

THE MAKING OF PRIESTS

**An examination of the post ordination experience
of mature stipendiary clergy within the Church of England
in the first three years of parish ministry.**

by

ROSAMOND MARY LATHAM

A thesis submitted to

The University of Birmingham

for the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

**Urban Theology Unit
Department of Theology and Religion
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham**

December 2012

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

THE MAKING OF PRIESTS

**An examination of the post ordination experience
of mature stipendiary clergy within the Church of England
in the first three years of parish ministry.**

ROSAMOND MARY LATHAM

ABSTRACT

The research project being undertaken explores the experience of mature stipendiary clergy within the Church of England in the first three years of parish ministry. My curacy did not take account of my age or previous life experience and upon its completion I found myself ill-prepared for parish ministry. It was this that prompted my research.

Interviews with six mature curates showed a direct correlation between the perceived effectiveness of post ordination training and the quality of the training incumbent and curate relationship.

Consideration of different theological understandings of priestly authority and an examination of the changing parish context from single parishes to multi-parish groupings confirmed that training must prepare curates for more collaborative and relational styles of ministry. I concluded that training relationships exhibiting greater mutuality and less hierarchical leadership styles would enable improved training.

This thesis recommends greater emphasis be placed on the development of every priest's unique personal identity and inner growth with less emphasis on the acquisition of ministerial skills. This would be achieved across all age ranges by extending the training couple of incumbent and curate to form a more widely skilled team, and prioritising the practice of reflective working.

CONTENTS

1	Context and Autobiographical Background	1
	Context	1
	The background story	5
	Initial call	6
	Initial training	8
	Search for a curacy	9
	Curacy	12
	Post of first responsibility	15
	The new curate	16
	Integrating life experience with ministerial practice	22
	Relevance	22
2	Methodology	25
	The nature of the research project	25
	The importance of context in theology	25
	Researcher's context	27
	Feminist and postmodern influences	31
	Research context	32
	Theological considerations	33
	Qualitative research methods	48
	Preliminary findings	44
	Contextual theology and qualitative research	45
	Gathering the data	48
	Anonymity	54
	Ethics	55
	The transcripts	57
	Sorting and analysing data	57

3	The Interviews	62
	Conducting the interviews	62
	Response to the figures	63
	Defining Success	66
	Relationships with the trainer	71
	The importance of a therapeutic relationship	74
	Similar human pairings	77
4	The Marriage	82
	1. Matchmaking	82
	The stakeholders	82
	The agendas	87
	The final match	92
	The working agreement	101
	2. Life Together	104
	Making the relationship work	104
	Working with The Prophet	106
	Loyalty	122
	Further observations	126
	The working agreement	130
	3. Divorce	135
	When a marriage goes wrong	136
	Duty of care	138
	A black mark	139
	When a marriage is happy	141
	Reflections	143
5.	Exploring the Nature of Priests	148
	Formation	151
	Relational ministry	156
	Models of priesthood	158
	Concepts of obedience and authority	159

Humility	170
Insights from the praxis model	176
6. Exploring training needs	181
Collaboration	192
Changes in marriage	202
The foundations of training	208
7. Training Criteria and Recommendations	209
1. The Building Blocks	209
The curate and training incumbent relationship	209
The Hind Report	211
Collaborative ministry	211
A first response	212
2. The Content of Training	214
A trinity of being	215
What is maturity of being?	219
Human development theories	220
Maturing of Christian discipleship	226
Priestly development	229
3. The Delivery of Training	233
Returning to the marriage metaphor	235
Matchmaking	235
Life together	241
Divorce	247
A further issue	248
Potential obstacles	249
Age related issues	250
Summary and reflection	254
8. Final Reflections	256
1. The Main Findings	258

2. A Reflection on the Usefulness of the Methods Adopted	263
Is further research necessary?	269
3. Contribution of these findings to the training debate	270
Final comments	272

Appendix	273
-----------------	------------

Bibliography	274
---------------------	------------

1. CONTEXT AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The Context

The research project being undertaken explores the experience of mature stipendiary clergy within the Church of England in the first three years of parish ministry. This is usually referred to as a curacy and is regarded as an integral part of the training of every priest following his or her ordination within the Church of England.

This research is sourced in my own experience. My rationale for beginning the research is personal and experiential. I wish to explore the particular issues relating to the training of mature curates within the Church of England in their first three years of parish ministry. I define mature curates as those who are over forty years of age. I choose to concentrate on the post ordination training period of curacy because this was the period which I found most challenging and in which understanding of a personal priestly identity is forged at the interface of theory learned and reality experienced, where priests first face the challenge of “integrating the realism of the task with the idealism of the ordinal.”¹ Anecdotal evidence gained from colleagues suggests other trainee priests have also found their curacies particularly challenging. My impression was that few ordinands dropped out or significantly changed course during the first three years in theological college, but were more likely to encounter a crisis in training during the second stage of training or curacy period. My personal story formed one strand providing impetus for this research.

¹ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishop’s Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, (London: Church House, 2011), p.2.

I was a 'second career type' and began training for ordination in 2000 at the age of forty six years old. I was surprised to find in my cohort of twenty seven ordinands resident at a Church of England theological college, that thirty per cent would be ordained priest when they were over the age of forty. These statistics were confirmed within the Lincoln Diocese where I served as curate from 2002 to 2005. In Lincoln, three women were ordained priest in 2003 at thirty eight, forty seven and forty nine years old. Church of England statistics confirm that the average age of men and women being ordained priest is rising significantly. In 1990, thirty two per cent of those recommended for training were over forty years old, in 2004 this figure rose to sixty seven per cent, thirty seven per cent of those were over fifty and nine per cent over sixty years old.² There have been some more recent initiatives aimed at encouraging more young people to explore the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood, especially those under the age of thirty³, but this initiative, even if effective, will take some time to feed through and significantly affect the statistics.

The formal process of becoming a priest was and is commencing with ordination training for people whose average age is rising significantly. The nature of priestly development is rarely clearly defined but has, in my personal experience, been variously described in terms of conformation, transformation, deskillling, sacrifice, growing into the role of priest, learning priestcraft and apprenticeship. These descriptions do not always take account of the wealth of preordination experience of the curates involved or recognise the development as mature adult and growth as baptised Christian that has been taking place for several decades of the individual's life. My own experience as a mature curate offered no differing pattern of education or training opportunities than might have been offered to

² Archbishops' Council, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church – Reviewing Progress (London: Church House Publishing, June 2005), Appendix 1, p.17.

³ See Church of England, Call Waiting, <http://www.callwaiting.org.uk> accessed on 11/08/2012.

a younger person. There was little flexibility offered in pattern or length of curacy and my training incumbent referred frequently to his own curacy, undertaken twenty five years earlier as a young man in his twenties. The new context was not acknowledged.

During forty six years, I had grown physically, mentally and spiritually. I had learned the rudiments of being human from family, school and community, I had grown in stature, skills and knowledge. I had grown in self understanding, married, borne and reared my own children and divorced and returned to single status. I had been educated, trained and worked in my chosen profession. I had been taught about Christianity at home and church. I had explored my faith in depth, based my life choices upon its tenets and trained for leadership in my local church. I had, like Jesus, “increased in wisdom and in years”.⁴ It had been a long journey towards ordination training and only now was I to be ‘formed’ into a priest in the Church of England. My understanding of vocation and calling was that all my previous life experiences were part of my development as a priest and I was now entering a particular specialist phase of training in that process. Yet ‘formation’ was being presented as an activity complete in itself within theological college and curacy. Throughout my development as a priest in college and parish, I have struggled with the degree to which my previous life experience has contributed to the priest I am, and which was identified when I was selected for further training, and the degree to which I would be conformed into the required priestly mould during the period of formal training. The Church of England website states:

“Priesthood is not only about what a person does. It is also about what a person is.”⁵

⁴ NRSV Luke 2:52.

⁵ <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifevents/ministry/ministryinthecofe.html/#priest>, p4 accessed on 14/05/06

Related to this story, in that it is also experiential, is a second strand which motivated my research. This strand relates to process. It is in growing in experience as a reflective practitioner in ministry that has empowered me to have the capacity to undertake the research at all. I concluded that by exploring my own story and encouraging others to begin the same journey by telling theirs, two types of outcomes could be hoped for. One would be measurable, in recommendations for the future training of curates, and specifically the subgroup of curates I had labelled mature. The second would be less tangible, but no less valuable, my own growth in wisdom would be enhanced by the process of reflection. Others could be encouraged to follow suit by the reading of the final report. Thus it was important to record my own inner journey and development as I undertook the research. This was very much in the genre of feminist and liberation theologies and whilst not the primary focus of the research an important constituent part of it. The dilemma this raises in terms of validity and acceptability to the academy is discussed in the methodology chapter.

I refer to it at this stage because my conclusion has been that to maintain integrity the inner process of my own continued personal development should be recorded, but that distinctly autobiographical should be substantially separated from the interview data and only appear in the central chapters where its inclusion reinforces or clarifies meaning. To acknowledge the autobiographical material contributes honesty to the research process as that material is revealed and owned, but could risk detracting from the validity of the research should it dictate the direction of the study. It is intended that the direction of study will be dictated

by the interviews to be undertaken. Yet I also wish to acknowledge with Heyward, and in the spirit of those she terms “postmodern philosophers”⁶ that, “.. all knowledge is partial and that every theory in every field represents a particular standpoint or perspective.”⁷

Whilst I value beginning the pastoral cycle at the quadrant of experience, in so doing this can only lead to valid conclusions if the lens through which they are viewed is identified and owned. That gives the findings honesty and integrity. My intuition is that it is not helpful to introduce compensating filters, I suspect choosing their hue would introduce further complexity in the search for an unreachable objectivity. In deciding on the necessary compensation it would be necessary to define the neutral stance by adopting the judgements of others and so limiting the potential of the research in breaking new ground. I had already made a conscious decision to conduct open ended interviews as far as possible without direction or questioning. I have some training in counselling and listening skills so incorporated in order to introduce a discipline in limiting interventions to reflection back, paraphrasing and questions of clarification as far as possible, whilst seeking to maintain a relaxed environment for the conversation. This technique is explored further in the methodology chapter. It is with this justification that I include a substantial amount of autobiographical material as my rationale for the research and at this stage of writing.

The Background Story

My own curacy was problematic and whilst a primary motivation for undertaking this research, in the early stages, I was aware of emotions being stirred and feelings of panic

⁶ Carter Heyward, Saving Jesus from Those who are Right – rethinking what it means to be Christian (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p.49.

⁷ Heyward, Saving Jesus from Those who are Right, p.49/50.

and anxiety being aroused in my body. My body would tense, my brain freeze and my stomach churned. Frequently I could not bring myself to face the study at all. It was important to acknowledge these feelings whilst not allowing them to skew research findings and invalidate the findings. Whilst the research project was underway and I was exploring the best ways to train curates, I became a training incumbent (TI) myself.⁸ I discovered the tensions in practising what I preached. That too, becomes part of the research experience and I believe offers greater depth of understanding if handled appropriately. I intend to track my experiences chronologically, picking out pertinent issues as the story unfolds and drawing conclusions as to their relevance at the end. By recounting both initial motivation for the research and personal reactions during its progress, I seek to offer a greater transparency of process and purpose.

Initial Call.

The Church of England has a national selection policy. The language of selection is that all Christians have a vocation in the world to work for the establishment of God's kingdom and for some that vocation will be as an ordained priest. The purpose of the national selection conferences is to test whether that vocation is lay or ordained. Nevertheless for those who attend, it is hard to experience the three days as anything other than an interview with associated success or failure outcomes. Conversations between candidates run on the lines of – 'let me know if you got through'. In seeking to 'get through' there is much preparation. Firstly the story of calling is repeated many times. Aveyard notices the risk of the much repeated and honed story becoming a controlling narrative, especially after

⁸ The term training incumbent is quite cumbersome and one few readers may be familiar with. It appears increasingly frequently during this research, I have therefore introduced the acronym TI in an effort to address the problem. TI will be used in place of training incumbent from hereon in this thesis, except where quoting the actual words quoted in interviews or training literature.

selection and through training, resulting in a narrowing rather than a widening of ministerial options.⁹ My own experience was that a strong sense of call maintained motivation in challenging times and over many years. It was during the occasions when the intensity of initial call flagged that I was tempted to give up.

My own story began as a teenager when at a Methodist boarding school, my faith became extremely important to me and I explored working as a deaconess in the Methodist church. I sought integrity in living out the principles and values I claimed to believe and believed that a church context was one that would allow me to do so. My first setback was my much loved and respected father telling me that wasn't a normal thing for a woman to do. In 1970, I was experiencing my first encounter with gender prejudice from the most influential figure in my life. The call did not go away, but I duly took the recommended and presenting course and married and had children. Now married to a non Christian, answering the call I heard within became even more problematic. I sought other routes to respond as R.E. teacher, Church of England lay reader, counsellor and religious book shop owner. Still the call persisted and was not fulfilled, the first women were ordained in 2004 and my focus crystallised in form to priestly ministry. I attended a selection conference in May 1999, was selected and began non-residential training, whilst remaining a full time teacher and farmer's wife. I anticipated becoming a non-stipendiary priest, continued to live on the farm and ministered in the place where I lived. It was a close run thing, my parish priest could not recommend me as he "couldn't get round Paul's teaching" and "didn't think the parish was ready for a woman". This was a second experience of gender prejudice from a significant other.

⁹ Archbishop's Council. The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency. p.8.

Initial Training

The Hind Report¹⁰ sought to make the training stages pre and post ordination recognisably continuous by terming the post ordination period IME (Initial Ministerial Education) 4-7, pre-ordination training constituting IME 1-3, the numbering according with the years undertaken at each stage. In fact length of training is more flexible than the numbering suggests, mature curates frequently undertaking just two years of pre-ordination training at residential theological training establishments, although this can stretch to four years where a PhD is incorporated.

IME 4-7, the period post ordination, as a curate attached to a TI in a parish setting, usually lasts three to four years. After this two part process, formal training is complete and the priest may seek a first post of responsibility in a parish or chaplaincy. Ongoing training is encouraged throughout the priest's working life but the culmination of Initial Ministerial Education supposes the individual to be sufficiently trained or developed as a priest to be capable of fulfilling that role independently without further close formal oversight.

My part time non-residential pre-ordination training began one weekend in late September 1999. The week before my marriage broke down, for me a sudden, cataclysmic and unexpected event. My husband had found someone else – less “religious”, less “academic” but in his mind all was well, “because the church will look after you now”. I encountered a more complex mix of prejudice this time. The following year was a blur, I had to find somewhere else to live, leaving my farming son and husband behind on the farm, continue

¹⁰ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church – The Structure and Funding of Ordination Training (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), title page.

in full time teaching to support myself and complete my studies at weeknight tutorials and monthly residential weekends. I continued to teach but collapsed shortly after Christmas with a breakdown. Eventually I resurfaced and with the support of a friendly bishop restarted training at a residential training college in September 2000. Why is all this relevant? Ordinands at residential theological colleges are not a blank canvas, they come with a history and a story, very rarely are those who train them fully aware of all the details, my tutors knew as much as I chose to tell them. Unsurprisingly, I found the practicalities of the transference from a five bedroom farm house to a single room without bathroom facilities traumatic. I had to relearn how to make friends and reinvent myself as a single person. I survived residential training because the call was still strong. God had a road for me to travel, a ministry for me to undertake, survive this, I thought, and I will be in the parish where I belong. I invested heavily in my future priestly identity.

Search for a curacy.

The diocesan bishop and I agreed that I should look for a title parish¹¹ in another diocese, well away from my husband and his new partner. In retrospect it is less clear whether this was supportive or a mild form of divorcee prejudice. Why have I included so many personal details prior to my arrival in the curacy? Because I suspect no curate arrives without secrets and life experiences to process and dreams to be realised, maybe not as dramatic as mine, but for a mature curate much will have been sacrificed in order to reach this moment.

¹¹ Title parish is the term used for the parish in which a curacy takes place. Ordination is dependent upon being licensed to a geographical parish. A person cannot be ordained without a job.

There was not much help around to assist me in finding the right curacy. It was Autumn 2001, the internet and email did not impinge directly on the process. I was directed to a black A4 ringbinder folder which contained vacancies in importing diocese. So much jargon. I was to discover, in this new world of the Church of England, that dioceses who trained more curates than they had curacy posts were exporting dioceses and dioceses who did not train enough curates to fill the vacant curacy posts were importing dioceses. I was to identify a post I was interested in and contact the TI to make an appointment for us to meet. I identified the first post and contacted the TI. I was too late, someone else from another theological college was already exploring that one and the rule said only one curate to look at any one curacy at any one time. There had been delays in starting the search related to the slow speed of diocesan administration teams. The more highly recommended posts were being snapped up. Was I entering the search too late to find the treasure? I had to find a title post or I could not be ordained deacon in summer 2002.

I speedily sought a second choice. I visited the parish and met the TI. I had been advised by my tutor that the priority was to ensure I could have a good working relationship with my training priest. He seemed a personable man but I had no idea what sort of trainer he would be, he had had curates before so all should be well. It was not possible to see inside the house which I so looked forward to occupying, as the present curate was ill. I just gazed at it from the outside. Just before I left I had lunch with another clergy colleague. How did I feel about living with her in a large remote village vicarage for six months? What did she mean? It transpired the curate was having a nervous breakdown and it was pastorally inappropriate to move her until she recovered. I challenged the TI, why had he not told me this? He had thought it might put me off and the bishop would like to have

someone with an M.A. in the parish. I turned the offer down. I could not trust and work with someone who was so ready to mislead. This was a sharp introduction to the mixed motives of those matching curates and training incumbents. I was shocked to realise that the church was not always delivering training based on professional or defensible principles. This became a strong personal motivator to undertake research that would both reveal the what was happening in parish based curacies and lead to recommendations for improvement.

I contacted another parish, a visit was arranged. I arrived for a mid week communion service. Afterwards the vicar went to the church hall to speak to congregation members over coffee, I was to wait in the church as we did not know whether I would be coming to the parish as curate or not as yet, and it was not helpful for them to get any wrong ideas. Strange, but obediently I loitered in the church. An elderly flower arranger came in. She pointed to a temporary arrangement where the altar had been pulled forward. A re-ordering scheme was underway. A white curtain hung behind the altar to give the congregation a visual example of how re-ordering might look when space behind the altar was converted into a meeting room. "Don't you think those bedsheets look dreadful behind the altar?" "He just put them there without saying a thing, he's like that. Thinks it's his church and we have no opinions." I was not able to see the flat that would be my home, but the TI hoped I would not be complaining about the gas fire like the last curate had, it may have been old but it worked. I wondered whether hiding me from the congregation was for more important reasons than he was admitting. "Have the congregation ever experienced women's ministry?" I asked. "No, but they will have to get used to it when you come."

Could I work with this man? Evidence suggested his non consultative leadership style would not make working together easy. I refused the offer of the curacy for a second time.

My next attempt would surely be the last. I could hardly refuse another offer. I would be considered spoiled or too choosy, 'they' might decide I was not willing enough to serve where I was needed. Perhaps they would not offer me another chance if I refused the next one and I would not be ordained. The visit went well. I saw the house, not very smart but a palace to me after two years in one room. I met the congregation after the service over coffee. The TI was friendly and spoke of having trained many curates and enjoying it. He was the area dean which meant I would have the opportunity to take advantage of a wide range of training opportunities across the deanery. I would not just be an extra pair of hands, I would be there to train. He described the church as a thinking church, into which he thought I would readily fit. He offered me the post of curate. I accepted the post on the assumption that his description of the church was accurate and the training opportunities he described would be available. Neither statement was as described and I was alerted to the inconsistencies between promise and reality in the training process.

Curacy

The church was a busy one, I learned a great deal. I took around sixty funerals a year, usually the ones at the crematorium, the ones in church were usually for congregation members which the vicar took. I took around twenty weddings a year in the period after priesting, sometimes as many as four on a busy summer Saturday. Little things annoyed me. The vicar was frequently ten minutes late for morning prayer, eventually I would start without him, he was not very pleased when he eventually arrived. Just occasionally his

temper exploded for no reason. He complained that I had filled in a marriage register wrongly on one occasion. I had not. I had filled it in as the registrar had taught us in our IME training. We had regular staff meetings where we planned work. I did not have recognisable supervision sessions. I tried to set an agenda and arranged one occasionally, but they were always interrupted by several people at the door or on the telephone. We got nowhere. I was offered the opportunity to do a few hours a week chaplaincy work at the hospital near my house. It was refused. A week later I was told I would be doing more funerals because the training incumbent was helping out at the hospital. There was no IME officer after the first year to consult. He had moved on and not been replaced.

I arranged, through an archdeacon, to have a three months placement in another urban setting in a more deprived parish in Sheffield. As the time drew near, the TI's temper flared. How was he to manage with so many funerals when I was away for three months? So much for not just being an extra pair of hands. I went to Sheffield, he did the funerals. I was never allowed to chair a PCC, curates did not do that.¹² I was not unhappy. I learned a great deal about being a priest in an industrial town. I made good relationships with the people and, I thought, a good relationship with the TI most of the time. I was frequently in the dark. He often did not tell me what was going on. Our relationship was dependent on my playing the game to an unwritten rule book. He spoke often of a previous curate who had not kept the rules and demonstrated a more catholic approach to celebrating the Eucharist than was acceptable. She had now left parish ministry and the church. He told me another curate had been difficult to work with because she hated men. That turned out to be a prejudice against lesbians. I later pondered long and hard on how it was that during

¹² PCC is the abbreviation for parochial church council, the responsible body in managing a local parish church.

that period, I felt so stressed and trapped, yet on the surface all appeared harmonious.

Some years later I realised the reason. I intuitively knew the rules to play by, and slotted in so well, because the TI behaved in very similar ways to my ex-husband. I knew how I was expected to respond. But not a good place to thrive and flourish in the circumstances.

There were joys during that time. I began a research degree in Sheffield. I was able to upgrade my M.Phil to a Ph.D. That recompensed for the fact that there was no opportunity to 'think' at church. The training incumbent was pleased because it would please the bishop, his words echoed ones I had heard when exploring the first curacy I had looked at. I was disappointed that his motives for allowing me to pursue further academic training were more closely related to the bishop's response than his personal interest in my training. I began to wonder who was taking responsibility for ensuring the priests of the future received training of an adequate standard.

During the curacy I remarried. I mention that because I had to, not because I was pregnant at fifty, but because I would lose my job if I did not. I was not minded to marry when I was beyond child bearing age and had not yet completely recovered from the experiences of the past. What was the purpose of marriage? If it did not work I did not want the solicitors' bills or the heartache. I tried to tell the TI that I would really rather we lived together. He told me never to tell anyone that again and referred me to 'The Bishops' Guidelines on Sexuality'. I did not read them, I could guess what they said. I was concerned that I was losing my own independence and integrity and that my life was being subsumed under the institution of the church. As soon as I could, after three years, I found another post. I could have waited to find a better one, but I could not wait to leave. I had hoped to flourish

during training, my experience was that my training had fallen well short of either my expectations or its potential.

Post of first responsibility

Neither was my first post of responsibility¹³ to be a place where I would flourish.

Aveyard notes, after his concerns about prioritising call, a further shortcoming of current IME 4-7 training,

The second core issue is the huge ‘step-up’ that is required when a person becomes an incumbent. The learning required for incumbency is not so much skills or information (though these are necessary) but the more significant qualities underlying formation: character, insight, breadth of awareness, judgement, leadership and confidence. If we are to have the incumbents we need, we will have to become intentional about these deep formational matters from the first.¹⁴

There were many difficulties not of my making and the step-up to post of first responsibility was harder than I could have dreamed. I was not prepared. I needed to navigate the sensitivities of villagers as we (I)¹⁵ closed one church and opened a new jointly owned building with the Methodists. It was assumed I understood the priorities of a Durham ex-pit village. It was assumed I knew how to negotiate with parish and district councils. I did not, my TI had always done all of that. I met powerful and manipulative people determined to undermine any change. I met lovely supportive people who would have supported me whatever I did. I moved after two years when the relationships elsewhere in the team imploded. Then I began to flourish.

¹³ A ‘post of first responsibility’ refers to the first post taken after the curacy has been completed, when the curate is considered fully trained to lead a parish.

¹⁴ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

¹⁵ The ‘we’ was more theoretical than actual. The congregation were familiar with a less collaborative and more hierarchical style of ministry and understood the church as ‘ours’, but the task of closing it as the vicar’s.

The new curate.

Two years into the next new post I was offered the opportunity to train a curate. Not as training incumbent as I worked in a team and the team rector was to be nominally training incumbent. The curate would work with me full time and I would supervise her as mentor. Part of my work also included teaching at the local residential theological college, I was involved in IME 1-3, and now I could gain practical experience of IME 4-7 as effective if not actual, TI. I would learn from the mistakes of the past. I would do everything I could to provide a good training experience for the curate. This would be good training. There would be supervision. I would work hard at building a good relationship. We would have regular diaried supervision sessions. No one checked out my suitability to be a trainer, no training was offered. No one checked that I was doing the job well. A portfolio system, including a tic box list to check a wide range of competencies, was introduced the following year in order to formalise and check that at least an agreed minimum of expectations would be met, but I was not involved with that. In many ways I overcompensated. Curate 4 referring to the training of an ordained clergy person in his post of first responsibility and linking this with his own traumatic experience of IME 4-7 said,

I will never do anything like that to anybody who is under my care and supervision ... so we (*he and the trainee*) have regular staff meetings and I try to make it open, value people's contributions and indeed all of us have been for a week in France, where I have a house, which has given us time to reflect and enjoy each other's company and get to know each other. It's that sort of relationship that I am trying to form rather than a sort of oppressive relationship where one person has all the power and the other person may be asked to grovel.

I knew exactly what he meant. I tried to give the curate as wide an experience of ministry as I could, I tried to ensure we shared out the interesting bits. I agreed to placements outside the parish. I tried to read widely and equip myself to be a good supervisor. Some of this I achieved and some I did not. Towards the end of three years, I began to find the

relationship more difficult. I resented the fact that the curate was a more introverted personality than me and did not readily share as much of her inner self as I was prepared to do. I resented the fact that her ministry experience contained many elements closed to me in the position of responsibility that I occupied. I resented the fact that the priestly identity I had freed her to develop was so unlike mine.

I had discovered how difficult it is for a busy parish priest to remain an honest reflective practitioner. How difficult I found it to cede authority and popularity. How difficult I found it to work collaboratively. How difficult I found it to be the trainer I wished, when my personal history and personal vulnerabilities intruded. How easy to theorise about training. How difficult to deliver. It is with this realisation that I offer this research. I suspected that shortcomings in IME 4-7 may reflect unresolved issues in the lives of the training incumbents as well as the curates, and was convinced of the ongoing need to learn to process both positive and negative life experiences within ministry for both experienced and inexperienced priests.

Integrating life experience with ministerial practice.

Aveyard stated his intention to find recommendations for training which would integrate “the realism of the task with the idealism of the ordinal”.¹⁶ There is a further and more complex integration required of every priest’s internal and external realities, whether theorist or practitioner, trainer or trainee. This is a life long journey which emphasises the necessity for regular and sustained training and practice in reflective working. This is not a new concept. Frank Lake promoted the discipline of clinical theology from early

¹⁶ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2. previously quoted at the beginning of the chapter.

beginnings in the fifties to the publication of ‘Clinical Theology’ in 1966¹⁷ and founded the Clinical Theology Association later renamed The Bridge Pastoral Foundation. His work continues to develop from his first insights that to help others it was necessary for the client to understand and accept the psychological origins of their problems, to the Bridge Foundation training courses today which acknowledge the need for the helper to be similarly self aware.

“The call upon the therapist is to have the courage to enter into his or her profound personal journey”¹⁸

To suggest that a priest should be qualified in psychotherapy is not a recommendation of this research, but rather to emphasise the importance of self awareness in practice. This movement towards more reflective working has grown over recent decades, a plethora of publications have been published drawing on the insights from psychotherapy and forming a growing genre of leadership theory.¹⁹ Whilst the literature offers useful scaffolding on which to build practice, experiential learning is vital. The methodology of this research emphasises the importance of experience as a starting point. Other professionals’ theoretical input can aid analysis, but must not detract from the importance of priests developing their own understanding, incorporating the integration of personal priestly

¹⁷ This book has been reprinted many times and is still in demand, the last reprint being 2012. The edition referred to for this research was Frank Lake, Clinical Theology, London: DLT, 1986.

¹⁸ <http://www.bridgepastoral.org.uk/psychotherapy/index.htm#diptaster> accessed on 04/08/2012

¹⁹ These include James Burns, Leadership, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). Donald Schon, The Reflective Practitioner, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 1983) and Educating the Reflective Practitioner, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987) and more recently Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) and Boyatzis and McKee, Resonant Leadership (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005). Their work has influenced a plethora of less academic and more accessible books on church leadership theory, evidenced by at least one of the above appearing in their bibliographies including Walter Wright, Relational Leadership, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2000) and Keith Lamdin, Finding your Leadership Style, (London: SPCK, 2012).

identity which includes their chosen leadership styles, and the reality of context and practice.

The autobiographical material above addresses only one aspect of my story. The other element I wish to explore is the process of completing the research project itself.

Completion has taken far longer than I intended. Despite the best attempts of tutors and supervisors, progress has been extremely slow. Sometimes anxiety levels have been so high that I could not read a book and remember the content for more than minutes, I have had panic attacks, I found myself unable to articulate my thoughts and reflections at the level of depth at which I knew they existed within me. The results sounded shallow and trite. Of particular difficulty was processing the interview data and organising it creatively, the attempts were mechanistic and unoriginal. I reached a point where I developed research refusal, similar in nature to the school refusal my son experienced when school was just too hard to attend.

This was a state beyond rationalisation. My thinking processes felt paralysed, I even wondered if this was the onset of Alzheimer's disease or some other form of brain degeneration or dementia. I took remedial action and consulted a work mentor who eventually referred me to a psychotherapist. Initially I considered the work of the psychotherapist unhelpful, because I was still unable to put pen to paper or more accurately fingertips to keyboard. Several months later, the mists began to clear. I began to realise that in exploring the core of the research data, I was revisiting my own lived experience. In searching for answers to the dilemmas of IME 4-7 training, I was revealing my own anxieties about priestly identity and practice. The completion of the research could only be

executed in parallel with a painful inner journey. I was not a psychotherapist but I was discovering that I could not begin to make sense of the research data until I began to make sense of myself. The inner personal journey was inseparable from the external exhibiting research project.

In her early work as a theologian, Heyward encountered the same personal issue.

“The question of authority touches all that I am and do,”²⁰ and concludes,

“The only one who can answer for me is me. There is no person, no book, no tradition, no Church, no story that is my authority, unless I know it as my own. Unless it is mine.”²¹

I concur with Heyward’s conclusions and with those of psychotherapist, Carl Rogers,

“Experience is for me the highest authority.”²²

The core content of this study is the nature of priestly ministry as it is perceived, appropriated and exercised by its practitioners. It has been necessary for me to undergo the identical process that I am exploring, before discovering the authority to complete the thesis. Thus I place this section of autobiographical material as an introduction rather than a conclusion of the research. I intend the conclusions to relate more directly to the interview data. For each priest in training, they must begin to discover for themselves that “Being a priest is internal. It is how the clergy feel about themselves which is expressed in their priestly persona.”²³

²⁰ Carter Heyward, A Priest Forever: One Woman’s Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church, (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1976), p.68.

²¹ Heyward, A Priest Forever, pp.67-68.

²² Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person – A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy, Revised edition. (London: Constable, 2004), p.23.

²³ Yvonne Warren, The Cracked Pot – The state of today’s Anglican parish clergy (Stowmarket: K. Mayhew, 2002), pp.154/5.

By the end of the research I was to discover that it was not only my curacy but other diverse experiences that inhibited progress as both researcher and training incumbent. The need for me to integrate previous life experience into my priestly persona gained a priority and importance that I could never have previously acknowledged. Sometimes the process required outside help of psychotherapist or spiritual director, sometimes the support of colleagues, sometimes I managed it alone. I learned that maturity of being and associated personal integration is achieved at a cost, and that I must take responsibility for making it happen. As the deadline for the research approached the physical symptoms had not gone disappeared, but I had begun to learn to recognise the ways in which my past affected my thinking and my behaviour. Parishioners and family identified my increased self confidence and more relaxed demeanour. I grew in self knowledge and personal autonomy, I identified a future career path that I would not previously have contemplated, I got a new job, I flourished. There is little doubt that this must have consciously and sub-consciously influenced the direction of the research, but in ways of which I was aware, and which enriched and affirmed the findings.

I am sure every vocation, priestly or other, benefits from an increase in personal integration and an understanding of ourselves such that we gain insights into the reasons we find some situations and people more difficult to respond to in all together rational ways. For an individual, the process is empowering, for the Christian humbling, for the priestly leader it becomes a valuable aid in offering the same tolerance and level of understanding to the myriad of different people with whom he or she has contact, for the training incumbent it is essential in nurturing that self understanding in another priest.

