I was on placement, myself and my family were really settled there for the three years that we were there, and it has felt like a sense of grief moving away from there, so that's been really hard. (FTNR)



For this participant, the difference was not just in the uprooting and relocation, but also in the change of status from ordinand to curate, which extends beyond the individual to the family:

we were really nurtured and encouraged, and I think there's that slight shift between somebody training and somebody in post; I think they think you know it all now, and you don't need any support and you're there, and you know what you're doing.

Families are impacted by the transition to curacy in several ways. As well as adjusting to a different church, many find themselves in a new locality, a new house and new schools. It is not always possible to time initial ministerial education to fit around the exam schedules of multiple children and families may face difficult decisions about schooling as they transition into and out of curacy. For some, this means requesting permission to remain in their family home and commute into their parish, which can add to the stress of a new role. For others, the sacrifice is made by the family, with children commuting to and from their school (in one case, a parent driving over 100 miles each day to enable this) or living apart from their ordained parent for the remaining months of their exam year. Families face similar challenges in negotiating the careers of spouses and partners, with some clergy restricted in their options of potential posts by the needs of others:

wherever we go, [my husband is] going to have to drive a bit further, I'm mindful of that, I don't want to give him a big journey and I want him to, I don't want him to feel pressurised in that place at all. So, I want it to be somewhere that he feels comfortable, I suppose.

Others recognise the adjustments made by their partner to enable their vocation, for example through a longer commute, reduced working hours or changing family roles. The latter can be challenging for all involved, as noted by a woman whose husband has become the primary carer for their children: 'it's taken some processing to get used to my different role within the family.' Others, however, describe being able to be 'more present' for their children in curacy than during IME 1, and we see below that a move into incumbency can allow further freedom to manage time with family.

Whatever the mode of IME 1, participants in both Wave 1 and Wave 2 reflect on the importance of families fully accepting the implications of the vocation of the ordinand and being considered and given opportunities to be involved all the way through training: 'the cost of ministry isn't just to the clergy, it's to the whole family and if they're not part of that because they don't go to college ... then they are going to feel shut out' (PTNR). Care for family relationships is of the utmost importance because they are binding in a way that other relationships are not, with potential for deep, long-term trauma on all sides if they break down.

In most respects, however, the new curates in this study are aware that the relational difficulties they are describing are likely to be temporary, as they adjust to the loss or re-shaping of previous relationships and support structures and forge new ones in the context of their curacy. As they leave their TEI peer group, they enter a new group of curates, some of whom they may or may not already know. Several describe being



welcomed and included by curates a year ahead of them, while others, especially those moving to a new diocese or who have been used to a more homogeneous peer group in IME 1, report feelings of isolation during the initial months. Some have intentionally put in place strategies to manage isolation or potential isolation and to protect existing relationships, including setting up social media groups with former college friends and new curates; continuing links with TEs; joining local clubs and community groups; fostering potential friendships and supportive relationships; building dedicated time with loved ones into working agreements and family life; and taking time to prepare emotionally as a family for moving.

These new relational patterns form part of wider rhythms of life that new curates negotiate, both adjusting to pre-determined activities and timetables and purposefully developing their own patterns and boundaries. As well as affecting physical, mental and relational wellbeing, this negotiation of dislocation is also evident in their spiritual life and sense of vocation.

Spiritual wellbeing

We have already noted the busyness that often characterises the first weeks and months of a new curacy. Included within dilemmas over time management and adjusting to new working patterns are questions about finding time to pray and nourish oneself spiritually:

when you move your life and all your routines, then all your prayer routines and those kinds of things somewhat go out the window and you have to start from scratch again. That's proving a little tricky to kind of find the right places to do the things I want to do.

In addition to time pressures, new curates face other challenges to their spiritual life. Those who have moved into contexts different from their expectations or experience can struggle to find spiritual nourishment in the way they are used to. They may miss the rhythms of prayer they were used to as an ordinand: '[at college] we went to chapel twice a day, every day, and it's strange now just going in the mornings and pray with other people' (FTR); 'I miss the joy in worship that we had [at college]' (FTNR). They may find themselves ministering and worshipping in a tradition with which they are less comfortable:

I was in ... an evangelical college and I'm now in an Anglo-Catholic diocese and a group of parishes where there's a range of spiritualities but ... they're certainly not coming from an established Evangelical kind of place. So in terms of worshipping in the way that I'm used to and that I really like there's a lot less of that, so that's a bit more of a challenge. (FTR)

Their own preferences may contrast with their training incumbent's, as in the case of a curate finding herself with a 'very gifted training incumbent' but struggling to find enough retreat time in a faster-paced parish. As noted in Wave 1, curates often have limited agency in style of ministry or in time. A curate who has been in post for over a year recognises that her spiritual life is not as she would like it to be and hopes it will improve: 'when I can control my own diary, when I can set my own rhythm, I've learnt that that is the rhythm I want.'



None of the participants criticises their TI or the tradition in which they find themselves working; nor do they complain at any apparent lack of fit. Rather, those in this situation feel the need to adapt, to find ‘room to breathe’ and spiritual nourishment: ‘the daily office doesn’t always do it for me in terms of connecting with God. So, it’s just finding those spaces.’ It remains to be seen whether this becomes a major difficulty in their curacy, if they successfully find alternative forms of worship, or if they find their spirituality broadened through their encounters with different traditions.

All this is combined with the transition into a leadership role where, as we saw in Wave 1, curates are faced with the realisation that they are no longer in the congregation receiving teaching and ministry, but responsible for delivering or facilitating it: ‘that is tending to make me a bit squeezed spiritually in that ... I am playing the deacon’s role in worship, and I have not yet once sat in the congregation.’ Another curate describes how the weight of responsibility has affected her prayers:

it’s sometimes hard to maintain my own spiritual core ... even doing Morning Prayer feels very different from when I was doing Morning Prayer in my previous home parish, because now I feel a weight of responsibility, this is about praying in the parish, for the parish that I have responsibility for. So I think it’s become a more outward thing and a less inward-feeding thing.

While one contextually trained curate articulates a sense of spiritual disorientation at having less leadership responsibility in his new church than his former context church, even curates with experience of church leadership, including those coming from context-based pathways, miss the structured worship and formative input of IME 1.

To manage their spiritual wellbeing amid the challenges of a new environment and a new role, curates describe developing new rhythms and practices. These may be private, such as quiet days, retreats, increased Bible study or, for one self-supporting minister, adapting Morning Prayer to a more personal style on the days when she is not formally on duty. They may be with other people, whether prayer with their TI, groups within their benefice, or affiliation with groups and orders such as the Franciscans, the Society of Catholic Priests and New Wine. Curates may seek nourishment in other worship spaces, such as churches with more familiar traditions or services they can attend as a congregant.

Some of this involves adapting practices learnt during or before IME 1 that deacons bring with them into their curacy. These include long-term personal habits (‘a pattern of prayer and worship that whilst has spanned very different sort of expressions it’s just been constant’ (FTR)); as well as the more formal habits of the Eucharist and daily offices:

what my college did was embedded the importance of a prayerful routine, of Morning and Evening Prayer, the centrality of the Eucharist at different fixed points in the week. That, for me, is something that I’ve carried on, ... but at different times. (FTR)



As well as equipping ordinands with formal spiritual habits, TEIs provide them with tools with which to develop and sustain their spiritual life in a more personalised way. A part-time non-residentially trained curate describes formation groups where ‘we would work through stuff around ... work-life balance, around spirituality, things like that, that all kind of helped in terms of formation.’ A contextually trained curate notes that, while they were expected to develop rhythms of prayer within their context rather than the college, the leadership training was invaluable for her current spiritual life, including elements ‘about how to keep yourself well and topped up and nourished.’ A residentially trained curate points to the value of the informal learning, not from the ‘organised training part of it, but a lot from conversations with colleagues, friends, and informal stuff that happens’ to support spiritual discipline and prayer.

Vocation

In Wave 1 we identified five levels at which participants reflected on their sense of vocation: their calling to ordained ministry; their institutional identity in relation to the Church of England; the shape of their ministry; their calling to a specific post or place; and their vocational fulfilment in the tasks they find themselves doing. Of the curates in the current cohort, none questions their calling to the Church of England; however, all the other aspects are present in the curates’ narratives.

While some of the more experienced cohorts find the tasks of ordained ministry too heavily weighted towards administration and buildings maintenance, such burdens have yet to affect these new curates. We have already noted that while curates sometimes find the shift from college to curacy challenging in the level of responsibility and general busyness, they often also experience a new sense of vocational ‘rightness’ as they find themselves enacting the role they have been preparing for: ‘I suppose I feel happier doing the job I’ve been trained to do, and just doing it rather than sitting in a room [at college] thinking about it’ (FTR). Some of the contextually trained curates, with more practical experience of ministry, feel fulfilled ‘particularly [by] just the level of responsibility that I’m being given, which feels so refreshing relative to my last role,’ and frustrated when they find themselves doing less: ‘I feel like it’s been a kind of step down in terms of responsibility from, from where I was before. ... [I]t feels a bit kind of frustrating.’

The frustration of this curate arises partly from previous hopes of planting a church during his curacy. Other participants also mention aspects of their vocation which are not as they expected, for example, a curate who believes she has a calling to deprived areas but finds herself in a relatively affluent parish, or a self-supporting minister aware that his curacy is almost entirely focussed on parish ministry to the exclusion of his identity as an ordained minister at his workplace. However, at this stage, these are framed as issues to be addressed rather than deep vocational disappointments. In the words of the former,

I didn’t really feel that it’s second or third best by any means. My training incumbent has a similar heart for social justice and the disadvantaged, so we have a mindset that’s similar and thinking about how we could work that out in the benefice has been very interesting.



Most participants at this stage report feeling basically fulfilled in terms of the shape of their ministry. For some, this goes beyond the performance of local parish ministry to new opportunities within the diocese ('since being ordained I've felt fully able to participate in the life of the church and I've also got a core role in my diocese ... I feel that everything that I am called to do is- the doors are opening'), or opportunities to develop aspects of vocation put on hold during IME 1, as in the case of a curate who had an unexpected encounter on his first day: 'when one's ordained ... there's a certain sense of worry you know is this right, ... and for me it was a sign that this particular kind of ministry would be opened up again.'

Curacy holds less scope than later transitions for a strong sense of calling to a particular place or post, given that neither the timing nor the curacy itself is chosen entirely by the minister. Indeed, we have seen above that several participants found the process of securing a curacy difficult and feel that their hopes have not been wholly met. Unlike some of the curates in the previous (2015) cohort who, perhaps because they had been in post longer, were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the fit of their curacy, these curates so far accept their post. Underlying this is faith that God has called them even outside of their own preferences, combined with the willingness we have seen above to try to address vocational issues. This is expressed by one participant who was initially hesitant about her curacy but is starting to see encouragement: 'it's not as bad as I dreaded and I should trust God more.' Another, who has seen her curacy become more, rather than less, challenging, articulates the tension in acknowledging the difficulties while simultaneously stating, in faith, 'I don't believe God's made a mistake in any of the journey I've come along.'

Some curates do express a strong sense of calling to their specific context, mostly as something that has developed since the curacy has been arranged: 'vocationally I'm definitely in the right place ... I've really felt that we've arrived in the right place to be.' One participant described a longer-term call to the geographic location of his curacy, which entailed moving dioceses to pursue it: 'I feel very called to where I am, and God has been all over that process of getting me there, and that feels really good.'

The final aspect of vocation causing this cohort of curates reflection is ordination itself. While some, as we have seen, feel a sense of 'rightness' on being ordained, for others, assuming the identity of deacon or priest is unsettling. This is regardless of training mode, age or remuneration, although the precise issues may vary according to such factors, as in the cases of three participants. One, commenting, 'I think I've still got question marks as to what a priest is and whether I should be one and whether I am being one,' was ordained later in life and struggles to experience ordained ministry as particularly different from her previous work: 'it doesn't seem quite so distinctive.' A second, juggling self-supporting ministry with a busy job, finds moving between identities difficult: 'I don't know who I am ... this afternoon I've got to go and do a visit, dog-collar on, ... then you're taking it off again because you've got to go and work, ... put it back on,' contributing to a sense of discomfort. For a third, on the other hand, in a full-time curacy, the challenge is managing identities simultaneously: 'being authentically me but also authentically the clergy person that God has called me to be'. All three of these participants refer to the impact of other people as well as themselves on their sense of identity as a priest, whether, as a public figure in a clerical collar, being



unexpectedly recognised at a wedding; being bought a drink by strangers in a pub; being shouted and spat at in the street; or being treated differently by congregation members. Experiences expressed as ‘feeling like a fraud’ by some participants are articulated by one as the symbolism of one’s status as clergy:

if it’s something positive it encourages you and it’s great but it also makes you aware of the weight of the calling that God has placed on my life and other clergy ... there is something about the collar and you being an ordained person that ... it’s perceived that you hold some sort of power. And then equally in terms of the negative stuff ... you are in some sense a public face of the church because you know that’s what you sort of signed up for but also you cannot bear the weight of the church’s failings.

The ordained body therefore carries immense and multi-layered symbolic value, and the social identity of ordained ministers is shaped by others as well as by themselves.