Relevance

There has been other work done on the efficacy of curacies. Most notable Neil Burgess published, 'Into Deep Water'²⁴. He encountered the same themes of poorly matched training incumbents and curates, conflict and resentment in their relationships, under utilised gifts and poor accountability, that had been evident in my own experience. It was tempting to wonder if anything could ever change. The Hind Report made recommendations for improvement in 2003, yet eight years later in September 2011, further research was still commissioned in response to bishops' concerns that training processes were not producing the incumbents that bishops were seeking. The Church of England's Research and Statistics Department, led by Ian Aveyard, produced the subsequent report in September 2011. The main findings were that from selection through training to first post of responsibility within a parish, clergy's vision of ministry narrowed whilst the context in which they would work increasingly became more diverse. Parishes increasingly comprised multi-parish units which needed ministers of "wide sympathy and understanding"²⁵ and, especially pertinent to this research, at the end of the curacy insufficient numbers of clergy were sufficiently competent to run a parish.

One of the reports conclusions was that,

Too many curacies fail to achieve their potential. Often diocesan decisions about the placement of curates are distorted by the location of housing, benefices that are traditional 'training parishes' and good incumbents who prove less than good trainers. Ordinands are told to seek good 'chemistry' between themselves and their incumbent, so recommending good matches requires that diocesan authorities take care to understand the people involved. When a curacy is failing to work well, not only does it involve the direct participants, but other curates lose confidence if remedial action appears dilatory.²⁶

²⁴ Neil Burgess, Into Deep Water, (Stowmarket: K.Mayhew, 1998)

²⁵ Archbishops' Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

²⁶ Archbishops' Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.3.

Over 13 years, from Burgess through Hind to Aveyard, deep problems were not finding ready solutions. It was not as though nothing had changed during those years. Regional Training Partnerships (RTPs) had been set up to ensure the course and college based training of IME 1-3 related more closely to the practical training in the parish of IME 4-7 and college courses were accordingly being rigorously inspected. Dioceses were experimenting with new methods of curacy training, for example Oxford Diocese moved to evidence based portfolios, recording development and competencies, yet still I heard too many informal anecdotes referring to ‘bad’ curacies. I became personally involved across IME 1-7, as college tutor and curate trainer, and became even more determined to hear the experience of mature curates and contribute to the debate myself.

I was aware of an imbalance of authority. The voice of the training institution was more readily heard than the voice of the less powerful curate. Curates’ concerns were dismissed because, ‘Curates always complain about their curacies.’ I concluded it was important to examine the perspectives of those receiving rather than delivering post ordination training and especially ones within the growing cohort of those over forty years of age. These mature trainees had much to offer in terms of previous life experience both within and outside the church, but needed to be deployed efficiently in order to recoup the cost of training them for a church whose financial resources were also declining. Another voice in the debate, hopefully offering new perspectives, had the potential to add new insights, clarity and focus to the existing research. From within structures of the church, it was clear that many clergy had well developed skills of self expression, report writing and pronouncement but were equally cautious about articulating and owning those opinions to

those with power to influence their future moves, further up the church hierarchy. It became increasingly important to offer the trainees an open microphone, rather than direct any questioning too closely. I determined to explore the ways in which this could be effected, the content of which constitutes my next chapter.

2. METHODOLOGY

The nature of the research project

The research project is a product of contextual theology and qualitative research. The intention is that the exploration results in recommendations for future training in order to better prepare curates to take up their posts of first responsibility within the twenty first century church. The research is fundamentally contextual and experiential in nature and any methodology and methods adopted must reflect this. The researcher is a particular type of participant observer, not someone who has chosen to immerse herself in the context for the purpose of research, but someone whose research project emerges from the context the researcher already inhabits. For this research to have validity in the academy, this perspective must also be explored and validated. Substantial autobiographical material has already been introduced as rationale for the task. It is for these reasons that a consideration of suitable methodologies begins with a consideration of context. The task is distinctly Christian, adherence to a particular faith and ideology being central to the task of training Christian leaders in the Church of England. I begin by exploring the importance of context in the theological task, followed by consideration of the qualitative nature of the research to demonstrate that the two disciplines are complementary and compatible.

The importance of context in theology.

Russell, a theologian of the feminist tradition, links a serious consideration of context with making connections and deduces that.

“Things are viewed and interpreted differently according to how and to whom they are connected.”¹

The aim of this research is to make connections between the articulated experience of the curacies of mature priests, the observations of the shortcomings of training by experts in the Church of England and an understanding of the nature of priesthood within the changing culture of the twenty first century. The method is inductive because it moves from experience to reflection and interpretation of that experience to make practical recommendations for changes in training. The primacy of context in the process has the potential to enrich the research process but also to challenge its validity. The experiences recorded will be authentic, but interpretation can never be objective. A historical positivist approach to research values provable outcomes from verifiable data. This assumes one correct truth, or deduction from gathered data. A contextual approach challenges that this is either possible or desirable.

Russell challenges any methodology which seeks to elevate any one perceived truth over another and proposes that theological methods must

“... take into account the struggle to move beyond the competitive and hierarchical forms of patriarchal methods, which seek a truth which is secure in the vanquishing of all other truths.”²

She regards her feminist paradigm as not primarily concerning hearing the stories of women and being their advocate but rather as part of a search for liberation and empowerment for all who find themselves oppressed as a result of hierarchical structures and pathologies.

¹ Letty Russell, Church in the Round – Feminist Interpretation of the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 32.

² Russell, Church in the Round, p.32.

“... from my point of view as a feminist theologian it (*feminism*) represents a search for liberation from all forms of dehumanization on the part of those who advocate full human personhood for all of every race, class, sex, sexual orientation, ability and age.”³

Bevans regards the contextualization of theology as a theological imperative and defines it as,

“... the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context.”⁴ He acknowledges the complexity of the task in appropriating past tradition and owning it in the present. He identifies the influence of each individual’s life story, personal and communal, in the process which itself is influenced by the surrounding culture. In identifying and naming the predominant influences on this research, it is in so doing that interpretative lenses are acknowledged rather than denied, and validity and authenticity is achieved.

Researcher’s context

It is as important to explore the context from which the researcher has come as the context of the research in order to acknowledge any potential attitudes or influences the researcher may have, consciously or unconsciously, on the direction of the research. As May notes the relationship of researcher and researched are inextricably linked and it never possible to be totally detached.⁵ Methods will be adopted to minimise the influence of any preconceived hypotheses of the researcher and hear the authentic experience of the interviewees, but there is an element of interpretation in collating the data and drawing relevant conclusions

³ Russell, Church in the Round, p.22.

⁴ Stephen Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, Revised Edition, (New York: Orbis Books,2002), p.3.

⁵ Tim May, Social research – Issues, Methods and Processes (Maidenhead: OUP, 2001), p.21.

that is affected by the researcher's philosophy and background. It is this interface of data and researcher that offers the possibility of new insights and outcomes.

The opening autobiographical material identifies the author's personal experience of prejudice in exploring calling to priesthood. Throughout my journey, faith and education have been liberating and empowering influences and have contributed to the challenges I have faced and the ongoing personal development in maturity and self awareness. It is natural to draw on paradigms of liberation and feminism in approaching the research project. Liberation theology was groundbreaking in moving authority in theology from the academy to the ordinary believer. It established experience as authoritative a starting point as theory in the theological task and understood hearing the voice of the people as the beginning of their empowerment in a hierarchical societal and church structure. This has immediate parallels in hearing the voices of trainee priests and according those voices authority in evaluating the training process.

Liberation theology was an influential force in the second half of the twentieth century but in contemporary thought is more often developed through its derivative groups including feminist, womanist, black, Asian and green theologies. The fundamental principle of any such theology of liberation is that there is greater authenticity when the task is undertaken by those inhabiting the culture than when carried out by onlookers. This is more easily achieved at the popular level, but should still be an aim at the professional or academic level. Leonardo and Clodivis Boff offered some foundational insights into the use of liberation theology and offer a useful table identifying three levels of liberation theology, professional, pastoral and popular, reproduced overleaf.

The Three Levels of Liberation Theology⁶

	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Pastoral</i>	<i>Popular</i>
<i>Discourse</i>	Detailed and rigorous	Organically related to practice	Diffuse and capillary, almost spontaneous
<i>Logic</i>	The logic of erudition: methodical, systematic, dynamic	The logic of action: specific, prophetic, propulsive	The logic of life: in words and deeds, sacramental
<i>Method</i>	socio-analytical, hermeneutical, and theoretico-practical	Seeing, judging, acting	Confrontation: the gospel and life
<i>Locus</i>	Theological institutes, seminaries	Pastoral institutes, study centers	Bible study groups, base communities
<i>Promoted through</i>	Theological congresses	Pastoral congresses	Training courses
<i>Practitioners</i>	Theologians, professors, teachers	Pastoral ministers priests, religious, lay persons	Members of base communities and their coordinators
<i>Spoken works</i>	Conference papers, lectures, seminar papers	Sermons, talks	Commentaries, celebrations, dramatizations
<i>Written works</i>	Books, articles	Pastoral instructions, guidelines	Notes, letters

The indicators in the tables are not identical to the structure and process of this research, though there are sufficient parallels for them to be relevant and form useful tools for structuring the project. For example, the researcher inhabits the category of professional and pastoral, the discourse is detailed and rigorous and organically related to practice. The categorisation becomes ‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’. There is a logic of erudition and of action with the researcher and a logic of confrontation with the researched. The different methods defined by the Boffs are especially pertinent, as the use of praxis method that unfolds in this research is a development of the seeing, judging, acting method employed by the pastoral priests and ministers, whereas the immediacy of their curacy experience places the curates at the level of popular and a confrontation with the Gospel and life. Researcher and researched are drawing on elements of each level. This could be

⁶ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Liberation Theology (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1987), p.13.

anticipated as the researcher stands in shoes of priest and theologian, seeking to contribute to academy and practice and in the context of this research curates stand in shoes of priest and the people as trainee leaders but also those whose experience of training is the object of research.

The Boffs describe this as a schematic table indicating how the three levels relate in an integrated and integrating way. There is nothing to prevent those involved in a theology of liberation operating at more than one level.

..the most obvious integration is at the intermediate level, that of pastoral liberation theology, This is seen most clearly at church conferences, where you can find pastoral ministers – bishops, priests, religious, and lay persons – telling of their problems, Christians from base communities recounting their experiences, and theologians contributing their insights, deepening the meaning of the events under discussion and drawing conclusions from them.⁷

So in this research the researcher priest presents the problem within curate training, the curates recount their experiences, the insights of theologians are drawn on in the reflection, all deepening the meaning of the events and leading to conclusions being drawn. This research draws on significant insights from the paradigm of liberation.

Initial analysis of the research interviews was to introduce a dilemma as theologically aware priests in training did not consistently reflect objectively on their experiences. The table helps explain the reason. For some of the interviewees experiences are too close and too emotional. They have not yet achieved the distance enough to process the experience effectively and their discourse was spontaneous. Another classic writer in the field of liberation and education, Paulo Freire notes,

⁷ Boff and Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, p.15.

“One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness.”⁸

A consideration of methodologies underpinning the research and ensuing selection of appropriate methods not only facilitates the research process but also helps ensure the interviewees are moved from disempowerment to empowerment, an important ethical consideration. Oppression is a theme of liberation, the intention of liberation is that, at the Boff’s level of the popular, those perceiving their experience as oppressive are empowered by education, study and reflection to take control of and remedy their situation.

Feminist and postmodernist influences

The opening autobiographical material reveals a feminist paradigm. Feminist theologians are acutely aware that both history and tradition have been recorded almost exclusively through a male interpretative lens. Historical documents have arisen from a culture where hierarchical and patriarchal models were prevalent and in which the female voice and person was silent. The result has been that the foundational documents of the faith, including the Bible, have been written, translated and interpreted in a male hierarchical paradigm which has reinforced an unjust, inferior and subjugated status in society for women. A feminist paradigm seeks to restore the female voice, challenge the oppression of women and establish equality of status and choice. Within this paradigm it is important that researcher and researched inhabit the same culture, thus as only women can authentically interpret other women’s experiences, it follows that only someone who has

⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p.6.

experienced IME 4-7 in the Church of England who can authentically hear and understand the stories of his or her contemporaries.⁹

Whilst the research is not explicitly feminist, and care has been taken to sample equal numbers of men and women, the researcher has experienced gender prejudice and is sensitised to the incidence of power abuse and oppression consequent of a historically hierarchical church structure. Legislation to allow women to be ordained priest in the Church of England was not passed until 1993 and the first women ordained in 1994. This move is still not received and accepted throughout the church at the time of writing. Where any such inequality of opportunity exists, misuse of positional power has the potential to further disempower women. It is also important that women priests do not adopt the pre-existing patriarchal and hierarchical models of working and relating as to do so does not facilitate change but reinforces the historical inequalities. Rubin and Rubin note that in paying particular attention to issues of dominance and submission, feminist theory prioritises the building of relationships and the use of gentler methods of gathering data that intentionally humanise rather than objectivise the interviewee.¹⁰

Research context

The subject of the research is experiential, it is an exploration of the experience of training as priests as lived and described by the trainees. The material is inevitable subjective in nature and conclusions will be drawn according to the degree of commonality and correlation of experience. It is social research as it explores the way in which human

⁹ See H. Arksey and P. Knight, Interviewing for Social Scientists (London: Sage Publications, 1999), p.12/13 for a summary of feminist research approaches.

¹⁰ H.J.Rubin and I.S. Rubin, Qualitative Data – the art of hearing data (California: Sage Publications, 2005), p.26.

beings relate to each other and the detail of the articulated experience is important. It is as important to define the curates' response to their training as to identify the nature of the training and falls within the descriptor of qualitative research. The research project is both theological and qualitative, both elements are complementary, but can only be so if they are approached from consistent paradigms. I intend to consider both elements separately in order to maintain each discipline's integrity and then demonstrate how their use together is both logical, compatible and necessary.

Theological considerations

Firstly theology, the theology is contextual, that is to say it recognises that present human experience, culture, tradition and its expression is a significant influence on the task. There has always been a dilemma present within theological study relating to the understanding of truthful action. In Christianity the revelation of truth is believed to be mediated through the life and witness of Jesus Christ. This is a foundational belief. The challenge arises as that truth is interpreted differently across different cultures and centuries. For example, over time Christians understanding of key concepts has changed. Where once the Bible clearly describes slavery as acceptable and was used for the justification of the ownership and subjugation of one individual Christian by another, the Bible was later used as justification for considering slavery contrary to God's will for his created world and abolishing it on the grounds that all people are equal before God. How can slavery be both acceptable and unacceptable? In the history of theological study, classical theology understood the discipline as one which led to objective truth based on the two components of scripture and tradition which remain unaltered through time and across cultures.

In the process of translating faith into action, contextual theology recognises the validity of a third component of experience, recognising human qualities of reason and the lived expression of faith. This introduces the possibility of variations of interpretation according to variables of time and culture. This third component relates to context. Bevans quotes Karl Rahner in this revolutionary change in thinking of validating context as being characterised by a “turn to the subjective at the beginning of modern times.”¹¹ Whereas classical theology methods prized objectivity, contextual theology is unapologetically subjective. Contextual theology denies the possibility of one single and timeless objective truth, and understands all human interpretation as being culturally conditioned, but attaining truth in acknowledging that influence. It recognises that all historical and classical interpretations of faith and scripture emerged from a specific cultural context and are never value free. Contextual theology does not deny the findings of classical theology or declare them invalid but incorporates them as an essential historical component of the contemporary context. This understanding is pivotal to this research project where the researcher is open to the possibility that methods of training Christian leaders will need to change dependent on the age and life experience of the trainees and the presenting needs of the church, but must also be compatible with Christian teaching and practice as received by a new generation. For those that are concerned that consideration of context alters or changes the original Christian imperative, Bevans quotes Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,

¹¹Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p.4 citing Karl Rahner’s essay *The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions* in Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol.4. (Baltimore: Helicon Press and London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1966), p.324.

“...what matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures, always taking the person as one’s starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.”¹²

Paul VI makes clear the Christian faith ceases to be relevant to everyday life and relationships if context is not taken seriously. As contextual theology combines the strands of scripture, tradition and context, the challenge is to assess the priority of each strand in a particular scenario.

Bevans¹³ offers different models of contextual theology which ascribe differing priority to context. They range from the most conservative, the countercultural model which is more suspicious and distrustful of context as being authentically revelatory to the most radical, the anthropological model, which accords greater authority to context or cultural identity. Whilst each model is also more readily applicable to different tasks, it is important in this research project to achieve a reasonable and appropriate balance between all three strands. The task of training Christian leaders is central to the teaching and continuance of the faith and must be congruent with historical Christian teaching and tradition and be applicable to the contemporary context. Over emphasis on context risks introducing a secular training method that does not honour the explicitly Christian nature of the task, risks unacceptable alterations to the foundational tenets of the faith, leading to an outcome where the task ceases to be Christian. Over emphasis on the past and a historical understanding of the faith risks training becoming sterile and disconnected with the world in which the priest

¹² Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi- Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), p.20 quoted in Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, p.15.

¹³ Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, p.31f.

will operate, so rendering the faith irrelevant. Experience of past and present must be held in tension whilst authenticity is retained.

A more classical presentation of this dilemma is offered by Niebuhr who presents the tension of interpretation as between Christ and culture, and most modern models of doing theology owe much to his work,¹⁴ including Dulles who applied the thinking to models of the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald and servant.¹⁵

The task of this research is to find a model which is applicable and relevant for the training of curates across a diverse range of Christian leadership styles and models of church, a model that simultaneously explores the issues in depth and leads readily to new practice. Bevan's Praxis Model, sometimes termed the Pastoral Cycle or Spiral¹⁶ is a familiar model and has been frequently utilised in liberation theologies where empowerment as well as changed behaviours are desired outcomes. This resonates with my own autobiography and anecdotal evidence from contemporaries who reported feeling deskilled during training. This is not a new phenomenon, Burgess also notes in his research that a significant number of his interviewees described occasions when trainers had underestimated curates' skills.¹⁷

The advantage of the model is that it begins with experience, moves on to exploration or analysis of findings, followed by a reflection stage leading to an action or outcome. This offers the opportunity to begin with experience and introduce traditional insights at the

¹⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1951) and see also A. Dulles, Models of Revelation (New York: Doubleday, 1983)

¹⁵ Avery Dulles, Models of the Church – A critical assessment of the church in all its aspects (London: Gill and MacMillan, 1976)

¹⁶ see Laurie Green, Let's Do Theology – pastoral cycle resource book (London: Mowbray, 1990)

¹⁷ Neil Burgess, Into Deep Water – the experience of curates in the Church of England (Bury St Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew, 1998), p.82f.

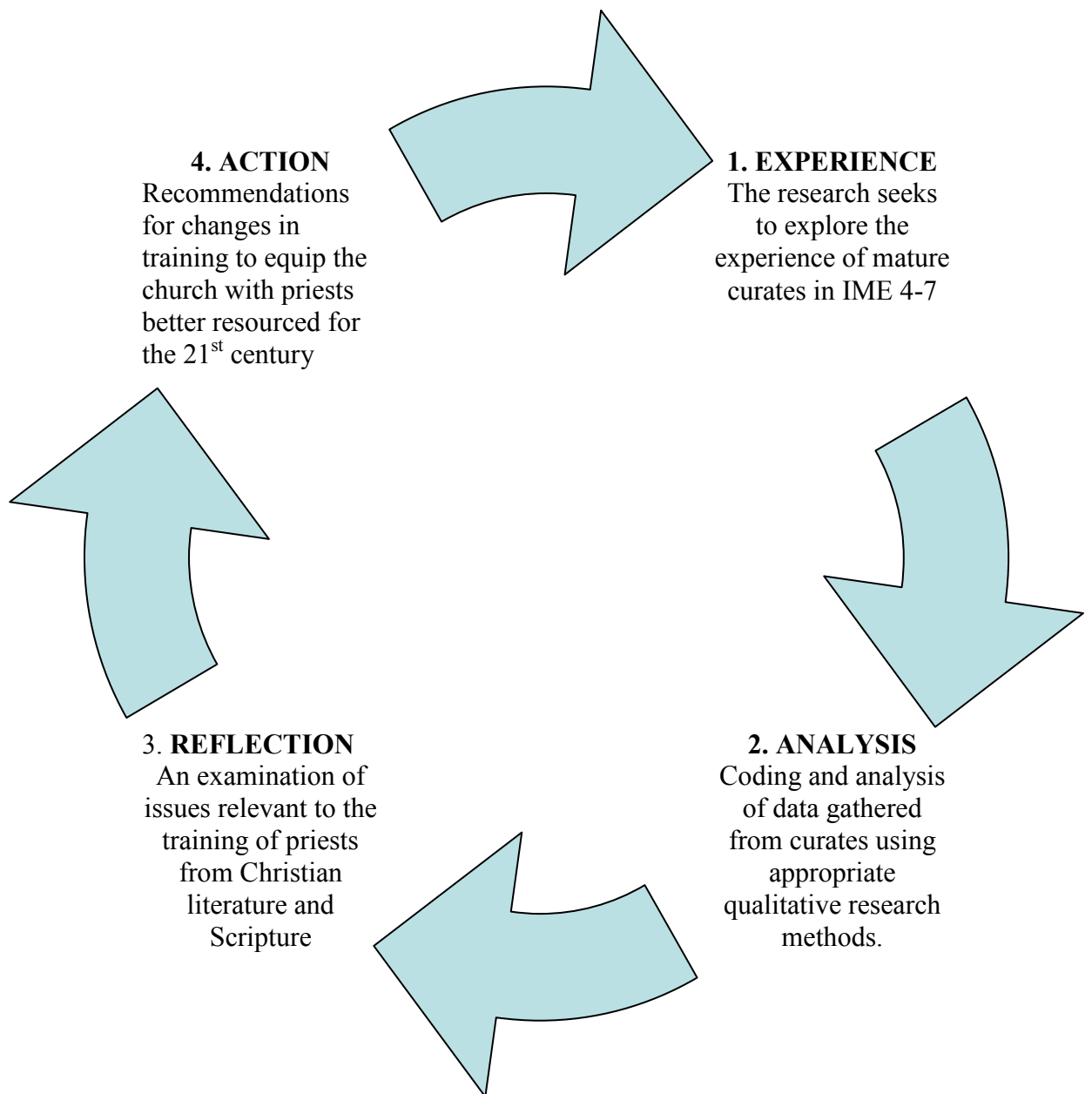


Diagram illustrating the use of Bevan's Praxis Model

reflection stage. It is best illustrated in diagram form, see above. Initial suggestions of content at each stage of the process are included, but can be refined as the full research methodology and research methods are identified. It is also easy to develop the circle into a

spiral as any final recommendations for training can be again practised, analysed, reflected upon and further researched in a continuing cycle. The advantage of identifying a contextual theological research method is not to constrain the research but to offer a framework which will encourage discipline, direction and rigour in the research process so avoiding muddled thinking and vagueness.

Qualitative research methods

Within any research project a decision must be made as to whether quantitative or qualitative research methods are most appropriate. With a statistical starting point, some quantitative methods have already been used as the changing average age of curates has been analysed within the Hind report and used as evidence that the researcher's hunch is in fact based on hard evidence. Simply, it is provable by counting up the curates ordained each year and noting their ages. But this research project demands much greater detail, exploring not only what happens during curate training but how the trainees, the curates have experienced that training. Quantitative data is numerical, measurable and capable of statistical analysis. Qualitative data is often described as 'thicker'¹⁸, it indicates the depth, detail and richness that can be gained by interviewing the target group, in this case the mature curates. Whilst positivism and empiricism, associated with quantitative methods, suggest that there are facts that can be gathered about a specific context individually of how an individual experiences them, central to this research is each individual's interpretation of his or her experience. The desired outcome is to introduce changes within IME 4-7 which will facilitate an environment in which the learner flourishes. A constituent element of that flourishing is the individual curate's degree of self

¹⁸ see for example Arksey and Knight, Interviewing for Social Scientists (London: Sage, 1999), p.54 and Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing, p.13.

worth and self esteem. Furthermore, part of that training involves the development of a personal understanding of priestly identity, an intangible reality which defies empirical measurement.

In a research context where objectivity associated with quantitative methods is employed, the intention is to gather data which has not been altered by an individual's interpretative process. Within this research the interviewees' interpretations of their training experience are critical to their self understanding. Throughout their training progression from newly ordained to experienced priest, curates' self understanding as maturing adult and maturing priest become coterminous and the two aspects of self become inseparable. Thus the meaning each curate places on his or her experience is pivotal to the whole training process.

The core goal of the research is not the testing of a theory but describing and understanding a complex lived experience so as to create a basis for action and reform. There are different methodologies associated with qualitative research and differing results will be obtained according to the consequent methods selected. Creswell undertook useful research in this regard. He subjected a single case study to analysis using different qualitative research methods and demonstrated the differing outcomes achieved.¹⁹ It is therefore important that the correct methodology is selected and that methodology and method are compatible.

¹⁹ John W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, (London: Sage, 1998)

Phenomenology

Several established methods of undertaking qualitative research make a contribution to understanding the issues involved in the proposed research project. Denscombe²⁰ comments on the approaches and outcomes associated with a phenomenological approach to research. He notes an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity, description rather than analysis, interpretation rather than measurement and agency rather than structure and understands a phenomenological approach as dealing with individual's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs and feelings and emotions. In summary, "Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on how life is experienced."²¹

Initially a phenomenological approach appears compatible with the nature of this research and desired outcomes. The individual's personal experience is taken seriously and feelings and emotions valued. However a purely phenomenological will produce conclusions that are more descriptive than analytical, prioritizing an accurate description of the other's experience over recommendations for improved practice or changed behaviours. It is hoped that the conclusions of the research will be recommendations for future training in IME 4-7 that can improve the training experience of mature curates and enable the church to utilize their gifts and experience more effectively. Not only must the methodology selected incorporate the analysis of stories heard, but also lead to new training methods being developed.

This research is phenomenological in nature and in that it offers insights into the way in which specific groups can hold a shared understanding of a reality which may differ from

²⁰ Martyn Denscombe, The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), p.96.

²¹ Denscombe, The Good Research Guide, p.97.

other groups, but falls short of recommending specific changes. My hunch is that such an insight is important in exploring ways in which the training of a priest may differ from other professional education and training models but does not offer sufficient scope for change.

Grounded Theory

It is in moving from pure description to analysis that a grounded theory approach has a valuable contribution to make. Grounded theory values human experience yet provides a structure which can produce recommendations for change and improvement within a specific context. Denscombe notes that a grounded theory approach is especially suitable for “small-scale projects using qualitative data for the study of human interaction, and by those whose research is exploratory and focused on particular settings”²² A grounded theory approach entails gradually building up a theory whilst the research is in process. Strict adherence to this system in this research context would involve generating a provisional hypothesis after one interview and then testing that hypothesis with the next and ongoing interviewees. Questions are adjusted to reduce variables and confirm the emerging hypothesis as the interviews progress.

In the context of this research project, the concern again arises that interviewees will not be given the required freedom to tell their story but be directed in the areas they discuss in order to support or challenge an emerging theory. Furthermore, the number of interviews necessary to generate the final theory would be too many and too unmanageable within time and length constraints. The researcher’s affirmed intention is to allow interviewees to

²² Denscombe, The Good Research Guide, p.109.

tell their stories and then analyse the gathered data for similarities and correlations from which suggestions for change may be made. Grounded theory does contribute to an emerging methodology for this research in validating an approach which allows the empirical data to generate the theory in an inductive way rather than testing a previously determined hypothesis, but is limited in terms of empowering the interviewees.

Case Studies

Case studies²³ offer another conventional approach to qualitative research. This is an approach usually characterised by focussing on only one instance of the identified object of research. Usually one example of the presenting phenomenon is studied in great detail. It would be to stretch the point too far to regard this research as a group of small case studies as the driving factor is to compare the experience of several mature curators drawn from differing contexts in order to discover common themes. A strictly 'case study' approach thus is of limited application within this piece of research. The intention is to gain an overview of several different experiences of curacy rather than study a specific example of a curacy in great detail.

Action Research

An action research approach suggested itself as relevant to a research project which is sourced in a context of work experience and seeks definite outcomes or changes in practice. Denscombe²⁴ identifies the four distinctive characteristics of action research as involving practical, real life issues, bringing about change, including participant practitioners and leading to a continuing cyclical re-evaluation of practice. The first two

²³ See Denscombe, The Good Research Guide, chapter 2 for more detail of this approach to research.

²⁴ Denscombe, The Good Research Guide, p.73f.

criteria are easily fulfilled but the latter two are more difficult to assume. The integrity of an action research strategy requires those practitioners participating in the research to have direct input into findings and for the research to be ongoing as change in practice is effected. In this research project, the researcher acts as participant observer and participant practitioner but retains influence on findings whilst interviewees are not involved beyond the gathering of data. An action research approach is tremendously time consuming conducted alongside full time work, and it was considered neither desirable nor practical to involve interviewees in developing findings.

Similarly it became evident that several of the interviewees had experienced their curacies as significant personal crisis points and it was neither ethical in terms of their recovery nor valuable in terms of their objectivity to include them beyond the interview stage. Whilst it was intended that definite recommendations for changes in training would be made, it was not manageable within a diverse diocesan system within the Church of England to anticipate those changes could or would be delivered uniformly or that further ongoing research could be undertaken. One particular insight gained from the consideration of an action research process was the value of “a shift in the direction of *democratizing the research process*”²⁵ It was important that the direction that the research took could be influenced by the interviewees as well as the researcher. It was important that mature curates with their considerable life experience could feel a sense of ownership in the research, rather than have any sense of powerlessness in the process of training being reinforced. This would be partially achieved by the use of open ended interviewing rather

²⁵ Denscombe, The Good Research Guide, p.77. (author’s italics)

than questionnaires or structured interviews so that interviewees could determine the direction the interviews would take.

Preliminary findings

The direction the research would take was becoming clearer. The pre-existing liberation and feminism influences on the researcher required that interviewees were not disempowered by the interview process and hopefully would be empowered to process their IME 4-7 experience more effectively. Context would be accorded value, in that the articulated experience of the curates would be valued with minimal interpretation by the researcher. No judgement would be made as to the correctness of their recorded perceptions. Whilst the research did not have an explicitly feminist focus, care would be taken to minimise the inherent potential of the misuse of positional power by the researcher during interviews. Congruent with liberation theology a pastoral cycle or praxis method would be adopted. Qualitative research methods had the potential to offer thick descriptions and contribute to a phenomenological understanding of the importance of hearing how life is experienced by mature curates in the Church of England.

Consideration of grounded theory contributed to the process of justifying an inductive method of moving from interview data to findings without the necessity to introduce preconceived hypotheses. A case study approach was going to be of limited use as it was the breadth of experience of curates that was important rather than too limited a focus on any one area of training. An understanding of action research reinforced the need to democratize the research as far as was possible within parameters of time and church structures. It was becoming increasingly important that mature curates in training, perhaps

all curates in training would be able to own the research. Initial conclusions suggested contextual theology and especially the use of the praxis model fitted easily with the use of qualitative research methods.

Contextual theology and qualitative research

Swinton and Mowat have written extensively on the compatibility of qualitative research methods with practical theology. They use the phrase practical theology and offer a definition,

“Practical Theology is critical theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices, in, to and for the world.”²⁶

They define the task of the practical theologian as

“... to excavate particular situations and to explore the nature and faithfulness of the practices that take place within them.”²⁷

Thus practical theology is theology which is contextual in character and encourages ongoing reflection on practice in order to maintain integrity of action and belief.

“a performed and embodied act”²⁸ and conclude that “The idea of faithful performance is key.”²⁹

They affirm the authority of the individual’s expression of faith regarding belief as only becoming real or relevant when lived out or embodied in a human life. `

²⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research (London: SCM press, 2006), p.6.

²⁷ Swinton and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, p.viii.

²⁸ Swinton and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, p.5.

²⁹ Swinton and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, p.4.

It is this explicit articulation of faith that presents a dilemma when employing qualitative research methods from a secular discipline of social science. The researcher is a Christian priest studying the way Christian priests are trained. This is not an objective study of how any training should take place but an exploration of how specifically Christian training for future Christian leadership should be undertaken. A concern is that the training should have integrity of purpose and of process.

Clarity of purpose requires acknowledgement that the trainee must be a Christian believer who when trained will lead and nurture other Christian believers in their faith and encourage other non believers to join them. Christianity is a proselytising faith. Similarly the process of training must demonstrate that it is undertaken in a way compatible with Christian teaching and tradition. The undertaking is not value free and can have integrity only when action is compatible with belief and process with outcome. Qualitative research methods ensure the validity of the research task by minimising the influence of bias. The question must be addressed whether the requirement of a distinctive and faithfully Christian outcome constrains the use of qualitative research method to the extent that a Christian bias is introduced so invalidating the task.

Swinton and Mowat are concerned that in undertaking practical theology and qualitative research, the integrity of either discipline is sacrificed for sake of the other. A purely qualitative approach would allow for non Christian outcomes, a purely theological approach could underestimate the complexity of human interaction. Swinton and Mowat conclude that it is insights from the field of action research which justify the use of the two disciplines together. They go so far as to term practical theology as a specific form of

action research, where the participants are Christian. This seems too simple a conclusion, practical theology and qualitative research have the potential to enrich each other's discipline but will always remain tense bedfellows. But it is in maintaining rather than minimising the tension that the creative potential of the combination lays.