Summary

The transition from IME 1 to curacy impacts wellbeing in multiple ways. While many of the physical, mental, relational and financial challenges are normal in a period of geographical or occupational relocation, it is nonetheless important that they are recognised and mitigated where possible. The early period of curacy brings new working patterns, relationships and rhythms of prayer and the loss of some support networks, which can be exhausting and difficult for families as well as the curates themselves. However, the move into curacy also brings greater financial stability for many, alongside increased vocational fulfilment.



3. Curacy to next post

Who took part?

A total of 19 participants ordained in 2015 took part in Wave 2, a drop of seven from Wave 1: the largest fall of all the cohorts. This may reflect findings from Wave 1 and the Wave 2 quantitative survey that the move from curacy into first incumbency is one of the most challenging times for wellbeing, leaving little space for extra activities, especially given that all but one of those who did not participate in Wave 2 were stipendiary and therefore likely to enter incumbency. Of the 19 who took part in Wave 2, 14 were stipendiary and five self-supporting (including ordained local ministers). One participant had moved from self-supporting to stipendiary ministry and one from ordained local ministry to self-supporting ministry. Two remained in curacy posts, one shortly to move from a self-supporting curacy to a stipendiary incumbency and the other struggling to find a suitable self-supporting post. Three participants moved diocese following their curacy and three took on the office of priest-in-charge or incumbent within their curacy parish. All our participants had moved or were intending to move to a parochial post, meaning that the experiences of chaplains and other non-parochial clergy are not represented here.

Finding a post

Following curacy, ministers move into a range of posts including, in our sample, associate priest, house-for-duty priest and, for the majority, an incumbent-status role. When we spoke to them, most participants had been in their new post for about a year, although this varied from as little as two weeks to 18 months.

The transition between curacy and first post of responsibility is not always straightforward. This may be experienced positively, with ministers finding opportunities towards the end of their curacy to take on fixed-term placements in different contexts or to cover vacancies, either in their curacy parish or elsewhere. Some of this cohort, however, describe difficulties in finding posts. In Wave 1, participants ordained in 2011 described the pressure on stipendiary ministers to leave their role and home by the time their curacy ends. This was also experienced by some of the current cohort, while others had their curacies extended to allow them to cover vacancies or sabbaticals. While self-supporting ministers are unlikely to face pressure to leave their home, they are usually restricted to a geographical area and thus have fewer options regarding posts. Two describe a sense of frustration and abandonment as their dioceses seemed unable to offer them anything suitable for their own vocations and the needs of their families.

Increased responsibility

In some respects, moving out of curacy is similar to moving into curacy, given that both phases of initial ministerial education are time-limited and both usually involve a step up into increased responsibility as well as to a different church and sometimes geographical location. Those who have moved parish face all



the challenges described above of accustoming themselves to new people, places, roles and routines, along with the exhausting task of physically relocating themselves and often their families, who also face challenges similar to those of previous moves. The defining characteristic of this transition, however – especially when it involves a move into first incumbency – is the change in level of responsibility. We also saw this in Wave 1, with participants in this position describing the weight of realisation that they no longer had anybody to hand things on to. In the Wave 2 quantitative study, the only transition showing a consistent significant drop in mental wellbeing was the move from curacy to first incumbency.⁷ From the accounts of the more recent cohort to make this move, we can identify three key areas impacted by this new sense of responsibility: the extent to which they feel isolated or supported; their workload; and their sense of vocational fulfilment.

Isolation

A heightened sense of isolation is common for those moving into their first incumbency or a similar role. It is caused by several factors, among which the responsibility of the role features strongly. Participants speak of a ‘step-change’ in the level of responsibility in that ‘the buck stops with you in a way that it didn’t necessarily in curacy’ (SM), including a continued and deepened awareness of the challenge of personal worship when constantly facilitating worship for others. One describes the anxiety arising from the burden of responsibility:

no matter how well I know this shouldn’t be the case, I do feel hugely responsible for the future of my particular church, the congregation at St X’s, its future, financial issues around the congregation and the age demographic, all that sort of thing, and that weighs heavily on me. That’s the sort of core of feelings of anxiety. (SM)

Participants also point to the loneliness that comes with holding relational boundaries between oneself and one’s congregation, which was discussed in detail in Wave 1: ‘being the incumbent puts you in a different position, so although people are becoming friends here it’s never the same relationship as I can have with other people’ (SM).

New levels of responsibility may be compounded with the overwhelming busyness of incumbency (see below) as well as a move to a new environment bringing the challenges described above. During IME 1 and IME 2, ordinands and curates find themselves part of a structured and (usually) supportive training community of peers. Beyond this point, formal structures shift from cohort-based to geographical, largely deaneries. While some clergy are able to maintain close relationships with individuals or small groups from college or curacy, this is difficult amid the challenges of a new role:

⁷ L. McFerran with L. Graveling, *Ministerial Effectiveness and Wellbeing: Exploring the Flourishing of Clergy and Ordinands*, Archbishops’ Council, p. 27.



with the passage of time, some of those relationships that I've formed, particularly through training, you know, other curates, have just cooled off because everyone now, myself included, is so focussed on the parochial job, that you spend less time keeping up those relationships. So, some of those relationships which had nurtured me and given me strength in the initial year or two of curacy have changed in nature, so that they don't feel as supportive as they were before, and I can't say that I've found lots of new relationships to take their place. (SM)

How far participants in their first post after curacy feel isolated or connected varies, therefore, partly according to whether they have relocated and the extent to which they already have support structures in place and are able to maintain them. Relocation and low levels of previous support do not necessarily lead to increased isolation in a new post, however, which can be a positive move in terms of relationships, as one participant comments: 'I felt quite isolated in curacy ... so actually relationship-wise, I've actually got far more supportive people around me' (SM). The new context clearly impacts levels of isolation and connection in numerous ways, including the structure of the new benefice and relationships with colleagues (if any). As much as the circumstances themselves, it is often the change that poses the challenge: while one participant describes moving from 'always [having] had retired clergy and readers to work with' to 'practically zero,' another finds himself with responsibility for several colleagues having moved from a curacy where he was largely working alone: 'it's a very big culture shift for me.'

The former, like other participants, is very aware of the potential for loneliness in an incumbency role and is investing effort into 'building relationships and trying to form networks' within the deanery and ecumenically. Several participants have found local and peer networks invaluable at the beginning of their post, whether colleagues within a team ministry, Churches Together networks, or peers at a similar stage or just ahead. Other forms of support intentionally put in place or made use of by participants to mitigate against isolation include one-to-one formal or professional 'experts' such as mentors, coaches and counsellors. These groups and individuals do not remove the challenge of responsibility that comes with incumbency, but they help clergy to deal with it safely: 'the tendency to feel isolated I think is quite strong because you feel you're carrying the responsibility ... the support networks that enable me to deal with that are very strong' (SM). As this participant has found, it is helpful for support structures already to be in place in order to help effectively when difficult situations arise, whether work-related or other challenges such as bereavement or family health.

Participants also discuss wider relationships, mostly within diocesan structures, as extremely important to their relational wellbeing, providing connection with others and a 'broader perspective' which contributes to a sense of belonging: 'I do quite a lot in the wider diocese which I find quite enlivening ... having a wider picture, which I think does inform ministry quite a lot, I find that really useful' (SM).

Some, like this participant, who have remained within the same diocese (especially if this was also the case for their IME 1 training) describe establishing connections over a period of time, including involvement in vocations work, tutoring, chaplaincy, and positions on various committees and governing bodies: 'my



involvement in the last two years has certainly increased, sort of at a deanery and a diocese level. ... I've been around a little bit longer, so you get known don't you and when you get known then you get offered opportunities' (SM).

The three who have moved diocese (all about a year into their new post) have taken different approaches to their participation in the life of the wider church. One, following an uneasy relationship with a previous diocese, expresses relief at starting a challenging new post without extra commitments 'so I can get on with being a parish priest, which is bliss' (SM). In contrast, another describes making a conscious decision to accept any invitations to contribute within the deanery or diocese during her first year in post, partly as a strategy to mitigate against isolation:

as part of getting to know a new diocese I've put myself out there a bit more and made relationships broader. Because I am isolated so it's therefore it is important to meet up with your deanery and to go to Synod and to link in with the wider diocese, ... that's been really helpful to feel that I'm part of the bigger picture, and that's helped with the isolation I think. So I don't feel as isolated as I possibly could have been and that's led to me feeling more like I am participating. (SM)

The third has valued a proactive approach from her diocese, being asked at the beginning what fulfilled her vocationally and then provided with opportunities to connect in those areas. Several participants mention measures actively put in place by their diocese to support them in their new role, such as mentors and new incumbents' courses (valued as much, and possibly more, for providing connections with other new incumbents as for the training content). However, several participants across the 2015, 2011 and 2006 cohorts also describe receiving little attention from their diocese when managing new or challenging situations. One, having covered a vacancy at the end of her curacy, comments, 'nowhere along the line, in the 18 months that I was holding the fort, did anybody ever ask how I was ... just checking in and saying ... "Are you okay? Do you need anything?"' (SSM).

Workload

While the transition from IME 1 to curacy can involve an increase in workload, the move beyond curacy is a further step-change, often, as we have seen, with less structured support. We heard in Wave 1 from the cohort ordained in 2011 how the early stages of incumbency often feel overwhelming, with the shift to greater responsibility bringing longer hours and increased stress. The 2015 cohort report a similar experience. While not everyone has a good experience in curacy, one participant comments that 'curacy's a pretty good gig really ... you've not got all the responsibility. ... I'm definitely working harder than I was' (SM). Another, who described in Wave 1 the relentless busyness of curacy, acknowledges that she now looks back on those days as relatively easy: 'I probably thought curacy was fairly busy ... now ... it's kind of like, wow, curacy was so restful' (SM). The fact that she has not been completely overwhelmed suggests that her capacity has grown along with her role.



The increase in responsibility affects workload in several ways. Participants point to the ‘sheer volume of different things you have to handle at any one time’ (SM). Two dynamics are at play here: both the number of tasks for which one is responsible and the range of work, requiring shifts of focus between, for example, pastoral, missional and administrative work, sometimes across multiple and contrasting church contexts. Attending to one’s own spiritual wellbeing is something that can easily be lost amid competing demands: ‘I feel more guilty about taking the spiritual time for myself. When I wasn’t like, “The buck stops with you,” it was almost easier to say, “Actually, I’ve got the time to do the spiritual stuff,” and so I’ve found it harder than last year’ (SM). However, as another notes, ‘I kind of feel like I [neglect prayer] at my peril really, so if that’s the thin end of the wedge and I start doing that and it all unravels from there’ (SM).

Combined with this, which is likely to continue as part of the nature of parochial ministry, are the additional pressures of being new in the role. These may relate to the extra effort required to search for the best way to do things or the discomfort of being inexperienced in a role of responsibility:

you know how to find the answer, but you do look a bit of a sucker at times when you have to give the impression that you’re going to have to come back to people all the time, you know, ‘sorry, I had to look this up.’ (SM)

Increased workload may also stem from the burden of responsibility to address issues within the new context, as for a participant who recounts arriving in her new parish to find several important structures and policies not in place:

I could just see this stuff that was basic, was the foundational stuff, was just not there. Each one, you think, ‘I’ll just deal with that. I’ll just deal with that.’ I was just working, working, working and working (SM)

or the need to develop a team of people with whom to share the load: ‘I’ve spent this first year trying to identify lay people that I can grow and enable to lead or preach and that’s a slow process’ (SM).

Furthermore, while involvement in the wider life of the diocese is important for developing connections and mitigating against isolation, such activities increase pressure on time and energy. The person quoted above who finds involvement in diocesan life ‘enlivening’ adds, ‘I must admit, I do think the next thing they ask me to do, I’m going to say I don’t think I can do it, because you can only stretch in so many ways.’

While some participants mention receiving training in time management during IME 1 and/or 2, they also comment, as did the previous cohort, that no amount of theory can fully prepare a person for the move to incumbency: ‘it may just be one of those things that you don’t really get it until you’re in it’ (SM). The participants who describe a less dramatic increase in workload tend to be those who had already experienced similar levels of responsibility during their curacy: ‘I’ve never felt that big step up ... my responsibilities grew and grew over a three-year period so that by the end I truly was just like an associate minister to the rector’ (SM).



Participants have taken various approaches to the challenge of a new role, including, as we have seen, increasing their hours, attempting to develop lay participation, and ensuring support networks are in place. One describes holding back initially: ‘I’ve spent the first year listening and getting to know the parish, just tweaking things where necessary and only changing the absolute necessary’ (SM). Handling the demands of incumbency is clearly a learning process. Most participants had been in post for about a year when we spoke to them and several describe, after a busy first year, making efforts to cut down their hours, improve their time management, or decline offers of further participation in ministry beyond their parish: ‘I made a decision ... that I was not going to work that many hours anymore’ (SM).