Practical theology contributes to the discipline of qualitative research by challenging the researcher to demonstrate integrity of principle as well as achieving practical solutions to problems. The underlying issue being that all human researchers hold beliefs upon which they base practice, whether theistic or non theistic. Qualitative research contributes to the discipline of practical theology by reminding the believer that there is rarely one truthful outcome and alerting the theologian to the complexities of human social interaction. A caveat of any research project employing both disciplines must be that only outcomes having integrity within both schools will be considered valid. Potentially each discipline may have to sacrifice some directions of enquiry which are not compatible with the other. The resonant solutions will be those in the overlap of the circles of possibility. Thus whilst revelation and objective truth may appear inconsistent, revelatory truth must stand up to detailed analysis and objective truth must be able to contain the possibility of discovering the previously unknown.

The role of the participant observer within qualitative research is crucial as the within this research the participant observer acts as bridge between the disciplines in holding a personal integrity as believer and researcher. Within this research project, only a believing Christian can be fully immersed in the context to a sufficient extent that the context can be understood and explained.

The research emphasis on the priority of context makes the simultaneous use of theological and qualitative research method viable and compatible with contemporary postmodernist thought. A postmodernist approach challenges the possibility of discovering absolute truths and understands truth as applicable within specific cultures and contexts, so allowing for the co-existence of different, even opposing possibilities. This research appropriates an approach in postulating the use of practical theology and qualitative research in an attitude of mutual hospitality, the use of both/and rather than either/or, neither one is subsumed in the other, but both strengthen the task by challenging the potential weaknesses of the other. “... the open ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single umbrella-like paradigm over the whole project.”³⁰

Gathering the Data

Having explored and established the epistemological assumptions operative within the research, it is necessary to identify compatible research methods. To maintain integrity with liberation and feminist methodologies, the process of gathering data seeks to create a reservoir of relevant information whilst simultaneously empowering those who are the object of the research. Experience is the starting point of the preferred praxis model and pivotal to the process. Care must be taken to offer the interviewees as open a method of sharing that experience as is possible, so that their voices may be heard authentically and within the principles of action research in a way which gives them influence over the consequent direction of the research. Arksey and Knight note one of the features of

³⁰ Denzil and Lincoln, Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd Edition, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2000), p.xv, cited in Swinton and Mowatt, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, p.29.

unstructured interviews is that the direction is largely set by the informant.³¹ It followed that formulating questions for a questionnaire would be more directive and thus less suitable an approach than open ended interviews in which the curates set the agenda.

This presented the first challenge, the research would benefit from as wide a range of curates' accounts of their training as possible in order to justify any commonality as significant. It was important that interviewees were empowered by the process of being interviewed and that they were free to offer their own interpretations of their training experience. Unstructured interviews would be preferable to questionnaires as they were more likely to provide the space for the curates to tell their stories. Yet unstructured interviews tend to be longer in length than those with more structured questions. It was necessary to decide between number and length. In order to manage data handling and analysis, the number of unstructured interviews would have to be limited or if more structured questioning was used, the opportunity for the curates to have greater influence on the direction of the research would be limited. In order to honour the liberational aspirations of the research, it was decided to limit the number of interviews, so allowing them to be less structured and more open ended in nature. As varied a sample of mature curates as possible would be sought whilst limiting the acquired data to an amount a single researcher could process within a finite time limit.

Sampling

Silverman notes the need for qualitative researchers to overcome the temptation to anecdotalism and make every attempt to ensure that conclusions are genuinely based on

³¹ Arksey and Knight, Interviewing for Social Scientists, (London: Sage, 1999), p.7.

critical investigation.³² Findings, especially using a small sample, need to be representative of a wider body of experience rather than particular to an individual.

Assuming it would require a minimum of one hour of conversation for interviewees to explore their curacies, it was decided to limit interviews to six mature curates over the age of forty. The validity of the research required that the reduced number of interviews covered as broad a variety of curacies as possible. Within the sample, diversity of churchmanship and training would be achieved by selecting curates who had undertaken IME 1-3 at different residential theological colleges and completed IME 4-7 in different dioceses. The different theological colleges at which the curates had undertaken IME 1-3 potentially introduced differing expectations of training to the curates and different dioceses have varying training provision and operate independently of one another. A gender balance would be maintained by choosing three men and three women.

A random selection was made using Crockford's Clerical Directory³³ selecting one interviewee from the alumni of different residential theological colleges across the country. There are eleven residential theological colleges in England, so care was taken that the sample of six included a range of churchmanships and covered as wide a range of geographical location as possible. It was unclear how much dioceses differed in interpreting the centrally produced guidelines for IME 4-7, so a similarly broad geographical range of dioceses was selected, ranging from North to Southern England and West to East and curates ordained deacon at a similar time were chosen, between 2001 and 2003. The intention was that the curacy would be complete and next post found.

³² David Silverman, Doing Qualitative Research - A practical handbook, 2nd Edition. (London: Sage, 2005), p.211.

³³ www.crockford.org.uk

In each case the first name from the alumni lists that fulfilled the required criteria and agreed to take part in the research was used. In the event it became increasingly difficult to fulfil the criteria as the sixth interviewee was selected. All were approached by email, giving the title of the research and a brief indication that an open interview of approximately one hour duration would be conducted in which they would be invited to share the joys and sorrows of their curacies. Every attempt was made to obtain a valid manageable sample and not to 'choose' those perceived to be potentially good respondents. All those who were approached agreed to take part, although there was some delay in finding unpressured time in researcher's and respondents' diaries. The sampling was purposive in geographical spread and diversity of churchmanship, but random once these criteria were met.

Establishing rapport in the interviews

The decision to undertake unstructured interviews was risky. Unstructured interviews rely heavily on the interviewer establishing rapport with the interviewee.³⁴ Arksey notes that rapport is best established when interviews take place in comfortable and familiar surroundings.³⁵ The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes in all but one instance. One respondent living close to me chose to visit my home rather than experience likely interruption in his own home.

I was aware of the responsibility placed on the researcher of establishing a relaxed environment of trust in order that interviewees felt confident to share in depth information

³⁴ Arksey and Knight, Interviewing for Social Scientists, p.9.

³⁵ Arksey and Knight, Interviewing for Social Scientists, p101.

in the interviews. However, I was confident this could be established because I had previous counselling experience and knowledge of listening skills. Even so an interview method reliant on active listening skills also required that the researcher maintained concentration levels and remained alert throughout the interviews, or important issues requiring clarification or explanation might be missed. I had estimated I could maintain a high level of concentration in listening for about one hour. My previous experience in active listening had been in a counselling context using person centred counselling methods. Here an hour was the conventional time for an interview. This was a duration I was experienced in pacing and could estimate without having to look at a watch or clock too often. Listening skills employed in both contexts were anticipated to be similar. In person centred counselling the emphasis is placed on creating a positive environment of empathy and trust which facilitates the telling of the client's story.

Recording the Interview

The method of recording needed to be unintrusive, causing as little interruption to the free flow of conversation as possible. Note taking was out of the question as eye contact and the use of active listening skills were to be vital in establishing the required listening environment. The interview would be recorded using a digital voice recorder. Whilst this might introduce an initial hesitancy in talking by the interviewee, my experience was that this soon disappeared if other techniques were employed to help them tell their stories.

Conducting the Interview

I remained unsure the degree to which prompting may be necessary in order to help the curates tell their stories. I decided to conduct an initial unstructured interview and use

prompting for purposes of clarification, greater detail or moving on to new areas. I would offer brief summaries of what had been said to reassure the interviewee that he or she was being closely listened to and that his or her contributions were considered valuable, paraphrasing is also a useful technique if the interview slows or stalls. These interventions were not predetermined as the aim was to test the feasibility of using as little structure as possible in the acquisition of a narrative. I concentrated on creating an environment of trust and empathy, in which each interviewee could tell their story freely and anonymously, using their own vocabulary and style and then to explore afterwards how best to analyse the content.

Whilst the first interview was not primarily identified as a pilot, I was keen to observe whether such open ended interview technique would produce valuable data and was prepared to revisit this approach if necessary. The first interviewee concluded, “I shall be very interested to read the transcript when it comes back, some of the things that came out. I wasn’t expecting them to come out, be interesting. Your questions were very perceptive.”³⁶

I concluded that the emphasis in creating an environment of trust had been successful. The storyteller was free to tell her story. She had perceived that this was the result of my questions, when these questions had almost exclusively been reflecting back previous conversation and paraphrasing. Reflecting back does not introduce new material but can be a useful technique in prioritising or refocusing, by referring back to previous material. It can be used to expand or encourage elaboration yet without direct questioning. eg ‘You

³⁶ This quote is used again emphasising as it does both the value of the interview technique and self awareness developed by reflective working

mentioned earlier' and 'I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about that.' Other brief comments such as 'That's interesting' or 'Really' followed by a précis of previous conversation, encourage greater depth.

Brief questions were asked for purposes of clarification, 'Do you mean....?' or even a repeated word used with a questioning intonation. Simple probes helped manage the conversation for example a continuation probe such as 'and....?', or even 'Uh, huh..', or evidence probes like, 'Were there any other occasions when you experienced that?' The speaker responds to the quality of the listener's presence, rather than direct questions. Rather than a questioner, I had been an active listener. Techniques of attending and active listening can be found in many counselling texts.³⁷ The remaining interviews were completed in a similar manner.

Anonymity.

A colleague with responsibility for overseeing IME 4-7 in the diocese where I had previously worked, suggested that interviews with curates would have greater chance of success if they were conducted by someone outside the reporting system. He identified an attitude of suspicion among clergy and a reticence to share information for fear that information should become public and adversely affect their future job prospects. Great care was taken in maintaining the anonymity of the curates both as an ethical imperative and because it was anticipated that this would facilitate the gathering of valuable and in depth data. The interviews once taped were then transcribed, all references to individuals being deleted. Transcribed copies were sent to the interviewees and they were offered the

³⁷ see for example Gerard Egan, The Skilled Helper (California: Brooks/Cole, 1994), p. 91ff. and Sue Culley, Integrative Counselling Skills in Action (London: Sage, 1991), p.35ff. and Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing, p.164ff.

opportunity to remove any sections they wished. After transcription the voice recordings were deleted.

It emerged prior to Curate 2's interview that fear of being identified was a very important issue for her. She asked repeatedly that she would not be identified in any way, that her conversation would not be made known in her diocese and that the transcribed interview would not be included in the final thesis. In the light of these concerns and the personal issues which all interviews revealed, I decided it would not be appropriate to include transcribed interviews as an appendix to this research. This was necessary both to gain valuable data for the research project and to protect and reassure the research participants. This factor in itself is a relevant finding of this research.

Ethics

In some contexts research proposals need to be approved by an ethics committee or review board. Whilst there was no such formal requirement in this instance, the ethics involved in conducting the research must be considered before any fieldwork is undertaken.³⁸ The researcher always hopes that the academy will value his or her work as much as he or she does. Any work to which a wider public may eventually have access, may have consequences for contributors, in this instance the interviewees. One aim of this research is for interviewees to give in depth personal accounts of their training experiences. Methods have been employed to ensure the participants cannot be identified in the final piece of research, but there is also an ethical necessity to avoid "undue intrusion into private and personal spheres, embarrassment, distress, nervous strain, a sense of failure or coercion."³⁹

³⁸ Arksey and Knight, *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, p. 126.

³⁹ Arksey and Knight, *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, page 127.

Interviewees were made aware of these concerns prior to interview. Questioning was limited as far as practicable to clarification and reflecting back, giving the interviewee control over how much personal material was revealed.

The opportunity to read transcripts and so control which material could be quoted in the final research guarded against any possible abuse of participants in this regard. This was carefully explained before a standard consent form was signed by both interviewer and interviewee.⁴⁰ I explained to interviewees that I was only concerned to hear their stories and would not be meeting them again, thus they would be left to take responsibility for dealing with any emotions that may surface during or after the interview. It was not always possible for interviewees to gauge the depth of emotion or hurt that might resurface in the telling of their stories. Curate 6 broke down in tears during the interview. On such occasions, prompted by the interviewee's behaviour, a direct question can be appropriate, eg 'Is this becoming too difficult, would you like to stop?' My preference and intuition with this respondent was to allow a silence, enabling the interviewee to take responsibility for continuing or ending the interview. He said, "It surprised me how, quite how difficult and painful it still is. I thought I was a lot further on." I discussed what had happened with a course tutor, who assured me I was not responsible for the after care of interviewees who had freely agreed to take part. It was however difficult not to carry that responsibility.

The transcripts

The interviews were completed and five of them transcribed by a third party from the digital voice recorder. The sixth interview I transcribed myself, as coming from the same

⁴⁰ For consent form, see appendix.

geographical area, there was some risk that the voice of the interviewee might be recognised by the transcriber. In order to record as much detail as possible in transposing data from spoken to written form, hesitations and pauses were included. Occasions where volume changed, conversation became significantly louder or softer, or particular emotion was expressed were indicated in the text. I checked the transcriptions several times against the voice recording and made margin notes where appropriate.

One difficulty with the second interviewee was that some parts of the conversation were inaudible, her voice went quiet when she became emotional. In future interviews care was taken to place the microphone closer to the interviewee, but some occasions of phrases or words being inaudible could not be avoided when voices were dropped, a hand placed over the mouth or a head turned away from the microphone. Where the reason for inaudibility was known a note was made in the text. I made a conscious choice not to ask the interviewee to speak louder where this might interrupt the train of thought or progress of the interview.

Sorting and analysing the data.

To limit subjectivism and the imposition of personal hunches and unsubstantiated theories it is necessary to have some method of analysing, ordering or coding recorded interviews. Arksey and Knight warn that unstructured interviews generate large amounts of data that are hard to analyse reliably such that

“*(it)* can be difficult to decide what a section of conversation is about, let alone agree on the key message it contains.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Arksey and Knight, *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, p. 9.

Six interviews produced over a hundred pages of single spaced A4 text to sort and analyse. The length of unstructured interviews require the use of some method of sorting and analysing the responses, in order to manage the data and facilitate useful deductions concerning the nature of 'what is going on'.

In her book, Charmaz⁴² discusses the way in which the work of the early proponents of grounded theory still relied on positivist methods when analysing data collected. She notes Strauss and Corbin's desire to achieve unbiased data collection and Glaser's assumption that an objective external reality could be discovered. She offers another alternative which she terms constructivist grounded theory. Her aim is to recover the value and status of subjective empirical research data by avoiding too rigid or prescriptive analysis which undermines the qualitative nature of the research and seems to revert to valuing positivist method. Coding and memo taking allows pertinent issues to rise from the text of the interviews and use further sampling and interviews to refine these ideas.

One option to shortcut the time element associated with coding and sorting raw data is to use computer assisted techniques such as the NU*DIST and Ethnograph programmes. Such packages have the facility to search for key phrases and the number of times they occur in an interview. Whilst this method of analysis was retained as a possibility, when interviews were transcribed it became obvious that different interviewees were verbalising their experiences in very varying ways, using differing vocabulary. Tone and volume of voice, speed of talking, pauses, repetitions and hesitations contributed to the articulation of experience. Regional variations, educational background and previous work experience

⁴² see Kathy B. Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory – a practical guide through qualitative analysis (London: Sage, 2006)

influenced the vocabulary used, different personalities told their stories in different ways and few phrases were repeated by different respondents.

For example Curate 6 gave a detailed example of an occasion when he felt he had received poor feedback from his trainer and became disempowered. He described completing a project and the training incumbent's response, 'it was obviously not what he thought it might be and so he pulled the plug on the whole thing..... it was not good enough.....and I felt quite undermined by it'. Curate 4 described feedback in which he has 'torn to shreds'. A rigid coding of words or phrases was not practical when similar themes are expressed using different language. Each interview required careful reading and note taking by the researcher in order to categorise and compare similar experiences. On these grounds it was decided not to proceed with computer assisted analysis techniques.

The interviewees had initially been approached with a view to being interviewed only once. The unstructured open interviewing technique resulted in interviews and transcripts of considerable depth and length. The amount of data coupled with my concern about the emotional cost of the story telling to some of the interviewees, led me to reject employing any follow up interviews. The data was sorted by reading and rereading the interviews several times and manually using highlighters to colour code each section of discourse according to content. Thus issues concerning choice of curacy, working agreements, supervision, loyalty, use and abuse of power and authority, relationships and conflict situations arose and the transcript was marked according to the appropriate colour key. The precise nature of the research also required that any age specific material was separately marked. A list of categories and references was made so as to ascertain which interviews

emphasised which aspects. The open ended nature of the interviews meant this was time consuming and tedious but it did seek to honour the intention that the experience of interviewees rather than interviewer drove the research.

One of the desired outcomes of the research was to identify as yet unaddressed components of priestly formation. This was a challenging remit. Whilst the interviewees have not been included in the process of analysing or reflecting upon the data, faithfulness to a paradigm of empowerment required that any specific method or approach to the analysis is driven by interview content. For that reason precise methods of analysing data beyond initial colour coding, categorising and comparing of interview transcripts was postponed until the data was gathered and would be explored at that point of the research. It was important to allow the data to drive the initial theory building. It was for that reason also, that detailed exploration of the nature of priests was not undertaken until a theory or theories were built nor the needs of the contemporary parish context considered. This approach was influenced strongly by grounded theory method. The theory was not refined through following interviews but it was important that potential theories arose from data alone. The approach was about theory building rather than theory testing.⁴³ As in grounded theory there was less focus on generalisation and more focus on the potential for new ideas and innovative ways forward. Unlike grounded theory, following interviews were not used to refine theory but at this point other literature was introduced to test whether the emerging theory was compatible with the driving paradigms of liberation and empowerment and the contemporary ministerial context. Data drove the theory, but it was in effect built from three directions of emerging theory, literature pertaining to compatible models of

⁴³ Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing, pp.240/241.

priesthood and literature describing the contemporary context of ministry in the Church of England. This approximates to a triangulation of theory emergent from the data, theory and practice. Such a combination would ascertain whether the emerging theory had integrity with the paradigms driving the research and whether it was realistic enough for application in the contemporary ministerial context.

A further aim of the research was to explore the journey of empowerment of the researcher brought about by the process of completing the research. This was a secondary outcome, identified after the initial planning of the research and was limited to journaling throughout the process of the research and reflecting on those entries within the conclusion. The aim was not that this should detract or divert from the initial direction of the research but was valued as a by product of it.

The interview transcripts proved long and extensive to analyse. I have used the next shorter chapter to summarise the findings, before using the following chapter to explore more deeply those findings especially pertinent to this research.

3. THE INTERVIEWS

Conducting the interviews

Undertaking open-ended interviews, using only paraphrasing, review and clarification or refocusing prompts was a risk. The curates had been warned to expect the interviews to last around an hour. They had received the research title by email and knew of the researcher's background as a mature curate in the Church of England. Each interview opened with thanks for taking part and an invitation to share joys and sorrows of the curacy. It was not possible to predict whether the interviewees would share information relevant to the research topic, whether they would have too much to say or too little, whether the environment created would feel relaxed or strained, whether or not rapport would be established or whether the planned minimal intervention techniques would facilitate or inhibit story telling. In the event every interviewee assumed an affinity with the researcher based on his or her shared experience of curacy.

It was sometimes difficult to draw opening introductions to a close and resist clergy gossip. The shared church culture, and in particular the assumed bond between those who had undergone an experience few others understood, was evident even before words were exchanged. Without exception, each of the interviewees was enthusiastic to share their experience of curacy. Intuitively, I enquired how much time they had available to talk, so that adjustments could be made to the length of interview if extension seemed appropriate after one hour. The shortest interview lasted fifty minutes and the longest ninety minutes.

The only interview comprising an account exclusively of joys was also the shortest. The remainder contained varying mixes of joys and sorrows. There was an approximate correlation between those who described most sorrow and an increased interview length, but with only six interviews this remains a tentative rather than definitive observation. There was no shortage of data, rather a daunting hundred pages plus of single spaced A4 transcripts to process. An attempt was made to codify sections of script by category with different coloured highlighters but this proved to be challenging. It was difficult to quantify meaningful statistics because of the diversity of experience. The only strong correlation was between the two curates, curate 5 and 6b, who perceived their curacies as empowering and also being the only two to regard the quality of their relationship with their TI as good. There was no similar correlation between empowerment and the provision of formal supervision sessions.

Response to the figures

It was clear that the qualitative style of interviewing did not lend itself to detailed quantitative analysis. The small number of interviews did not justify conclusions based on quantitative methods, but rather illustrated a wide diversity of training experience seemingly judged by how well the curate related to the TI. The degree of correlation of factors influencing the efficacy of the curacy was in some part predictable, in some part surprising and in the majority of cases too complex to compare.

The way in which the curacy was set up and TI and curate paired illustrates the difficulty of direct comparison. Curate 1's experience was potentially doomed to fail from the outset as she had never wished to be involved in parish ministry, stating her intention to work as a

chaplain even prior to selection, but IME 4-7 was only offered within a parish context. Curate 3's curacy was set up in a way which meant he held considerable responsibilities from the outset as he had previously exercised ministry in a different Christian denomination. His problem was that this had not been communicated to him before the commencement of the curacy and his expectations were rather different. He expected much greater supervision and support. High levels of stress then meant he was unable to draw on previous experience to help him handle the situation and rather opted to disengage and move out of IME at the earliest opportunity. In one case poor matching of curate to training context was a result of the inflexible nature of the system, in the other poor communication between the participants.

All curates referred in some way to the method of feedback they received from their TIs and whether formal supervision sessions were used. This may have been because such a method of supervision is emphasised in recommendations for good practice. It can only be assumed that where more specific reference to formal sessions was not made, such sessions did not occur or had little perceived impact on the curacy. There was some correlation between adopting a formal method of supervision rather than informal feedback and perceptions of empowerment, but even this response contained complexities. Curate 5 who described her curacy the most positively of those interviewed, said,

"We did have contact sessions but there wasn't a lot to do in them because mostly we had done it as we went along." commenting elsewhere,

"He (*the TI*) was really helpful and supportive and helped me talk through how I was going to do it and what I was going to do."

Good supervision was not necessarily dependent on formal supervision sessions.

Within this research, issues surrounding the age of the curate are especially relevant. First analysis of the figures suggested some correlation between the use of the curates' previous skills and competencies and perception of empowerment. But on examination of the detail of the experience, this was not always recognised by the curates. For example, C1 described organising a trip to Iona and introducing street prayers in her second year of curacy, but also referred to an experience of deskilling. C3's previous ministerial experience was utilised in a way that he did not find satisfactory and was not then able to draw on previous experience to manage the situation. Where C2 and C4 did report drawing on previously acquired skills, this was in a context of enabling survival in difficult and potentially damaging circumstances rather than contributing more positively to the training process.

One of the six interviewees understood her curacy to have been a positive and empowering experience, one understood his curacy as being in two halves, the first half disastrous and leading to a mental breakdown, and the second half restorative and leading towards recovery. That left four and a half or seventy five per cent reporting significant problems which inhibited their development as priests. Of those, all respondents exhibited anger about their experience and identified unresolved issues which they were to carry forward into their next posts. Five interviewees were to move on to full time parish ministry, and one was so disillusioned with the parish system that she sought a secular posting teaching overseas. As previously quantified, the only exact correlation was between those curates who experienced their curacies as empowering and the quality of relationship they enjoyed with the TI.

My motivation for the research had arisen from my own experience of IME 4-7, my initial subconscious thought led me to seek to categorise the interviews as good or bad, positive or negative, success or failure. Such categorisation proved impossible.

Defining success – a paradox

Early in the research process an informal conversation with a psychotherapist friend challenged the wisdom of a classification of success and failure of curacies. His proposition was that in order to be successful, all curacies needed to fail in some way. Only in so doing could the learner achieve full autonomy of thought and purpose and avoid more conformist and less authentic outcomes. The detail of his thought was intricate and a potential diversion from the direction of this study but did lead me to re-evaluate any definition of success. It was paradoxical to judge a personally damaging educational experience as a success. Yet his view was substantiated in two of the interviews.

Curate 6, comparing two contrasting curacies separated by personal breakdown termed the first “a mini-hell” and “a nightmare” and the second “fantastic” and “a rich blessing”, concluded,

“But I look back on it and I see God’s hand at work in all of it in a way, ...and if I hadn’t had a really difficult experience I think I probably wouldn’t know as much about myself as I need to know and I wouldn’t have the richness of the experience of learning how to recover.”

Curate 3 judged his curacy with the phrase, “we could have done better” recalling a period “where whatever I did, I was the enemy,” and described some very difficult and unresolved experiences, yet concluded,

“So although ... there’s a story of woe, ...I think it’s a story of God in a sense of I didn’t leave, we didn’t get pushed to the brink, to turn to drink or whatever, we did see good things and I think I am a lot better person to open the door here. So the question is – if my bishop was to say to me was it a good curacy, ... you would have to say, ‘Yes.’”

The parameters of success and failure of the curacy were becoming increasingly difficult to define. Painful and traumatic experiences are described by both professional and trainee as good training. Warren¹, in a section exploring the emotional and physical health of the clergy, notes the paradox of the Christian faith. Clergy model a faith whose foundational beliefs include death before resurrection, dying to self as well as receiving new life and before them is the example of the first martyrs enduring suffering in many gruesome forms. Whilst these are inevitably Christian truths, the role of those supervising IME 4-7, and in current structures that means primarily the TI, includes taking responsibility for ensuring the safety and care of a trainee whilst in training. Recently employment terms have changed for the clergy with the introduction of common tenure, this means that should there be the necessity to remove a clergyperson from their post, evidence of adequate training and care must be demonstrated. A recent Ministry Division paper refers to this change and states its purpose as being to propose

¹ Yvonne Warren, The Cracked Pot, (Stowmarket: Mayhew, 2002), p.156f.

“.. a way for the Church of England better to form and assess its curates, to equip them for future ministry and to meet the ministerial and legal standards expected within broader society.”²

With enhanced employment terms, and IME 1-7 defined as a training period, curates are entitled to support and adequate training from their trainers and protection from emotional and psychological abuse including bullying. The imperative to ensure IME 1-7 constitutes adequate training for the task is now a legal as well as a moral imperative.

A successful curacy must be one that prepares a curate well for their next stage of ministry, a post of first responsibility, in a parish or chaplaincy. The opening sentence of Barley and Aveyard’s report of 2011 is significant,

“The background to this research was an indication to Ministry division that the training processes were not producing the incumbents that bishops were seeking.”³

However it must be noted that the context of this research does not include data which can make judgements about actual preparedness for first posts of responsibility as it focuses exclusively on the training period, this can only noted as an overall aim of training.

IME 4-7 is referred to in the Hind Report⁴ as an apprenticeship. The curate is apprenticed to the training incumbent, the nature of the training must equip the trainee with both functional skills to undertake standard competencies and also facilitate the development of leadership skills as he or she develops a growing knowledge and understanding of personal

² The consequences of this for IME 1-7 are referred to in several recent Ministry Division papers including Archbishops’ Council, Formation and Assessment in Curacy, (London: Church House, 2011), p.74.

³ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

⁴ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church, p.3.

priestly identity. The Hind Report acknowledges that the task is complex and describes the training task as,

“...attempting to draw together the deepening life of prayer and the Christian life lived, with deepening self-knowledge and developing theological knowledge and understanding.”⁵

The Society of Mary and Martha report draws attention to the consequences of poor curacy training,

“In our experience, the roots of many stresses and breakdowns in later ministry can be tracked back to problems in curacy,”⁶ and summarises the necessary qualities of the curacy, “It involves practising what we preach about the value of each individual in the sight of God.”⁷

It follows that in order for curates to flourish in the curacy, the TI/curate relationship must demonstrate that same valuing of the individual. There is necessarily an intimacy in a training apprenticeship which addresses who a priest is as well as what they do. Back in 2002, the Society of Mary and Martha research findings recommended that priests needed to “... build up a secure inner sense of ‘who I am’ as a person and a priest”⁸

Within the interviews none of the curates felt they were deficient in basic ministerial skills at the end of their curacies, such as leading a service or conducting a marriage. Where any such learning had not been gained from TI, it had been relatively easy to access help

⁵ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church, p.37.

⁶ Carl Lee and Sarah Horsman, Affirmation and Accountability – Practical Suggestions for Preventing Clergy Stress, Sickness and Ill-health Retirement (Sheldon: Society of Mary and Martha, 2002), p.39.

⁷ Lee and Horsman, Affirmation and Accountability, introduction.

⁸ Lee and Horsman, Affirmation and Accountability, p.21.

elsewhere. The bigger challenges in training were associated less with what the priest does as who the priest is, his or her developing style of leadership and emerging priestly identity. This is less tangible, more difficult to facilitate and harder to assess. It is often quite difficult to describe, curate 1 expressed an integrated sense of self,

“As a priest that’s an all encompassing whole isn’t it? Any one person can be any one curate, as a priest, as a person, as a Christian, that’s a trinity of being, that’s an inter-relationship of being that should be allowed to flourish.”

In different ways the consequences of not having a personal identity recognised and affirmed was expressed by the interviewees in negative language,

“By its very nature the curate is the underdog.” (Curate 1)

“It’s not recognising who I am as a priest.” (Curate 2)

“I was there to become an Anglican, and I hadn’t been an Anglican, I had been a minister, I was there to become an Anglican.” (Curate 3)

“I felt that curates are relatively colourless really.” (Curate 4)

“We all have a sense of an idyllic curacy where everything is granted to us so we can be stretched and blossom as clergy people and that felt to me as that was gone completely.” (Curate 6a)

Whereas in the two curacies that were described in more positive terms the terminology was similarly more positive,

“I’ve got tons to learn but I’ve been treated like a grown up here.” (Curate 5)

“It was rich blessings working there ... a place where I felt I learned about myself.” (Curate 6b).

Relationship with the trainer

These aspects of formation are impossible to assess by tick boxes and I would suggest require the trainer to be a competent theological reflector, astute in discerning any inner conflicts within the curate, sensitive in addressing emerging issues and flexible in the method of managing the curacy. On listening to that tapes and analysis on the transcripts, it was evident that it was the quality of the relationship between TI and curate that was pivotal to the quality of the learning experience. In all of the interviews the quality of the relationship between curate and TI, contributed to the perception of the learning experience for the curate and their understanding of good or poor practice.

This had also been identified in Burgess' research based on curate training in the early nineties,

“The most fundamental difficulty, reported by the majority of those interviewed, was that they had no effective training relationship with their training incumbents.”⁹

Further evidence from the interviews confirmed the importance of the quality of the relationship between curate and TI.

Only one of the six interviewees described a very positive learning experience throughout her curacy. Her opening remarks made clear that her abiding memories were joys rather than sorrows:

Interviewer: I would like to talk to you about the joys and sorrows of your curacy as a mature curate.

Curate 5: Oh joys, I think. Looking back and at the time it was a truly happy time.

⁹ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, p.131.

Whilst happiness does not necessarily reflect high quality of training and personal well being, her memories were all positive and she judged her training as having prepared her well for her subsequent post of first responsibility. That left four and a half curacies or a seventy five per cent correlation where major problems were recounted.¹⁰ Of these curacies all respondents exhibited anger about their experience within the interviews. Unprompted five out of six curates included as part of their account a significant component relating to the quality of the relationship between themselves and their training incumbent and even the sixth remarked,

“...generally, 95% of the time we did genuinely agree on things, but there wasn’t that degree of openness for that other 5%, and maybe that other 5%, there are the deeper issues that really do need to be addressed.” and described finding nowhere in the parish to take her frustrations and feelings.(Curate 1)

Residual anger existed where major problems were identified by interviewees, with five out of six curates, and five out of seven curacies. This was evidenced both within the conversations and non-verbally by raised or faltering voice or tears. Major problems developed in contexts where relationships were poor, positive learning experiences were described where relationships were good. The varieties of relationship between TI and curate differed but where positive relationships exhibited openness, mutual trust and respect, the learning experience had been nurturing. Where relationships had been poor, a residue of anger and resentment remained.

¹⁰ I have chosen to handle curate 6’s two TIs as two curacies by referring to the first as 6a and the second as 6b, recognising the continuity of the same person having two different experiences.

Curate 5 remained friends with her TI after the curacy, but identified the qualities of trust and respect rather than friendship as having been the key to the quality of learning that took place.

“It (*the friendship*) was an unexpected bonus,” but

“(the curacy) was absolutely brilliant really and trust is the key.”

She expanded this to describe the characteristics of a good training relationship based on her experience,

...try and be honest and begin to develop a feeling that we can trust each other. Even though one of us is kind of the teacher and one of us is the learner, this doesn't mean we don't both learn and we won't both teach at some time in the relationship. So you have to feel that person is someone you could work with, that you could pray with, that you could share difficulties with, that you could trust to keep their mouth shut.

The quality of this relationship reflects a depth which allowed mutual sharing and learning, an intimacy which facilitated self revelation and regular prayer, a trust and reassurance that matters of deep concern would remain private, a level of mutual respect that assumed positive listening yet simultaneously remained professional and capable of developing between two people of vastly different skill levels, experience and authority.

This contrasted dramatically with the way Curate 4 had described his curacy as “one that never should have happened”, and a relationship in which the TI regularly “tore me to shreds.”

Curate 6 described his experience as he drew close to breakdown during his first “impossible” curacy. Rather than the creation of a therapeutic environment and relationship, he felt “powerless” and “stripped of any confidence”. He describes a meeting which was “quite abusive ... made me feel two inches high”. In the second “fantastic”

curacy, he describes the TI as “an open man and so willing to be alongside me and be a friend.”