Vocational fulfilment

As we have seen, curacy and first incumbency usually both involve a high quantity of work. One reason why clergy are able to make the second step-change into incumbency without reaching breaking point is that they have grown in capacity over the period of their curacy, through experience and reflection. A second reason is the difference in the nature of their role. The increased workload and stress resulting from heightened responsibility are mitigated for many by the sense of vocational ease brought with it by incumbency. Several participants describe feeling noticeably more fulfilled on entering their new incumbent role. This sense of vocational fulfilment has several elements to it. First, there is the fulfilment of a calling: as one puts it, ‘I’m feeling far more at ease within my role, and that’s partly vocational as well, it’s partly that I am doing what I’m called to do, even though it’s hard’ (SM). The vocation of clergy, especially those with a calling to incumbency, includes leadership which, unless they cover a vacancy or take charge of or plant a church, may only partially be fulfilled during curacy. While some have known this to be their calling since the initial discernment process, for others it is unexpected, as in the case of an incumbent whose original intention had been to act in a self-supporting capacity while continuing a secular job (‘it was a well-paid job and I was quite happy doing it [but] since ordination I’ve ... been given a greater sense of fulfilment through church work’), or a team vicar who moved into the role from her assistant post when it became vacant. As we have seen above, vocational fulfilment may also occur through opportunities to take up additional roles within the diocese or elsewhere: ‘It’s okay to be me now, whereas before it felt like I was having to be squeezed into the curate’s box’ (SM). A further contributing factor is job security which, for many, has increased with the move from a fixed-term curacy into a permanent incumbent-status role. Others have moved into fixed-term posts which, particularly if compounded with underlying vocational anxieties or experiences of pressure to find a job at the end of curacy, may give rise to concern: ‘there’s still anxiety. It is an interim post, it is time limited, it has got an end point’ (SM).

Second, as well as feeling released to do what they are called to do, following curacy clergy may feel liberated in terms of how they do it. While the sense of responsibility and workload has increased, so has the freedom to manage one’s own diary and work to one’s own preferred style, eliminating some of the frustrations expressed by the same participants as curates two years previously:



One of the joys about being incumbent status is that actually you can [spend time with family] without having to have any feeling of guilt pressed upon you by anybody else. ... I might have to juggle some bits around in the afternoon, so that meetings happen in the evening, but that's my call. I think I was released by that independence. There was no one telling me to do that, but I think I flourished because of that. (SM)

As noted in Wave 1, levels of agency are therefore important to wellbeing. Contributing to this, as well as freedom to manage time, is confidence in one's role. Transition to a new position can be both beneficial and detrimental to confidence. We have seen that it can leave new incumbents feeling inadequate during the early days. Another participant, a year into his post, describes the anxiety he feels over his responsibility for his church and congregation and the expectation (both internal and external) to deliver numerical and financial growth. However, others articulate heightened levels of confidence. This is largely a result of increased experience and settling into a role, as in the case of an SSM whose outlook changed from, in Wave 1, feeling on the edge of the leadership team at her church and unsure how to handle the changing status of her relationships within the congregation, to feeling confident and settled: 'I'm seen now as part of the leadership.' She attributes this partly to personal growth through increased responsibility when her incumbent was on temporary leave:

Not that the incumbent is that controlling, but ... [i]t was such a lovely time and it was such a lot of freedom. ... I think, to be honest, [it] just gave me wings. I think there's something about feeling that, 'Okay, I just need to step up to it,' and then thinking, 'Actually, this is how I should do it. I shouldn't just feel I always have to check to do something which I know is okay.'

Another participant recognises the first year of incumbency as an important period of growth, noting:

I'm not as anxious as I was in the early days of this job with the number of things I was picking up and my sense of, 'gosh can I even do this,' you know, I'm a year in now and I can do this, I've sort of proved that through this past year and you know there are things I've got to work on and there always will be, but I'm not feeling that same sense of sort of anxiety over it that I was at the beginning. (SM)

Summary

While the new responsibilities of a first post after curacy may lead to increased isolation and workload, for many clergy they also bring a strong sense of vocational fulfilment. Although enhancing wellbeing to a large extent, the latter may also contribute to clergy placing heavier than necessary demands on themselves. The challenge, then, is how to take on new responsibility that is vocationally fulfilling whilst maintaining supportive relationships and a manageable workload. Structures, practices and training that provide experience and promote personal agency and self-determination while also providing support with managing workload, connection with peers and a sense of belonging within the diocese are therefore



critical to wellbeing. More specifically, it is important to ensure that adequate support structures are in place to help new incumbents navigate their role while not adding to pressure on their time, so more are able to comment, 'I've had wobbles this year that's for sure, had to deal with some quite challenging things ... But I had mechanisms to deal with it and places to deal with it' (SM). This is likely to include mentoring and peer groups, but also active support from dioceses in checking how clergy are coping and offering opportunities for ongoing vocational discernment.



4. Transitions between posts

Who took part?

Of the 32 Wave 1 participants ordained in 2006 or 2011, 29 returned to take part in Wave 2. Among these, eight had moved to a new primary role since Wave 1, including six who had moved diocese. One is self-supporting and another moved from a temporary self-supporting role back into stipendiary ministry. New roles were mostly parochial but also included deanery, diocesan and cathedral posts. Reasons for moving varied, including a strong calling to a specific post; cutting back on hours; leaving a role because of bullying, burn-out or theological differences; and family reasons.

Workload

The striking difference between these cohorts and the later ones discussed above is the relative lack of reference to a step-change in workload following their move. Some refer to the fatigue that comes with relocating and building new relationships, noting the importance of being able to take time off to move house and rest between roles ('there's just been practical stuff like [building furniture] which I suppose meant that I was a bit tired than I would like to have been when I actually started the job' (SM)). However, only two describe heightened stress and tiredness from an increased workload. Both of these have moved to roles of greater scope or responsibility, one having also temporarily lost administrative support and the other having taken on a benefice more than twice the size of his former one, with three churches instead of one. Although the latter now works with an associate minister, he comments, 'I think I do take on a lot more worry in the job, and just physical exhaustion from it and not being able to do some of the stuff that probably fed me before, because time gets squeezed.'

A third participant, moving from a Team Vicar role to Priest-in-Charge, describes the demands of taking on new tasks and responsibilities, 'pulling in skills that I am not afraid to use but I am finding it tiring using them because it is not my natural place.' This, however, echoing the new incumbents transitioning out of curacy, is mitigated by the freedom of being able to control her own diary and priorities.

New beginnings

Overall, this minister, like several others, describes her physical and mental health as significantly improved since moving to her new role. Five participants had moved from a difficult situation, reasons including: differences with their congregation regarding tradition and ministry style; difficulties finding a suitable role because of family circumstances and an unsupportive diocese; bullying by a colleague; and overwork, either resulting in burnout from the demands of the job or because of a felt need to prove oneself.

For some, then, the move to a new job represents an attempt to decrease stress, whether by reducing workload, removing oneself from damaging relationships, or entering a role more closely aligned with one's



vocation. These issues were all evident in their accounts two years earlier in Wave 1, although not necessarily recognised as such. While one participant was already questioning whether he was in the right role, another comments, ‘Two years ago, I put [physical and mental wellbeing] quite far out. Actually, two years ago that was right, because I was on the verge of burnout, probably, but I hadn’t recognised it’ (SM). For another, who later realised she was being bullied by a colleague, participation in Living Ministry was one of the factors contributing to her decision to move:

Meeting in the group last time and hearing other people’s stories was part of the journey to me deciding that something had to change, and there were other things as well, but it all began to paint a picture that as much as I didn’t want to go, to preserve my wellbeing I had to go.

Less than the research itself, it was the connection with other clergy and the new perspective that gave her on her own situation that enabled her to take action and make a positive change.

It is difficult to say whether all these posts were wrong from the start, as participants also recognise positive outcomes and personal growth during them. It is of the utmost importance that clergy wellbeing is considered both during recruitment processes and continually as the person remains in post.

Authenticity

A key element contributing to wellbeing in most of the narratives of participants who have moved post is, in the words of one, ‘the ability to be me.’ A good fit between minister and post plays out in several ways. First, theological outlook has implications not just for spiritual wellbeing but also for relationships and leadership. A common dilemma for clergy throughout this study has been how to worship and obtain spiritual nourishment while constantly delivering services for others, and we have seen that clergy tend to manage this by putting in place regular patterns of prayer and retreat along with support structures such as cell groups and spiritual direction, and by engaging with resources such as books, podcasts, conferences and occasional worship at other churches. This is the case however far a minister feels aligned with the tradition of his or her parish. If, however, they find themselves in a parish of a different tradition from their own, not only is this challenge accentuated, but such differences may also lead to conflict with congregation members over theological issues and ministry style, and to frustrations concerning vision and ministry plans. While some curates value the opportunity to experience a different tradition within a learning context and a few clergy may feel called to minister in a theologically different church, others find it challenging to the point of being detrimental to their wellbeing as well as to the flourishing of the church. One participant described in Wave 1, ‘being on a different page to many of the people in the parish,’ with ministry team meetings ‘the most stressful thing in my job.’ He commented, ‘I am really conscious that I speak a different language sometimes, although I try really hard not to speak a different language. I find it very hard to be myself in the place where I am.’ Wave 2 finds him in the early stages of a new role in a tradition much closer to his own. Looking back, he reflects, ‘what sustained me was not the parish and the worship in the parish, ... that that was draining. I was out of my traditional, out of my comfort zone, and overstretched in my



leadership role.’ His strategy to resolve the previous situation was twofold: first, he moved to a role that fitted better with his tradition; and second, he

made a definite decision when I arrived that I was going to come here and be myself and that people would just have to deal with that, and I feel a lot happier having made that decision. ... [A]ctually people have responded to that, people have seemed to have been quite happy to accept me as the kind of Christian that I am.

In this case, then, the desire for authenticity has led both to changing the external circumstances to bring more alignment between the tradition of the minister and the ministry context, and to a change in self-acceptance and personal boundaries.

Second, one’s ‘ability to be oneself’ can be constrained or enabled through relationships. One participant commented in Wave 1, ‘I feel that [my current location is] where God called me to be. ... But I’m not doing the job I think he called me there to do.’ At the time, she explained this as being caused by difficult relationships within a team ministry, which she now understands as bullying, preventing her from fulfilling a central aspect of her vocation. Having exited that relationship, she comments, ‘I’ve finally reached a place where I am ... doing the ... ministry that I am called to do.’

An absence of negative relationships is only part of the story, however. The same participant attributes part of her newfound vocational fulfilment to supportive relationships within her current diocese, citing proactive visits from or appointments with archdeacons, bishops and continuing ministerial development (CMD) officers:

I had a visit from the archdeacon probably a month or maybe six weeks after arriving, and I have an appointment with the bishop to see how I am getting on. ... It says a lot, doesn’t it, ... to know that you are being thought of, and that somebody knows your name and where you are. (SM)

The welcome given to clergy entering a diocese affects wellbeing deeply. Along with ‘checking in’ from archdeacons and bishops, participants cite clergy conferences, bishops’ social or study invitations, discussions with CMD officers and ‘buddying’ with peers as helpful to developing a sense of connection and belonging. Some, however, even if they have not moved diocese, may be left feeling unsupported, as one participant notes: ‘I am now 14 months in and at no stage in that 14 months, despite being at a conference last week and having a couple of conversations with the archdeacon, at no point has the archdeacon asked how I am, or how I am getting on’ (SM).

The importance of being known, understood and valued within one’s diocese and particularly by senior clergy was identified in Wave 1 of Living Ministry and is further highlighted in Wave 2. Participants articulate a sense of loss and sometimes anxiety when a respected bishop moves on, either because of a change in theological perspective with an incoming bishop or because of the loss of personal support. Senior clergy can also be enabling of transition, both through contributing to vocational discernment and through



providing permission to move, even when permission is not required. A participant whose bishop suggested it might be a good time for a change comments,

that was definitely the right thing for her to say, because I felt a loyalty to the deanery and to the diocese and I needed her to say, ‘you get moving.’ Because once she did that, actually I’d applied for a job within about 48 hours from the conversation.

Finally, we see in the accounts of our participants the importance to authenticity of the job itself. While only one person moved primarily because they felt called to a specific post, most articulate a sense of calling to their new role. For several, the decision to leave a difficult situation allowed them to spend time discerning a call to a new place through the process of job-hunting. For others, pursuing their calling is understood in the context of family ties, whether seeking a new role to enable their partner’s job change or moving to be closer to family. Two participants describe times of ‘wilderness,’ when their diocese has been unable or unwilling to offer them opportunities to exercise the ministry to which they feel called. For one, this was resolved by moving to a role in a different diocese. The other, for whom moving is not possible, has found her vocation being expressed in a very different way from how she had expected. For her, the experience of pursuing her vocation has been painful, despite her current role allowing her to use more of her gifts. She comments, ‘Couldn’t it have just gone seamlessly and beautifully together? It didn’t. And I’m still trying to work out what form that is and how it works.’ Her story, along with others, is a reminder that vocational fulfilment may emerge uncomfortably from unexpected and undesired circumstances, rather than being a straightforward progression, and that it may require perseverance. Agency and calling are held in tension: ‘you’re in a role for a season and then God might move you on or God might change your focus.’

Summary

For many clergy, movement between posts subsequent to curacy results in improved wellbeing. Although the challenges of relocating are still there, the choice to move is usually their own and, unless their new role is bigger in scope or seniority, unlike those entering or leaving curacy there is little change in level of responsibility. Given that several participants moved in order to exit a difficult situation, it is important that attention is paid to wellbeing at recruitment, to pick up potential pitfalls, as well as on an ongoing basis. Analysis of the period of transition between posts highlights the importance of authenticity—‘the ability to be me’—which plays out in theological stance, relationships (including with senior clergy) and role.



5. Approaching retirement

Who took part?

Across all cohorts, 16 participants were aged 60 or over at the time we spoke to them. All were still active in ordained ministry and they include stipendiary, self-supporting and sector ministers approaching retirement; self-supporting ministers already retired from other jobs; and those who continue with Permission to Officiate (PTO) beyond the age of 70. Impending retirement raises different issues for stipendiary and self-supporting ministers.