Whilst the quality of the relationship was not necessarily articulated by all the interviewees, the requirement was implicit.

The remaining three curates made brief or less explicit references,

Curate 3 felt he and the TI “could have done better”, he felt unsupported and of the TI, “I don’t think he understood, sadly.”

Curate 1 blamed the shortcomings in her curate training on an “inflexible system” but noted,

“The relationship with the incumbent was fine as long as there was no dissent. If there was ... then there wasn’t the openness to discuss it, so I suppose it wasn’t a good relationship was it? .., I was always deferring to him.”

Curate 2 left her curacy with much unresolved anger and damaged self-esteem. She blamed the power dynamic of her relationship with the TI. The relationship demonstrated a lack of respect by the TI for the curate.

“They (*the other curates*) are called ‘this is my colleague’ whereas I have ‘This is my curate’, I am a possession.” and “It’s not recognising who I am as a priest.”

The importance of a therapeutic relationship in the learning process

I was reminded of Carl Rogers criteria for a therapeutic relationship,

“If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur.”¹¹

Egan states “helping and other deep interpersonal transactions demand a certain intensity of presence,”¹² and evaluates relationships in terms of “socio-economic presence”¹³. For Egan, as with Rogers, it is the degree to which the helper offers full attention and authentic presence to the helped, both verbally and non-verbally which dictates the degree to which a relationship can be nurturing and in which valuable learning and growth can take place.

In the interviews, the learning that takes place as a result of poor quality relationships was excused by invoking a corrective of divine intervention over which there can be no human control. It follows that in order to facilitate learning, the human element of the process must take responsibility to offer a nurturing environment to facilitate the learning process and limit the need for the divine corrective. Otherwise the curate could be equally well served by just being left to get on with things in a parish, learn by their mistakes and leaving God to sort out the ensuing mess. This may be closer to reality than the church dare acknowledge. Analysing his research, Burgess offers a deeply worrying observation, “The unavoidable conclusion to be drawn is that the majority of curates have received no training at the start of their ordained ministries and that their training incumbents were in name only”¹⁴

¹¹ Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person – A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy, Revised Edition. (London: Constable, 2004), p.23.

¹² Egan, The Skilled Helper, p.91.

¹³ Egan, The Skilled Helper, p.93.

¹⁴ Burgess, Into Deep Water, p.131.

The training task demands intentionality in developing a good training relationship, secular educationalist Robert Burns notes that,

“the extent to which teachers accept themselves, their role and the pupil determines the extent to which they can function positively in the role of significant other.”¹⁵

The role of the TI is to train the curate to be a future leader of the church. This is undertaken through instruction, practice, reflection and example. For the learning to take place the TI needs to ‘practice what they preach’. Any dissonance between teaching and practice gives opposing messages and limits learning. Oxford Diocese trainers recommended Walter Wink’s book on leadership to both experienced clergy and curates in their recent ‘Servant Leadership’ courses¹⁶. On the book list is Walter Wright’s book with the self explanatory title ‘Relational Leadership’. It is contradictory that the church should be placing curates with TIs who do not aspire to the type of leadership they are promoting. Wright suggests that

“...leadership is a relationship – a relationship in which one person seeks to influence the thoughts, behaviours, beliefs or values of another person.”¹⁷

Not only is the relationship between TI and curate key, but relationship is also key to the activity on which they are mutually engaged, the training of leaders. Counselling, educational and leadership theorists all propose with curate 5 that the quality of the relationship is key. This will be explored later as recommendations for future training are made. Meanwhile I propose to explore similar types of nurturing human relationship to that

¹⁵ Robert Burns, Self-Concept Development and Education (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), p.256.

¹⁶ Oxford Diocese, Developing Servant Leadership Course, undertaken by the writer in 2006.

¹⁷ Walter Wright, Relational Leadership – a biblical model for leadership service (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2000), p.2.

of curate and TI, with the intention that this can both facilitate analysis of the interviews and offer insights into building good training relationships.

Similar human pairings

Having established that the quality of relationship is paramount to the curacy, certain particular human pairings suggest themselves. The most obvious is that of teacher and learner but I have rejected this as it does not necessarily value relationship. In the twenty first century much learning takes place on the internet or large lecture hall, a context without the intimacy that relationship suggests. A less obvious pairing offers greater opportunity for new lines of thought and creative insights. The pairings of child and parent, friend and friend, and husband and wife are more immediately suggestive of relationship. I considered each of these in turn to evaluate which might be most helpful.

Child and parent.

The primary human learning relationship takes place between parent and child. It is a universal human experience. Similar to TI and curate the purpose of parenting is to take the child from a position of dependence to independence as the curate will journey from inexperience to parish priest, from a position where the learner lacks the requisite skills to a position of competence. It is a relationship in which the child instinctively trusts the parent at birth and mutual trust and respect remain important as the child grows and matures. The analogy is less helpful in placing the parent in a position of both biological and legal power over the child. Until the child reaches maturity the parent will be bigger, stronger and hold the balance of power. Fundamental to this research is the age of the curate. The curate begins the relationship with a great deal of previous life and work experience and is in many ways ‘formed’ before priestly ‘formation’ begins. There is an

element of choice for both TI and curate in the pairing which is not present in the biological connection of parent and child. Furthermore, the mutual learning which takes place is more developmental and less similar in nature. For these reasons I rejected the parent/child pairing and explored whether the simple concept of friendship was more helpful.

Friends

Curate 6b concluded that his second curacy was so much better than the first because he was able to establish a friendship with the TI. Friends choose each other, they usually have shared interests and philosophies, their degree of input and equality within the relationship is similar and there are no factors binding the relationship for life. Thus far the similarities to TI and curate are helpful. Yet friendship falls short of being an adequate parallel because by its very nature it is social with no specific intention that learning should take place. Friendship is social rather than educational in purpose, it is informal in that expectations remain informal and usually unarticulated rather than formalised in a working agreement, and the relationship of friend assumes some commonality or attraction of personalities not presumed for the TI and curate. Curate 5 was explicit that whatever qualities the TI /curate relationship required, friendship was not necessary.

Marriage

A third relationship is marriage. Within marriage there is choice of partner at the outset and often much effort expended in seeking the correct partner. The pairing is one of autonomous consenting adults. The relationship demonstrates a historic progression from less choice to more choice. Whilst marriages of the past may have involved greater input

from parents or other interested parties, twenty first century marriages tend towards a more personal choice of partner. I suggest this movement from several people having agendas and input into the final precise pairing to the specifically personal choice of the participants is mirrored in the expectations of TIs and curates. Whilst college principals, bishops and DDO's have input, both curate and TI hold a veto. Where once the bishop's word was final and curate went where they were sent, now curates have a much greater degree of participation in the matching process and choice of their placement.

There are nuances of change within the marriage relationship that are mirrored in the TI/curate relationship. Greater power is moving into the hands of the participants than the organisers. Expectations of equality and power sharing in the two relationships are changing in similar direction over time. Where once one party of the marriage, the wife, might have anticipated a subservient position in the marriage to her husband, so too two generations ago a curate would have expected to hold considerably less authority than the TI.

Within both relationships, marriage and curacy, the power dynamic has changed considerably over time from a position of lesser to greater equality. In both types of relationship the consequences of such a change continue to be revealed. Historically this change has begun and developed within the institution of marriage before becoming so apparent in curacies, suggesting the pairing model of marriage may be a helpful tool through which to explore the curacy partnership and anticipate further change. Marriages are regarded by Relate as being less problematic if the participants have a shared vision and philosophy of life and my hunch is that this is also true for curacies.

Less helpful to this research are the necessary gender differences of marriage and its anticipated life span. Couples are married with the intention of being joined for life, a curacy lasts 3 to 4 years, yet unlike friendships this expectation is clear from the outset. Conversely sexual intimacy is appropriate in marriage but totally incompatible within the professional TI/curate relationship. And yet there are parallels between the early stages of a marriage and the exhilaration of being ‘in love’ and the excitement and anticipation witnessed at ordination ceremonies as curates set out upon their new life as a curate. When the initial excitement subsides, disillusionment can creep in. A Relate publication notes: “The exhilarating feelings of being ‘in love’ are only temporary ... there is something to pay when the effects wear off. In romantic love the ‘hangover’ or ‘withdrawal’ symptom is disillusionment.”¹⁸

The language of the Relate guidebook even offers insight into the success/failure dilemma.

“Problems can be good, But only if you both know how to deal with them.”¹⁹

The emphasis on the importance of a good quality relationship for a lasting marriage coupled with the participants being autonomous adults together with the changing expectations towards greater equality, suggested to me that the metaphor of marriage could be a valuable one. Good personal relationships are crucial to both and the marriage metaphor offers a useful tool to manage the data and explore the pertinent issues. The metaphor would be employed where it overlapped and was compatible with a professional learning relationship, but not understood as an exact fit. My conclusion was that use of marriage as a loose metaphor could be potentially enlightening whilst too close an analogy

¹⁸ Sarah Litvinoff, Better Relationships – practical ways to make your love last (London: Vermilion, 2001), p.17.

¹⁹ Litvinoff, Better Relationships, p.9.

could be a diversion from the focus of the research. This metaphor was also noted but not developed by Burgess who quotes a report by Adrian Harbidge entitled “Those whom the DDO has joined together..”²⁰

The metaphor’s usefulness will be further explored in the next chapter and its usefulness assessed in the conclusion of the thesis. Initially the data will be viewed from the perspectives of ‘matchmaking’, ‘life together’ and ‘divorce’, progressive potential stages of both a marriage and the curate/TI relationship.

²⁰ Burgess, Into Deep Water, p.171. (Harbidge’s report unpublished)

4. THE MARRIAGE

In this chapter I intend to use the marriage metaphor and the sequential stages of marriage of matchmaking, life together and divorce to see if this throws light on the dilemmas identified in the interviews. I am hoping that use of the metaphor will assist in exploring the nature and qualities of a nurturing relationship.

1. Matchmaking

In twenty first century western culture, a couple have an extended period in which to get to know and check out a partner, sometimes through serial relationships, usually cohabiting, often prefacing marriage with the engagement. This opportunity is impractical in the context of curate and TI. There is neither time nor such opportunity for them to get to know each other. The scenario more readily equates to matchmaking or an arranged marriage. The pertinent issues arising being, who are the stakeholders and what are their agendas, who holds the power and who will be the matchmaker and broker the deal?

The stakeholders

Diocesan Director of Ordinands

There are a number of people with an interest in pairing curate to TI. A superficial response would be to assume in that in the Hind Report's apprentice/craftsperson model the central players would be curate and training incumbent, this is rarely the case. The process is set in motion at least a year before the ordination when Diocesan Director of

Ordinands (DDO) meets with the ordinand to discuss his or her situation. The DDO will have been involved with the ordinand prior to selection for training, through selection conference and time at theological college and have a developing relationship with the prospective curate. Post Hind report, most dioceses have appointed IME 4-7 officers to oversee the post ordination training period and in some dioceses he or she too, may be involved in the matchmaking. Whilst, informal anecdotal evidence from dioceses with which I have contact suggests this happens less often than might be anticipated, the DDO can be expected to hold in depth knowledge of the curate and the supervisor of IME 4-7 of the TIs.

Bishop

Whilst the diocesan bishop usually holds the power to make the final decision on whether an individual will be ordained first deacon and then priest, the management of staffing of different parts of a diocese will often be delegated to an assistant bishop. It is the bishop with this brief who will be involved in the matchmaking. He will hold a list of potential curacy placements and a list of ordinands who have been recommended for training by his diocese. The first decision he has to make is whether numbers tally. Are there going to be more or less curates than trainers? Whilst curates are paid from a central training budget, there are still financial implications for the diocese in deploying a high number of curates. The respective dioceses will have contributed resources, human and financial, to ordinands in college and are termed the sponsoring diocese of a specific trainee. Those dioceses with more ordinands than curacies will inform some of the ordinands that they must seek curacies elsewhere and the ordinands are 'released' to explore other opportunities. Even the word used for indicating that prospective curates may have a free choice of the

geographical area in which they will work, gives a first indication of where the power resides. Such dioceses are termed exporting dioceses, conversely those with more curacies than prospective curates are importing dioceses. Hopefully the number of exporters will match the number of importers. As diocesan finances become more critical there is the potential for exporters to outnumber importers, there is no absolute guarantee of a curacy for every ordinand. This feeds the imbalance of power, as the time draws closer to the end of college training, curates may have to forego ideals and take whatever job they can get.

Training incumbent

Currently the only context in which IME 4-7 can be located within the Church of England is within a parish. Diocesan practice as to how parish priests may be identified as appropriate trainers differs. Usually the parish priest will indicate to the responsible bishop that he or she wishes to be considered as a trainer. Occasionally a bishop will approach a parish priest to suggest he considers training a curate, the possibility may already have been raised at the annual ministerial review which if not conducted by bishop with his parish priests is certainly reported to him. In my own diocese an application form is submitted by the parish priest to the bishop, a year in advance of the placement. The application includes detail of the parish, the housing available and the training experience that can be offered by the parish, it does not include any evidence of the training experience, training courses completed or previous background of the trainer. It is unclear how much priority is placed on the form. I recently witnessed an occasion where a prospective TI was approaching the deadline for the submission of forms, and reported only filling it in in part because the bishop knew her well, so it didn't matter. As a team

vicar, my line manager the team rector submitted the form, despite the fact that the prospective curate would train almost exclusively alongside me.

Curate

The diocese holds a file on the curate that has been gathered since selection for training was first explored, this is normally available to the bishop and DDO, but not the TI or ordinand. One of the final additions to that paperwork is a form indicating the ordinand's training preferences. All the curates filled out a standard form at theological college, but in the non directed interviews, only two referred specifically to it, so the actual extent to which the form drives the process is unclear. The opening paragraph on the form states:

This form is intended to help candidates to clarify their thinking about a title, and also help dioceses in placing ordinands. It should be completed by all candidates for ordination. It will be sent with the penultimate report to the Sponsoring Bishop, who will make it available to the training incumbent in the Diocese who will be discussing the possibility of a title (*curacy*) with the candidate. The College or Course should keep a copy so that they can send it to any ordaining bishop who requests it before offering a title parish in his Diocese.¹

There are five questions. Question 1 has 11 tick boxes exploring the status of the curate across a wide range of stipendiary and non-stipendiary options and whether they wish to return to the diocese which sponsored their training. Question 2 asks the potential curate to tick "contexts in which you might most effectively work and train for ministry"² These include rural, semi-rural, country town, industrial, suburban, urban, city centre, inner city, housing estate and anywhere. Question 3 explores traditions of churchmanship within which the potential curate considers they might most effectively work and be trained. These are conservative evangelical, open evangelical, central, modern catholic, traditional catholic, charismatic, influenced by renewal, local ecumenical partnership, parish which

¹ Church of England Ministry Division personal profile form, included in researcher's personal file and supplied by Oxford Diocese to support her role as vocations advisor.

² As reference 90

has passed resolutions A and B and parish under Episcopal care.³ The last two questions allow space to give details of housing requirements and any other matters which would affect future ministry. The questions are practical in terms of physical context and churchmanship but do not cover details of learning styles or preferences.

It is usual for ordinands to begin discussing potential contexts for curacies, half way through their penultimate year of training. For mature curates, many of whom have a degree in theology and undertake only two years residential training, this may be as early as January of their first year in theological college. At this very early stage any understanding of personal training needs is unlikely to have crystallised. The inner structures, procedures and machinations of the Church of England are a mystery to many who have inhabited it for many years, it can be very difficult for new entrants to understand their needs at this stage much less negotiate their direction, whatever their age.

Theological college principals and staff could also be deemed to be stakeholders but are not included in the list as they are not normally included in the matchmaking process beyond the submission of reports on the curates to bishops and DDOs. The degree to which they will informally advise the curate varies tremendously. Some are known to manipulate matches between ordinand and TI by brokering informal deals and directing ‘released’ ordinands in specific prearranged directions.

³ The final two categories refer to those parishes who do not accept the ordination of women.

The agendas

My own experience indicated that agendas are rarely public and often complex. The Diocese, bishop, DDO and any others the bishop chooses to consult have the responsibility to matchmake curate and TI as effectively as possible in order to maximise training resources and benefits, but things are rarely so simple.

The Diocese

The first responsibility of the bishop and DDO is to identify potential TIs. The bishop has the responsibility for making the final decision, the extent to which he consults the DDO or other advisors will vary between individuals. Whilst best practice dictates that the bishop should seek only his best trainers as TIs, a variety of agendas exist. There is no standardisation of practice between dioceses, some dioceses provide housing for curates, others require parishes to finance housing. This risks curates only being allocated to those parishes with houses irrespective of the training skills of the resident priest.

Curate 4 notes,

“I think you really have to choose the training incumbent on their ability to train rather than where the curates houses are, and this particular parish was always used to having a training curate.”

Sometimes it appears TIs are selected because they are hard worked and need some help or as some sort of reward for achievement. Curate 6 suspected his TI's health problems meant the TI was more rather than less likely to be allocated a curate.

“I think they also saw that having a curate in those parishes whilst someone was off sick was actually getting them out of a hole.”

Curate 3, previously a minister in another Christian denomination, found himself very much at the centre of a diocesan agenda to provide ministry for a group of parishes who had recently lost a full time parish priest,

“I think the biggest bonus was that they lost the team vicar, I was coming out of college at the same time, and they thought they could get two things for the price of one.”

He understood this as the source of the problems he was to experience because agendas were not articulated to curate or parish, parish assumed he was a replacement team vicar, he assumed he was training to be an Anglican and the diocese thought he'd be experienced enough to lead a parish without much support. Such unspoken agendas lead to mismatched expectations and necessarily prepare the ground for future conflict.

Whilst the ability to demonstrate how a parish can be run efficiently is important, good leaders are not always good trainers. Curate 2 expressed concern about her TI's inexperience in training,

“I think the whole curacy thing, the training incumbent thing, needs to be properly looked at, I think there are not only gender issues but there are age differences I think the curacy had worked in the past with an older priest.” She had perceived her curacy had not worked with an inexperienced trainer.

Burgess notes,

“The choice of training incumbents is often based upon unacceptably vague criteria furthermore clergy still become training incumbents even when they are known from their previous work with curates to be unsuitable.”⁴

⁴ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, pp.27/28.

Curate 4 recalled speaking to the outgoing curate when looking round his prospective parish who did not indicate any problems with the trainer,

But it subsequently emerged that the curate felt she was unable to be frank with me about how her curacy had been because she feared that would affect her reference and getting a job. And what I subsequently learned from her much later in the curacy that the previous curate had regularly been reduced to tears on meetings and was really at breaking points at various points in her curacy. The diocese and the people in charge of training really should have known, if they didn't actually know, that this was a time bomb just waiting to happen.

The facts of previous failures may have remained hidden from the prospective curate but with even basic oversight of previous curacies, the diocese should have been aware of the problems.

In my own diocese, six years later, I shared my concern that such things could happen with one of the diocesan training officers who was part of a team the bishop consulted with when placing curates. He told me of a recent meeting he had attended, the purpose of which was to match curates to training incumbents. It was a new bishop, a new DDO and a new college principal. He recounted one example where he had alerted the group to the fact that he felt one proposed curacy could not possibly work and that the curate and training incumbent had little chance of achieving a fruitful outcome. He spoke of his distress that 'It hadn't a hope of working', but that his concerns were dismissed and the other parties commented that they would have to sort that out when it happened, and refused to reconsider. The curacy ended with much pain for both curate and TI in less than a year.

Minimum levels of proficiency are recommended by the Church of England, but the interviews suggest that other agendas sometimes outweigh them.⁵ In 2008 Mary Travis conducted a three year research study for the Diocese of Bristol, part of which involved Balint type groups run at a residential for curates in their first year. The groups offered a safe environment, facilitated by two trained leaders, for curates to explore a tricky pastoral problem in small groups with their peers. She concluded, “We wondered whether the incumbents themselves have received sufficient training and support for their vital and demanding role of training clergy for the future.”⁶

The training incumbent

The way parishes are grouped within the Church of England is changing. Increasingly one stipendiary priest has responsibility for multiple parishes rather than a single unit. There is much energy directed as to how this is best managed. In Summer 2012, the Church in Wales responded to a drop in numbers and finances by recommending moving away from the parish system. This debate has been picked up by the Church of England as it faces the same challenges. It is not the subject of this research to explore this restructuring in depth but sufficient to say in very many places, parish priests are leading increasing numbers of congregations and have pastoral responsibility for greater numbers of parishioners. Some have adapted their leadership styles to work more collaboratively and incorporate greater numbers of volunteers from the congregations into a team, others have not. Most feel over worked and many feel under appreciated. It is within this context that many seek the additional help of a curate. Others are attracted by the opportunity to train newcomers to their profession. There has always existed a tension between the curate as trainee and as

⁵ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church , Appendices 4 and 5.

⁶ Travis Mary, Supporting Clergy in Post-modern Ministry – bridging the gap between provision and need, Bristol Diocese:2008, in house diocesan publication.

extra pair of hands. Some TIs seek to respond to budget cuts and lost fulltime posts in the parish with the addition of a curate, others enjoy the status among their colleagues that they believe a curate brings. So many more agendas are hidden and unknowable, my autobiography hinted at introducing women's ministry without the need to consult, the perceived status of a curate with particular educational qualifications and also the predictable extra pair of hands.

The curate

The least experienced stakeholder in the brokering of the curacy is the curate. They have been selected for training by the Church of England and especially those with previous professional working backgrounds, can assume the training will be monitored, adequately and appropriately. Both my own experience as trainee and my experience as tutor within a residential theological training college have given me insights into the raised levels of excitement and anticipation as college based training draws to a close and the parish phase begins.

You have given up a rewarding career, a pleasant house and a good salary, left behind friends and colleagues and moved into a small cramped flat in a close and intense residential community. This is the sacrifice you are willing to make to achieve your goal which is to respond to God and train to be a vicar. This lifestyle has had its rewards and its challenges, many of your friends find it difficult to understand your choice, you miss what can only be described as ordinary life. But the time is coming, the end is in sight, soon you will be out there and doing it. You will be doing the job your Creator intends for you, you are about to be linked with a TI for 3 years of real ministry. No more job shadowing, no

more placements, you will be wearing a dog collar and be walking the streets as a bona fide priest, be living in a real house, in a real street with a normal diversity of neighbours and finally some privacy. You will be able to put all you have learned, all you have planned over many years into practice. Who will you make this journey with? Who will be your TI? The over-eagerness at the prospect of marriage expressed by Tevye's daughter in Fiddler on the Roof has echoes of the curate's experience as they approach ordination.

Matchmaker, Matchmaker,
I'll bring the veil,
You bring the groom,
Slender and pale.
Bring me a ring for I'm longing to be,
The envy of all I see.⁷

Even as a mature person, it is necessary to structure critical faculties in order to avoid the temptation of assuming the first match offered will be the best one. Add to that the crucial detail that ordination as first deacon and then priest, is dependent on having a curacy, the tension mounts. In the Church of England ordination can only take place in the context of a formal role with a worshipping community, which is why the curacy is also sometimes referred to as a 'title' parish.

The final match

In theory the DDO brokers the deal and will have the soundest knowledge of potential TIs and potential ordinands in any diocese. In fact the bishop has the authority to make the final decisions, the extent to which he allows himself to be led by the DDO varies. The diocese represented by the bishop who is advised by DDO, training incumbent and ordinand are the three players in the game, the bishop is the final matchmaker, he will invite the ordinand to take up the post and he will ordain him or her first deacon and then

⁷ www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/fiddlerontheroof/matchmaker.htm accessed on 27/01/12

priest, the final two events being mutually dependent. Yet like any arranged marriage others can influence the process. After potential matches have been identified by bishop and DDO, the ordinand is invited to contact the TI. If the ordinand is looking for a post outside his or her sending diocese, the ordinand will have greater opportunity to select the match for him or herself from a published list. One ordinand may explore only one position at any time, and each TI may hold discussions with only one ordinand at any time. The TI will have access to the profile form the ordinand has filled in, but the ordinand may not necessarily have access to the profile form the TI has filled in, if indeed he or she has filled one in at all.

Few potential curates have a comprehensive understanding of the varieties of parishes and TIs in the Church of England. Their experience is drawn from the churches they have attended as lay people, a rather intense worshipping experience at theological college and brief glimpses of ordinary congregations on college placements. The bishop and DDO are trusted to have a wider view and must be trusted as matchmakers. The bishop holds the final authority to ordain or not ordain, the TI is already established in the ways of the institution, it is the curate who is most disadvantaged at the point of matchmaking.

The contribution of age and experience.

It is unclear whether maturity of years brings advantage, gained from previous life experience, in discerning a good trainer or whether it is more likely that an unrealistic expectation is placed on a mature curate by the diocese to be more discerning because of his or her age. The value of previous training and possessing skills developed in previous

professional life, rather depends on the nature of the skills and the degree to which they readily transfer to the task in hand.

Curate 5's previous professional skills as psychologist and work with companies on management structures were readily transferable. The only interviewee who evaluated all of her curacy as positive, she had deliberately taken responsibility to employ her skills from the outset of the matchmaking process. She intentionally sought a trainer who was secure enough not to be threatened by her. She had experience problems at theological college with some staff and students.

"I was concerned about it (her future curacy) .. because I was aware that I could be threatening to people, because of what I had done in the past, and I had already experienced that at college.. that I could make staff nervous, not on purpose"

She perceived that her own professional background involved in leadership training might be a potential problem.

"I was a psychologist and I specialised in managing change through looking at leadership..... I slightly experienced the fact that I was being taught by people who knew a lot less than I did, and I didn't mind that, but they did."

Whether her perceptions and conclusions were accurate is not within the remit of this research, but clearly her own previous training alerted her to the potential for problems. She shared her thoughts with her bishop in person, who acknowledged her concerns and who she reports as saying:

"I know exactly who will not be phased at all – he's completely secure and not bothered, and so if you get on that will be perfect...' "

Her further research reassured her that the potential trainer was experienced with a proven track record in curate training. It is reasonable to hypothesise that her knowledge of leadership styles and issues could have caused problems with a less experienced, secure or accomplished TI. Her informed research can be assumed to have contributed to the success of her curacy. It cannot be known whether this was solely due to her own initiative or whether the potential difficulties would have been identified by her training establishment, DDO or bishop. It is clear that the successful matchmaking relied considerably on her own endeavour outside formal appointment structures.

Whilst Curate 5 was proactive in the matchmaking process, others were not. I suspect their previously acquired skills were not so easily transferable in the new context. Curate 4 also referred directly to previous professional skills but with a less positive outcome. He claimed to have negotiated the terms of his curacy with diocese and training incumbent in detail and emphasised the value of his previous professional experience as a solicitor at the beginning of the interview.

It will be apparent...that I am somewhere on the evangelical spectrum, and it was deemed by the DDO .. that it would probably be good if I had experience in my curacy in another tradition. So I was offered a curacy in a very eucharistic based church, with an incumbent who would state her theological position to be liberal catholic, and so I said, I would explore the possibility of that and I went along and the lady concerned did a very good job we had a very frank discussion about the difficulties it might pose, in our theological differences and we negotiated various things.

It was evident that Curate 4 had employed his organisational skills to negotiate future tasks, “I negotiated that I would be allowed to run an Alpha course which the parish had never had.”

His skills were less useful in discerning other pertinent aspects. Whilst theological difference may have contributed to the problems which later emerged, he regarded the training incumbent's personality and health problems as the major issues. He was not made aware of these before commencing his curacy training, but the diocese were aware of them and he considered their disregard for this information as causal of the relationship and training breakdown that resulted.

"The Diocese and people in charge of the training really should have known ... that this was... a time bomb waiting to happen."

Curate 3, who had had a previous career in the army, identified a secret diocesan agenda as the cause of major difficulties in his curacy but blamed himself that as a mature person he did not foresee the problems.

"I was a mature curate, I was a mature curate, I was a mature person, I'd got experience, I should have seen it, I didn't." His response is contradictory, firstly he places the blame for difficulties with others and then retracts.

"They should have seen it."

But later in the interview he reviews the curacy experience with the comment,

"So I don't blame the diocese or even the parishes."

Could it be that his understandings of obedience and hierarchy gained in the army inhibited him designating blame? If so, it would suggest his previous work experience was inhibiting him making informed input to the matchmaking process. Whatever was going on, Curate 3 had been left holding strong, confused and unresolved feelings for which the trainer must take responsibility.

Curate 6a also took responsibility for some of the failures of the matchmaking in his first curacy. He regarded himself as having a very strong intuitive sense and regretted not having trusted this more when others tried to dissuade him with rational argument.

The process of discernment between me and the training incumbent was just a couple of meetings together of about an hour or two And of course we were both on our best behaviour, as you are in those sort of settings. It was quite difficult really to understand what was fully involved. But I came away from those meetings with a strong sense of foreboding ... it really did feel quite wrong. I talked that through with a number of my peers, and the principal of the college, and everyone was very helpful but between us we managed to explain it away as just fear of the big bad world.... I couldn't quite put my finger on it and I think that was the problem, I am by nature quite an intuitive sort of person, but translating that intuition into something that was well thought through and articulate ... it has never been something I have been good at. So my intuition, my guts were telling me, don't go there.

(Interviewer: So, you were going against your intuition?)

“One of the things you were taught was to try and think things through and have a rational way of understanding our thoughts and feelings... It was good to have an aim but it did run very counter to my natural way of decision making.

Curate 6 was to deeply regret not trusting his instincts when he later had a breakdown.

It is not within the boundaries of this research to judge whether mature curates are expected to possess greater wisdom in discerning potential problems at the first meeting with a potential TI, it is clear that if such an expectation were to be assumed it must be articulated by the DDO or bishop beforehand, and appropriate preparation and support offered. When the weight of authority and decision making power lies with bishop and diocese, such privilege must be accompanied by them accepting additional responsibility within the matchmaking process.

With a greater number of mature candidates in the system, there are also grounds for suggesting greater flexibility in the structure of training offered. Logic dictates that if an

older priest will have a shorter working life before retirement, and if they are accepted for training with a specific scenario in mind, it would be reasonable to offer a matched training experience. Curate 1 referred to the limitation of IME 4-7 necessarily taking place in a parish context.

“I knew at the outset I didn’t want to (go into parish ministry), and yet I still had to jump through the hoop of doing what turned out to be a four year curacy.”

A new Church of England website ‘Call Waiting’, though an initiative directed to encouraging the 13 to 30 age group to consider ordination, lists a curate as one of seven different jobs, suggesting an ordinand might choose from being a deacon, a priest, a curate, a parish priest, a chaplain, an OPM (ordained pioneer minister) or a bishop. This website did not exist when curate 1 was planning a curacy yet it is still not immediately clear that all ordinands will need to complete a period as a curate until a further page is accessed and the glossary of terms viewed. Only then does it become clear that a standard parish based curacy is part of training for all the different types of ministerial posts and that it takes place in a conventional format with the incumbent of a church and within a parish setting over potentially 4 years.⁸

Within the parish options available, the initial profile form filled in by curates is intended to indicate his or her preferred training path. The fact that only one curate referred to it in detail implies it was not considered to have influenced the process significantly, and he then found its content ignored.

The diocese gives us a nice form to express our wishes about the sort of place we want – it’s fairly broadbrush – urban, suburban, I can’t remember the other – estate whatever estate means. It struck me as a very interesting sort of classification, semi-rural, or country town or.... so I ticked a few along the suburban, semi-rural,

⁸ <http://callwaiting.org.uk> accessed on 26/10/11

country town sort of line. But when the first contact was made with the DDO about a likely curacy, that was after I had to chase because the time was getting on and I was getting nervous, she said to be accurate it was very rural. So it was a different sort of place to what I was expecting.

Does anything ever change? In 1998 Neil Burgess notes in a chapter of his book entitled, 'Finding a Job',

Ordinands have certain expectations of a parish, the parish has certain expectations of a curate and the diocese, through the DDO, and the bishop has expectations of both. It may not be possible, even undesirable, to satisfy all these simultaneously and as the interviews indicate, many ordinands effectively abandon some of their positive expectations in looking for a job anyway. But this need not lead to disaster if the training incumbent is carefully chosen, has the necessary skills, and knows how to apply them. Unfortunately, this is generally not the case. The choice of training incumbents in many dioceses is often based on unacceptably vague criteria⁹

and "Clergy who have these (training) skills could be discovered straightforwardly by any moderately effective diocesan training programme. That it is not discovered, or acted upon, is one of the most fundamental weaknesses of the present system and it is the curates who pay the price for this."¹⁰

He adds, "There will always be a gap between the expectations people have of a job, or a place, or a colleague, and of living or working with reality.... However much initial responsibility is laid at training incumbents' doors, in the end a greater responsibility rests with those who devise and perpetuate the present system of appointments."¹¹

More than two decades later I concur with these comments and so I suspect would the majority of the curates sampled in this research.

There are myriad different ways of meeting a mate, at work, socially or increasingly on the internet or speed dating. Some individuals consciously seek certain qualities in a partner

⁹ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, p.27.

¹⁰ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, p.28.

¹¹ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, p.43.

and may spend time browsing the internet dating sites whilst others just hope physical attraction and the right ‘chemistry’ will do the trick at nightclub or pub. There are no rules. The rules for TI and curate matchmaking ritual is also varied. At the time of writing, I am unaware of any TI with CVs, or any formal means by which a curate can assess the suitability of prospective trainer, but bishop’s and DDO’s have reports and the aforementioned form on which dioceses can make a preliminary judgement on a curate’s suitability. It can seem that the matchmaker holds all the cards because they hold the book. There is no transparency of agenda. There is no common process. This lack of clarity increases the likelihood that the matchmaking will be problematic. The interviewees’ unprompted accounts describe mixed agendas. Whilst a bishop is responsible for authorising the curacy, the closeness of his involvement with its arrangement varies. The interviews suggest mature curates, used to structured employment systems and policies are uncertain who has responsibility or oversight for ensuring a good match is made.

Relate warns that during the early years of marriage:

“If one of you is less than wholehearted, or hasn’t thought beyond the romance of the wedding to consider what real-life experience of being married might involve, then your expectations will be mismatched, and someone’s bound to end up disappointed.”¹²

There is a parallel between the vague notion that God who has done the calling will also sort out the process of the curacy to the romantic notion that being married will mean all will be well. A sharing of expectations will have ideally taken place before the curacy begins, but at an early stage of the curacy a working agreement will be drawn up.

¹² Elizabeth Martyn, Before You Say I Do (London: Vermilion, 2003), p.17.

The working agreement

“Setting high expectations together means that you have a joint aim in view. ...If people go into marriage with unrealistic or unshared expectations, life afterwards becomes much harder. Finding out that marriage isn’t going to give them what they hoped for can come as a shattering blow and put the marriage under serious threat”¹³

In a chapter entitled ‘Work: the expectation and the reality’, Burgess notes,

“ The reality of the clergy’s situation is that they are not just free spirits, liberated to move through the world and engage with life as God moves them; they are employees of a large and long-established human institution with a great many institutional procedures, assumptions, codes of conduct, buildings, money and other resources.”¹⁴

In theory the working agreement, written and agreed at the start of the curacy, should establish expectations and be an opportunity for a curate to input his/her dreams and ambitions. Three of the curates interviewed referred to the working agreement directly, which would suggest this was not as influential a document as it had the potential to be and certainly not a means of establishing common ground and shared expectations.

Significantly Curate 5, who so valued her curacy training, was involved in the initial working agreement and was, after initial conversation invited to write the first draft for discussion herself.

“something we worked at before we started was ... a learning contract, and he said to me here’s a few guidelines, you know headings, do you want to write it? I went ‘Yep! Yep, I

¹³ Martyn, Before You Say I do, p.32.

¹⁴ Burgess, Into Deep Water, p.48.

can write that ... kind of set the tone in a way because I felt right. I know I've got tons to learn but I've been treated like a grown up here, and he would tell me if I'd missed things out."

For Curate 5 the respect and trust placed in her at the start of the working relationship was sustained. Unfortunately this was not true for others.

"I think when I first came I had to do like a working agreement. I had time for that and since then there's been nothing." Curate 2.

Curate 3 completed a working agreement but found that it needed to be shared with a wider readership than just TI. Commenting on the PCC and wider congregation he said, "What was never put on the table for them clearly was what was in the working agreement from myself and my incumbent." His main problem was being left to work apart from the TI in a different church and for him there needed to be a method of writing into the working agreement a system of communicating its contents to the other people he worked with.

As Witcombe notes,

"Working agreements are a valuable aid to communication, the most essential ingredient of a satisfactory working relationship."¹⁵

Omission of any reference to any working agreement for the remaining three curates suggests it did not influence their training substantially, yet other comments they made suggested the forethought and planning required for a good working agreement could have helped avoid later difficulties.

¹⁵ John Witcombe, The Curate's Guide – From calling to first parish (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p.96.

Curate 2 found she was not properly equipped for some of the tasks she was asked to undertake.

“I had the common sense to think I am not going to get training in this area, and I looked for people who would give me training.”

Curate 1 found difficulty in managing her workload and expressed frustration at not being able to complete an outstanding MA dissertation. Had this been discussed at the outset as a working agreement was drawn up, the issue could have been avoided. It seems particularly significant that Curate 5 describes her working agreement (the term used by her diocese) as a learning agreement. Whether this was her understanding or her TI’s explicit usage is not established, but a contract of ‘learning’ rather than ‘working’ articulates a more appropriate emphasis on the nature of the task.

Working agreements apart, Curate 5’s experience demonstrates a collaborative style of working that is healthy. A more hierarchical curate/TI relationship has greater potential for power abuse or over dependence. Mature curates are more likely to have been in a position of authority over others in previous working lives by virtue of their age and length of working life. It can be especially frustrating and potentially destructive for them to be denied a voice in their training. Within a marriage Relate counsellors suggest that it is not the similarity of partners in a pivotal relationship that dictates growth but shared responsibility.

Relate counsellors know that happiness in a relationship does not depend on harmony. Meeting problems in the right way deepens love, and couples who learn to tackle differences positively can survive even serious crises. ... Working through problems together so that there is no winner or loser has a transforming effect on love ... Unresolved problems are disruptive and damaging.¹⁶

¹⁶ Litvinoff, Better Relationships, p.9.

The Church of England has expended much energy in recent years to improve the situation. The Hind Report has already been discussed, advice handbooks have been published,¹⁷ quangos convened and courses for training incumbents organised. In one diocese, curate 5, whose curacy was such a positive experience, led one such 'Leadership Development Programme' in which she was asked to work with curates and training incumbents. She reported the course as well received but acknowledged that even the bishop could not persuade one or two training incumbents to attend. One wonders how they continued to remain as training incumbents. The Church of England offers guidance about the desirable qualities of potential training incumbents¹⁸ and even recommends Masters level courses which can training incumbents would find helpful. The desire to change is there, the resources are in place, but progress is limited.

2. Life Together

Making the relationship work

Realistically many couples cohabit before marriage, but this is not the case for the curate and TI. Only after ordination does the parish staff team change to include the new curate. Whilst the TI will have greater experience of ordained ministry, outside the church context he or she may not have greater life or leadership experience. Even within church life, a mature curate may have considerable lay experience of parish life whether in worship, PCC or pastoral care. Each couple will be different, but especially in the case of the over forties, previous life experience is a significant element that the curate brings to the relationship. Considerable problems arose in the sample interviews when this was not recognised.

¹⁷ see Witcombe The Curate's Guide and Lamdin and Tilley, Supporting new minsters in the local church – a handbook, (London:SPCK, 2007)

¹⁸ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church, Appendices 4 and 5.

In furthering the marriage metaphor, I sought a description of married life which could encompass the potential differences and challenges presented by a mature curate, who by virtue of age is at a more advanced physical if not spiritual maturity. I found such a description in Kahlil Gibran's, *The Prophet*. I include the second half of the piece in its entirety at the start of this chapter and will allude to different sections as a tool for organising the interview material.

The opening alludes to the permanent and life long nature of the marriage relationship, which is less relevant to the time limited nature of a curacy, then Gibran turns to the way in which the relationship should be lived.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.
Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,
Even as the strings of the lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.
Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.¹⁹

Gibran's words lie comfortably alongside the more practical advice from Relate, "Couples whose marriages last well know how to communicate and compromise, can sort out their differences, and accept and value each other, warts and all."²⁰

Relate also define a good relationship as "a creative, developing partnership"²¹.

¹⁹ Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 16, 19.

²⁰ Martyn, *Before you say I do*, p. 12.

²¹ Litvinoff, *Better Relationships*, p. 11.

Creativity presumes that outcomes will be diverse, different, new, even unexpected. The curacy must have the capacity to nurture different plants.

The oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadows

The final lines of the Gibran extract describe the ideal outcome in order that different species of oak tree and cedar may flourish alongside each other. Difference is applauded.

The interviews suggest that there is little correlation between different churchmanship and healthy curacies, sometimes differing churchmanship existed where the training relationship flourished, sometimes it did not. Curate 6 found his wounds healed in his second curacy when he moved into unfamiliar evangelical territory from his more catholic background, whilst his churchmanship more closely matched that of the damaging first curacy. Curate 4 consciously trained with an incumbent of very different tradition but focussed on the difficulty in building good relationships rather than churchmanship for the ensuing problems, describing the curacy as “not a good place to grow” but did “enable me to span different traditions”. He suggested his TI’s hierarchical understanding of authority might be due to her churchmanship, and as the leadership style and TI/curate relationship are closely linked there is some contradiction in the two statements, suggesting further reflection and analysis of what took place would be valuable. With the opportunity for further research, it might be possible to establish whether the leadership style of a more catholic TI is generally more hierarchical in nature and whether this creates the potential for more difficult relationships with mature curates. Curate 3 knew the context of his curacy better than most because of previous church contact in the town, “I also planted a

church in that town before I was an Anglican.” It was not the Anglican nature of his training that was the problem but differing agendas of trainee and trainer which resulted in him becoming de-motivated. Where the trainee must grow under the shadow of the TI, this is unlikely to be the best environment for growth. This is substantiated by Curate 5 who does not refer to churchmanship at all. She describes a good trainer as a TI who is “secure in their own ministry”, with an accent on self awareness. She suggests security in one’s own identity allows the space for the other to develop his or her own different and personal understandings of priesthood.

Within each interview there is a recurring theme of the strength of God’s initial call to the various individuals. Within this context is a clear implication that as God has called the whole person for a specific task in the church, then the expectation must be that the purpose of training is to allow that individual to grow and develop their pre-identified gifts rather than undergo a radical change of direction. Any suggestion that they need to retrain is refuted. Where there was evidence of de-skilling within the interviews, there was also evidence of de-motivation and an absence of flourishing. Each curate’s call is unique and oak tree is called to be oak tree, cypress to be cypress. Within curate training the tree is in the early stages of growth, its final form may not yet be apparent, but to impose too rigid growing conditions can inhibit natural development.

Curate 1 is quite clear about the unique element of her original calling.

Each curate has gone through a very strict selection procedure, presumably being the person God made them to be, and going into the curacy in the hope they can continue to be that person and grow and develop and reach their full potential as a human being and as a Christian and I think obstacles are often put in the way of that. Because of the structures you are not able to be fully yourself. I was not able to be fully myself.

It was unfortunate that during the first year of her curacy she experienced a great deal of frustration

in relation to her authenticity of being. She noted,

“In my curacy, in the deacon’s year I was not allowed to do anything of my own ... meaning the gifts I had to bring or experiences, it was purely bread and butter stuff.”

Any high expectations of what curacy might have been were dashed,

“All right, I did have a lot to learn, but it was as if everything had been wiped away, and any gifts that I felt I could bring to contribute were not even acknowledged, never mind used. So I think I spent a lot of the first year de-skilling.”

Lack of affirmation of her individual gifts contributed to a lack of flourishing reflected in some quite negative reflections on her state of health and mind.

“Very, very draining, completely draining.” “I really had to dig low.” “I felt I was going under at one point.”

Curate 2’s comments reflect a similar experience of having the gifts she brought unappreciated and undervalued. Speaking of the TI she said,

“Within the curacy, it doesn’t matter what gifts I brought to that, I always had the feeling that my training incumbent could do better.”

“I think when you are at college, you come with skills that have already been recognised and identified by the church, you have training, you have theological learning and theological study ... you come with a lot of life experiences and then you are just a curate.”

She continued, “I came in because .. this was what God called me to do.” Failure to value her individuality led to the comment,

“ ... it’s not recognising who I am as a priest.”

Constant demand by the TI to conform to his understanding of ministry rather than recognising her individuality led to similar effects on her health and mind as curate and she referred to the loss of her sense of humour. A situation denying such a crucial element of self cannot be described as a context in which to flourish.

Curate 3 also had a strong sense of God's personal call.

"Call. I'm called to be a priest."

And speaking of his curate cohort, "We were all supposedly clever people, you know, we had been selected, the fact that we had got education, and we had got a call."

Curate 3 was clear his training needed to be specific in addressing his move from being a free church minister to an Anglican priest. This did not happen and he too did not flourish.

"By the time I had got to about eighteen months (*of the curacy*), six months into being a priest, I had lost the drive..... Let's say it's because I might actually not complete the race."

Curate 4 used many of his God given gifts but found that this caused difficulties with the TI.

"I think that the incumbent felt that she didn't like being upstaged. There was certainly a particular issue about the holiday club because I had done a huge amount of children's work in my sending (*sponsoring*) parish so I was very experienced, it all come to me as second nature, and .. I think she liked to be 'queen bee' at the holiday club."

"she was expecting me to be green in all sorts of ways and I wasn't really".

The low personal value placed on the curate by the TI was demonstrated by a disproportionate amount of negative criticism.

“She went through everything just picking it to pieces as if making, you know, all sorts of picky remarks about it, and there was no element of praise at all.”

And he too ceased to flourish, losing his initial energy and enthusiasm.

“I suppose my theological training had excited me as to all sorts of possibilities and so on and to find that really I was going to be very much reined in and confined .. I found that quite difficult.”

“It was a matter of survival quite honestly.”

Curate 6a also referred to the lack of value placed on the gifts he brought. His TI asked him to produce child protection policy documents.

I’d done quite a lot of work in my previous job, producing policy documents and manuals. So I used that experience and I put something together which drew heavily on the diocesan material that we had been given. And I produced two documents a policy document and a day to day manual for other people to use. He rejected that because he said it was not one document and I need one document.

And as a result,

I felt quite rejected, I felt there were skills I’d got which were useful skills to bring ... and I don’t know whether it was that he was not comfortable with me having a previous life which brought something to my curacy or whether it was just that he had the need to have things done in a particular way.

It was clear curate 6a felt there were gifts he had to offer from his previous working life that his TI lacked.

“He was younger than me by about ten years and hadn’t done much in his life apart from being a clergyman.”

After later criticisms about a family service leaflet not being the TI’s corporate style, curate 6a too became demotivated,

“I felt rather powerless but felt driven to do more and more and I tended to end up doing, well on some days, very little, because I just felt stripped of any competence.”

Of this first curacy,

“I felt robbed really ... I suppose we all have a sense of an idyllic curacy, where everything we need is granted to us so that we can be stretched and blossom as clergy people and that felt to me as that was gone completely.”

“I didn’t feel that I was getting what I felt I wanted which was to grow alongside an experienced colleague and to develop skills which I had but just needed that opportunity to operate.”

In his second curacy he flourished because his individuality and identity was celebrated,

“He (*the second TI*) would happily accept whatever you did really and he’d give you feedback and comments and advice. He really had a completely different approach to being a training incumbent.”

In contrast Curate 5’s psychology background served her well as she proactively searched for the right TI to deliver the learning experience she hoped for and was well rewarded.

She found a TI who accepted and appreciated her contributions.

“In my curacy when I would have done things really differently to the way in which you (*the TI*) would do it..... (*the TI*) was able to say ‘ I can receive from you as well, so this won’t be a one way street.’ And that was very affirming.”

Her TI would seek her opinion as a valued colleague, so affirming her as person and priest.

“He would ring me up and say I’ve got this tricky situation.”

“He didn’t pretend he had all the answers.”

Coping with perceived rejection of oneself and the gifts one offers can be damaging and traumatic, a good trainer must identify the respective species and respond by providing a nurturing environment.

Just as in marriage, some differences between curate and TI are more difficult to manage, a forester friend tells me that an oak tree can flourish in damper conditions at the bottom of a hill whilst the cypress would naturally thrive higher up. In such an instance the cypress literally cannot thrive in the oak's shadow.

Curate 6a found his attitude to work varied dramatically from that of his TI.

I've always had a much more laid back approach to work and life and getting the balance between what has to be done and being able to relax with my family. So... my natural approach to work would be well, there's lots more to be done, but it's still going to be there tomorrow, so it's time to take some time out. And he, of course found that very difficult and that then of course made me feel guilty that I wasn't working at the same pace he was, and that I was expected to work at.

and

The other side of him, which was very difficult, his own personal standards for work were very high and so when he asked me to do something there was always an expectation that it would be done his way ... silly little examples , if he said well I'd like you to do the prayers at the next family service and that would be fine and I'd have something ready and then when I turned up he'd be at the family service and he'd hand me some prayers that he'd prepared for me to do.

Curate 1 found herself under pressure from her TI's working model.

"I used to see how hard my training incumbent worked, and I used to say to myself I'm tired but look at so-and-so, how much work they do."

Curate 2 also found different working habits difficult to reconcile,

"One of the things, I do work hard, but my training incumbent was doing even longer hours and one of the things was the expectations, my diary was always full, and because he wasn't around I was the only one in the parish, and people came to me a lot."

She found her desire to host social occasions at her home that was not well received by the TI. At Christmas she,

“...put a notice on the pew sheet inviting you know, the whole of the parish to mulled wine and mince pies before the service.... I was taken to task for doing it... he just had a dicky fit.”

Curate 1 quoted personality typing to demonstrate similarities between herself and the TI who was, “... the same Myers-Briggs, type as me, exactly the same as me, so he could see immediately where I was coming from.” Yet she encountered unmanageable tension relating to some deep personal issues within the congregation. She found it untenable that gay couples were welcomed into the congregation but within the church life issues relating to homosexuality could not be discussed.

“There were people in the congregation who were homosexual, male and female, and talked to me. But all of them said at one point or another that if they let it be known in the wider congregation then they would be ostracised, and nothing was ever done to raise the issue within the wider congregation.”

Her frustration grew as a subject she regarded as of great importance was “swept under the carpet.” She described growing resentment feeling inhibited from sharing her thoughts because she had been previously instructed, “never disagree with your training incumbent.” Fearing any challenge would damage the curate/TI relationship, she fought back her own feelings “for the public good”. But repeated to herself, “So why didn’t I challenge him about the homosexuality thing?”

Perhaps in any relationship some conversations are too difficult.
Give your hearts, but not into each other’s keeping.
For only the hand of life can contain your hearts.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak and the cypress grow not in each other’s shadow.²²

²² Gibran, The Prophet, p.19.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:

Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Bonhoeffer in 'Life together', from which the title of this chapter was taken, opens the first chapter with a quote from psalm 133, "Behold, How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"²³ He then offers practical guidance on the ways in which Christians can live their lives together as a model to the world of Christ's teaching. All Christians know that following Jesus commandment to love one another and demonstrating that to others can be extremely challenging.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."²⁴

No more challenging than for the curate and TI where the relationship between two individuals called by the church for leadership, is conducted in a public arena in front of the rest of the congregation and parish.

There will not always be unity, disagreements will happen but as Relate note,

"A good relationship has ups and downs, and uses them to change and develop. The best relationship can meet almost any challenge and use the experience positively."²⁵ Litvinoff regards the best relationships as ones in which the partners share a strong bond yet also have the freedom to develop as individuals. But how is this to be managed when difference becomes disagreement and disunity. It was the handling of disunity that most challenged the curates interviewed.

A bond confines, the love Gibran speaks of offers the freedom of a moving sea.

²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, (London: SCM, 1954), p.7.

²⁴ John13:35 NRSV.

²⁵ Litvinoff, Better Relationships, p.11.

Curate 2 spoke of her TI, “...some people are willing to allow people to develop and I think other people are not.”

Yet to have the confidence to give a curate a significant degree of freedom to develop, to allow the sea freedom of movement, requires the building of trust. Trust requires the TI has the confidence that the curate is competent and will not make regular or serious mistakes.

Curate 5, who had the trust of her TI, acknowledges that even he “was very protective of the congregation”. Fortunately she found this “entirely reasonable”. Trust does not mean the curate will be left on his or her own. Curate 5 describes her TI,

“... his attitude was you can get on with it, not unsupported but it was a trusting attitude.”

She regarded self awareness as a vital quality in building trusting relationships.

“I think they (*the qualities of being secure and self aware*) are crucial to building trust. If you don’t know yourself, you are not an awful lot of good to anybody.”

and

“unless you are willing to make the inward journey, I don’t think we can be an awful lot of help to anybody else, because you will have too many things to defend.”

“Without that trust you won’t be able to acknowledge and appreciate that people could do a really good job completely differently to the way in which you would do it.”

It was clear that curate 4’s TI was in a position where she did not have the self awareness necessary to build relationship and trust.

“Surprisingly what became apparent (*were*) the chips on her shoulder really”

He described how, at an early review of his work she “tore me to shreds.”

“everything, everything was absolutely no good and hopeless, and I knew at that point I was in trouble.”

“The sort of dressing down that she could give was quite horrendous. She was a very intelligent lady, very sharp tongued and she could just come out with the most amazing verbal stabs at people.”

Curate 4 interpreted much of this as her being jealous of his differing skills, his friendships and successful activities within the congregation. Whether this was precisely the reason is unclear, he cited the fact that

“... she was a lady who sadly had gone through a divorce late in life, only a few years before, and that had been a considerable knock to her confidence ... and I later understood ... that she had a tough time over sort of ordination of women and issues like that.”

It was an ongoing issue,

“the previous curate had regularly been reduced to tears.”

Whatever the underlying reasons, this lady was in no position to build a relationship of trust and lacked the self awareness and self confidence of which curate 5 spoke.

A relationship of trust was not possible for curate 3 because he found his age and previous ministerial experience catapulted him into a position for which he was not prepared. Curate 3 initially trusted that his training needs would be met as he requested “reshaping” as an Anglican.

“I was there to become an Anglican, and I hadn’t been an Anglican, I had been a minister. I was there to become an Anglican.”

This trust was misplaced, other agendas superseded his.

“I think they thought they could get two things for the price of one. They could get me to serve my curacy, serve my title and they could also tap into the knowledge that I’d got of pastoring and leading a church in that area.”

As a result he was left too much alone and not supervised enough as he worked in parishes adjacent to the TI.

“You can’t locate a curate outside of the area and just say ‘well get on with it’, and then when it goes wrong say, ‘well why has it gone wrong?’”

Curate 2 also found it difficult to build a professional relationship of trust because she did not have sufficient supervision time set aside to build relationship nor the opportunity to share her experiences.

“One of the things I’ve really missed, ... not having my training incumbent (*and*) to be asked to reflect where I am in ministry, I have to rely on priests who are friends to do that.”

Curate 1 had a relatively good and professional relationship with her TI but not one where she felt able to challenge.

“95% of the time we did agree on things, but there wasn’t the degree of openness for that other 5%, and maybe that other 5%, there are the deeper issues that really do need to be addressed.”

Building quality relationships is not easy. The responsibility for establishing the relationship cannot be left with one person, as in a marriage both have to risk revealing their vulnerabilities in order to receive the gifts the other has to offer. Sometimes the mature curates wanted things both ways. They wanted their previous experience valued, used and affirmed, yet readily blamed the TIs for any shortcomings in training.

Fill each other’s cup but drink not from one cup.

Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.

These images of Gibran's, offering nurture to the other whilst ensuring one does not neglect to nurture oneself, paint a picture of mutuality which is not possible within a hierarchical relationship.

I became a training incumbent without any guidance or training. I work in a team which involves working with colleagues on a relatively equal basis. One member of the team may have responsibility for ensuring the task is completed, but all will contribute to the content. The process of planning can be energising as ideas are brainstormed, one person's comment picked up and developed by another, adapted by another and carried out by someone else. Working in teams is not everybody's experience, if TIs are not trained, from where are they to gain understanding of training? Training future leaders of the church is too important an enterprise to be left to chance.

Curate 6a offers an answer

I've spoken about this with other colleagues of mine who've had similar experiences. There's a tendency to step in to a stereotype which was he's the training incumbent, I'm the curate. I'm supposed to do as I'm told and just get on with it. I think he stepped into a stereotype being a rather overbearing training incumbent which may have been his experience as a curate, and there was this idea that we probably pandered to one another's sense of what the stereotype of a typical training incumbent and curate is.

Several of the interviewees described a hierarchy of relationship which placed them in a lower status position than the TI.

Curate 1 describes her struggles with hierarchy,

In the Anglican hierarchical structure there is no room for someone like me being a member of the Anglican community where yes, I value the priesthood as being leader of worship, and being able to celebrate communion, but that width, the breadth of people travelling a journey together doesn't fit into the vertical structure. I don't know how those two come together.

Whilst these comments refer to the Anglican church generally, it was also her experience in the local context as she described feeling unable to raise an important issue.

“I felt as though I didn’t have the authority as a curate to raise it. I would be undermining the rector’s decision.” and “By its very nature a curate is the underdog.”

Curate 2 had similar awareness of hierarchies at work. Phrases spread through the interview included,

From the parishioners, “She’s just the curate, she should live in a flat (*not a house*).”

Of her TI, “I just think I came in expecting to be treated like a colleague, and I think what I discovered with some curates are that they are called ‘this is my colleague’ whereas I have ‘this is my curate’. I am a possession.”

She talked at length about the teamwork she experienced in her previous working life.

They all had different skills to me and I would listen to what they had to say and then together we would come up with something, a model, and then we would present that to the whole team, the whole of the workforce, and then they would feed in. So that I felt that wherever, whatever was done we all had ownership of it, we had all contributed to it, although it may not have been exactly what I thought of at the beginning, it was something that was very much ours.

In the next sentence she compared this to her current experience,

“... Whereas even if you had a different idea or project, or scheme you wanted to go forward with, you didn’t get all the shape of it, because you were just the curate.”

Curate 3 found the TI’s determination not to be as directive as the TI he had experienced in his own curacy rather backfired.

“His curacy wasn’t good and I think he tried to definitely not model his being my rector on what he had done, but actually overcompensated by not being directional enough.”

He considered it was the fault of poor management by the TI, that his own skills were not always deployed.

“There was certain things I was kept away from because there was unsurity, not because I don’t think I was capable, I think because you know ‘Oh curates don’t chair PCCs’ and I wasn’t going to jump forward and say, ‘Let me, let me, I have chaired meetings before.’”

Curate 3’s learning lacked mutuality, rather because of the absence and hands off approach of the TI, than because of too much control.

“I think I found myself not being, it sounds a bit bleaty, but I think not being supported, these initiatives I set up I found people were not there, like the rector.”

Curate 4 experienced angry outbursts from his TI throughout the curacy which made any possibility of mutual learning possible. He wondered if her hierarchical stance was part of her churchmanship.

“This lady had been in the very catholic side of things where perhaps the bias in those churches is more towards the priest doing most of the upfront stuff and lay people being allowed to do the intercessions read a lesson and do administrative tasks behind the scenes.”

Whereas his previous church experience was quite different,

“I had come from a setup where a lot of people were very involved upfront, as indeed I was, and doing all sorts of things and perhaps in the evangelical wing the idea of every member ministry and so on as being more developed over a longer period that perhaps has come as news to some other areas of the church.”

Mutuality was difficult for curate 6a because he found himself working with “a self confessed control freak.”

And, “His need to be in control of the situation and of people and of somebody who was under his authority, so there was quite a lot of damage done in his understanding of authority.”

“I think he was more driven by the need for authority to exert itself than for the proper balance of power between incumbent and curate to be maintained.”

Whilst curate 5 thrived precisely because of the mutuality and trust she experienced. She described one occasion when she was compiling liturgy,

“I think I have always loved liturgy, and (*my TI*) let me and encouraged me to do that, He’d say, ‘Go away and write something beautiful’, you know and that was incredibly freeing, so I got very confident, very quick.... and that was good because that enabled me to be very sharing with other people and to bring them in and help them.”

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,

Even as the strings of the lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

In the context of this research, this stanza from The Prophet suggests that a flourishing marriage is a joyous experience. It implies energy and movement in the references to dance and quivering lute strings. It is explicit in its reference to time spent together and time alone, yet introduces a new concept with the production of the same music by different strings. This is the crux of the relationship. A balance is necessary within the curate/TI relationship which enables each person to develop their individual identities, yet still produces a harmonious sound. The interviews show evidence of considerable disharmony,

this occurs when the outcome is the production of different soundtracks. In exploring this balance, firstly I am interested to examine the contribution of loyalty in maintaining harmony between two very different individuals and secondly to explore the contribution of planned supervision sessions in providing the opportunity for harmonies to be learned.

Loyalty

Curate 1 was especially conscious of the need to maintain loyalty. The issue arose repeatedly throughout the interview, for that reason I am analysing her responses in detail. She referred to a strong directive from her theological college.

“... we were told publicly you must never disagree with your training incumbent. You may disagree privately, but not publicly.”

Whilst this sounded reasonable to her, practically this created difficulties,

“I remember personally disagreeing with him, but not daring to say anything out loud in the team meeting, because I didn’t want to be seen disagreeing with him publicly, so you have to fight back your own personal feelings for the public good, if you want to put it like that.”

In her next sentence, there is evidence that of the extent of the frustration and stress this incurred.

“Yes, perceived to be the public good, so why didn’t I challenge him about the homosexuality thing.”

She felt bound by loyalty to refrain from disagreement with the TI in front of colleagues at the team meeting, neither did she raise her difficulties in individual supervision meetings with the TI.

“I couldn’t have ever gone to them(*my colleagues*) because I would have felt very disloyal to the training incumbent ... Yes, at the expense of your own frustrations and what do you do with your frustrations and feelings then? There was nowhere in the parish to put them.”

She did not feel able to discuss an issue of great importance to her with anybody.

“I spoke to my spiritual director at one point, talked to friends, talked to other curates in different parts of the country, a little bit but not fully, you can’t, I, I didn’t feel able to, you know, a 100%, but no the tendency is to bottle it all up and then if you are not careful it is like a bottle of pop, and what do you do with that then?”

She avoids commenting on her inability to share the problem with the TI.

“... I don’t know, it’s difficult isn’t it? Would it have needed to have been with somebody who was within the structures of the church to understand where you are coming from, but then does that defeat the object, the whole object of having the objectivity, and do you ideally need someone outside the structures of the church?”

It is not clear what the interviewee is defending. She moved on to another subject but returns to the issue later in the interview. She speaks in complex terms of her personal flourishing.

“Any one person can be any one curate, as a priest, as a person, as a Christian, that’s a trinity of being, that’s an interrelationship of being that should be allowed to flourish, and often one of those is not allowed to flourish.”²⁶

After a period of stumbling and hesitation in the conversation, she becomes more ambivalent about her attitude to loyalty.

Because of holding back and ... because of loyalty, maybe misguided, maybe misplaced loyalty, but taking to mind what’s said in theological college .. it would

²⁶ As noted I use this quote frequently.

be interesting to see if all theological colleges say that to ordinands .. about public.....

The expectation was that you didn't disagree in public with your training incumbent... because if I disagreed with him, even in private, if I had disagreed with him, then that would have been a little bit of conflict and confrontation, and I'm not very good at that, and so it could be that I am making an excuse.

It became clear that the method of listening employed in the interview took Curate 1 to inner depths that she had not previously examined and she did not return to the subject except at the very end of the interview.

"I shall be very interested to read that transcript when it comes back – some of the things that came out. I wasn't expecting it to come out, (*will*) be interesting. Your questions were very perceptive."

One can only conjecture the outcome had such an opportunity to speak and be heard taken place earlier in the curacy. It is impossible to know whether she would have remained in formal ministry rather than seeking secular employment had she had the quality of relationship with the TI that had enabled to explore these issues more fully. Contrary to her perceptions, I had not asked questions, but used the techniques of paraphrasing her comments and reflection back, she had heard this as questioning.

The training as a priest encompasses a totality of being and identity, vulnerability and reflection, which demands expertise which TIs may not possess. What they must possess is the skill to identify the issues their trainee needs to explore and the place in which they be directed to do so.

Whether or not Curate 1 had recognised her personal issues, the concept of loyalty was rooted deeply into her psyche at theological college in a way which complicated her ability

to address them. She so feared being disloyal to her TI or encountering conflict, that she was inhibited in her development.

Curate 4 comes close to acknowledging that his lack of complete loyalty to his TI in trying circumstances was problematic in a brief reference. When parishioners complained to him about their treatment by the TI,

“... I suppose it made it a bit more tricky in a way really, because I sided with those, with those parishioners, because it was quite what was happening,” and justifies the disloyalty, “... and certainly, you know, I mean you dreaded morning prayer each day, because you didn’t know what her mood would be.”

Whether it was loyalty or popularity or whether motives were mixed, when the allegiance of parishioners to one or other of the curate/ TI couple was divided, problems arose.

“I went in the summer and I was asked to start a new evening service which I did, and it was well liked, and that is always, that can be a source of difficulty between a curate and a training incumbent anyway.” (Curate 4)

He goes on to describe the TI and a coach load of parishioners attending the licensing to his new parish and post of first responsibility.

“I don’t know why she (*the TI*) bothered to come down really, and that’s my last interaction if you can call it that with her, I think again she found that occasion very difficult because I was the centre of attention. All her parishioners were coming down and greeting me warmly and so on and she couldn’t cope with it.”

After a pause he ended the interview with the qualifying comment,

“But it’s hard to know, I mean that’s guessing isn’t it?”

Further observations

Where parishioners become 'hers' and not 'ours', the same music is not being played.

When the nature of the relationship has to be guessed at, the strings of the lute are not quivering close enough together and communication has not been effective. For the strings to sound a harmonious chord there must good communication. Curate 4 and his TI were singing solos. In the case of the curate and TI, they must both be playing the same tune or as more commonly expressed they must be 'singing from the same song sheet'.

Expectations of curate 3 were not clearly stated and trainer and trainee sang from different song sheets. The curate occupied a space where he was expecting to be initiated into Anglicanism and the TI wanted a neighbouring parish to be held in experienced ministerial hands. The expectation would be that these differences would have become apparent when the working agreement was drawn up. The problem seems not to have been that the working agreement was unclear but that it was not shared with the parish and parishioners where curate 3 found himself placed. He had greater experience than most curates having been a free church minister prior to training, the parishioners did not recognise his status as trainee and responded to him as experienced practitioner. The relative absence of the TI until problems arose also suggests, though the working agreement may have articulated the training need the TI had was not responded to appropriately.