Stipendiary ministers

The stipendiary ministers in this age group are all between four and eight years from retirement. For these, retirement marks a clear end to their current ordained ministry. While they may later take on a different form of ministry as retired clergy, that is not something they discuss at this point. Rather, the focus of their attention is on the questions of when to retire and what to do with their last years of stipendiary ministry.

For many stipendiary clergy, especially those who have been in their current role for several years, entering their early sixties marks a period of uncertainty as they consider whether to remain in the same post until they retire or to move in time to give a substantial number of years to a new role. One, having applied unsuccessfully for more senior roles, reflects on how this has dented her confidence and challenged her vocational wellbeing:

what is my vocation until I retire now, is something I'm just starting to pick through, without much enthusiasm. ... So having had that door apparently closed, then it's a real question of well, what's left? ... So I'm working with my spiritual director and just thinking through where this going or what does it mean.

Dilemmas about retirement played out in the minds of some participants in Wave 1 as they weighed up the future. As we meet them again in Wave 2, some have resolved this by making a firm decision either to move or to stay put and note the implications both for their ministry and for their wellbeing, as in the case of this person who has decided not to move:

I think if I had foreseen moving in the next couple of years, I would let the status quo continue, but I think it's now a sense of, no, I can't just let that, we've got to keep positive and moving forwards ... I think in that same sense, I'm not looking all the time to see if there is a parish out there that's just the right one for me to move to, that satisfies grandchildren criteria and all this sort of thing. ... [I]t's left that sense of, okay, I don't need to worry about that.

Similarly, another participant comments, 'just the pressure of not thinking, "do I need to move on, do I need to do this?" and actually making that decision has actually released me really.' For her, setting the date of



her retirement has contributed to easing financial as well as vocational anxieties: ‘Financial and material [wellbeing] are a bit better, partly because I’ve kind of made the decision about when to retire.’ Despite her financial situation not having changed—she is reliant on CHARM for housing when she retires—the process of thinking through her options for the years leading up to and beyond retirement and coming to a decision has helped settle some of her concerns.

Self-supporting ministers

For self-supporting ministers, retirement can be much less clear-cut. With the exception of two who are both also paid chaplains, all our self-supporting participants in this age group have already retired or semi-retired from paid work and for some this has allowed them greater time for their ordained ministry. Some discuss future retirement from ministry as taking place at the age of seventy, when their licence will come to an end; others are beyond this point and considering retiring from their PTO activities. Rather than dilemmas about finances or whether to change job for their last years of ministry, the question for many self-supporting ministers is how to retire within the place where they minister. Unlike stipendiary ministers, who normally leave their parish at retirement, many self-supporting clergy expect to remain in the same place.⁸ Unless they occupy a house-for-duty position, their housing is not tied to their role and they may have lived and worshipped in the parish many years before being ordained.

In Wave 1, we heard of the relational challenges involved in switching from being a lay member of a congregation to starting ordained ministry among the same people. Many self-supporting clergy must navigate questions not only of how to relate to long-time friends as a pastor, but also of how to differentiate between work and non-work, both in the tasks of ministry and in relationships. Looking ahead at the transition into retirement, we see these issues mirrored in reverse as clergy contemplate moving out of their ministerial role while remaining in the same context.

The need to retire is recognised by most. This commonly stems from reduced physical capacity: ‘I think it’s true to say that mentally I’m getting a little bit more tired more easily than I used to, so therefore I don’t need to do quite so much to actually feel quite shattered.’ This participant feels a lack of support in this area: ‘the diocese has not actually made any particular effort at all to, shall we say, say is this workload still okay for you?’ Another, on the other hand, admits to hiding her diminishing stamina because ‘I don’t want to go there; I’m not going to give in yet.’

Other attractions of retirement include the hope of spending more time with friends and family, or simply to enjoy being retired. One participant, already beyond retirement age, echoes others in observing:

⁸ Some dioceses suggest SSMs spend an extended period away from their church when they retire.



You know, I don't have the energy. I've got friends I've never seen or hardly ever see in other parts of the country and that I want to visit. I've got holidays I want to have which I've never had the time to have. I've got a husband, bless him, who gave up his retirement years for me in this vocation.

However, for this minister, as for others, the process of retiring is not straightforward. In this case, the dilemma is twofold. First, it reflects loyalty to an incumbent:

how do I move out and actually come to a point where I am more retired than I am, without letting down this person who has really transformed my ministry through being such a good person to work with?

Other participants also point to the implications for others of leaving their role, knowing that, unlike many stipendiary roles, they will not be replaced. One, a vicar of a church, comments,

I'm not sure how the church intend to manage afterwards, in terms of manning or whatever, simply because I don't think the diocese will put anyone else in. ... [H]ow I can equip the church for that moment when I say I'm going to retire. ... [T]here is this awful feeling that I'm building it all up and here we are, and then I'm going to go away and it's going to burst like a bubble.

The needs of other clergy and parishioners weigh heavily. In this case the decision has been made to leave the church on retirement and the concern is for the future without him. For those who plan to remain in close proximity, there is recognition that they will find it immensely difficult to lay down their ministry: 'if you're self-supporting, living in the parish where you've served, it's really diff-, how on earth do you ever stop doing it and being there for people?'

Second, the quandary of the priest quoted above reflects her own vocational desires. Having been ordained late in life, she comments, 'I'm retired without having had a ministry. Never been an incumbent.' She identifies a longing to fulfil ministerial desires developed since ordination as part of the reason for her reluctance to stop: 'I find myself judging myself for why I still am burning to do things and my motivation for wanting to be involved ... it's almost as if I want to tick it off the list.' Similarly, another (also in her seventies) reflects, 'I wanted a flock and it was not going to be possible. ... So, I'm left with sadness, grief.' A third articulates a sense of 'having to give back' because her years of ordained ministry have been few. She considers her forthcoming retirement apprehensively, aware that her assistant minister and chaplaincy licences will end when she turns 70:

I know how bereft people then end up feeling because there isn't any planning towards how you recognise your priesthood and your sense of identity that comes from that when you're approaching the time at which the church will suddenly say we don't want you anymore.

There are issues here, then, about the expectations of clergy ordained later in life, but also about how vocations and aptitude develop beyond ordination despite limited years of ministry. Moreover, the experiences of these clergy echo the Wave 1 findings of the importance of being valued and raise the



question of how this is continued into retirement. These participants themselves recognise the value of retired clergy to the church, but they do not feel that this is respected by the church: ‘the church says we don’t want to give you a licence and we don’t want to include you in anything but we need you to keep the whole show on the road. That’s how it feels.’

Summary

The transition into retirement can be a difficult time for clergy. For stipendiary clergy, it can cause anxiety several years before as they weigh up when to retire and how best to spend their last years of stipendiary ministry. For self-supporting clergy, retirement is much more fluid and the dilemma is often over how to retire when they plan to remain in the same location afterwards, mirroring some of the relational and vocational issues they may have grappled with at the start of their ordained ministry. The need and desire to retire because of diminishing physical strength and the wish to enjoy their time is held in tension with loyalty to their church or incumbent, unfulfilled vocations, and a continuing need to be valued.



6. Power dynamics

Power

As we look across the stories of transition, one of the common themes to emerge is how power is experienced in entering and leaving different roles and stages of ministry. The discussion that follows outlines the power structures within the Church of England and the narratives of Living Ministry participants, considering particularly the implications of power dynamics for agency and self-worth.

Power is a contested term. Sociologically, one of the most commonly used definitions is Weber's: the ability to achieve goals and purposes despite resistance from others.⁹ Weber distinguishes between three forms of authority from which power is derived: traditional, rational-legal and charismatic. Each of these is evident within the power structures of the Church of England. Other important perspectives on power come from Marx, for whom power is based on production relations that result in the domination of the ruling classes over the working classes; Lukes, who identifies three dimensions of power based around decision-making, non-decision-making (e.g. agenda-setting), and preference shaping;¹⁰ Foucault, who contends that power works through social discourses shaped by knowledge;¹¹ and Bourdieu, who understands power to be culturally and symbolically created over time, as people internalise social norms and discourses. An additional model is VeneKlasen and Miller's 'expressions of power.' Four expressions are identified: 'power over,' usually understood as negative, coercive force; 'power with,' with a focus on working together across different perspectives; 'power to,' the capacity of an individual to shape and change their situation; and 'power within,' which is about one's internal sense of self.¹²

Who holds power?

The formal power structures of the Church of England concerning clergy are complex. They include 42 separate dioceses governed synodically at deanery, diocesan and national level and served by seven National Church Institutions; three orders of ordained ministry (deacons, priests and bishops) who may occupy hierarchical roles based on pastoral or geographic designations (e.g. Team Rectors, Rural/Area Deans, Archdeacons and Archbishops) and cathedral structures; a patronage system integral to parochial appointments; and parish governance through churchwardens and PCCs. Chaplains and Ministers in Secular Employment work within other formal power structures, for example in healthcare, educational,

⁹ M. Weber (1968), *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, New York: Bedminster Press.

¹⁰ S. Lukes (1974), *Power: A Radical View*, London: MacMillan.

¹¹ See P. Rabinow (ed.) (1991), *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*, London: Penguin.

¹² L. VeneKlasen with V. Miller (2002), *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Oklahoma City: World Neighbors.



military or prison sectors. Alongside these structures is power residual in formational processes, including 23 theological education institutions, diocesan officers responsible for Phase 2 of initial ministerial education, training incumbents and other developmental and therapeutic professionals. Finally, running through all of these is socio-cultural power based on differences such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status and geography.

All these power structures are evident in the accounts of Living Ministry participants. Following Weber's definition, participants both hold power—especially within the parish context—and are subject to power. Given that this paper is about participants' accounts of their own wellbeing, the majority of the data relates to the latter and is therefore the focus of discussion.

Participants describe multiple power relationships as they discuss their wellbeing. At parish level, there is the soft power of congregations played out through expectations, demands, and positive or negative feedback, as well as the structural power of PCCs and churchwardens to hold clergy to account, to influence strategy and vision (in one case, during a PCC meeting, questioning the need for the vicar) and to pay expenses. Clergy may also be subject to power of other ordained ministers depending on the specific relationship, for example between incumbent and assistant, or rector and team vicar. We saw in Wave 1 how the power inherent in the training incumbent – curate relationship can render it supportive and nurturing or suffocating and demanding. Although insufficient time has passed for these dynamics to play out fully for the new cohort of curates in Wave 2, some note the challenge of adapting to this power relationship during the initial stages:

establishing that relationship as training incumbent – curate is quite a, you know you plonk someone in with someone, it's hard for them as well I think to adjust. ... [W]e're just different personalities but I think the good thing is that we have worked on it and we have a good working relationship.

the thing that's been hardest for me has been adjusting to the relationship with my TI, particularly because it's so immediate and so intense it's very weird. ... [Y]ou're thrown into this TI relationship and there is a power and vulnerability thing even though she's not a power-trippy person, it just is what it is. But it is a good relationship, we work very well together.

Bullying can occur in any of these parochial relationships and participants have experienced this from training incumbents, lay leaders and clergy colleagues.

Beyond the parish, the main loci of ecclesial power for clergy are the deanery and the diocese. Deanery chapter, we saw in Wave 1, may be experienced as a safe place where clergy can provide mutual peer support; as an occasional social encounter; as excluding based on, for example, tradition, sexuality or role; or it may be entirely dysfunctional. Oversight of the deanery is held by rural or area deans, who variously emphasise the pastoral or strategic elements of this role.



The diocese is the institution with the most responsibility for individual clergy care and wellbeing and to which clergy (especially those not employed by other organisations) are formally most accountable. Participants often refer to ‘the diocese,’ usually when speaking about the institutional policies and culture within which they work (‘in this diocese...’), although they also talk about the diocese in personal terms, for example ‘what the diocese is thinking’ or ‘the diocese made a choice.’ Individuals mentioned who represent the diocese in various ways include those with gatekeeping or performance measurement powers, such as DDOs, IME 2 officers and CMD officers; and those with bureaucratic or administrative responsibilities, such as housing and finance officers. However, by far the most commonly mentioned diocesan roles discussed in relation to wellbeing are senior clergy, specifically bishops and archdeacons. In the small number of cathedral contexts arising in the research, participants also refer to cathedral deans. Senior clergy provide a combination of pastoral, professional and strategic oversight, which clearly has implications for relationships with other clergy in terms of power dynamics.

Power and transitions

The power structures and relationships described above exist throughout ordained ministry, with some specific relationships, such as with training incumbents, DDOs and cathedral deans, relevant in particular periods and contexts. Clergy also move between relationships with different individuals who occupy similar roles, for example when they move diocese. However, despite the structures of power remaining fairly constant, how they are experienced varies according to factors such as policy variation between dioceses and differences between the individuals who enact them, and factors such as personality, socio-demographics and circumstance of the individual clergyperson. In the accounts of Living Ministry participants, power dynamics are most evident when there are theological or social differences between parties, especially when the participant is in a minority group; when participants are particularly vulnerable, for example during health or family crises or when their performance is subject to review; and at times of change and uncertainty. Periods of transition are therefore key moments, whether they are times of actual change, such as starting a new role and/or entering a new diocese, or moments of decision-making which may or may not lead to change, for example relating to deployment, remuneration, health or family life.

We discuss below two implications of power dynamics experienced by Living Ministry participants during, and stretching beyond, times of transition. First, the effect on agency, or the capacity to act, and second, ramifications for personal identity and self-worth.

Power that affects agency

Although many clergy—particularly incumbents—may have a great deal of scope to direct their own lives and ministry at parish level, in some areas they depend very much on others. This is especially the case when formal decisions are to be made regarding their ministry, such as a move to a new post, a change in remuneration status, or the handling of a personal crisis or challenge. Clergy discuss moves between posts



with various people including, at different stages of ministry, archdeacons, rural/area deans, DDOs, IME 2 officers and, the person to which Living Ministry participants refer most in this area, their bishop.¹³ It is the power relationship with the bishop on which we focus our discussion.

One of the most stressful transitions between posts is the move out of curacy. As noted above and in Wave 1, the fixed-term nature of curacy adds pressure to find a new post, leaving some curates fearful of unemployment and eviction if they cannot secure a job before the end date of their title post. However, they are not free to act independently in this matter. First, they must be ‘signed off’ by their bishop to confirm that they have completed their initial ministerial education and have permission to seek a further post. Second, the bishop—sometimes along with the archdeacon and rural/area dean—often plays an important role in identifying and securing that post, as bishops have strategic oversight of the diocese (or their area within it) as well as oversight of the vocations of individual clergy. Curates seek guidance from their bishop and commonly talk of whether the bishop has been able (or willing) to ‘find’ them a suitable position in the diocese. If that looks unlikely or if the minister does not wish to stay in the diocese, they will look elsewhere (and thereby enter into conversations with another bishop). For those who are not in tied accommodation but are restricted geographically as to where they can work, including many self-supporting ministers, the reduced urgency may relieve pressure but can also leave them in limbo if an appropriate post does not arise. One participant, for example, describes feeling frustrated and ‘a bit abandoned’ several months after her curacy was due to end, having consulted her bishop and two archdeacons to no avail.

During the transition from curacy to next post, then, power resides with the bishop in multiple dimensions. Notwithstanding the financial, strategic and institutional restraints to which bishops themselves are subject (for example, bishops are not usually the sole agent in appointments), from the curate’s perspective they have power to provide or withdraw accommodation; to allow or deny progression; and to provide a job. The decisions and actions of bishops therefore affect not only the individual cleric but, for many, their immediate family also. In contrast, curates can feel largely powerless amid the uncertainties of this decision that affects so many aspects of their lives. Similarly, while TEIs assess ordinands, bishops are central to their placement as curates. This may work smoothly, with bishops facilitating the process of arranging a curacy, or the bishop may block potential curacies: ‘effectively the bishop and whoever just said no, no ... [eventually] we had to look elsewhere.’ While ordinands have the option of declining curacies offered to them, several describe feeling uncomfortable about saying no to their bishop or archdeacon, alongside uncertainty as to whether a more suitable position will arise. Other decisions also hang heavily on bishops in multiple ways. A participant required by Candidates Panel to complete a placement before switching to

¹³ Participants do not always specify whether they are referring to their diocesan, suffragan or area bishop or to a Provincial Episcopal Visitor, so we are unable to explore the differences between these roles in participants’ experiences of power dynamics.



stipendiary ministry¹⁴ found not only that the bishop was involved in the decision, but also that the placement could not be arranged after the bishop fell ill, leaving her unable to progress.

Some participants describe facing personal crises that have affected their ministry and require input or oversight from senior clergy, diocesan officers or TEIs to allow them to progress with their ministry. It is impossible to describe specific circumstances without compromising the anonymity of the participants; however, such crises may include serious physical or mental health issues, family breakdown or health concerns, or other trauma. For ordained ministers, many of these issues are handled informally with support from senior clergy and relevant diocesan officers, such as IME 2 officers, diocesan advisers for women’s ministry, and wellbeing or pastoral care advisers. Clergy who seek help may request or be advised to take periods of sick or compassionate leave (‘I had to ring the bishop and say, “I need some compassionate leave, is that okay?” And he said, “Of course it is, no problem.”’) and may receive counselling. Some have additional support structures in place, including spiritual direction, doctors, mentoring, peer groups of various kinds, family and friends, and several report receiving proactive care from senior clergy: ‘When I had my operation, I had phone calls immediately from the diocesan bishop, the suffragan bishop, from the archdeacon.’ While for some clergy such crises contribute to a change of post, for example where the issue is ministry-related such as a difficult relationship with a congregation, most continue in their current role.

Some issues, such as bullying, harassment and assault¹⁵ require formal procedures which can leave those involved feeling powerless and frustrated, particularly if communication is limited, if they do not feel sufficiently understood, or if decisions are made against their will or without their participation. Outcomes for some participants have included a change of role to allow the person to exit adverse circumstances. The stakes are higher for ordinands where their physical or mental health or their family is affected to the extent that it brings into question the continuation of their training. Two participants describe the vocation in which they have invested deeply for years being thrown into doubt, along with the corresponding practical and material support: ‘once this ends in June, I’m homeless. ... What would I do? I feel really called to this ministry.’ In this context, these participants articulate two aspects of the power dynamics they experience: first, how the process is conducted and, second, who makes the decisions about the outcome.

The contexts of the two participants and the issues they describe working through are very different. However, clear in both accounts is their exposed position as they negotiate various institutional actors and processes. To the vulnerability already caused by the personal circumstances faced may be added loss of privacy as their situation is made known among their TEI community. The impact on relationships varies:

¹⁴ This would actually be a decision to move from assistant to incumbent status and is an example of these categories being incorrectly conflated with self-supporting and stipendiary ministry.

¹⁵ Accounts of these were only from the perspective of the victim and none of the participants described experience of the Clergy Discipline Measure.



while one received strong support from peers, the other experienced partial ostracism. Vulnerability is intensified during interviews and discussions with TEI principals, DDOs, bishops and formal panel members, in each case faced alone and where the balance of power is heavily weighted towards the institution: one participant comments, ‘the diocese have all the cards, they are completely in control of the whole process;’ the other explains, ‘I completely submitted myself to the whole process.’ One describes ‘very, very personal questions ... about all sorts of stuff that I would never dream of talking about with a boss at work, or anybody really,’ while the other comments, ‘some of the questions I was asked I found extraordinary actually and it would have been quite nice to have somebody else in the room just as an arbitrator.’ Finally, the wellbeing of the individual is affected by the manner in which the process is communicated and conducted. While this may be clear and straightforward, in the experience of one participant it was characterised by uncertainty, long periods of silence and repetitive meetings with different people, sometimes requiring travel across the country at short notice.

In both cases, although each participant always retains the option of withdrawing from training entirely, neither is willing to do so and thereby give up completely on their vocation to ordained ministry. However, the decision to continue is not theirs to make. Ordinands are sponsored by bishops, who alone have the power to ordain them, and their training fees and, for some, maintenance, are paid by the church. As one puts it, ‘it wasn’t up to me actually ... it’s ... up to the bishop.’ However, while bishops have ultimate authority, others, such as archdeacons, diocesan officers, TEI staff and panel members, are also involved in decision-making. Both participants describe a series of one-to-one interviews with a range of different people. Both also recount decisions being made about them in their absence: one describes long waits to discover outcomes of meetings and the other comments:

I think the conversations and the decision-making had happened without me around. So you come in and you’re presented with a fait accompli and actually that wasn’t, you weren’t involved in that process. And you get a choice of a and b, you still think you’re being given a choice but actually, the whole process of how they came to a and b, you’ve not been involved in that.

Neither participant questions the right of the institution to decide whether or not they should be permitted to continue their training. The process by which this decision is arrived at, however, is characterised for both by uncertainty, opacity and powerlessness, with detrimental effects on wellbeing.

While clergy in posts beyond curacy are not obliged to talk to their bishop before deciding to move, given the dual strategic and pastoral nature of the relationship they often seek their advice. The potential weight of this is illustrated by a participant we met earlier in the report who found himself struggling with stress:

I went to see my bishop because I was actually asking for emergency time off. And she said ‘Are you fulfilled in what you’re doing?’ And I went very quiet. And she said, ‘Well, I suspect you’re not, you’re probably doing the wrong job, you’ve been doing this job for [several] years, it might be time for a move.’ And that was definitely the right thing for her to say, because I felt a loyalty to the deanery



and to the diocese and I needed her to say, you get moving. Because once she did that, actually I'd applied for a job within about 48 hours.

Here we see the strength of influence of the bishop in facilitating a move by providing permission for the clergyperson to make a decision to leave, even where permission is not formally required. This echoes the importance noted in Wave 1 of senior clergy proactively giving permission to clergy to take time out and attend to their own wellbeing. It is a way of managing boundaries and making decisions in circumstances where clarity is lacking, boundaries are blurred and the demands of ordained ministry jeopardise the wellbeing of the minister. In such cases, intervention from senior clergy can arbitrate between competing demands, affirm clergy in decisions—or relieve them from the responsibility of making them—and increase their capacity to act in the interests of their own wellbeing. Where intervention does not come, either because it is not sought or because it is not offered, the clergyperson may be left feeling trapped and powerless.

The narratives of Living Ministry participants suggest that within the power structures of the Church of England, agency is affected most for those still in initial ministerial education, both Phase 1 and Phase 2. Unless they take the option of exiting entirely before ordination, those yet to be ordained remain under the sponsorship of a bishop. Sponsorship includes both permission to proceed towards ordination and provision of resources (including financial) to do so. While formal sponsorship ends at ordination, the authority and oversight of the bishop continue into curacy and beyond: at ordination and admittance to any subsequent office, clergy are required to take an oath of canonical obedience to the bishop, a practice dating from feudal times. While, legally, canonical obedience relates only to the bishop's exercise of legal powers, symbolically, it reaches far more widely. We see this in the experiences of Living Ministry participants most clearly in the arrangement of title posts; transitions between posts (especially at the end of curacy); and situations where boundaries are unclear and therefore require (or are perceived to require) arbitration or permission to set.

What we see here is a combination of personal authority (symbolised by sponsorship and oaths of obedience); financial and material provision (including funding for training and, for stipendiary clergy, housing and remuneration); a vocation that encompasses the whole of one's life, including to various extents one's family; and, especially for clergy beyond curacy, work that has few fixed boundaries. These four elements can result in constraints on the self-determination and agency of ordinands and clergy. The first three are especially pertinent for curates, whose agency is usually already constrained by nature of their training role, and who find themselves in a position of being required to trust the institution and the bishop personally to make decisions about their progression and wellbeing. The enormity of this requirement dawns on an ordinand offered an unsuitable curacy: 'What am I giving myself to here? My whole heart and soul, my personal life, everything has just been chucked in the hands of all these quite impersonal people.' The irony here is that, regardless of the (im)personality of the people embodying it, it is the personal, paternalist nature of the system itself that can limit agency and leave ordinands and clergy feeling



so powerless. This is a drawback of an institution based strongly on hierarchical personal relationships. While the ultimate outcome of a given situation may be positive, as for both ordinands mentioned above, this is not always the case and, even where it is, the very trust that the system demands may be eroded. As one comments, ‘you rely on the church being a benign dictatorship that has your best interests at heart but ... you’re putting a lot of pressure onto a very fallible institution.’

For some clergy, especially incumbents, reliance on the church is mitigated by the scope of their own power in their daily life and ministry. As we have seen, the unbounded nature of parish ministry can allow clergy flexibility and great freedom to make their own decisions although, combined with the pressures of ministry, this very freedom can result in a sense of responsibility that curtails rather than enhances agency through pressure to respond to all the demands of ordained ministry (see Wave 1). Where clergy struggle to set and maintain their own boundaries, they may rely on senior clergy to give them permission to act.

Power that influences identity and self-worth

The power of senior clergy is not limited to enabling or constraining others in their decision-making and agency. Bishops, archdeacons and others in positions of authority can have immense influence over how other clergy are positioned within the church and how they perceive their own identity and self-worth.

In Wave 1, we saw the importance to wellbeing of knowing oneself to be valued. Many things contribute to this, including connectedness within church networks, a sense of achievement, and one’s relationship with God. The first of these is clearly pertinent at times of transition, as people disconnect to various extents from some networks and connect into new ones. We have seen in the sections above how uprooting during a move affects not only relationships but also physical and mental wellbeing. We have also seen some of the different perspectives of clergy who have relocated, whether enjoying fewer extra-parochial commitments or actively seeking involvement to mitigate isolation, and the immense value of proactive welcome and engagement on the part of the diocese, including discussions about continuing ministerial development, social and study invitations from bishops, and pastoral care from bishops and archdeacons.

The immense value placed by ordained ministers on being known, understood and valued by senior clergy that was identified in Wave 1 continues strongly in Wave 2. Bishops especially have power to influence a clergyperson’s position within the diocese not only by acting as gatekeeper to certain roles, but also by shaping the environment within which they minister. Although this clearly extends beyond periods of transition, it is in transition narratives that it is often revealed, as participants feel less secure in their new role or diocese or reflect on differences between their current and former situations. Bishops do this partly through the personal interaction and support discussed above (‘It says a lot, doesn’t it, ... that somebody knows your name’) and partly by setting expectations of ministry. The latter may be through their own theological stance, as in the case of a participant who, even before a new bishop arrived, reported feelings of uneasiness because he was of a different tradition from that dominant in the diocese, or another participant feeling excluded by bishops because of his own tradition. It may also be through the diocesan



strategy they impose, including both investment in high-profile projects and the pressures of parish share and church growth which, as we saw in Wave 1, can leave clergy feeling energised and included or demoralised and marginalised.