Curate 3 explains, "They hadn't thought it through." Then as curate 3 waited to be trained in being Anglican he found himself with insufficient contact with his trainer, "I self generated work, because I wasn't managed nobody was pulling me back. I expected to

be pulled back, and sadly there were times and issues that pulled me past the mark. And it wasn't resurrected until it was too late. And it.. and that was sad."

"My expectation was you'll be directed to some degree ..., and I left the curacy thinking I could have got better out of this – we could have got better out of this."

Curate 3 sought closer supervision than was offered.

Curate 6 made quite explicit comments about differing expectations in the curacy. Prior to his own breakdown his TI was off work with stress related problems, he began to wonder whether his curacy placement was to meet his training needs or his TI's work related stress.

I think there is something there too about what a curate is there for. The church tends to talk a very good game about the curacy is for the curate and not another pair of hands. You're just there to learn and actually it's your time to be a fledgling minister and to grow. On the one hand they say that but on the other hand you are treated as an extra pair of hands, there to support the ministry in that place. And quite a lot of the time it appears that your needs in training are subordinated to the church's needs to maintain a ministry in that particular place. So I think there is a need for a change in attitude in the church which will result in a more bespoke curacy rather than an off the peg curacy. And I think if I go right back to the beginning of my time when the curacy was being set up. It seemed much more about what was available to offer me rather than what was ideal for me.

Curate 2 did not feel she had received enough guidance prior to conducting her first marriages, she spoke of seeking help elsewhere.

"I had the common sense to think I am not going to get this particular training in this area, and I looked for people who would give me training."

She had problems with her different style of building relationships with parishioners to her TI. She commented,

"They're (TIs) supposed to be creating training supervision and leadership, and I just think... that it wasn't there."

When life became difficult, a good relationship had not been established, regular supervision was not in place and rather than taking the problems with the TI, she describes managing on her own.

“So I stuck at it (*the curacy*), and then thought, well I’ve got to find a way to make it work.”

“He (*the TI*) should have sat down and said, ‘How are you managing, because ministry is like a bottomless pit, isn’t it?’.

“I got no brief.”

She would have benefited from regular supervision sessions with a skilled reflector, help in reflecting upon her ministry and training would have facilitated more significant learning and enabled the curacy to more fully achieve its potential.

Any option of supervision was removed when Curate 6a’s TI went on sick leave, for him as with others who had poor relationships with their TIs an alternative viable option would be to find an alternative person to offer supervisory sessions. With his original TI curate 6a did not explicitly refer to supervision sessions but referred generally to occasions when they he received feedback on his activities.

“He saw it (*feedback*) as a problem rather than seeking to give me the best training and the training I needed at the time.”

When an alternative supervisor was found,

“We tried rather unsuccessfully using another incumbent nearby to give me weekly support and guidance but really that wasn’t the problem. The problem was that I am in a bad place where power and authority weren’t being used appropriately.”

One might have expected that curate 5, a psychologist who entered her curacy with considerable experience of helping others manage change would have ensured she had formal supervision sessions during which she could reflect on ministry. Yet this was not so, she had regular contact with her TI, but the reflection did not necessarily take place within those supervision sessions.

“He would always give me feedback as we went along.”

“We did have contacts sessions but there wasn’t a lot to do in them because mostly we had done it as we went along.”

Whether realised in practice or not, formal, diaried supervision sessions are recommended for all curates and TIs. If this recommendation is followed, adequate time for reflection, sharing and trust building can be ensured. However the interviews suggest that it is not the degree of formality of the supervision session that is paramount, but the quality of the relationship that is established in order for a curate to flourish in his or her training environment.

Relate warns that during the early years of marriage:

“If one of you is less than wholehearted, or hasn’t thought beyond the romance of the wedding to consider what real-life experience of being married might involve, then your expectations will be mismatched, and someone’s bound to end up disappointed.”²⁷

I think there is a parallel between the vague notion that God who has done the calling will also sort out the process of the curacy to the romantic notion that being married will mean

²⁷ Martyn, *Before you say I do*, p.17.

all will be well. A sharing of expectations will have ideally taken place before the curacy begins, but at an early stage a working agreement will be worked out.

The working agreement

“Setting high expectations together means that you have a joint aim in view. ...If people go into marriage with unrealistic or unshared expectations, life afterwards becomes much harder. Finding out that marriage isn’t going to give them what they hoped for can come as a shattering blow and put the marriage under serious threat”²⁸

In a chapter entitled ‘Work: the expectation and the reality’, Burgess notes,

“ The reality of the clergy’s situation is that they are not just free spirits, liberated to move through the world and engage with life as God moves them; they are employees of a large and long-established human institution with a great many institutional procedures, assumptions, codes of conduct, buildings, money and other resources.”²⁹

In theory the working agreement, written and agreed at the start of the curacy, should establish expectations and be an opportunity for a curate to input his/her dreams and ambitions. Five of the curates interviewed referred to the working agreement directly, the only curate not to do so was Curate 6 whose TI took sick leave six months into the curacy, and who subsequently experienced breakdown himself. Neither did he mention a working agreement as part of his second curacy.

²⁸ Martyn, *Before you say I do*, p.32.

²⁹ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, p.48.

Significantly Curate 5, who so valued her curacy training, was involved in the initial working agreement and was, after initial conversation invited to write the first draft for discussion between herself and the TI.

“something we worked at before we started was ... a learning contract, and he said to me here’s a few guidelines, you know headings, do you want to write it? I went ‘Yep!’ yep, I can write that ... kind of set the tone in a way because I felt right. I know I’ve got tons to learn but I’ve been treated like a grown up here, and he would tell me if I’d missed things out.”

For Curate 5 the respect and trust placed in her at the start of the working relationship was sustained. Unfortunately this was not true for others.

Curate 3 completed a working agreement but found that it neither impacted sufficiently on his actual working context nor met his personal aspirations for training. The effectiveness of the working agreement was limited by the number of people who were party to it.

Finding himself working independently with a different PCC and congregation to his TI, he said, “What was never put on the table for them clearly was what was in the working agreement from myself and my incumbent.” His main problem was being left to work apart from the TI in a different church and for him there needed to be a method of writing into the working agreement a way of communicating its contents to the other people he worked with.

“They (*the PCC*) didn’t know the expectations ... all they saw was the dog collar.” During his curacy he offered draft working agreements between curate and PCCs for consideration to his CME group. Whilst his situation was unusual in being separated for much of the

time from his incumbent, it is worth considering how widely a working agreement can be valuably shared or whether more than one working agreement would be appropriate.

A working agreement in this context had the potential to clarify expectations, the curate was invited to engage in the process, the systems were in place to encourage good working practice. The curate was enthused about his involvement.

“Let’s take what’s burning inside you and put it on the working agreement.”

“I spent a lot of time in the first year putting it (*the working agreement*) together highlighting for each key area I wanted to be involved in and how to do it. So the document was put together, we had a meeting, everything looked rosy, got to the end of the year, analysed what we’d done, well actually we haven’t done that..”

As the curacy progressed he expressed similar frustration that the working agreement was not utilised as an actual ‘working’ document. He explains to his CME training officer (significantly not his TI),

“I’m sorry, I can’t, I just can’t sit again and go through the whole process of saying, ‘what do I want to achieve? What do I want to get out? and what do I want to be doing in my next year?’ and everybody’s going to sit down with the agreement and nobody’s going to do anything with it.”

and when asked to repeat the process in planning his second year,

“I wrote on the form refer to last year’s. and when you’ve completed that, when you have completed your side of it, then I’ll write this year’s.”

Refusing to be part of the annual review process of which the working agreement is a part, he described his action,

“...it was militant action in a sense ... I wanted to push him (*the TI*) ... into a corner and say, ‘Well, you’ve got to,’ because at that point I would have wanted more response.”

A system was in place to facilitate learning but it required both a system and form relevant to the specific context and the commitment of all parties to work with it. The opportunity was not only wasted, the lack of carry through contributed to demotivation.

Curate 1 related the provision for staff meetings and supervision sessions written into her working agreement with the TI as crucial to her well being in her first year. There is some contradiction that she valued the time with the TI that was laid down in the working agreement, but did not find this an opportunity to share all of her problems, she appears to have a specific, but unarticulated understanding of the subjects that could be discussed in a supervision session.

“We had a working agreement ... and certainly during the first year, that was a religious lead ... we had an hour every week, then we talked it through. That was good because I hear there’s other people haven’t had that.”

Less clear is the full content of the working agreement or any option of revision during that first year as she spoke of overwork and loss of time to complete an MA. A comprehensive working agreement should have included the requisite time for study.

The potential of the working agreement to establish expectations was rather lost for Curate 2, “I think when I first came I had to do like a working agreement. I had time for that and since then there’s been nothing.” As a result she does not find the TI the person to discuss her training needs with later in the curacy,

“I had the common sense to think I am not going to get training in this area, and I looked for people who would give me training.”

Similarly the working agreement was not a high priority for curate 4. He referred only to a review system which may or may not been related to drawing up a working agreement. He mentions,

“... a little sort of initial review after about a month or a month and a half.”

Later in the interview he comments that methods of review did not cover issues relevant to his needs,

“... *(they)* didn’t really touch on the sort of things I’ve been describing.”

He recommends,

“... there ought to be systems in place which give curates a little more *(input)* into the dynamic of this *(the curate/TI)* relationship, because you’re there to learn ostensibly.”

Had a system of writing and reference to the working agreement been consistent throughout the curates’ differing experiences and had such an agreement had the potential for revision during each year as required, it could have been a much more valuable document and tool for training.

As Witcombe notes,

“Working agreements are a valuable aid to communication, the most essential ingredient of a satisfactory working relationship.”³⁰

³⁰ Witcombe, The Curate’s Guide, p.96.

It seems particularly significant that Curate 5 describes her working agreement (the term used by her diocese) as a learning agreement. Whether this was her understanding or her TI's explicit usage is not established, but a contract of 'learning' rather than 'working' places a more appropriate emphasis on the experience.

3. Divorce

The published statistics on divorce can be interpreted in different ways, figures include the fact that one third of marriages entered into in 1995 had ended in divorce fifteen years later.³¹ Of the six interviews covering seven curacies undertaken for this research one of the curacies ended within eighteen months. Of the remaining six curacies, two others seriously considered requesting a move, one of whom progressed as far as enquiring from senior diocesan staff, whether this was possible. Half of the random curates selected at some point, seriously considered ending their curacy prematurely. The accompanying trauma of any such breaking in the training relationship is damaging for the individuals concerned and the wider parish. The curacy is structured to last three to four years with the same pairing of curate and TI. Once the possibility of a curate changing trainer becomes a reality, the relationship inevitably becomes more conditional in nature. Relate counsellor Martyn takes this logic one step further,

“... once it becomes possible to escape from marriage, it also becomes harder to decide whether a problem is terminal or can somehow be resolved.”³²

So too, once the practice of changing curacy becomes a common option during IME 4-7, it is likely that there will be less motivation to work through problems, which can be a valuable learning process and a greater tendency to change trainers. There is a tension

³¹ www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/Jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons accessed on 8/09/2012

³² Martyn, *Before you say I do*, p.56.

between ensuring a quality training experience and being prepared to work through conflicts and difficulties, a vital skill in self awareness and the maturing process. Relate advice includes,

“Even the best matched couples go through difficult patches in their relationship.”³³

“Love that has never been tested is more fragile. Problems can be a good thing”³⁴

“When a marriage is happy and fulfilling, it’s wonderful. When a marriage goes wrong, the misery can be overwhelming.”³⁵

When a marriage goes wrong, the misery can be overwhelming.

The curacy went wrong for Curate 6 and the misery was overwhelming. Six months into IME 4-7, his TI was signed off, officially with chronic fatigue. It seems unlikely that the TI was in a healthy position to begin the training relationship. Curate 6 described his TI as a ‘self confessed control freak’, someone who was

“...much more driven by the need for authority to exert itself than for the proper balance of power between incumbent and curate.”

Curate 6 placed the responsibility for the problems with the diocesan matchmaker and himself noted,

“I am not sure he was healthy enough to engage.”

The need to be in control extended into his period of sick leave when curate 6 was placed in the impossible position of being told not to bother the TI by the archdeacon, he complied, and then found himself being berated by a vicar who declared himself still the vicar of the parish and needing to be kept informed of parish matters. As the situation

³³ Litvinoff, Better Relationships, p.125.

³⁴ Litvinoff, Better Relationships, p.9.

³⁵ Martyn, Before you say I do, p.12.

progressed the curate carried a level of stress that meant he too was signed off work.

Curate 6 acknowledged that he did not find it easy to seek help,

“ my tendency is to try and bear the weight of difficulties.”

Alternative oversight was put in place but not on the day to day basis that was necessary, the situation dragged on until two clergy were damaged and broken. The diocese did then offer counselling but at a stage when curate 6 felt he was,

“... already significantly hurt, and not really able to engage effectively with the process.”

Curate 6 broke down into tears as he recalled the detail of his personal descent into emotional breakdown, he referred to the “personal scars” he had been left with and

“A lot of that will be stuff I will carry with me through life.”

His personal testimony describes the effects of the stress he experienced, had there been appropriate alternative oversight in place the breakdown might have been predicted and avoided.

I felt rather powerless but felt very driven to do more and more and I tended to end up doing, on some days, well very little, because I felt stripped of any competence. So, yes, some days I would sit at the computer and play stupid games for hours and hours just because, you know, because it felt almost too painful to do something that would be good enough. And at that time I just felt guilty at what was happening. And I wasn't able to rationally understand what was really happening inside me at the time.

Had the diocese taken alternative oversight more seriously when the incumbent fell ill, had the diocese had sufficient knowledge of the extent of the TI's ill health, things might have been different, or would they? Curate 6 spoke of talk early on in the curacy

“.. of retiring him on health grounds.” There were strong grounds for suspicion that the purpose of this particular match was to meet the TI's needs rather than curates, an ‘extra pair of hands’ rather than a place to train.

“ I think that having a curate in those parishes whilst someone was off sick was actually getting them out of a hole.”

I agreed with curate 6’s conclusion that

“the church did not do all that it should have done to protect me, to help me bear that.”

Curate 6 had taken personal responsibility for his training and had contacted the bishop about a potential move,

“I’d already been speaking with the bishop about whether there was a way in which I could be moved. We’d been talking about whether there was a possibility of giving me a final year as a curate in a place which was more healthy and a chance to recuperate.”

Duty of care

Where does the diocese’s duty of care as trainer begin and end? It is likely that moves to full secular employment law with common tenure will sharpen the diocese’s awareness of their responsibility to ensure adequate and non abusive training placements, yet within a context of a strong sense of call and belief in a faith trusting in resurrection following every crucifixion, such an assumption is more complex than in the secular world. Healing took place when the curate was affirmed in a nurturing training environment with a new TI. With the presenting evidence it seems unbelievable that the second was not selected as a trainer in the first place. The primary responsibility for ensuring a nurturing, non abusive training context must lie with those holding responsibility for the delivery of IME 4-7, the bishop and DDO.

A black mark

My personal impression was that there were adequate grounds for considering a divorce from their training incumbents for both curate 3 and curate 4. One of the inhibitors to taking action was the impression held by curates that to change parish would negatively affect future job prospects, especially if wishing to continue working in the training diocese.

Curate 4, whose TI was also suffering from health problems at the outset of IME 4-7, reached the stage of making a formal enquiry.

“I did at one stage in the curacy investigate whether it was possible to change my curacy and the enquiries that I made of the person in charge of CME, and it might have been the bishop..... that really even if it wasn't my fault it would go as a black mark against my career record if I did that. So I just decided to grin and bear it and sit it out.”

Curate 3 found he was initially unable to take a full part in the matchmaking process because of his lack of knowledge of Church of England traditions and structures. It took him some time into his curacy before he realised that change was an option, he expressed surprise on discovering a contemporary in another diocese had changed curacies when his did not work out, but he believed his previous experience would enable him to achieve an early exit from the curacy. The diocese had indicated before the commencement of IME 4-7 that his previous ministerial experience would equip him to move out of the curacy at an early opportunity. His displaying symptoms of demotivation had echoes of curate 6's experience.

“Every month was another month clicked off. so if the deal was you were only going to serve three years then it’s like prison, you know, let’s get it done.”

“If there had been a definite rule you aren’t going anywhere for four years, I would have gone to another one (*curacy*) after the second year.”

He understood his resilience and choice not to seek a move as a positive which indicates a culture in which endurance is valued over challenge and described his age and previous experience the reasons for his survival, without which,

“I would definitely have gone, I would not have completed the curacy.”

Curate 2 also identified a culture which valued continuance of an unsatisfactory situation as preferable to challenge and change.

“So I stuck at it, and then thought well I’ve got to find a way to make it work.”

Again she saw her age and previous experience as helping her do this.

“It came down to being a more mature person that I coped – and I think that maybe a younger person wouldn’t be able to do that.”

She was the curate so desperately concerned that she should not be identified in the research by those leading her diocese, she identified a hierarchy of friendships behind the scenes that she found threatening.

“I was so concerned that I didn’t want to step over the boundary and I was thinking I’ve got to be very careful what I’m saying here because they’re friends.”

The move to common tenure for clergy enables dismissal of poorly performing clergy but has an accompanying responsibility for good in training support to be provided. It is to be hoped that the willingness to bring the church into line with good secular employment

practice also indicates a willingness to accept responsibility for good oversight and provision of training. IME 4-7 is particularly vulnerable to potential problems precisely because of the inevitable close nature of the curate and TI relationship. The analysis of relationships is qualitative not quantitative, tick box forms will not necessarily reveal problems. It requires close, personal and relational oversight by IME or other senior diocesan officer. It is inconceivable that friendships within the secret corridors of power, or fear of poor references inhibit mature professional people from taking personal responsibility for their training within a Christian training environment. Such attitudes are similar to the ones that allowed the sexual abuse of children historically to go undetected within some parts of the church for so long. The church above all institutions must promote transparency and honesty and not secrecy and self delusion. It is unclear why proper professional lines of accountability seem so much more difficult to establish within a church rather than a secular context.

When a marriage is happy and fulfilling, it's wonderful.

The two curacies, curacy 5 and curacy 6b, which were happy and fulfilling were indeed wonderful.

Curate 6 reported experiencing a curacy of two halves but perceptively noted that there is a natural human tendency to recall greater detail of the bad times than the good.

“I suppose it's the first half I have more to say about, if something's difficult it tends to ingrain itself more into your psyche.”

He talked predominantly about the first damaging curacy. Curate 5 who spoke of an outstandingly good training in which she flourished also had the shortest interview. Neither Curate 5 nor Curate 6b considered divorcing their TI. Neither emphasised the structure of

the curacy, supervision sessions or working agreements, curate 5 found supervision sessions superfluous when the reflection had already taken place in the course of the working day. She spoke briefly of a learning rather than a working agreement. Curate 6b did not refer to any working agreement, it is likely one existed, IME officers tend to insist, but that specific reference to it was not considered necessary when training requirements were met. We cannot know about his supervision sessions. For both, loyalty grew out of a trusting relationship, it did not have to be demanded but was offered spontaneously because of the mutual respect held and the quality of the curate/TI relationship. Interestingly both emphasised their TI's being 'laid back', whilst the other curates described their TIs quite differently.

"He (*the TI*) was so laid back he was nearly falling over." (Curate 6b)

"He was so laid back he was practically lying down" (Curate 5)

This term does not relate to a casual approach to training, for both considered their TIs most professional, but rather an attitude of mind and degree of being self assured and self confident. The characteristics of their relationships were warmth, mutuality and friendship. There was a degree of trust which allowed each to develop individually of the other with no expectation of cloning. I remain convinced that a crucial quality of a training incumbent is that he or she is capable of forming lasting and quality relationships.

Neither curate 5 nor curate 6b had specific training needs nor looked to work in a context other than a parish, yet it was curate 6 who suggested bespoke or made to measure rather than off the peg curacies. I remain convinced that it takes a maturity of personality and character to be able to accommodate a curate in a TI's working life. It requires an integration of self and a well developed understanding of personal and priestly identity in

order to have the vulnerability necessary to allow a curate to grow to their full potential.

Any personal instability or insecurity that leads to jealousy or threat, whether because of a mature curate's previous skills or other reason, cannot be part of the TI's make up.

A first response

Matchmaking

Selecting good trainers

The importance placed by the church of matching the curate with a suitable trainer was not evident in the research sample. The first criteria, even before matchmaking begins must be that bishops select good trainers. Ministry is relational in nature and a prerequisite must be for the curate to be placed with a trainer who is self aware and self reflective and crucially, can model good relationships between him or herself and the curate. The selection criteria for training priests include elements relating to personality and character and relationships. The personality and character criteria include the ability to be self reflective and the capability to integrate ongoing self understanding with one's personality.

The same care is not evident in selecting training incumbents with the relevant and required personality traits and the ability to model self reflection and integrative practice as is required of the training curate. The summary document stating the criteria to which prospective priests should aspire states,

“Candidates should be sufficiently self-aware, mature and stable to show that they are able to sustain the demanding role of an ordained minister. They should be able to demonstrate

how they have faced change and pressure in a balanced and flexible way and how they manage stress.”³⁶

It would follow that these criteria should be especially well developed for a TI who will inevitable experience change, challenge and potential stress in the training of a curate.

Similarly the character selection criteria for a prospective priest include.

“Candidates should show the capacity to build healthy, personal, professional and pastoral relationships ... They should be able to manage conflict and show an ability to negotiate difficult relationships”

Before forming final conclusions recommending specific criteria for trainers, it must be ascertained that basic selection criteria for priests are well developed and self evident in trainers.

Appropriate training contexts

Curates 1 and 3 both required specific training contexts, Curate 1 in order to train for chaplaincy and Curate 3 to explore the differing nature of Church of England parish priest to free church minister. Curate 6 commented,

“I would love to see a much more imaginative approach to designing curacies which fit the individual and which may involve work outside of parishes as well as work inside the parish.”

“I think there is a need for a change in attitude in the church which will result in a more bespoke curacy rather than an off the peg curacy.”

As financial constraints impinge on training budgets, it is even more important that the training is fit for purpose. Extending the marriage metaphor, resources could be employed

³⁶ Archbishops’ Council, A summary of the criteria for selection for training for ministry in the Church of England from July 2010, 2010 provided as accompanying document to the author with a reference request for a candidate exploring ordination.

more efficiently, both financially and particularly by choosing clothing for the curacy that was bespoke rather than off the peg.

The choice of training incumbent and establishment of an appropriate context for training must be predominantly the matchmakers', bishop and DDO's, responsibility for they create and hold the book of possibilities.

Life together

A modern marriage emphasises equality of status and equal rights of the partners. Whilst within the training relationship the trainer has a responsibility for overseeing training, the interviews suggest that it is within a context of mutual commitment to the training task, mutual respect for each other's competencies and a desire to collaborate rather than compete, that curate and TI flourish.

Within a marriage Relate counsellors suggest that it is not the similarity of partners in a pivotal relationship that dictates growth but shared responsibility.

Relate counsellors know that happiness in a relationship does not depend on harmony. Meeting problems in the right way deepens love, and couples who learn to tackle differences positively can survive even serious crises. ... Working through problems together so that there is no winner or loser has a transforming effect on love ... Unresolved problems are disruptive and damaging.³⁷

A more hierarchical, less equal, curate/TI relationship has greater potential for power abuse or over dependence. Mature curates are more likely to have been in a position of authority over others in previous working lives by virtue of their age and length of working life. It can be especially frustrating and potentially destructive for them to be denied a voice in their training. In marriage and in curacy both partners must be committed to the flourishing

³⁷ Litvinoff, "Better Relationships – Practical ways to make your love last". (London: Vermilion, 2001), p.9.

of each as individuals, and be prepared to commit not just to the marriage or curacy but take ongoing responsibility for sustaining the relationship.

Divorce

Hopefully no couple enter marriage anticipating an early divorce or the marriage is a parody. Similarly no training incumbent and curate should be paired where the potential for a breakdown of relationship is high, or it too makes a joke of training. Divorce exists as an option when all attempts at reconciliation have failed. The tension between making divorce too easy so it is chosen too hastily, and offering a safety net when things go wrong is high. There is evidence of woolly inconsistent thinking within IME 4-7, with an implicit message that suffering may be good for the soul. It is one thing to emerge from problems the stronger for having experienced them and another to be destroyed because problems were not adequately addressed. Just as couples with problems can benefit from the professional counselling services of Relate, so too there needs to be a readily accessible and confidential mediation and counselling service for curates and TIs, offered by trained professionals. Such a service can never operate within a hierarchical structure of reporting and assessment and must be offered independently of the church, much in the same way as some dioceses now offer independent coaching for job applications and interviews.³⁸

Relate states their aims on their website,

Relate's vision is a future in which healthy relationships form the heart of a thriving society.

Our mission is to develop and support healthy relationships by:

- helping couples, families and individuals to make relationships work better
- delivering inclusive, high-quality services that are relevant at every stage of life

³⁸ Oxford Diocese currently offer access to secular independent career coaching for clergy anticipating a career move.

- helping both the public and policymakers to improve their understanding of relationships and what makes them flourish.”³⁹

A similar statement would not be out of place within IME 4-7 training.

However, before making more detailed recommendations as to how IME 4-7 might be structured and delivered in the future, it is important to consider the nature of the process. It is important to decide upon the nature of priests needed to serve within the contemporary context and in the next chapter I will explore the nature of priests through the eyes of contemporary priest theologians in the light of the presenting issues emerging from the interviews.

³⁹ www.relate.org.uk/about-us/index.html accessed on 11/09/2012

5. EXPLORING THE NATURE OF PRIESTS

It is pivotal to the training process for curate and TI to hold a shared understanding of the purpose of the task. This is more difficult to evaluate in the disparate context of a plethora of parishes than when ordinands are gathered, trained and assessed in a residential training institution. Residential training colleges are inspected regularly by Ministry Division to assess

“...fitness for purpose of the training institution for preparing candidates for ordained and licensed ministry.”¹

Structures are in place to ensure that trainer and trainee hold at least an overlapping if not fully shared understanding of the priesthood for which they are being prepared. The context of curacies makes such oversight more problematic. Whereas an ordinand can choose a residential training college that is compatible with his or her understanding of the nature of priesthood, this is not necessarily as straightforward when selecting a curacy. This may be because such understandings are not clearly articulated or that other criteria drive the process.

Where fundamental differences emerge in the marriage relationship, there are often different unarticulated expectations of the nature of marriage. At its most basic one spouse may understand marriage as a relationship in which children are to be born and nurtured and the other as a mutual commitment of two adults to share their lives and support each

¹ taken from the introduction to the Ripon College, Cuddesdon inspection report 2009 accessed at <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/56194/RCC%20Report> on 16.11.2012

other's careers to the exclusion of children, both acceptable but crucially different definitions. In a mismatched pairing disagreement and conflict are likely outcomes. There is similar potential for conflict in the TI/curate relationship, where the two have different understandings of the nature of priests.

This chapter explores the nature of priests with particular emphasis on aspects of priesthood that emerged from the interviews and which were a cause of conflict. In keeping with the inductive nature of the methodology, this chapter is deliberately placed after the interview data, so as to minimise influence on the interpretation of the interviews. Within the interviews each curate's understanding that he or she needed to develop his or her own priestly identity was clear. For some this was incorporated within an understanding of the totality of their personhood called to be priest, where such a calling would necessarily be unique according to each individual's personal giftings and previous life experience.

Curate 3 spoke more explicitly of his continuing development as a priest within the curacy, “.. I'm forming my own theology and how I am going to develop.”

Curate 4 acknowledged within an otherwise difficult curacy that his TI allowed him to, “develop my own ministry.”

Curate 1 described her frustration that her understanding of priesthood being concerned with people travelling together did not fit the church's hierarchical structures.

“In the Anglican hierarchical structure there is no room for someone like me.”

It was when each curate's personal and unique priestly identity was not respected and acknowledged that conflict arose. When mature curates felt their being subsumed within the TI's or the institution's preconceived models their reactions were the strongest. Thus curate 2 described herself as a possession, curate 1 felt herself inhibited from discussing even privately issues on which she and her TI disagreed, curate 6b felt his skills rejected and curate 2 encountered jealousy from the TI as he formed close relationships with parishioners.

The Church of England's website includes a section introducing enquirers to the different authorised ministries within the Church of England. It says of priesthood, "Priesthood is not only about what a person does. It is also about what a person is."² The foundation of being or what a person is, is fundamentally unique and personal, yet in the context of priestly training inescapably public. Where TI and curate hold different outcomes of priestly being in mind, and are working to different agendas, the collateral damage to the parish and the two priests can be very serious indeed.

In this chapter I intend to explore contrasting understandings of priesthood, drawing on the work of Michael Ramsay, Carter Heyward and Michael Sadgrove and consider the differing understandings of God and hierarchy that these imply. I am especially interested in their attitude towards the curate/TI relationship and anything that may throw light on the inevitable struggle to address the inequalities of status and power between trainer and trainee. I begin with the 2003 'Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church'³ which has been the foundational document informing the training of curates in the last decade, yet

² <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifevents/ministry/ministryinthecofe.html/#priest>, p4 accessed on 14/05/06

³ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church

risks inferring, from the outset in its title and use of the word formation, that there is a set model to which a curate must conform. Its primary outcome was to recommend a continuum of training in IME 1-7, such that there should be a continuity between the residential college training of IME 1-3 and the practical, parish based curacy or IME 4-7. This document has been the basis on which any changes in training methods have been made in recent years. I also make reference to expectations expressed the Church of England ordinations services (or ordinal) and to which priests must assent.

Formation

I begin by exploring any change in emphasis in residential theological training over the last six years with reference to the meaning or nature of formation. Formation remains a word which assumes a wide range of definitions. It is not the purpose of this study to pin down a definition rather to identify that's its use and adds to the confusion surrounding IME 4-7. Formation was a word that was repeated frequently in the report in the context of learning and growing in ministry as an ordained priest. The Hind Report notes: "The term 'formation' is widely used in ministerial education."⁴ True, but it is not clear whether this refers to inner ontological transformation of being, pivotal to a catholic understanding of priesthood or a more practical acquisition of requisite ministerial skills or some combination of the two understandings on the continuum between. In a secular context formation is descriptive of the experience of mature trainees who have necessarily been 'formed' by their life experience for more years than younger ones.

⁴ General Synod, Formation for ministry within a learning church, p.37.

Neither the Hind report nor the residential college websites provide a clear definition of the word. The Hind Report alludes to two elements of the formation process as ‘transformation’ of the individual into the likeness of Christ and the process of being ‘conformed’ into the public role at the service of the Church.⁵ This is an interesting use of words as transformation suggests a less restrictive type of change with more creative possibilities, whilst conformation suggests greater restriction, uniformity and similarity of being.

My initial fears of theological college being a vicar factory stemmed from an understanding of conformity being a negative experience relating to compulsion. My inner desire had been for transformation with associated personal perceptions of this as a positive experience relating to growth and freedom. Certainly transformation is a more personal and open ended experience and conformation one of adapting to the structures and expectations of the church. Transformation relates more closely to the nature of the individual and conformation to the role or function they perform.

The interview data suggested that there was greater disharmony where TI’s training methods had been more conformist, the curates resenting the perceived affront to their unique and personal gifting and individuality. It is possible that mature curates especially, regard themselves as having already developed or been formed more fully over a longer life and greater life experiences. Without a comparative study of younger curates this is not possible to confirm, but remains a potential factor in the training of the over forties. My own response to the word formation, when training as a forty eight year old ordinand in a

⁵ General Synod, Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church, p.38.

residential theological college was that the word was at best presumptive, at worst constricting. I had understood my individuality, personhood and life experience as pivotal to my calling, I was a mature adult, I did not anticipate there was need to alter the basic nature of my personality or inner world to become a priest. The person discerned at selection as a potential priest was the gift of self I offered. The examples of ordinands' resentment at being restricted or corrected in their ministry in the interviews, supports this view. For example, Curate 2 was angered when her TI did not welcome her offers of hospitality to the congregation one Christmas and curate 6a strongly resented intercessions being reordered by the TI in his first curacy.

A trawl through the Anglican theological college websites in 2006 revealed several references to the word formation which was widely used across the different churchmanships and traditions of the Church of England. Oak Hill, which describes itself as part of the Reform tradition, declared itself, "...committed to Anglican Formation."⁶ Whilst Mirfield, an anglo-catholic theological college at the opposite end of the spectrum, understood

"Our primary task is the formation of those who are responding to a vocation to the priesthood."⁷ The word formation was being used across the full range of theological colleges as they described their aims and facilities. The Trinity Hall, Bristol website offered a general reference where Ministry Formation Groups were described as meeting "...to explore experientially what it means to be a Anglican, the nature of priesthood and ministry, and leading God's people in the 21st century."⁸

⁶ <http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/ordination/anglican.html> accessed on 3/02/06

⁷ <http://www.mirfield.org.uk/college/> accessed on 3/02/06.

⁸ <http://www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/index.php?id=29> accessed on 3/02/06.

Cranmer Hall aimed, “ to provide resources for formation and training for the church and mission”⁹, at Ripon College, Cuddesdon ministerial formation was achieved by offering “a training programme which aims at preparing the whole person for mission and ministry in the contemporary church.”¹⁰

The evangelical college Ridley Hall, Cambridge defined formation as “developing holiness in character and lifestyle”¹¹. The general tenor of usage confirmed findings of the Hind Report that formation is a process involved in the development of the whole person from lay to ordained status. At this stage, it is not my intention to delve deeply into the different usages of the word, and emphases of functionality or internal transformation rather to check whether, six years later there are any changes in its usage which would indicate a changed approach to training.

In 2012, Ridley Hall and Oak Hill’s usage had changed very little. Ridley Hall still referred to formation being associated with the development of holiness in character and lifestyle¹² and Oak Hill retained the strapline “Committed to Anglican Formation”.¹³ Ripon College Cuddesdon’s website also remained relatively lowkey in its reference to formation. More interesting were changes at Trinity College, Bristol which had dropped any reference at all to formation and Mirfield which had changed its emphasis quite considerably. From the freestanding statement of intention that their primary task is the formation of those who are responding to a vocation to the priesthood, they have added more detailed and apologetic explanation of what they mean,

⁹ <http://www.dur.ac.uk/st-john's.college/cranmer> accessed on 3/02/06.

¹⁰ <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/rcc/MinisterialFormation> accessed on 3/02/06.

¹¹ <http://www.ridley.cam.ac.uk/calling.html> accessed on 3/02/06.

¹² <http://www.ridley.cam.ac.uk/calling.html> accessed on 30/04/12.

¹³ <http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/programme/ordination/anglican-formation.html> accessed on 30/04/12.

“ministerial formation needs to be focussed in a particular way which will form and equip ordinands for the new public and representative roles to which they are being called.”¹⁴

My conclusion was that the concept of formation which is related to changes in the totality of an individual’s being as they deepen their personal understanding of priesthood remained almost as influential over these six years but with just a suggestion, by removal from the Trinity College website and the need to define it more carefully at Mirfield, that this might be perceived as slightly more contentious than once it had been.

The expression I prefer to use in this research is priestly identity. This expression encompasses differing theological understandings, but emphasises the personal understanding of self and purpose that each curate must develop during their training years and beyond. Statistically the changes on the websites are only minimally significant but I am eager to identify any hints that that might support my own contention that training institutions are in any way becoming more sensitive to societal moves from hierarchical structures to horizontal ones, an increase in interest in collaborative ways of working and a move towards more relational working.

Conflict evident in the research interviews generally surrounded different understandings of where and how the locus of authority was held. As society becomes less formal in behaviour, less hierarchical in structure and working practices become more collaborative, mature ordained men and women entering their practical phase of training with a TI in the curacy are more likely to expect the changes they have experienced in secular working life

¹⁴ <http://www.mirfield.org.uk/formation/> accessed on 30/04/12.

to be reflected in their clerical training. The interview data suggests that training in curacies reflects little of the changes evident in the surrounding culture.

Relational Ministry

Jordan, analysing the work of interim ministers in the Church of England who offer short term time limited leadership during vacancies or pastoral reorganisation, refers to an operant theology in congregations which relates priestly authority to relationships. She identifies parochial ministry as “a unique emotional system.”¹⁵ and states, “Priestly authority is, apparently, a relational leadership, heavily dependant on the skill of the vicar for its maintenance.”¹⁶

She cites the expressions used when a priest announces his or her intention to leave a parish as indicating the profoundly relational nature of the post. Parishioners made comments to her such as, “we thought you liked it here” and “what will you do without your friends (here) around you?”¹⁷ I have experienced similar responses on announcing my decision to leave a parish, “It’s not something we’ve done is it?” or “We are going to miss you” and “We thought you were happy here.” Neither is this particular to parish life. I have personal experience of membership of a cathedral congregation where relationship breakdown divided the congregation as supporters of dean or chapter, based on their degree of friendship with each. Whilst the congregation operate an informal and “uninstructed” theology¹⁸ this is the system which is lived and within which the priest

¹⁵ Elizabeth Ann Jordan, Monarch, Shepherd or Parent? Interim Ministry and the Church of England in Practical Theology, Vol 5.1 2012, (Croydon: Equinox Publishing), p.68.

¹⁶ Jordan, Monarch, Shepherd or Parent?, p.68.

¹⁷ Jordan, Monarch, Shepherd or Parent?, p.69.

¹⁸ Jeff Astley, Ordinary Theology – Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.56.

serves. More traditional or formal theologies of priesthood as servant, shepherd or prophet or even more contemporary models of “artful story-teller”, “wounded companion” or “faith coach”,¹⁹ offer valuable theoretical analyses of what is taking place to an objective outsider, but that which priest and people experience is the lived context.

The ordination service draws heavily on the metaphor of sheep and shepherd, “They (*priests*) are to set the example of the Good Shepherd always before them as the pattern of their calling.”

“Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent.”²⁰

This pastoral metaphor is not relational, shepherds may know their sheep by name but do not have any meaningful interaction beyond the provision of food and shelter, similarly few congregations would appreciate being likened to a flock of sheep. It is in inhabiting the lived context of priesthood and the parish upon which curates flourish or fall.

A contextual model is required which is accessible and applicable to the aspirations of both priest and parish. To develop the marriage metaphor, if the relationship between priest and curate is that of spouses, then the relationship between clergy and congregation can be extrapolated to be that of parents and children. A family model of church and congregation is one that has been well documented. A familial model can be very useful in understanding the sometimes adolescent behaviour, outbursts and personal attack that priests have experienced. Such a familial metaphor can contain both the desire to belong and to rebel as members discover their positional authority. The model of father is a

¹⁹ John Pritchard, *The Life and Work of a Priest* (London: SPCK, 2007), pp.vii,viii.

²⁰ Common Worship. *The Ordination of Priest, also called Presbyters*

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/ordinals/priests.html accessed on 14/05/06

traditional relational model and that of mother a newly emerging contemporary model. The 2012 summer conference offered by Ripon College, Cuddesdon was entitled “Priesthood and Motherhood” with one of the main speakers, Revd Emma Percy, a priest currently completing a Ph.D using a maternal model for understanding parish ministry. Whether her work suggests that a maternal model is more relational and less hierarchical in nature than a paternal model, cannot be ascertained at this stage, there is clearly an underlying assumption of difference to trigger both research and conference title. I do not wish to analyse these two models in detail, rather to explore and confirm the move from less to more relational models.

Models of priesthood

Ultimately, I seek a model of priesthood which is realistic and relational and in which both TI and curate and, by inference the parish, flourish. I intend to explore the nature of priesthood through traditional and more contemporary authors with the intention of discovering pathways into understanding a more relational model for contemporary times. My impressions from the interview data is that curates are increasingly drawn to concepts of transformation within formation than conformation, and to fulfilment rather than sacrifice. I have selected Michael Ramsay²¹ as the author of a classical understanding of priesthood. “The Christian Priest Today” has been on the bibliographies of potential and actual ordinands since its publication in 1972. In contrast, Carter Heyward²², writing in the nineties, is a theologian with an intentionally relational understanding of priesthood and of

²¹ Michael Ramsay, The Christian Priest Today, Revised Edition (London:SPCK, 1985), first published 1972.

²² See Carter Heyward, Staying Power, (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1995)

what God is, yet she remains relatively unknown to many ordinands and priests.²³ To this mix, I then consider the contribution Michael Sadgrove²⁴, one of the more recent writers in this field who picks up the value of wisdom in ministerial leadership in a rapidly changing world. He occupies a space between Ramsay and Heyward, he acknowledges a high regard for Ramsay's work whilst offering a new approach in analysing the ministerial task.

Concepts of obedience and authority

Ramsay

Rereading Ramsay's work after a gap of ten years, I was struck by two virtues which he emphasises but which rarely appear in the interview data or in the relevant late twenty and twenty first century literature. Ramsay emphasises the concept that obedience to God is pivotal to vocation and calling, whilst the Christian minister must also be an exemplar of humility in delivery of the ministerial task. On reading his text, I found the emphasis on obedience particularly uncomfortable, it was important that I acknowledged and explored the reason. My suspicion was that my personal and visceral reaction mirrored something unarticulated yet present within many contemporary TI/curate relationships. Initially the word obedience suggested an undesirable concept of hierarchical power quite contrary to my understandings of collaborative ministry and the centrality of mutuality in relationship. It also related more easily to concepts of conformation and potential coercion rather than transformation with implied outcomes of freedom and liberation.

²³ Anecdotally none of 12 students on a course I taught at a local theological college in 2011 had heard of her, nor the colleagues in the team in which I currently work, nor two bishops I encountered during recent job interviews in 2012.

²⁴ Michael Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, (London:SPCK, 2008)

Returning to the marriage metaphor, the word obey, once a compulsory component of the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer, is absent from the main text of the Common Worship marriage service and offered only as an additional option. The word ‘obey’ was and is only ever avowed by the woman to the man and suggests an unwelcome patriarchal ordering of the marriage relationship. Its disappearance in modern usage suggests its incompatibility in contemporary understandings of the marriage relationship and perhaps any relationship. Can obedience be compatible with concepts of mutuality, equality and reciprocity so highly valued in the twenty first century? I hoped my exploration of the chosen texts would clarify my thinking.

Ramsay was writing forty years ago, his book was published in 1972. He acknowledges that even then the concept of obedience was unfashionable.

“Has not the idea of obedience as a Christian virtue rather slipped out of our contemporary religion? ... We tend to think it smacks of legalism, and not to dwell upon it. But it has an ineradicable place in the New Testament. Jesus was “obedient unto death” (Phil. 2:8) and “he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb.5.8) ”²⁵

Coupled with Ramsay’s concern for obedience are not unrelated references to judgement. Judgement can be an alien concept in a relational world which more readily responds to concepts of mutual accountability. Those who make judgements place themselves in a superior moral position over those they judge. Jesus advises caution in judgement, of the woman caught committing adultery,

²⁵ Michael Ramsay, The Christian Priest Today, Revised Edition, (London: SPCK, 1985) p.62 and first published in 1972.

“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”²⁶

Of criticising or judging a neighbour,

“..first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.”²⁷

So it is with hesitation that we read Ramsay’s words,

“Recall a biblical doctrine too often forgotten, the doctrine of divine judgement.”²⁸ Such a statement indicates a legalism ill at ease with the modern world.

The obedience which Ramsay considers ineradicable has become hidden, if not in actuality absent, in contemporary understandings of ministry. I am reminded of the Archdeacon who compared the emphasis on the personal self sacrifice demanded by ministry in previous decades and the personal fulfilment sought by priests today. It is a reasonable assumption that the majority of experienced parish priests selected as training incumbents will be more familiar with aspirations of self sacrifice taught in theological colleges of twenty years ago or more, than those of personal fulfilment more familiar to a curate in 2012. Problems are inevitable where a mismatch of expectations is encountered and where TI and curate have themselves been ordained in such different contexts. TI’s ages were not mentioned in the research interviews as the emphasis was on the curate’s experience, but more important than chronological age is the theological and cultural understanding of hierarchy in which priestly training or formation takes place. I quote at length Ramsay’s reference to ‘The Priest’s Book of Private Devotions’ in order to demonstrate a very different training context and attitude than might be expected today.

Volo, quidquid vis,

²⁶ NRSV John 8:7.

²⁷ NRSV Matthew 7:5.

²⁸ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p.22.

Volo quia vis,
Volo quomodo vis,
Volo quamdiu vis.

I commend to you the “four Q’s”. They often help me when duties are irksome and one is saying, “Do I really have to do this?” or “I cannot stick this for much longer”. *Quidquid*, if God wills it, God’s presence will be in it, however tiresome it may be. *Quia*, if God wills it, this becomes the motive. *Quomodo*, we are to do it not just in the way we might ourselves have planned, for the *how* is in God’s hands. *Quamdiu*, I must be ready to do this for as long as God wills that I should.²⁹

He does not make clear how one is to determine the nature of God’s will, other than through a general reference to prayer. The task is to attune the mind of self to that of the other, God. Assuming spiritually mature priests are sought as TIs, there is a presumption that they are well advanced in mastering the task, and so have a greater understanding of God’s will than a curate. Such an attitude encourages the establishment of a hierarchy of knowledge of the divine and leaves little room for question and challenge. It is potentially incompatible with collaborative working.

The virtue of obedience is closely linked to the understanding of the authority of the priest.

Ramsay tells his retreatants and his many readers since publication,

“Tomorrow you will receive authority. Make no mistake the authority is real and tremendous. The bishop who ordains you has authority in Christ’s name to be the minister through whose prayer and action Christ’s authority is given to you in his church.”³⁰

Ramsay refers to the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) ordinal (ordination service). At the ordination of deacons, and noting that all priests are first ordained deacons and remain deacons even when they become priests, the Bishop lays hands on the kneeling deacon and says,

²⁹ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p.64 attributed to Pope Clement VI but not otherwise referenced and the book does not have a bibliography.

³⁰ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p. 66.

“Take thou authority to execute the office of a Deacon in the Church of God..”

and

“Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God..”³¹

In the Common Worship ordination service this reference is tempered as these words are positioned differently in the service and spoken as the new deacon is given a Bible,

“Receive this book, as a sign of the authority given you this day to speak God's word to his people.”³²

In Common Worship too, there is an earlier charge by the Bishop to the deacons which gives greater emphasis to service than authority.

“Remember always with thanksgiving that the people among whom you will minister are made in God's image and likeness. In serving them you are serving Christ himself, before whom you will be called to account.”³³

Changes in the ordination services indicate a change in model of deacon and priest, moving from an emphasis on authority to a greater primacy of service. The emphasis on obedience to those higher up the hierarchy has also changed.

Whilst the Book of Common Prayer asks of the deacon,

“Will you reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief ministers of the Church, and them to whom the charge and government over you is committed, following with a glad mind and will, their godly admonitions?”³⁴

the Common Worship ordinal reads,

³¹ Book of Common Prayer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, no publication date given but reproducing the 1662 edition and including Clergy (ordination and Miscellaneous Provisions) Measures 1964. Noting the ordination of deacons remains fundamentally unchanged since 1662.

³² <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/deacons.aspx> accessed on 01/05/12

³³ <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/deacons.aspx> accessed on 01/05/12

³⁴ Book of Common Prayer see reference 31.

“Will you accept the discipline of this Church and give due respect to those in authority?”³⁵

‘Respect’ is a phrase open to a wide range of individual interpretation, as recent attempts of the Church of England’s General Synod to effect legislation for allowing women in the episcopacy attests.³⁶

Ramsay’s book is a transcript of addresses given to ordinands as they prepared for ordination according to the BCP. It is clear that the Common Worship ordination service reflects a reduced emphasis on authority and subsequent obedience to that authority. I suspect this direction of movement continues towards an even greater equality of relationship and mutuality between trainer and trainee today. It is around these different cultural understandings of the TI and curate relationship that misunderstandings and difficulties emerge.

Heyward

At the other end of the authority/mutuality dichotomy, stands Carter Heyward. She would find such unquestioning obedience when one Christian (the TI) requires another Christian (the curate) to undertake Ramsay’s ‘irksome’ duties, challenging. She offers four ways in which the Christian may check the authenticity of God’s voice including as the first, “... the voices of God always call us into more fully into *mutually empowering relationship* in which all parties are taken seriously and enabled more fully to be true selves.”³⁷

³⁵ <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/deacons.aspx> accessed on 01/05/12

³⁶ In November 2012 the Church of England’s General Synod failed to pass legislation that would allow women to be consecrated as bishops. Much of the disagreement revolved round the relative strength or weakness of the word respect in one of the clauses.

³⁷ Carter Heyward, Staying Power – reflections on gender, justice and compassion (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2000), p.53. Author’s emphasis.

She regards God's voice as being historically distorted by the church when it is described as being spoken down to the individual.

"Even when spoken as a benevolent voice, this hierarchical power, insofar as it represents an un-changing, static relationship between God and his/her people, or between the priest and his/her people is not a sacred voice at all but rather that of an idol created to hold patriarchal power in place."³⁸

She goes on to identify the Anglican priesthood as patriarchal and pleads for priests of today to reform the Anglican priesthood so that it becomes less hierarchical and demonstrates greater mutuality. She eschews individualism and looks for connectedness between leader and follower, priest and people and by implication TI and curate. It is within the context of mutuality of relationship that she discovers Christ.

Images of God

Not only do these understandings reflect different levels of equality within relationships, they also mirror different emphases on the transcendence or immanence of God. Ramsay uses language suggesting a distant God who demands obedience from his subjects in order that his kingdom may be realised, a pattern seemingly to be mimicked by training incumbent and curate. He quotes Christians as being "Christ's slaves."³⁹ He justifies such a hierarchical system by emphasising the need for priests to act with Christ's humility especially when exercising the power invested in them as leaders. Whilst reminding the ordinands before him that they will receive authority which is real and tremendous, he adds,

³⁸ Heyward, Staying Power, p.54.

³⁹ Ramsay, The Christian Priest Today, p.63.

“By your humility you will prove that the authority entrusted to you is really Christ’s”⁴⁰

The model Ramsay espouses is hierarchical in nature even if to be exercised in humility, there is no suggestion of collaboration or the shared authority espoused by Heyward who has a totally different understanding of God as “power in relation”⁴¹, in that she emphasises the relational and immanent nature of God.

Whereas Ramsay quotes Jesus’ command to love one another as an instruction issued by a powerful, superior and transcendent other which is to be obeyed by his followers, Heyward describes an immanent, even intimate love which can only be actualised in the making of right and mutual relationships. For Ramsay, a quality of love similar to that of Jesus for his followers must be exercised in order to establish God’s kingdom. For Heyward, Christ and by implication the kingdom, is discovered when self giving love is realised.

The difference in emphasis may seem small but the resultant pattern of leadership is vastly different. Ramsay’s model is vertical and patriarchal and the process of devolution of authority is top down, Heyward’s model is horizontal and authority is genuinely shared rather than delegated. Ramsay’s model begins with God who delivers an edict of love which creates a loving community amongst those who obey him. Heyward’s model begins with people who in their acts of shared love discover God among them and with them, this is not even a bottom up model as all, humanity and God, operate at the same level in mutual relationship. The different understandings create very different styles of leadership and very different models of priesthood. In the research interviews Curacy 5 stood out as one in which mutual flourishing of TI and curate took place within a positive, mutual,

⁴⁰ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p. 67.

⁴¹ Heyward, *Staying Power*, p.17.

interactive and dynamic relationship. Heyward created the verb ‘goddling’⁴² to describe such an experience. The degree of mutuality within the relationship being directly proportional to the degree the pairing can discover God and ultimately their truest selves. The more hierarchical models of, for example, curacies 2 and 4, did not exhibit such vitality nor allow for the development of mutuality of relationships.

Sadgrove

Sadgrove’s contribution is to hold a position midway between Ramsay and Heyward, he introduces wisdom as the means by which a priest can hold together the apparent contradiction of listening for and responding to God’s direction and attending to the context and voice of the people he or she serves. The influence of Ramsay on Sadgrove’s thinking is acknowledged in a short preface to the bibliography,

“If there is one book on ministry I wish I could have written myself, it would be Michael Ramsay’s classic *The Christian Priest Today*. Any minister could profitably read it through once a year.”⁴³

Yet he also acknowledges his own approach, through the use of Old Testament wisdom texts, as one previously neglected by church and theologians, Sadgrove describes his book as

“... an attempt to reflect on the *meaning* of ordained ministry as it is understood and experienced both by the Church and by the ordained themselves.”⁴⁴

Sadgrove’s work is practical and experiential compared to Ramsay’s which, to the modern ear, sounds doctrinal and unachievably idealistic. The wisdom which Sadgrove emphasises

⁴² see also Carter Heyward’s *Saving Jesus From those Who are Right – rethinking what it means to be a Christian*, Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1999 for a more extensive explanation of her use of the verb ‘goddling’.

⁴³ Michael Sadgrove, *Wisdom and Ministry – the call to leadership*, (London: SPCK, 2008), p.146.

⁴⁴ Sadgrove, *Wisdom and Ministry*, p.3.

is a concept particularly relevant within a research project pertaining to older curates who possess greater life experience. I hold within me an unproven connection between wisdom and age and more readily assume wisdom to be found in the old than the young. Such an assumption reflects the preponderance of images, literary and visual, in society pertaining to the wisdom of old age, the use of the word ‘elder’ and various instructions in the biblical book of Proverbs.⁴⁵ This connection was affirmed at a recent training course for those accompanying and guiding candidates exploring their ministerial calling, when as a vocational advisor, I was directed to establish whether older candidates exhibited a degree of maturity that might be expected for their age.⁴⁶

For Sadgrove wisdom is the virtue which allows the priest to hold together the contradiction of authority and service, he picks up Ramsay’s notion of humility and develops it. Sadgrove’s way acknowledges the importance of mutuality of relationship whilst accepting that whether by choice, or bestowal by bishop and/or people, a priest inevitably holds authority whether they wish to or not. The authority exists whether it is actual or projected. Sadgrove reflects much of Ramsay’s model of authority exercised in humility,

“Wisdom means practising humility in the spirit of the servant of the Lord who ‘did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.’ (Philippians 2.5-11). Ministry must always be lived according to this kenotic way of self-emptying, remembering it is to become servants of *God’s* way of wisdom, which St Paul says is the foolishness of the cross.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See especially Proverbs chapter 5, describing a parent imparting wisdom to a son.

⁴⁶ Words spoken by supervisor at Vocations Advisors’ training event at Church House, Oxford on 31/07/2012.

⁴⁷ Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p.33.

But he goes immediately goes on to explain how this can only be achieved in relationship, “It means keeping close to those we minister to, not allowing the ordained role to put distance between us and our fellow human beings who are also part of the baptised community. It is easy in public ministry to think we are something, and to lose touch with the reality of why we are here at all.”⁴⁸

Sadgrove offers a model of God which is still hierarchical, in which the priest operates as intermediary. He cites Solomon’s request to God for the gift of wisdom in order to carry out his national leadership responsibilities as the value required for all Christian ministers who act as intermediaries between God and the people. Solomon asks,

“I am only a little child: I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people you have chosen, a great people they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern good and evil, for who can govern this your great people.”⁴⁹

Biblically there is a tendency to create a dichotomy between what God wants which is good, and the desires of the people who, unless exceptionally godly, are often termed evil.⁵⁰

Yet despite the practicalities of desiring self knowledge and wisdom, and the serious consideration of context in order to prioritise relationships, Sadgrove remains aligned with Ramsay. God is to be found without rather than within, is transcendent more than immanent, is the enabler rather the consequence of forming quality relationships. This

⁴⁸ Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p.34.

⁴⁹ NRSV 1 Kings 3:7-9

⁵⁰ In the New Testament Paul describes the dilemma of discerning God’s will as he describes an inner conflict between spirit and flesh, God and self in Romans 7: 14ff.

stands in contrast to Heyward's understanding of the God within, who is revealed as quality relationships are made. For Sadgrove, the objective of specifically Christian leadership is to hear the often contradictory voices of God and humans and to occupy the place between, God to one side and the people to the other or, in Ramsay's hierarchy, God above and people below. Heyward entertains no such separation, where the people are, where true relationship is found, there is God. She denies any hint of hierarchy. Heyward understands that which is the essence of God as being part of every person and so there can be no dichotomy. It is rather a journey of discovery. Each person already possesses God or 'sacred power' which requires recognition to bring forth revelation. Wisdom is already present.

When someone sees and calls forth this sacred power in us, we often respond by growing more fully into our spiritual stature as sisters and brothers who are on this earth by the power of the Spirit to participate in creating, liberating and blessing the world. This, I believe is what the priesthood is all about – this seeing and calling forth – this speaking, it is not simply we who speak but the Spirit speaking through us that calls us, paradoxically, more fully into ourselves.⁵¹

Humility

Ramsay and Heyward both envisage a kingdom of God evidenced by people of humility.

“All Christians are called to be humble. But the ordained man sets forward the Gospel and the sacraments whereby their humility is sustained, and leads them in the way of humility as their pastor.”⁵²

Ramsay argues that only the priest who has become humble because of his knowledge of God through word and sacrament can reveal God to others. Again it is implication that one party in a relationship assumes superior knowledge of God that Heyward finds unacceptable. Ramsay acknowledges the tortuous contradiction of being proud of one's

⁵¹ Heyward, *Staying Power*, p.50.

⁵² Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p.77.

humility and so ceasing to be humble, yet this problem is rather the result of and affirming of a hierarchical understanding of society. For Heyward there has to be a radical re-imagining of society in order to discover humility.

“The only way to live rightly with our God, is to live humbly with each other.”⁵³

It becomes a case of which comes first the chicken or the egg? God brings out humility in us or our humility reveals God?

For Heyward humility must be dialogical and must always result in people being genuinely more fully present to one another. Humility is not discovered in church owned sacraments but,

“Humility is seasoned in the spiritual and intellectual work of genuine dialogue.”⁵⁴ She goes further to suggest the type of humility that can be found or dispensed in church can conceal a hidden arrogance.

“Arrogance is often veiled: I say that it (*humility*) is “God’s” will or “the tradition” or “the church’s teachings” or “for the good of others” rather than something I myself need, want, fear or hope for.”⁵⁵ Rather than a grace received passively through church sacrament, for Heyward, humility involves struggling and changing, struggling to discover the right thing to do together rather than struggling to uphold that which is already established as being good and right.

For Ramsay and Heyward the destination is remarkably similar, but the journey undertaken is quite different. Ramsay discovers through prayer and church authorised sacraments an antidote of humility in a troubled and arrogant world. Heyward finds her struggles to

⁵³ Heyward, Staying Power, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Heyward, Staying Power, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Heyward, Staying Power, p. 8.

discover what it means to be in genuine relationship bring her to an understanding of humility and of that which is God, from which prayer, understood as union with God, can be effected. Ramsay begins with the doctrine or theory, Heyward begins with the experience. Her thinking is a natural development of Carl Rogers who in his person centred approach, originally published in America in the fifties came to believe, “Experience is, for me, the highest authority”⁵⁶.

Ramsay’s God is able to share humility because he is by nature and definition humble, Heyward’s God is humility so that where humility is found, God is found. Returning to the archdeacon and his anecdotal evidence of the consequence of valuing fulfilment over sacrifice as less bitter clergy, it seemed that Heyward’s understanding of ministry was more closely allied with a philosophy of fulfilment as being the greatest good and Ramsay’s with the value of understanding sacrifice as the road to God. There must be a model of ministry where there is room for sacrifice and fulfilment. Ministry disproportionately predicated towards sacrifice is unhealthy and carries overtones of self flagellation, inhibition and abuse yet a ministry predicated solely on fulfilment incorporates undertones of hedonism and ignores the centrality of Christ’s self sacrifice.

Once again Sadgrove offered useful insights to the dilemma. Speaking of the temptations or sirens that tempt the clergy to compromise their Christian integrity, he notes popularity and the desire for success as obvious candidates though “the longing for fulfilment is perhaps more common and especially seductive in an age so obsessed with the meeting of personal needs.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Rogers, p.23. This quotation has been used earlier but is repeated here again because of its accent on experience.

I see in over emphasis of the transcendence of God, a parallel over emphasis on the authority of the priest and a subsequent unhelpful over hierarchical model of ministry. This is compatible with a representative understanding of priesthood, where priest stands midway between God and humanity, representing the divine to the human, and the human to the divine. Equally, over emphasis on the immanence of God, coupled with a parallel over emphasis on mutuality in relationship to the exclusion of all hierarchy, can result in disorder, a consequent lack of structure, definition or direction. A balance must be sought.

A model of ministry which maintains a balance between the transcendent and immanent aspects of God would both acknowledge the authority given to a priest at ordination whilst valuing the quality of relationships he or she develops. Authority is not by definition a negative concept but depends on the way it is exercised. Desire for personal fulfilment to the exclusion of self sacrifice fosters selfishness and self-centredness, emphasis on self sacrifice without acknowledging the human desire for fulfilment suggests an insincerity and hypocrisy.

Sadgrove emphasises that, "... ordained ministry is not a private response to God's call."⁵⁸ By doing so he identifies the public aspects as well as the private and personal aspects of priestly identity. He comes from a section of the church, like Ramsay, which places great value on the church's sacraments as means of drawing close to God. For Sadgrove, as Ramsay, there is a central theme of the privilege of being the leaders who can offer these sacraments to others, but also the reality that there is the necessity for wisdom in the task's

⁵⁷ Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p.23.

⁵⁸ Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p.22.

execution. He includes within the definition of wisdom, self awareness through self reflection, emotional intelligence and the means of developing a secure religious identity.

Sadgrove's book is a record of addresses given to ordinands in the days immediately preceding their ordination as deacons and priests in 2005. Ramsay's book is a similar record of pre-ordination addresses to ordinands dating from the early seventies. They are books of their times.

The differences are related to context. Ramsay, a bishop, wrote in the days of a male only priesthood where the formality of church services and the status of priests within the community was still significant. To the modern ear his language and experience sound strange, suspicion is aroused as he explains the particular representative role of priests⁵⁹ as if they were more important than the laity and that congregation members did not share their responsibility. The fact that he has to tell the shortly to be ordained priests that they will find people in their congregations who will know more than them about some issues is worrying⁶⁰, it assumes an environment in which the ordinand did not realise this and needed reminding that he was not the fount of all knowledge. There is great emphasis on discerning the will of God and then acting accordingly,⁶¹ there is a formality of process which may be familiar to some more catholic parts of the church but jars with more contemporary models of family and society.

Sadgrove, a cathedral dean, writes as collaborative styles of ministry and lay leadership are becoming more common. His approach remains quite formal in structure but recognises

⁵⁹ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p. 5ff.

⁶⁰ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, p.41.

⁶¹ Ramsay, *The Christian Priest Today*, for example p.52 relating to the confession of sins.

the wisdom required in sharing faith with a rapidly changing society. He incorporates references to modern secular concepts of emotional intelligence and self awareness, but maintains hints of a hierarchical ordering of ministry. Significantly they both speak from a position of senior leadership to which very few women are admitted, currently within the Church of England a few to the office of cathedral dean but none as bishop. Carter Heyward is an American woman priest who has experienced oppression by the church towards gay and lesbian people. Despite being one of the first women ordained priest, she speaks from a very different place, that of a lesbian woman who has suffered at the hands of a hierarchical and patriarchal church.

In “Staying Power” and other books⁶², her voice repeatedly emphasises the importance of mutuality in relationships and total avoidance of patriarchal and hierarchical organisational or functional models. Undoubtedly Ramsay, Sadgrove and Heyward are all devout and sincere Christians seeking to live out lives of self-giving love as exemplified by Jesus Christ, they are all members of the Anglican Communion. Their distinctly different viewpoints offer insights into the difficulties encountered in the research interviews. Heyward speaks from a position of having experienced powerlessness, Ramsay and Sadgrove from positions of status and power. Heyward’s yearning for right relationship resonates more readily with the relatively powerless curates and Ramsay and Sadgrove with the more powerful TIs. It is Sadgrove’s wisdom which can allow authority to be used without compromising the quality of relationships and which prevents mutuality disintegrating into hedonism.

He notes,

⁶² see also Carter Heyward’s Saving Jesus From those Who are Right and God in the Balance – Christian Spirituality in Times of Terror, (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2002)

“Learning the *habitus* of wisdom seems to me to be an absolute priority for all ministers who are serious about their calling.”⁶³

He quotes Socrates,

“ ‘the unreflected life is not worth living’, then the ordained are *par excellence* those who should be living it and demonstrating its value.”⁶⁴

Insights from the praxis model of theological reflection

Models of theological reflection are valuable in analysing the process by which theological conclusions are made. The hermeneutical circle or pastoral cycle⁶⁵ of experience, analysis, reflection and response, termed by Bevans⁶⁶ a praxis model, is useful in clarifying the ways in which the valuable insights of Ramsay, Heyward and Sadgrove overlap.⁶⁷

Heyward’s theology enters the circle at the quadrant of experience. The experience is of a mutuality of relationship with others. She moves on to analyse what is taking place and then reflects on the Christian story. She concludes that her experience results in revealing God in the midst and constructs her life practice (action) from that. This is not surprising as Carter Heyward’s work is liberational in genre and this model has been used extensively by South American liberation theologians, it also echoes the direction of this research.

Ramsay begins at the opposite side of the circle with Bible study and reflection on the Jesus’ life and teaching, from there he moves to action and develops a clear model by

⁶³ Sadgrove, *Wisdom and Ministry*, p.9.

⁶⁴ Sadgrove, *Wisdom and Ministry*, p.9.

⁶⁵ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action – Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 73-150; but see also Green, *Let’s Do Theology* pp.24-40.

⁶⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp.70-87.

⁶⁷ See diagram in Chapter 2.

which to operate ministry. By following his instruction the reflection arrives at the point of the lived experience of ministry. He shows little evidence of continuing to analyse or explore the experience but the model does serve to illustrate how Ramsay and Heyward can be engaged on the same activity of ordained Christian ministry but sound so different in the telling. Their exploration begins at quite different places on the pastoral cycle.

Sadgrove's work is quite theoretical in nature, but claims to explicitly draw on experience whilst relying heavily on Ramsay's work. It is as though he has begun like Ramsay with theory, moved to action by developing his own model of ministry but then takes the Ramsay's work one stage further, having experienced practical ministry, he moves to further analysis of what is needed for a healthy ministry and concludes by reflecting more widely in the Christian canon of Scripture to incorporate insights from the book of Proverbs. The result is that he moves to a new and adapted model of Ramsay's work which he recommends to his reader.