Expectations and value are communicated in multiple ways. Messages about strategy and policy are embedded within diocesan strategy documents, clergy conferences, chrism services, policy briefings and emailed missives from bishops, all of which are interpreted by the individual ordained minister in relation to their own situation. Participants also place great weight on the personal aspect of communication with senior clergy. As well as through individual conversations, this too may be channelled through corporate communications, such as chrism services, clergy conferences and letters or public statements, in cases where bishops speak honestly and vulnerably about their own challenges:

hearing [the bishop] say that parish ministry is just really hard work, that kind of thing actually is a huge encouragement. I find when people can be vulnerable ... when you hear it being a genuine exposure of weakness, I find that tremendously empowering actually.

[The bishop] was very honest and very real ... I was like, you're asking me to do this but you're doing this as well, therefore I can hold the integrity there. I can't hold the integrity there if you're asking me to do something you're not doing yourself. But if you're saying, I'm struggling with this too, that helps me to cope with that.

In these cases, the bishop's power to influence positively the sense of self of their clergy is held in their willingness to make themselves vulnerable.

The power bishops have to influence self-worth is also played out in personal interactions with their clergy. As we saw in Wave 1, it is enormously important to many participants to receive personal contact from their bishop (i.e. to know they are known by their bishop) and that the content of that contact is affirming (i.e. to know they are valued by their bishop). For example, some participants describe the positive impact of being told by bishops that they trust them, either in words:

That was really powerful, and it was powerful because nobody in that kind of authority position has said that to me before. It cut through an awful lot of stuff, and it kind of made me think, right, so they do trust me, and I think knowing that made a massive difference

or through personal encouragement and financial investment in their ministry: 'it's lovely to sort of feel believed in and trusted to do [this initiative].' Personal affirmation may also come through the kinds of invitations mentioned above, including investment in spiritual and leadership development. Some participants value their bishop making time for their personal growth ('he's a bishop who is committed to putting real time into his clergy ... it's a quite a lot, a major investment in his time'), while others point to specific suggestions by their bishop that they have found helpful.



As in Wave 1, participants report mixed experiences of their Ministerial Development Review (MDR, which may or may not be fully or partially conducted by the bishop), with some describing it as, for example, ‘a really positive conversation’ with encouragement to pursue a particular direction, while for others it serves to suggest a lack of interest from their bishop: ‘there is zero episcopal follow-up to that process, unless you ask for it and fight for it.’ Another participant reflects on her acknowledged need for affirmation from her bishop (including through MDR), recognising that, although ‘when I take the initiative [to ask], positive, affirming comments come,’ the need to initiate that affects her sense of her own value. When considering a new role and wanting her bishop’s approval to apply, she questions,

why do I need that? Why do I need him to do that? But I think we all need a bit of that, don’t we?... I think as clergy, however you perceive it, he has licensed me, given me this cure of souls thing that we share in together. I have to swear allegiance to him.

The power of the bishop, then, can be positively valuing and affirming of other clergy, but can also lead to dependency when so much of an individual’s identity and self-worth is bound up in this one relationship. This is not true to the same extent of all clergy: some describe a range of other groups and individuals from whom they gain support and affirmation, whether or not they reflect on the implications of this as does this participant: ‘I’m lucky to have some amazing friends and support, ... my self-esteem isn’t necessarily weighed by a bishop. I think I don’t revere them in the same way that other people do.’

We have focussed on senior clergy and bishops in particular because of their multiple roles in processes of transition and their dominance within the accounts of Living Ministry participants. These are not, of course, the only power relationships that affect agency and self-worth. Diocesan officers such as DDOs, IME 2 and CMD officers, and those who provide advice on things like HR and buildings, whether acting according to policy or at their own discretion, can encourage and enable or dissuade and constrain. Those who create policy, such as diocesan secretaries, directors of ministry and national church officers, contribute to setting expectations as well as rules of play. Clergy may find their voice restricted when conflicts of interest arise, for example if their training incumbent is also—or is friends with—their IME 2 officer. Clergy colleagues, lay ministers, churchwardens, PCC members and other members of a congregation can support, advise and collaborate or criticise, demand and obstruct. Training incumbents can help or hinder the flourishing of their curates. Bullying can occur within any of these relationships, where power is used both to restrict agency and to undermine self-worth. Any of these situations may precipitate a move either through creating adverse circumstances which the individual wishes to leave or through providing wisdom and support which releases a person to explore a further calling.

Social difference

This report has not attempted a full analysis of power and transitions by social structures such as gender, race and class. However, findings from Wave 1 indicate that social differences such as these and the power



dynamics around them are important contributing factors to how transitions are experienced, affecting both agency and identity.

First, not all clergy have the same number of posts open to them. We have seen above the importance of authenticity ('the ability to be me') in a role, in which theological tradition plays a key role. However, the flip side of this is that people may find themselves excluded—or may self-exclude—from potential posts on the basis of theology. Clergy can be formally excluded from applying for posts because of their gender (applicants may be restricted to men on the grounds of theological conviction); and they may find their options limited because of their sexuality, ethnicity, tradition or disability (the first three reasons at least have all been experienced by Living Ministry participants), whether because they are refused by others or themselves choose to steer clear. Women are also more likely than men to be constrained in their options by practical circumstances like childcare or a partner's career, although amongst our participants are also ordained women whose partners have taken on the bulk of family responsibilities and ordained men whose deployment options are limited by family needs and preferences.

Second, similar groups of clergy (and including those who identify as working class or less-educated) experience exclusion and prejudice that affect both their agency and their sense of self-worth. This may occur through internalised messages received from within and beyond the church about their identity, leading to damaged confidence and the need to self-protect; through exclusionary and hostile behaviour on the part of other clergy; or through limited access to senior clergy and other decisionmakers, either because of such messages and behaviour or because of uncertainty of a positive reception.

Responses to power

Participants vary in their responses to the power dynamics they encounter. Even in situations where they feel powerless, most possess some level of agency. According to Hirschman's classic model, when dissatisfied, people can choose either to *exit* the situation, to exercise their *voice* to change the situation, or to demonstrate *loyalty* by remaining in the situation.¹⁶ In the narratives of Living Ministry participants, we see each of these options played out.

Exit

One avenue open at least in principle to all clergy in difficult power relationships is to leave, and this has been the basis of some of the transitions we have considered in the pages above. For some, that means leaving ordained ministry entirely—and one of our Wave 1 qualitative participants took this route between the first and second waves of the research. More commonly, clergy leave their parish if they have a difficult relationship with their congregation, colleagues or churchwardens, or their diocese if they are unhappy with

¹⁶ A. O. Hirschman (1970), *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations, and States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



their relationship with their bishop or other diocesan staff or clergy, as discussed above, for example regarding the woman who chose to move both parish and diocese to exit a situation of bullying. They may also exit through retirement, either by reaching retirement age or by retiring early. One participant comments on the freedom she has experienced since moving from stipendiary ministry to PTO:

I'm grateful that I'm out of having to worry two hoots about the people at the top. Particularly with this [bishop] I take as little notice of him as possible. So, I can just ignore him, as he ignores me. ... I'm not licensed, I have a PTO, so he has no power over me, apart from my own angst.

Exit, of course, is not always a practicable nor a desirable option. Ordination is an immense investment encompassing all aspects of life. As one new incumbent puts it, 'honestly, having invested my entire life direction in this, I've no idea what else I could do that wouldn't feel like complete failure.' Practically speaking, many clergy, especially SSMs and those with families, would find it difficult or impossible to relocate geographically. Curates are unable to move to a new post or diocese without permission. Moreover, while ordinands can withdraw from training, ordination is not reversible.

Voice

Exercising voice can take a range of forms, from destructive behaviours to constructive engagement for change. Within the (self-reported) narratives of Living Ministry participants, we see some actively seeking participation and contact with senior clergy and others in their diocese in order to overcome obstacles constraining their agency or threatening their self-worth. Some do this by building their involvement and relationships in the diocese; some through conversations with senior clergy and diocesan officers about specific issues; some draw on procedures such as MDR or formal complaints; and a few actively resist what they perceive to be unhealthy uses of power. Using one's voice may bring risk. One participant comments, 'I re-empowered myself ... that takes its toll on you because you realise you have to speak out.' Another describes choosing honesty with senior clergy over strategic presentation of her ministry:

I don't play the strategic game ... to be honest I'm saying completely the wrong things to both the bishop and the archdeacon ... and that in some ways feels like a risk or feels you're vulnerable, but I would rather be honest.

Some clergy, however, are not or do not feel able to exercise voice in difficult situations. This may be because there are no obvious avenues to communicate their concerns or because they wish to avoid further emotional stress (or both). The possibilities that remain are to exit without raising the issue (as in the example of bullying above) or to exercise Hirschman's third strategy: loyalty.

Loyalty

For those who are not willing or able to exit their position or use their voice to change it, the option that remains is to stay in place. For some, this means submitting to a process beyond their control, as we have seen. For others, it means continuing in a difficult situation with little hope of change. This may be



something to which the minister has resigned themselves ('I just muddle along in my own way, I'm quite happy ... I just do what I do and keep out of the way of the hierarchy'), or they may feel left in limbo, as with some of those we have heard from who find themselves unable to progress in the way they would like. Alternatively, loyalty may precede (or follow) either voice or exit: some participants, who in Wave 1 described persevering in adverse circumstances, by Wave 2 had moved to a new post or were considering a move. It may also be a positive choice, as with the participant mentioned above who feels able to continue because of the honesty and integrity of his bishop.

Loyalty involves some form of self-sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the institution. Like voice, it can be either constructive or destructive. Indeed, many argue for a fourth category of 'neglect,' referring to cases where people become disenfranchised and less engaged with their work.¹⁷

Loyalty can, however, also have positive outcomes for wellbeing, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Several participants describe developing a deeper sense of their identity in Christ through their experiences, which disrupts the power of the church:

Spiritually, let's say I've moved on and now I'm just God's child and if the church wants me to be a priest I can be a priest and if not I'm still going to be God's child. So my relationship with God is now the only thing that matters.

Another talks of broadening her focus beyond her ministerial role to allow herself to be defined by other aspects of her identity:

[I'm] trying to hang on to who I am in the middle of it all, which is trying to get that sense of myself as a child of God before thinking about who I am as a priest And that I suppose comes through my relationships with my husband and my children and so on.

Thus, clergy who find their agency constrained and their self-worth threatened by hierarchical power structures may find their dependency on those very structures reduced as it leads them to look elsewhere for a secure sense of identity and support.

The bishop's dilemma

Senior clergy, and bishops in particular, feature heavily in power dynamics around and beyond clergy transitions. From a Weberian perspective, bishops possess all three types of authority: traditional, in the historic power structures that have shaped their role and status; legal-rational, in their legal and institutional responsibilities; and charismatic (to varying extents) in the personal influence they hold.

¹⁷ For an overview of how Hirschman's work has been developed, see: E. Aravopoulou, F. V. Mitsaklis & C. Malone (2017), 'A Critical Review of the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect Literature: Limitations, Key Challenge and Directions for Future Research,' *The International Journal of Management*, 6 (3): 1-10.



Bishops also operate in all three of Lukes' dimensions of power: by making decisions that others must adhere to; by setting the agenda of what is discussed (for example at clergy study days and in diocesan strategy); and by influencing preferences through teaching and exhortation.

Considered through the lens of VeneKlasen and Miller's four expressions of power, participants clearly largely understand 'power over' to flow in one direction, from the diocese or bishop to themselves. This is not to say they do not possess power over others or are aware of this: some of our sample are training incumbents, for example, who to some extent have power over their curates, and it is clear from accounts of bullying that clergy can wield power over colleagues. It is simply absent from self-reported narratives focussed on their own wellbeing. Many of our participants, however, do feel that their bishop has power over them in the ways described above.

The second expression of power, 'power with', is virtually absent from participants' accounts of their relationships with bishops, although it does appear in their stories of partnership with other churches, collaboration with parishioners, and mutual support and teamwork with colleagues (including in chaplaincy settings). Participants come closest to articulating power 'with' bishops when they describe their bishop demonstrating vulnerability and transparency. The third and fourth expressions, 'power to' and 'power within,' essentially correspond to the agency and self-worth discussed above. In relation to bishops, we therefore see layers of power, where bishops possess power to empower, for example by affirming and giving permission, and power to disempower, by ignoring and gatekeeping.

At another level, however, regardless of the actions of a bishop, their office itself shapes the 'power to' or agency of their clergy, in the obedience and respect it commands and the formal responsibilities it contains. The power of bishops to influence the agency and self-worth of their clergy lies at least as much in structures and symbolism as in their own personal will. To the multiplicity of powers described above is added the paternalist discourse of sponsorship and obedience. Ethnographic studies would no doubt also point to the language and ritual of enthronement, the constant use in social interaction of the title 'Bishop' (or the shorthand '+' in writing), and other symbolism elevating bishops and contributing to a culture of deference. All this is reflected in the significance clergy place on receiving positive attention from their bishop.

Bishops therefore face a quandary. They can attempt to fulfil the needs of their clergy to be known, understood and valued personally by their bishop, promoting agency by providing support and strengthening self-worth through affirmation. Indeed, the importance of this to all aspects of wellbeing was one of the messages of the first wave of Living Ministry, especially in such an environment where vocation is all-encompassing and temporal, spatial, mental, relational, financial and role boundaries are inevitably blurred. The problem is, however, that in doing this, bishops risk reproducing and reinforcing the structures of power and dependency that contribute to creating the need. The challenge is to disrupt the underlying cultural structures while still fulfilling the necessary responsibility and care towards clergy. This may include several strategies.



First, it can be helpful to diversify and encourage diversification of support and feedback. Where people receive high quality spiritual, vocational, professional, and emotional support and affirmation from elsewhere, they may be less likely to depend on their bishop. Some participants describe a multifaceted support network including things such as spiritual direction, mentoring (formal and informal), buddies, informal peer groups, facilitated groups, coaching, family and friends.

Second, transparency and good communication is essential. Limited communication not only leads to uncertainty and anxiety, but also reinforces distance and hierarchy. Power is disrupted when those in authority are honest, open and demonstrate appropriate vulnerability, and those with less power are involved in conversation and decision-making.

Third, as in other areas of life, it is important to manage expectations carefully. Letting people know what they can and cannot expect from their bishop and other senior clergy and where are appropriate sources of support removes uncertainty. In some cases, responsibilities may be fulfilled through the office of the bishop rather than by the bishop personally. It is helpful to be clear about this and the reasons behind it.

Fourth, disrupting the culture of power and dependency entails questioning paternalist language and practices, for example around sponsorship and obedience. This clearly requires profound reflection and interrogation of social and theological structures within the church, including their symbolic expression in everyday life.



7. Conclusion

Transitions and power

Transitions between roles within ordained ministry are always challenging. Whether right at the beginning, from IME 1 to curacy, or at the end, into retirement, moving role requires navigating new rhythms, responsibilities and relationships, and has repercussions across all aspects of wellbeing, including significant implications for clergy families. Geographical relocation brings disruption to relationships and physical tiredness from logistical coordination and the move itself, as well as the need to familiarise oneself with new places, people and organisational structures and processes, as well as to the role itself. Much of this is temporary and accepted as a normal part of moving.

Different wellbeing challenges arise at different transition points. As people move from IME 1 into curacy and then to their next post, in two big steps they lose the support of a structured learning environment while gaining increased responsibility. This brings a risk, especially for new incumbents, of isolation and exhaustion. While capacity also increases through learning and experience—not least through grounding in spiritual practices acquired during training—it is important that support continues for both the individual minister and their family as appropriate, albeit sometimes in different forms. Ideally, this is a combination of continued contact with peers from IME 1 and 2; new relationships actively sought by the minister, whether locally, at deanery or diocesan level, or through other networks; and diocesan-initiated support such as mentoring, peer groups, CMD and personal contact from senior clergy.

Mitigating against stress caused through isolation and workload is increased vocational fulfilment: for new curates this is about finally reaching the point of ordination for which they have prepared for so long and getting to ‘do’ ordained ministry. For new incumbents, it is about newly gained independence and leadership.

Transition between posts beyond curacy requires less of a step up into new responsibilities unless the new role is very different in some way. Notwithstanding the tiredness that comes with all moves, physical and mental, spiritual and vocational, and in some cases relationship wellbeing may increase following a change of post, especially if the move has been positively initiated by the clergyperson. This improvement, however, may partly be a result of low levels of wellbeing in the previous post, for example from excessive stress, difficult relationships or isolation. While we cannot tell from our data at which point posts go wrong, it is vital that wellbeing is considered at recruitment as well as on an ongoing basis. Much of the improvement in wellbeing relates to increased authenticity—the ‘ability to be me’—whether based on tradition, supportive and non-restrictive relationships, opportunities to fulfil vocational aspirations (sometimes beyond one’s primary role), or a better fit of job.

The move towards retirement entails a very different set of wellbeing challenges. Stipendiary clergy may encounter anxiety several years before retirement age, as they seek to ensure financial provision and face



the questions of when to retire and whether to make a final move before they do. Settling these decisions can resolve much of the uncertainty, allowing retirement to approach as an important but relatively straightforward milestone marking a clear move out of stipendiary ministry, away from their current post and into a break which may later be followed by further ministry on a PTO basis. How stipendiary clergy experience the transition into retirement itself remains to be seen. For self-supporting ministers, retirement is much more fluid. Some may already be retired from other employment and many plan to stay in the same location, especially if it is where they lived and worshipped since before ordination. Their wish to retire and reduced capacity for work may conflict with a sense of loyalty to their church or incumbent; vocational desires as yet unmet; a continuing need to be valued; and practical, emotional and relational difficulties in laying down their duties that reflect to some extent those they may have faced when they first took it up. Thus, while relocating geographically and relationally is challenging for wellbeing, transitioning into and out of ordained ministry while remaining in the same place and among the same people carries its own difficulties and also requires support.

Helpful strategies to address potential issues during periods of transition, based on things participants have found beneficial or lacking, include:

- Grounding in spiritual habits and practices and practical reflection on practice and leadership during IME 1.
- Ensuring housing is adequate and ready in time for moving day. As well as affecting physical and material wellbeing, from the incomer's perspective the state of their accommodation will reflect the tone and welcome of the diocese and/or parish.
- Addressing cashflow difficulties between the end of training grants and the start of curacy stipends, especially if curacies are delayed.
- Practical time-management support for new curates. This may include mentoring during the early stages of curacy and, where appropriate, training during IME 1.
- Active care and support for those in difficult transition periods, for example ordinands struggling to find curacies and curates struggling to find their next post.
- Intentional work on personality profiling and working relationships between curate and training incumbent (and the wider team where appropriate) from the start of curacy.
- Attention to continued and new support structures and networks in advance of a move, by both the person in transition and the diocese to or within which they are moving. These should be carefully thought through in terms of what they cover and offer and could include: continued contact with IME 1 or 2 peers; continuing links with TEIs; joining local clubs and community groups; actively fostering potential friendships and collegial relationships; ringfencing time with loved ones; preparing emotionally as a family for moving; engaging with local church networks; buddying; mentoring; coaching; counselling; and ongoing accompanied vocational discernment.
- Pro-active, periodic 'checking in' by relevant people (e.g. archdeacons, rural/area deans, IME 2 officers, CMD officers), especially during the first weeks and months of a new post and as clergy approach retirement age.



- Care for and consideration of families, including preparing them for a move.
- Early invitation to connect and participate in the diocese following a move, e.g. clergy conferences, bishops' social or study invitations, discussions with CMD or wellbeing officers.
- Consideration of wellbeing issues during recruitment processes.
- Regular access to one's preferred spirituality or tradition.
- Support for those approaching retirement, including: early vocational discernment and practical guidance for stipendiary ministers, eight to ten years in advance of retirement age; continued accompanied vocational discernment for stipendiary and self-supporting ministers into retirement; mentoring for self-supporting ministers during the period approaching retirement; consideration of the possibility for self-supporting ministers of leaving their church temporarily on retirement.

Ordinands and clergy experience transitions in the context of a range of power dynamics of which the most notable is their relationship with senior clergy, especially bishops. Bishops act as sponsors for candidates for ordination; as gatekeepers into and out of curacy; and as financial and material providers. They set expectations and values; they teach; they make decisions; and they give advice, permission and support. They hold strategic, financial, vocational, spiritual, pastoral, professional and moral influence. Notwithstanding the constraints under which bishops operate, and whether they like it or not, they carry an enormous weight of responsibility.

The convergence of multiple dimensions of power within one embodied office, combined with all-encompassing vocations where boundaries are often fuzzy, has deep implications for the personal agency and sense of identity and self-worth of individual clergy. Bishops and other senior clergy possess power to open up and to deny opportunities; to enable and to constrain; to encourage and to discourage; to empower and to disempower. Which outcome occurs in any given situation depends on numerous factors; however, even where bishops empower, encourage, enable and open up opportunities, the very nature of the power they embody means that they may end up reinforcing structures of dependency. It is where bishops resist paternalist discourse and instead choose to inhabit transparency and vulnerability that the power dynamic can begin to shift from 'power over' to 'power with.'

Responsibility for this cannot, of course, be placed entirely at the door of individual bishops. Their power is defined at least as much by their office and the culture that surrounds it as it is by themselves and how they choose to inhabit their role. The wider church can contribute to disrupting such power structures by diversifying and encouraging diversification of support and feedback; promoting transparency and good communication; managing expectations; and questioning paternalist language and practices. Indeed, the nature of bishops' power only reflects in embodied form discourses and dynamics that run deep through the Church of England's institutional identity.

These matters are clearly not limited to periods of transition. However, it is often during transitions into new stages and between roles that the wellbeing of clergy is most vulnerable, as they navigate change,



uncertainty, loss of established support structures and disruption to sometimes every aspect of life. These are times when questions of power, agency and identity are highly pertinent and of great consequence to the lives of clergy and those around them.

Summary of good practice

These are drawn from the experiences of the Living Ministry participants as described above and do not represent an exhaustive list.

For the person in transition

- Pay attention to continued and new support structures and networks, including which to continue from the previous situation (e.g. contact with IME 1 or 2 peers; links with a TEI; spiritual direction; support from family, friends and previous colleagues); how to develop new sources of support relevant to the new role and context (e.g. new colleagues; local community groups; local church networks; mentoring; coaching); and which to protect and nurture (e.g. time with family and friends).
- Take time to prepare families emotionally as well as practically for a move.
- Consider how to access preferred ways of worshipping, if these are different from the new ministry context.
- Develop a range of sources of support and feedback, considering what is beneficial and what each source provides, e.g. spiritual direction, mentoring (formal and informal), buddies, informal peer groups, facilitated groups, coaching, family and friends.

For TEIs during IME 1

- Provide:
 - a solid grounding in spiritual habits and practices;
 - theological and practical reflection on ordained ministry and leadership;
 - time-management training where appropriate, e.g. for those already juggling multiple roles.
- Consider how best to support, practically and emotionally, ordinands struggling to find curacies.
- Consider the implications of formal processes for the wellbeing of those involved, and how best to support and care for them.
- Consider the feasibility of continuing relationships with alumni where appropriate.

For diocesan officers and senior clergy

- Ensure diocesan-owned housing is adequate and ready in time for moving day.
- Address cashflow difficulties between the end of training grants and the start of curacy stipends, especially if curacies are delayed.
- Offer practice-based time-management support for new curates, including mentoring.



- Consider how best to support, practically and emotionally, ordinands struggling to find curacies and curates struggling to find their next post.
- Facilitate or encourage personality profiling and discussion of working relationships between curate and training incumbent (and the wider team where appropriate) from the start of curacy.
- Consider what kinds of support the person moving is likely to need and what can be offered to provide this, e.g. facilitated groups; buddying; mentoring; coaching; counselling; and ongoing accompanied vocational discernment.
- Ensure clergy receive pro-active, periodic contact to check how they are doing, especially during the first weeks and months of a new post and as clergy approach retirement age.
- Consider the situation and needs of families during transition periods, including regarding schooling, encouraging family time and connecting clergy spouses as appropriate.
- Invite clergy to connect and participate in the diocese early on following a move, e.g. through clergy conferences, bishops' social or study invitations, and discussions with CMD or wellbeing officers.
- Consider wellbeing issues during recruitment processes.
- Consider the implications of formal processes for the wellbeing of those involved, and how best to support and care for them.
- Offer practical and vocational support to those approaching and transitioning into retirement.
- Encourage and offer a range of sources of support and feedback to provide for different needs.
- Promote transparency and good communication, with those in senior roles demonstrating appropriate vulnerability.
- Manage expectations, especially around expectations of bishops and appropriate sources of support.
- Question the use of paternalist language and practices.

For parishes

- Ensure housing is adequate and ready in time for moving day.
- Consider the situation and needs of families during transition periods, including regarding privacy, expectations and family time.
- Consider wellbeing issues during recruitment processes (also the responsibility of patrons).

For the national church

- Address cashflow difficulties between the end of training grants and the start of curacy stipends, especially if curacies are delayed.
- Promote transparency and good communication.
- Consider the implications of formal processes for the wellbeing of those involved, and how best to support and care for them.
- Manage expectations where appropriate and support dioceses in doing so.
- Question the use of paternalist language and practices.



8. Power and Responsibility in the Church of England: A Theological Reflection

The Very Revd Dr Frances Ward

Introduction

Moving in Power: Transitions in Ordained Ministry presents qualitative findings to contribute to the Church of England's ten-year Living Ministry research, a longitudinal study began in 2017, that explores clergy wellbeing and how it may be enhanced. This excellent report by Liz Graveling and her team, takes 'transitions' as its focus, examining the experience of different cohorts of Anglican clergy as they change role from ordinand (IME1) to curacy, from curacy to next post, between posts, and, finally, into retirement. During such transitions five aspects of wellbeing are considered: spiritual and vocational, physical and mental, relationships, financial and material, and participation in the wider Church, with suggestions for good practice for the person involved, for training institutions, for diocesan and senior clergy, for parishes and the national Church. The research seeks to understand the power dynamics 'around and beyond moments of transition,' particularly as power affects agency and influences identity and self worth, as the participants experience their relationships with senior clergy and bishops (p. 6). Graveling summarises:

The power of bishops lies at least as much in their office – characterised by unequal relationship and deference – as in their personal will and they embody multiple dimensions of power, including traditional, legal-rational and charismatic power. They make key decisions – especially regarding ordinands and curates – and hold strategic, financial, vocational, spiritual, pastoral, professional and moral influence. Especially at times of transition and crisis, clergy may be or feel dependent on their bishop for guidance and/or permission to continue or to move. Bishops can use their power to enable or to constrain and to affirm or criticise; however, by doing either, they may reinforce paternalist structures of dependency. (p. 6)

The Church: a place of the Cross

The report comes at a time of transition for the Church of England, as it responds to the Archbishop of York's call¹⁸ to refresh its vision and strategy, from a task-centred approach to a Christ-centred and Jesus-shaped future. Stephen Cottrell calls for the Church to be 'simpler, humbler, bolder.' How might this report, with its

¹⁸ <https://www.Churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/A%20vision%20for%20the%20Church%20of%20England%20in%20the%202020s%20-%20commentary%20by%20Stephen%20Cottrell.pdf>



reflections on ‘power’, support that transition by enabling the flourishing of clergy and the growth of a more wholesome culture?

The Church of England has a crucial place in the contemporary world. A place of the cross – literally, crucial – in times of significant change and transitions, which are destabilising and unsettling, with the well-documented rise of anxiety and mental health issues, particularly in young people. In his theological reflection on the Church’s emerging vision¹⁹, Steven Croft uses a cartoon²⁰ to illustrate how the world is threatened by inundation – huge waves of a pandemic, and a recession, which obscure the biggest wave of all, that of climate crisis. How does the Church speak into such a world, not of its own power, but of the power of God to inspire and transform from fear to hope?

The Church of England has an up-hill struggle here. It is not widely perceived as a trustworthy institution, but in retreat and decline, with diminishing influence and ‘power’. Following the IICSA report,²¹ its credibility is minimal, its fallibilities all-too-sinful, as it owns its guilt and seeks forgiveness for years of shameful collusion with the abuse of children and the vulnerable. Gone are the days, and the voices, of the likes of William Temple; now is indeed the time for humility – that oh-so-difficult virtue to have, and communicate, sincerely.

As the world begins to realise – with the help of Bill Gates²², and others – just how enormous is the challenge of the climate crisis, compounded by Covid, and recession – what can the Church be and do, but preach a Gospel of simplicity, pointing, as Croft suggests, towards the fragility of life, the demands of justice and fairness, the sustainability and flourishing of the earth, and the need to think morally about the purpose of human flourishing in today’s world? How can it speak of the power of the Cross, which is the power of God realised in the death of a human being, of Jesus Christ, that all (*all* living creatures, including humanity) might have life, and have it in abundance? How can the Church find the corporate voice to witness to Christ in a world largely indifferent to its internal concerns? How can it understand its own dynamics of power in a constructive way that enables it to contribute in a world where civil, social and political orders are increasingly polarised and fragile, perhaps symptomatic of the deepest fear of all, that of climate catastrophe?

The powerlessness of the Cross might be the place to begin.

¹⁹ <https://www.Churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/A%20vision%20for%20the%20Church%20of%20England%20in%20the%202020s%20-%20theological%20reflection%20by%20Steven%20Croft.pdf>

²⁰ Editorial Cartoon by Graeme MacKay, The Hamilton Spectator – Wednesday March 11, 2020

²¹ See <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/>

²² *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need*, Allen Lane, 2021



St Paul on Power

As St Paul understands it, there is a rich relationship between God’s power and human frailty. In 2 Corinthians 12: 9, he persuades us that in our weakness God is strong: ‘but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ For Christ ‘was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God,’ and so Christ’s disciples live with him by the power of God. This is not to say that human weakness should be the focus, but rather we should attend to the power of God to transform in and through God’s people, lay and ordained. This not to embrace weakness with a distorted spirituality of woundedness or brokenness (*pace* Henri Nouwen²³), which can so easily lead to its clergy becoming ‘victims’ to themselves, obsessed with wounds and failings, and obscured from a responsible, adult recognition that failure, suffering, pain, frustration and anxiety are part of every life, every day, and, paradoxically, often enable human flourishing. To hold and transform the anxiety of others is possible only in the power and grace of God, as Saint Paul makes clear, with a healthy acceptance of one’s own failures and disappointments.

‘If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation’ (2 Cor. 5.17). Cottrell calls on the Church of England to renew its life in Christ. ‘It is his Church, not ours. It is his ministry not ours. It is Christ’s ministry in all of us.’ This Christ died on the cross that the whole world might have life in abundance. Any power exercised in the Church is in the name of Christ, a response to the call of God to be Christ-centred, Jesus-shaped – which is nothing if it is not shaped by the cross of Jesus, transformed by Christ’s resurrection.

‘Power’: suspicion and trust

Reading *Moving in Power* might lead us to reflect on power in two ways. ‘Power’ can be understood as a responsibility shared with each other, as we live and move and have our being in the power and grace of God in Christ – a responsibility to build the common life together. Or we can understand ‘power’ as something that some have more than others – like a commodity that is owned by those who are dominant, and exercised over others in subordinate positions.

This more oppositional view is essential at times of injustice and oppression; when arbitrary power is exercised with no accountability for the pain and suffering caused (think of how the power of social media recognises few constraints). A keen and healthy suspicion of the abuse of power is a requirement for any in positions of public responsibility in today’s world. Proper support for victims is essential, and appropriate means of discipline and guidance must be in place. It can be particularly helpful to have this hermeneutic of suspicion (to borrow an expression from Hans-Georg Gadamer and used by Paul Ricoeur, too) when the structures of any institution are inherently infected by prejudice and discrimination, with unconscious bias informing those responsible for creating and sustaining the culture. Then that ‘suspicion’ must be tuned to

²³ *The Wounded Healer*, 1972



continued self-critique and self-awareness of one's positionality and power. *Moving in Power*, with its reflexive attention to the power and positionality of the researcher, encourages all who hold responsibility in the Church to attend to their own use and abuse of power with an ongoing hermeneutic of suspicion.

A hermeneutic of suspicion is necessary in today's world and Church. However, when it becomes the only way to frame the structures and relationships of an institution like the Church, so every aspect is understood as pervaded by powers held unequally (bishop : dominant; curate : subordinate) then something is lost to the flourishing of the Church and those who belong. To view 'power' solely in these terms can result in a destructive and oppositional dynamic of suspicion, of unhealthy dependency/resistance, deference/defensiveness, even of victimhood and beleaguered 'identity' that is always 'over against' a more 'powerful' other – "I am 'me' because I am not 'you', and I need to assert myself to know myself". When the Church becomes such an institution, it is hard to see failure and disappointment as crucial to human flourishing, for always someone else will be to blame, those in leadership are not to be trusted with the vulnerability of others, and therefore become reluctant to give honest feedback for fear of accusation of bullying or abuse.

A hermeneutic of suspicion needs to be held, thoughtfully, within a broader and deeper hermeneutic of faith, or trust²⁴ (Gadamer suggests there is an ultimate choice to be made here; Paul Ricoeur argues that they are not to be viewed as binary, but rather that, while suspicion may be necessary, it is an element in the bigger process of faithful interpretation). When the Church is dominated by a culture of suspicion where power divides into 'us' and 'them',²⁵ then trust and faith in and through the institution, based on a sense of shared responsibility for Christ's ministry and mission in the world, is eroded.

Trust: a living, daring confidence

The challenges of the world are great. For the Church of England to be bold to speak out its gospel of love and justice, faithful with a living, daring confidence in God's grace, it needs to be trusted as an institution. Trust needs to permeate its structures, its people, its leadership, its clergy. Trust needs to be the culture – a culture that eats everything for breakfast.

How does trust grow? For once it is eroded, it is hard to regain. It takes time and carefulness, a prayerful thoughtfulness, reliability, wisdom, attention to virtue, to earn and keep the trust of others, to become trustworthy. It needs to move from a culture of constant disruption towards a culture of stability.

²⁴ To explore a 'hermeneutic of trust' further, see Richard Hays' biblical scholarship here <https://www.religion-online.org/article/salvation-by-trust-reading-the-bible-faithfully/>

²⁵ With something like Hegel's Master and Slave binary in operation; Ricoeur explained how what he calls the 'school of superstition' owes to other thinkers, such as Marx, Freud and Nietzsche – and Foucault belongs here too, with his power analysis of relations of dominant and subordinate.



One of the most powerful foundational texts of Western Christianity is the Rule of St Benedict.²⁶ Its formational impact over the centuries lies in the care that Benedict takes to detail the ordered life that creates trust within the community dedicated to live out Christ's way in obedience, stability, and conversion of life. Communal life is ordered in simplicity and humility. The impact on Western civilisation has been, and continues to be, bold.

Chapter 64 speaks of the Abbot, who is chosen for goodness of life and wisdom – regardless of status or rank. He must keep constantly in mind the burden that he will give an account of his stewardship – the stewardship of the power of God that he holds in Christ. Stewardship is responsibility – the responsibility to discipline when required, to be prudent and avoid extremes, to distrust his own frailty. 'Drawing on discretion, the mother of virtues, he must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from.' As ever, the gentle Rule of St Benedict holds wisdom to grow a culture of trust, and shows how crucial the ordered life is for the well being and flourishing of all.

Moving from suspicion to trust

Moving in Power can help the Church of England move from a culture of suspicion to trust. It speaks into a Church and society that is beset by transitions, by initiatives, by change, foreseen and unforeseen, and into a world of instabilities and anxieties that are enormous and ever-deepening, particularly as the very future of the planet is under threat, like no time before. How might the Church of England, and the Anglican Communion, be a place of trust and stability in such a world? Where flourishing, or the space to cope with the realities of not-flourishing, is normal? Where 'the whole' rather than oppositional factions is the focus; where 'power' is responsibility; where order rather than disorder gives security and stability? How can it be a Christ-centred body with a sense of its participation in Christ, where diversity is honoured and tribalism transcended, thereby showing a different way, truth and life in the world? How can it know the crucified and risen Christ in its own lived experience of the reality of decline, in parishes and churches, despite recent real efforts to renew and reform? What might it say in a world inundated by the tsunami of climate crisis, speaking boldly into an age of existential anxiety and fear?

Conclusion

Moving in Power offers helpful reflection to support and facilitate those experiencing the anxiety of transition. Can that be turned to institutional learning, to enable the Church to minister in a world beset by transitional anxieties? Can the report empower curate and bishop, clergy and people, to take responsibility together, as stewards of the power of God, to transform the anxiety of the world through the Church of

²⁶ A translation recommended by Benedictine Abbey of West Malling is the *Rule of St Benedict in English (RB)*, trans. Timothy Fry OSB, 1981; see also Rowan Williams, *The Way of Benedict*, Bloomsbury Continuum 2020



Christ? For the burden of anxiety is immense for many today: it stalks like pestilence in darkness, it destroys like sickness at noon day.

(Re-) building the Church as a trustworthy place of safety rather than suspicion begins with the desire to be humbler, simpler, and bolder, where the responsibility lies with everyone who responds to the call to be Christ-centred and Jesus-shaped. A culture of trust holds in tension the need for suspicion – for always Christians must be aware of their own frailty and propensity to sin, and alive to the possibility of abuse. But the suspicious eye must be a left-hemisphere attention, held in the greater gaze of the right hemisphere,²⁷ which looks with eyes of trust, taking responsibility for the building up of the common life for the good of all and the well-being of the world.

In today's Church of England, both suspicion and trust exist in transition and tension, evidenced throughout this report. To trust is to have faith in the people and institutions that enable corporate life. The Rule of Benedict highlights an ordered life, with clear expectations and understandings of responsibility. Those ordained into orders in the Church of England belong in one body, with the common responsibility to build up the common life. The more responsibility a person has, the more they are mindful of the whole, bearing the burden of leadership, seeking to earn the respect and obedience of the rightful authority of office, experience and diligence. To turn again to St Paul, to 1 Corinthians 12, we see that he follows Jesus in teaching that leaders do not lord it over others, but rather take responsibility – a better word here than 'power' – to ensure the whole body flourishes, where each member contributes individual strengths and gifts, bringing also weaknesses and failings. The responsibility of leadership is a heavy *gravitas*, requiring self-examination to ensure power and authority are used to build up the common life, so Church can serve the world, on the basis of faith and trust, creating a culture that empowers, equips and enables all its members. In such a culture, success counts in the way the Cross enables disappointment, failure, anxiety and fear to be borne and transformed in a clergy who flourish for the sake of the world.

The Church is the means of God's grace – it has an eternal and ultimate reality that transcends time and space, because it is based on the grace of God, the power of God. God's ministers are stewards of that power, responsible to God and to each other to offer the best of their ability, with a delight in the diverse gifts that God has bestowed, and aware that their orders partake in the God who orders all things in love in a creation that is ultimately trustworthy. A hermeneutic of trust and a hermeneutic of suspicion need to be held together, but the greatest of these is trust.

²⁷ See Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, 2009, for an account of the Right and Left Hemispheres of our brains, understood metaphorically in ways useful to understand culture today.



All ordained, whether deacon, priest or bishop, share the responsibility to build trust, each in their own position, and through transitions of all kinds. Building the trust upon which any common life depends is one of the most powerful gifts the Church can give the world. Each can ask:

How trustworthy am I?

How can I be trustworthy and grow trust in what I do, as a steward of the power of God invested in me?

By living humbly, simply, boldly. In doing so, the ordained of whatever order participate in the body of Christ that is a Jesus-shaped Church.

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THE CHURCH
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