Summarising these findings, Heyward stands in the tradition of liberation theologians and begins the process of reflection with experience. Ramsay is more closely aligned with the tradition of academic theologians who begin with the sacred text of the Bible and extrapolate models of ministry from it, they then work to these models and gain experience, but at this stage the model can fail if careful analysis of that experience and its wider implications does not take place. Sadgrove stands in the tradition of academic theologians as does Ramsay but progresses the cycle to analysis and further reflection, it does not quite lead to new models of ministry but has the potential to do so.

Having set out with the intention of discovering a practical relational model of ministry, I find this is not where my exploration has left me. I am left with the conclusion that the place on the pastoral cycle that one begins dictates to a considerable extent the model of ministry that ensues. Secular, cultural and societal influences, sociological and psychological, influence a person's approach to life and to ministry. Discovering one's priestly identity is predicated on previous education and lifestyle experience, that which has made the priest who he or she is before the present moment such that the nature of that life serves to interpret current experience.

The priest's identity comprises the totality of his or her being, all previous life and educational experiences including family, educational, church, community influences and in the modern world, global philosophical movements and trends. We are all children of our time. The crucial factor in maintaining a style of ministry appropriate to any specific context is to continue the pastoral cycle of experience, analysis, reflection and action in perpetuity. Socrates is proved correct, the unreflected life is not worth living or more precisely in the context of this research, the unreflected ministry is not worth ministering. Ceasing to reflect, ceasing to consider the influences of society, of the wider world, and then ceasing to relate that to contemporary theological thought leaves ministry stagnant and outdated. We live in a time of extraordinary change where static models of priesthood are soon outdated. The priority is not the place the priest starts on the pastoral cycle but that the priest keeps his or her development revolving round the circle. The priest must continually reflect on practice seeking to maintain personal integrity with his or her model of priesthood and understanding of God whilst maintaining an authentic voice within contemporary culture.

As society moves away from hierarchical structures towards more collaborative models of working, problems arise, especially for mature curates, where church structures do not reflect the same movement. The necessity for each priest, experienced and not, is to be able to minister in the surrounding culture without losing the fundamentals of the historically received faith. To ignore the legacy of faith received and concentrate exclusively on society lacks integrity, yet to cling to historical structures and models without the willingness to engage with the surrounding culture is to become irrelevant.

Practically as models of ministry become more collaborative through necessity and choice, it is especially important that curates are prepared for the new context and that their trainers have the skills to facilitate appropriate training. It requires the development of the wisdom to which Sadgrove refers to bridge the gap between the patriarchal and historical context of Ramsay's thought and the radical future to which Heyward points. The interviews suggest that it is the meeting of modern collaborative ways of working and traditional hierarchical understandings of authority that contains the potential for conflict and misunderstanding. I suspect issues of authority remain the elephant in the room, that are ignored or avoided as new recruit meets experienced practitioner. The need for experienced reflective practitioners as trainers who have a clear understanding of their own priestly identity so that they can honestly reflect upon and respect difference without feeling threatened is paramount.

Similarly a move from didactic to shared learning and greater emphasis on the fulfilment of God's calling rather than sacrifice requires a new look at training and I suspect a change

in emphasis from content to process in training methods. Yet training does not stand alone, it must result in a supply of priests that can meet the needs of the existing parish system.⁶⁸ It is with this practical concern in mind that I turn now to consider the context in which the trained priest will serve. There is little value in producing priests that cannot easily be deployed within existing church structures.

⁶⁸ I refer primarily to the parish system at this point rather than chaplaincies or other form of ministry as currently this is how the majority of trained priests are deployed.

6. EXPLORING TRAINING NEEDS

I have entitled the chapter ‘Exploring training needs’ as I seek to extend reflection on the nature of priests of the last chapter to include recent thought emerging from the church institution on their training, so linking the purpose and process of the training task. I intend to explore the Church of England’s recent reports to determine the training institution’s understanding of the purpose of IME 4-7 and compare this with the experience of the interviewees. The marriage metaphor will be used to explore whether changed understandings of authority are evident in wider society. My hunch is that changing attitudes to relationships in marriage, from a position of inequality to greater mutuality, mirrors what is happening in the wider society, and will contribute towards an explanation of the tensions experienced by five of the six curates interviewed. I will then compare my conclusions with the insights of Ramsay, Heyward and Sadgrove on the making of priests to establish any common ground.

The title of the September 2011 report, ‘The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishop’s Advisory Panel to First Incumbency’¹, offered a potentially rich place to start. The term, trajectory of vocation, suggested a recognition of calling and the development of an individual’s priestly identity which went beyond tic boxes of skills and competencies. The rationale for the research was a concern expressed by the Church of England bishops that:

¹ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, research report 2011. London: Church House, 2011.

“Training processes were not producing the incumbents that bishops were seeking.”²

At the outset the report takes note of context by noting the decline in the numbers of stipendiary clergy with the consequential amalgamation of parishes within benefices. This sets up a complex scenario for the curate in post of first responsibility, where he or she is likely to be working within a team and not alone and where they are likely to be ministering to congregations of different ecclesiologies and churchmanships. Whilst I would suggest, this is likely to be as team vicar rather than team leader or team rector in the first instance, this remains a huge change in context from a large single church model. The training form completed at the end of residential training as a precursor to finding an appropriate parish in which to complete IME 4-7, did not and does not at the time of writing offer a multi-parish option.³ If a primary aim of IME 4-7 is to prepare the curate for a post of first responsibility in a parish and most parishes are multi-church or multi-parish, then it follows that training to work in such parishes throughout the whole of IME 1-7 must be a priority. As the report points out,

“For ministry today and tomorrow, the church needs ministers of wide sympathy and understanding.”⁴

Far removed from Ramsay’s world of the late sixties and early seventies, remote from the ecclesiology of the gathered model of the American episcopalian church of Heyward and with little in common with Sadgrove as dean of a large English cathedral, this describes a

² Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

³ Available as appendix to report Archbishops’ Council, Code of Procedure – reports on Sponsored Candidate and Arrangements for First Appointments, London: Church House, 2010.

⁴ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

generalist who must build relationships first in order to gain trust from a broad range of differing parishes and parishioners. The report notes,

The learning required for incumbency is not so much skills and information (though these are necessary) but the more significant qualities underlying formation: character, insight, breadth of awareness, judgement, leadership and confidence. If we are to have the incumbents we need, we will have to become intentional about these deeper formational matters from the first.⁵

This sounds positive and hopeful, even inspirational, in the context of this research, the report adds,

“More thought needs to be given to how to bring about formation for incumbency without de-skilling ordinands at both stages of IME 1-7, and over protecting them during IME 4-7.”⁶

A major problem for several of the mature curates interviewed was lack of recognition of their pre-ordination skills and competencies. Thus curate 1 was limited in the early stages by not being able to share her particular spirituality, curate 2 longed for management skills gained in her previous working life to be introduced into the church, similarly curate 3 became deskilled, failing to call on his own management skills gained in industry, curate 6, a mature Christian in his forties, was not even allowed to take responsibility for intercessions and curate 5 flourished when given responsibility and respect. Curates 3 and 4 might have been perceived to have been under rather than over protected in their curacies, as curate 3 floundered alone leading a parish with an unfamiliar ecclesiology and curate 4 was left to the mercies of a bad tempered incumbent. What was at fault here was not under protection but the failure of good leadership and supervision by the TI and the encouragement and exempling of reflective practice.

The report continues,

⁵ Archbishops' Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

⁶ Archbishops' Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

“The church needs to consider how leadership and professional skills such as reflective practice can be encouraged without turning them into further subjects for academic study.”⁷

Crucially the report confirmed the findings of this report that,

“Too many curacies fail to reach their potential.”⁸

The report identified that at the outset of the journey, when the ordinand had attended a national selection conference the primary focus was the originating experience of God’s ‘call’ rather than any developing understanding of the nature of future parish ministry.

Thus ‘call’ became a controlling narrative, preventing a broadening of vision and aspect, and resulting in a narrowing and hardening of perceived options rather than encouraging the ordinand and then curate towards more flexible and numerically greater opportunities.

“During IME 4-7 clergy need to grow in that learning, experiencing how the differing models (*of church*) give rise to additional opportunities.”⁹

Particularly relevant to this research, the report picks up the presence in training of greater numbers of mature curates, whom it terms nearer forties. It recommends that their selection for training should,

“... be asking whether there is real evidence of age-appropriate qualities like wisdom.”¹⁰

The unarticulated assumption, is that if curates have not developed wisdom by the age of forty, it is going to be difficult to be even more difficult to nurture than in younger candidates.

⁷ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.2.

⁸ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.3.

⁹ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.9.

¹⁰ Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.9.

The difficulty in assessing whether a curate possesses the required quality of wisdom, defined as judgement, wider vision, deeper gravitas and enhanced skills of leadership is acknowledged. It must be noted in discussion that wisdom is another word to be used with caution as it has associated with it wide and varied definitions. Wisdom moves from a quality of inner holiness in Sadgove's useage, to one more closely associated with developed leadership skills in this report. The definitions overlap but there is very different emphasis, almost from the more theoretical imperative to the pragmatic application.

Whilst the selection of a mature curate for training might be considered more rigorous in requiring the rather intangible quality of wisdom be indentified, the expectation that a mature person is likely to have pre-existent professional skills of use to the church acts as a counterbalance.

“The qualities needed (*by the church of an incumbent*) are sometimes undermined by our own processes. For example: there is a consistent complaint that our training institutions de-skill our more experienced candidates by giving the impression that they must forget their preceding formation (as e.g. doctor) and start again with this new formation to be a priest. Perhaps some greater thought needs to be given to how to amend, rather than forget, preceding formations (e.g. how does the ex-GP continue to listen carefully but learn not to prescribe but to engage.).”¹¹

Whilst supporting the findings of this research, there is further progress to be made with even the ingrained perceptions of even these seemingly radical researchers. The terminology of ‘adapt’ rather than ‘amend’ would be more helpful. There remains even

¹¹ Archbishops' Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.10.

here, a trace of a culture of absolutes, suggesting wrong behaviour in the secular world and right practice in the church. This judgement may be harsh based on the usage of one word, but its choice remains significant.

The researchers reflected on the conversations they had with curates and noted, “One might hope that curates, after their three years in office, were a good deal more discerning, and had deeper reflections on the role of minister than they had as a student. We are not sure we heard it during the interviews.”¹²

The interviews I conducted were powerful in the strength of emotion and depth of feeling that was expressed by all interviewees except curate 5. Whilst this can be accounted for by the fact that this was for all of them the first opportunity they had had to give a totally uncensored account of their reflections on their experience of IME 4-7, this also indicates a huge flaw in curacy training that did not encourage the development of a more mature and developed reflective process. Accountability for this omission lies partly with the TI for not having offered appropriate supervision, but also with the system that meant TI supervisors could rarely be figures with whom curates could be totally open about their thoughts, feelings and emotions whilst the TI would make recommendation as to their eligibility and write references for future posts of first responsibility. I will explore this later when I look at the need to provide a safe place for curates to share sensitive material.

Crucially, the report and this research conclude that the training offered to curates did not in itself constitute ministerial excellence, neither did it produce enough excellent ministers. The report concludes that it must be a priority for the church to continue serious informed

¹² Archbishops’ Council, The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops’ Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, p.10.

debate about this issue. This research is one such continuation. The report insists that issues of leadership are addressed in both the theoretical training of IME 1-3 and its practical application in IME 4-7. My concern would be that whilst many TIs are challenged by the rapidly changing context towards greater numbers of multi-church units, there remain insufficient suitably experienced TIs in the required aspects of leadership to meet the supply of curates entering parishes at year 4 of IME.

The solution of the report was to recommend the establishment of a staff college after curacy, and in the first post of responsibility, in order to establish gatherings of mutual support for new incumbents who lack the requisite leadership skills and which provides a place of learning where previous training omissions can be rectified. Whilst continual ongoing training throughout ministry is vital, to expend human resources in time and effort and consequent financial resources in establishing such an option at a time of increased financial pressure on parishes seems an inefficient and expensive response. The solution must be to alter or improve the initial training programme before the curate arrives in a post of first responsibility.

A simpler summary of the report's findings could be described as:

Firstly, IME 1-7 is failing and is not preparing priests to be leaders in the current prevailing multi-church pattern of parish ministry. Secondly, acknowledging the level of mature curates entering the profession, many of their previous skills are not being sufficiently utilised. This is a loss for the church and discouraging for curates. Thirdly, there are insufficient suitably qualified TIs to train curates in parish ministry. Fourthly, the

consequence of the above is damaging to trainees and TIs alike and costly to the church in terms of necessary remedial action and lowered morale.

Unless the situation is addressed urgently there is the risk of escalation of problems and damage to the parish system. It would be possible to progress this research by improving the selection of TIs and training parishes so that the TI/curate matchings had a greater chance of success, but it is unlikely in the short term that the required numbers of proficient trainers could be identified.

Other aspects of the changing church context are also relevant. Whilst the Church of England remains committed to parish ministry, this struggle with declining numbers in congregations, increased costs and more thinly spread clergy had collapsed in the Church in Wales. In the Church Times, Richard Harries suggested that whilst the structure of the Church in Wales differed from the Church in England, there are lessons to learn.¹³ Harries observes the similar route that the Church of England has taken in joining parishes together under one stipendiary parish priest and questions whether this is sustainable. Whether sustainable or not he prioritises the development of collaborative styles on ministry incorporating lay and ordained leaders in these new and extended multi-parish units. He does not suggest that the parish system at this stage should be addressed but that styles of ministry must. It is a natural extension of such an argument that the substantial numbers of mature curates currently training in the Church of England hold collectively skills and experience in modern collaborative leadership styles and team working that the Church of England desperately needs.

¹³ www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2012/27-july/comment/opinion/what-wales-can-teach-england accessed on 02/08/2012

In 2010 David Rosedale, Bishop of Grimsby, came to similar conclusions. He wrote a paper supporting the call for more collaborative forms of ministry and suggesting a model by which IME 4-7 could be delivered collaboratively. He entitled the paper ‘Developing a collaborative model for beginning ministry.’¹⁴ He notes the reduction in deployable stipendiary clergy and refers to the increase in collaborative forms of ministry between lay and ordained ministers as elements in the changing “texture”¹⁵ of the church. He offers a model of learning collaboration by collaborating.¹⁶

He terms future incumbents in the Church of England as itinerant in nature as they oversee several parishes and sees the purpose of IME 4-7 as being to deliver the types of priests the church needs in the contemporary context.

“Collaboration will demand that an incumbent become shaped in their ministry by context, by the resources available ... whilst maintaining their own identity and theological integrity.”¹⁷

Rosedale identifies three generic features for the ministry of an incumbent in this new and emerging context as collaboration, complexity and diversity, features very similar to those identified by Aveyard in the Church of England research report mentioned earlier. In the context of this research project he highlights that within the current training model,

¹⁴ David Rosedale, Developing a collaborative model for beginning public ministry, July 2010 unpublished.

¹⁵ Rosedale, Developing a collaborative model for beginning public ministry, p.1.

¹⁶ “Collaboration is learned by collaborating” is now a much used phrase within ministerial training and was probably first used in the “Strangers in the Wings”, a report on local non-stipendiary ministry available from Church House, London

¹⁷ Rosedale, Developing a collaborative model for beginning public ministry, p.2.

“ There is also a significant and costly risk in that a successful training outcome is highly dependent on the quality of relationship between training incumbent and curate.”¹⁸

Rossdale claims to build on the strengths of the received model of an exclusive pairing of TI and curate to offer a collaborative model. This involves four parties to the IME 4-7 training, curate, facilitator, supervisor and reflector. The facilitator being most similar to the current model of TI, offering a home base, training in the practice of ministry and the context for the maintenance of a daily prayer routine. A supervisor will closely oversee a group of curates to ensure their training covers all required areas culminating in a recommendation to the area or diocesan bishop that the curate is ready to be appointed to a post of first responsibility. The reflector, appropriately skilled, is to facilitate the curate during training in becoming a competent theological reflector. The whole enterprise is undertaken with a group of curates formed into a hub in the facilitator’s parish and to include other lay and ordained ministerial trainees. He argues that this will provide a more consistent approach and enable a diversity of training where curates may experience a wider variety of training at a deeper level than the current model offers.

In this model the facilitator is proficient in teaching, modelling and overseeing the acquisition of necessary functional skills, the supervisor skilled in supervising and the reflector skilled in theological reflection. The trainee is surrounded by a team of competent trainers, each with complementary strengths, and works within a team of lay and ordained ministers as they develop their own competencies. Such a model partially addresses the faults within the current curate/TI system.

¹⁸ Rossdale, Developing a collaborative model for beginning public ministry, p.2.

Inevitably the facilitator works closely with the curate on a daily basis and is therefore the best person to recommend the timing of that curate's progression to a post of first responsibility. Reflection on practice will take place with a second person so that hopefully, potentially difficult issues which arise between curate and TI can be reflected upon, and preferably outside the parish. A third professional ensures that any ongoing formal courses or training opportunities are offered. It will take a very self assured and self aware training incumbent to handle the professional relationship between curate and reflector. In the sample interviews, it was day to day scenarios within the parish, between curate and TI or facilitator that created conflict and tension. Once again this system can only work in one of good working relationships.

I would contend that within this system, there is a significant and costly risk in that a successful training outcome is highly dependent on the quality of relationship between facilitator and curate, reflector and curate and facilitator and reflector. As the system becomes more complex accountability to nurture, maintain and sustain good quality relationships is pivotal. It must be presumed that the facilitator will need to direct the curate to other lay and ordained colleagues for parts of their training. The priority is for all those involved to be secure and self aware professionals. It perhaps sounds unreasonably negative to suggest there are not enough such individuals currently ministering in the Church of England. It is not that there are fewer professional and able parish priests in service than in other professions or that they are less mature or wise people but rather that operating as they are, within a parish environment under so much pressure to perform in such a rapidly changing environment, they remain particularly vulnerable.

There needs to be in place a support system for trained, trainee and trainer priests to support and facilitate their well-being that is free and without strings, unrelated to references for new posts, bishops or line managers. Presently such support is nominally provided in the dioceses by the area bishop or archdeacon and nationally, sparsely and unevenly, by groups such as The Society of Mary and Martha or individual diocesan counsellors or psychotherapists. All of this support is helpful when situations become critical but vital to any progression of new and collaborative training plans is a change of mindset in the parishes. Each team of ministers must move away from competitive and individualistic mindsets to a culture of mutual accountability and support.

Collaboration

The word collaboration is increasingly used in the context of team working and larger multi-parish groupings. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research, in length and time, to fully explore the definitions and usages of the word, it is necessary to pause to consider the ways in which it has entered common usage in this discipline of practical theology and specifically Christian ministry.

In my experience the word collaborative is used loosely in parishes across a continuum from a small group of people who form a loosely linked group working for the same parish, church or organisation, whose only common feature is the institution which they serve, to a fully integrated group of people who have identified each other's strengths and shared out tasks appropriately, and for which each individual takes full responsibility and is fully accountable. There is no one right model but rather different levels of mutual

accountability which is appropriate in different situations. The problem with collaboration is that it has become the fashionable buzz word to suggest horizontal rather than hierarchical patterns of organisation and working without fully considering structures of responsibility and accountability. In other words it is easily said or assumed but not easily delivered. I explore my understanding of the meaning of collaboration at this point in the research as it is central to and inseparable from Rossdale's findings.

Firstly and foremost collaboration is not authoritarian in nature. Writing on leadership D'Souza notes that,

“An authoritarian leader imposes the desired behaviour on an organization, whereas the servant-leader models the desired behaviour.”¹⁹

The common usage of the word collaboration has a history. It begins with a move from a model of hierarchy and authority to one termed servant leadership, where the intention is to work with others and values co-operation and mutual help and support over competition.

D'Souza notes the value of this,

The authoritarian approach may achieve temporary compliance, but it will also be accompanied by an attitude of resentment. People will carry out commands because they have to and be on the lookout for ways to circumvent the orders imposed. In contrast the servant-leadership approach creates a spirit of ownership, involvement and commitment among the people, they will work because they want to.²⁰

In a Christian context, D'Souza argues that Jesus rejected an authoritarian and worldly model of leadership in favour of a servant's attitude and a servant's heart. His instruction for his followers to imitate him²¹ is ample justification for disciples to adopt such an approach even before considering the ensuing benefits.

¹⁹ A. D'Souza, Leaders for today, hope for tomorrow – empowering and empowered leadership. Nairobi, Paulines Publications, Africa, 2004.p.19.

²⁰ D'Souza, Leaders for today, hope for tomorrow, p.19.

²¹ NRSV. 1 Corinthians 11:1.

“Servant-leadership empowers people through example, guidance, understanding, sensitivity, trust, appreciation, encouragement, reinforcement and shared vision it begins with the mind and heart- with our attitude.”²²

Robert Greenleaf was one of the first servant leadership proponents in the United States in the sixties.²³ This championed a change in secular leadership culture from an authoritarian and hierarchical structure where competition was encouraged and leaders maintained distance from the led, to a more relational model. The Oxford Diocese promoted this style of leadership in ‘Servant Leadership’ courses they have offered over the last decade.

My understanding is that the move to collaborative working takes this principle one step further. Not only does a group of people working collaboratively work to empower each other but they share the leadership in an even more significant way. They take responsibility for tasks according to their proficiencies and share in overall visioning and decision making. It is truly an empowering style of management in that when done well, the power as well as the tasks is shared.

Rossdale links the concept of collaboration with a theology of the Trinity and its inherent relationality. Thus as the members of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, exist in relation so too this is a model for interdependence and relationality in Christian ministry.

Lamdin²⁴ suggests that the importance placed on teamwork within a collaborative model of working creates difficulties in many church contexts. His extensive contact with clergy has

²² D’Souza, Leaders for today, hope for tomorrow, 2004.p.20.

²³ see Larry C. Spears (ed.), The Power of Servant Leadership- Essays by Robert Greenleaf (San Francisco:Berrett-Koehler Publishers,2008), p.3ff.

²⁴ Keith Lamdin, Finding your Leadership Style (London: SPCK,2012), chapter 1 offers a good introduction to these issues but they are picked up throughout the book.

led him to believe many model themselves on the trainers they had, and who act quite independently of others and find it supremely difficult to change.

This identifies many of the problems in the interviews, where mature curates were expecting their previous experience to be recognised and acknowledged and to work collaboratively, and instead frequently encountered TIs trained in a more individualistic and hierarchical leadership style.

Robertson describes collaborative ministry as leadership which is distributed across the church. Whilst this sharing of leadership may have been taking place in larger town centre churches, Harries, Rosedale and others are proposing a widening of this style across multi-parish groupings. Whilst adopting such a style was once a matter of choice, it is unlikely that the parish system can survive without adopting the model. Bluntly, collaborative ministry is no longer a choice but the only option in a critical situation.

Robertson is quite realistic about the practicalities of collaborative ministry and the extent of mind set change that is required. He understands a collaborative leader as one that can allow others to take real responsibility which may result in success or failure.

“He (*the leader*) must keep his hands off even when he could do a better job.”²⁵

Robertson acknowledges that the collaborative leader has to have special qualities,

“He needs the spiritual wit to recognize his own ministry and the ministry of others, and the personal strength to reject pressure. He must have strong sense of self, because if he

²⁵ David Robertson. Collaborative Ministry, (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007) p.143. (authors non inclusive pronouns)

finds personal comfort in busyness, a full diary or being the central person (needed, gifted and important), then he is going to have problems with CM.”²⁶

Once again the problems Robertson relates for a non-collaborative leader in a collaborative context, echo some of the problems experienced by curates with their TIs in the research interviews. Crucially curate 5 identified the qualities of a good TI, who she described as “secure in their own ministry”, “a trusting attitude”, “he was able to say I will receive from you as well, so this won’t be a totally one-way street”, “he would kind of set the tone .. I know I’ve got tons to learn but I’ve been treated like a grown up”, “trust is the key”, “even though one of us is the teacher and one of us is the learner, that doesn’t mean we both won’t learn” but notes a problem where things did go wrong for colleagues was often because “vicars in general are quite conscious of their status”.

Curate 4 described “a sort of oppressive relationship where one person has all the power and the other person may be asked to grovel.” He describes his licensing in his post of first responsibility.

“She (*the TI*) wouldn’t speak to me I think she found that occasion difficult because I was the centre of attention.”

Curate 6’s attributed problems working with his first TI to “his need to be in control of the situation”, “his understanding of authority”, and found when his intercessions were rejected “I felt quite undermined”.

²⁶ Robertson. Collaborative Ministry, p.143/144. (authors non inclusive pronouns)

Curate 2 compared a parish placement she had experienced with a more self assured priest, “The priest there actually identified the gifts that I had, and actually stated that he didn’t have those and it was an honouring of the differences we brought to ministry”. Whilst within the curacy “... it doesn’t matter what I’ve done or what gifts I’ve brought .. I always had this feeling that my training incumbent could do better.”

For these curates the TI/curate training partnership needed to be relational and collaborative.

Pickard offers a more firmly theologically based analysis of collaborative ministry, but also offers an interesting insight in the opening sentence of his book. He quotes a comment made by a colleague,

“to exercise ministry collaboratively requires spiritual maturity.”²⁷ He includes spiritual as well as personal or emotional maturity as a pre-requisite for a collaborative leader.

This spiritual element is echoed elsewhere,

“ A truly collaborative approach to ministry seems to require something of us that we lack the spiritual capacity and will to deliver.”²⁸

and “... collaborative ministry is a ministry that requires resurrection of a new self with others.”²⁹

“Collaboration is encoded into the way God creates and acts.”³⁰

One of key issues Pickard picks up is the issue of power. He notes that all of life and the relationships we form as human beings involves the exercise of power but that the

²⁷ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry, Farnham,U.K.:Ashgate, 2009.p.1.

²⁸ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry,p.1.

²⁹ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry,p.2.

³⁰ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry,p.6.

challenge, in a collaborative way of relating and specifically of collaborative ministry, involves the ability to share and bestow power on others. Whilst part of the human maturing process is recognition of personal power, it is the challenge of cooperation over competition that delineates the truly mature. He notes that is sometimes described as collaboration is more akin to delegation of tasks without the ceding of any real control or power and ultimately,

“where competition rather than cooperation dominate the scene, it is axiomatic that power will be skewed in unhealthy ways.”³¹

He summarises,

“to collaborate means to work with another. The accent is on ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ or ‘under’. It is a cooperative activity that requires trust in others, humility concerning one’s own wisdom and competences, and a desire to release the creativity and gifts of those with whom one works.”³²

Several things become clear about collaborative styles of ministry. Firstly, collaborative ministry is empowering and gift releasing. Secondly, collaborative leaders must be mature in mind and spirit if they are to cope with giving away power and with others being recognised and given credit for work done together. Thirdly, it is a concept which is difficult to learn for those who have operated a different, more individualistic, leadership style over many years. Fourthly, for collaborative ministry to work, the leader must be committed to the ideal and lastly collaborative ministry is fundamentally relational in nature.

³¹ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry, p.3.

³² Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry, p.6.

Pickard highlights another aspect of collaborative ministry,

“the collaborative impulse of Christian ministry continually draws us into the deepest mystery of the ecclesia of God that in Christ we are indeed ‘one of another.’”³³

This sounds very similar to Carter Heyward’s understanding that we discover God when we truly learn to love in mutual relationship.

Delving briefly into the literature about collaborative ministry confirms my belief that, not only are quality relationships helpful for curates training with their incumbents, but the ability to form them is crucial to the future of the church. Relationships of quality facilitate the flourishing of human beings per se, and are foundational for a collaborative style of ministry that is essential to learn for the future survival of the Church of England. The responsibility of the Church of England is to train priests to be the church leaders of the future. My concern is that the proposal that future and existence of any sort of recognisable parish structure in the Church of England is dependent on accepting that churches and parishes will be increasingly grouped together in significant numbers is resisted by many. Those within such groupings who fight to retain the fantasy of the priest who knows everyone in the parish are well known, they wish to retain a way of life which has long gone.

Even more worrying are training institutions delivering IME 1-3, who do not recognise the need to prepare ordinands for collaborative ministry or pay shallow lip service to it, preferring to retain the notion that well attended town centre churches are the best locations for curates to complete IME 4-7. My concern is based on personal experience. In 2010, I

³³ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry, p.225.

led a fortnight long practical ministry course for ordinands in IME 1-3. I reorganised it significantly to offer an experience of collaborative learning. Not only was it difficult for the ordinands to absorb that the process of working collaboratively was as important to their ministerial development as the outcome, but the college discontinued the course the following year, despite very positive feedback from students because it ‘did not fit in with the curriculum.’ For the same college I also run an annual themed study week on rural studies. When I suggested that to fit into the week, rural issues, conservation, agriculture and multi-parish benefice ministry was unrealistic in the time scale, and requested the opportunity to devote a further week solely to ministry in a multi-parish setting, I was told curriculum time constraints would not allow it. Nowhere else at that time were patterns of multi-parish groupings and consequent leadership styles covered explicitly within the curriculum. If collaborative ministry is to become an accepted and practised leadership style, residential theological training colleges, training incumbents in the parish and curates must be convinced of its worth.

The Church of England has recently published a table of learning outcome statements under the selection conference headings of vocation and ministry, spirituality, personality and character, relationships, leadership and collaboration, mission and evangelism, faith and quality of mind. The table offers three levels, learning outcomes to be completed at the point of ordination, at completion of IME 4-7, and a level which a curate must reach in order to be licensed to a post of incumbent status or equivalent responsibility. The two brief explicit references to collaborative ministry require that those to be licensed to incumbent status:

“Demonstrate effective collaborative leadership and the ability to exercise this in a position of responsibility,” and

“show an integration of integrity and authority and obedience, leadership and service that enables the exercise of collaborative leadership”³⁴

Whilst it is TIs who complete the form, there will be correspondingly varying understandings of the extent of cooperation necessary for collaborative working. If TIs fear not being allocated a future curate if they cannot tick the collaboration box, this is unlikely to be enough. Rossdale has made a start in recommending new structures within which IME 4-7 may take place and collaborative training delivered, but whilst new initiatives, such as the new Oxford Diocese system of portfolio completion for IME 4-7 rely on tick box outcomes for functional competencies, the importance and potential of relational and collaborative ministry and training is unlikely to be addressed.

Changes in society, habits of church attendance and consequent decline of church finances are dictating the move towards collaborative ministry. In the context of this research, I am interested to know whether changes in the understanding of marriage in the similarly changing society can offer any further insights. Can the marriage metaphor, which I have looked at previously, contribute to a response to church and ministry changes?

Changes in marriage

Picking up the marriage metaphor once again and returning to the rise in the divorce rate, it is clear that the pattern of marriage has experienced considerable change in two

³⁴ Learning outcome statements for ordained ministry within the Church of England, researcher’s own file copy supplied in Vocations Advisor folder

generations which contributes to some confusion about its purpose. In 2010 The Guardian newspaper³⁵ illustrated the rise in the numbers of divorces had almost doubled. Across a similar period there has been greater equality in the work place for women, even within a conservative institution such as the Church of England where women were first ordained in 1994. Women serve in the army in Afghanistan and women work on oil rigs, almost all types of work are open to women as well as men. It is generally agreed that society is becoming less patriarchal. Rachel Cusk wrote emotionally about the growing confusion surrounding the nature of marriage for both women and men in such a changing context.³⁶

I run a marriage preparation course for the Church of England deanery in which I work, both those participating and myself are keen to minimise the attending couples adding to divorce statistics in the future.

Drawing on Litvinoff's work for Relate, I encourage participants to think about the reasons their grandparents got married. Reasons include the desire to have children, to buy a house together, to rent a council house, to leave home and live independently, to gain status in the community. In a culture where those who bore children outside marriage were ostracised and home ownership and council house occupation was marriage dependent, marriage could deliver the desired outcomes. The culture has changed, these reasons are no longer compelling. The majority of couples on my course are already cohabiting, most share a mortgage or rental agreement and a significant number already have children.

³⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons> accessed on 03/08/2012

³⁶ Rachel Cusk, *Aftermath – On Marriage and Separation*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

Asked why they were choosing to marry in 2012, the couples' most common answers were, because we are in love, it will make our relationship complete, it's a sign of our commitment, it will help us stay together. The course develops on the realisation that marriage cannot automatically deliver these outcome, only continuing work on maintaining a good quality relationship can do that. The locus of authority for the delivery of desired outcomes has changed from external forces of society, building societies and a marriage certificate to internal forces of personal commitment. The judgement of success from objective and tangible outcomes has changed to subjective emotions and feelings. When considering the problems that might be encountered in marriage, it is clear that divorce remains an option if the marriage does not deliver. It is almost as if the marriage vows are conditional on perpetual happiness.

There are similarities to the curates interviewed. I have not had the opportunity to interview the curates of two generations ago, but anecdotal evidence from older colleagues suggests that ordinands had little choice in their curacy and few options to change if the match was not satisfactory. A quick trawl through Crockford's³⁷ confirms that most curates of the sixties spent at least four years in a first curacy and usually a further period totalling a maximum of six or even eight years in a second. The commitment to ordination and the title parish was unconditional, it did not depend on perceived success criteria being achieved. Half of the curates interviewed for this survey referred to changing curacy (of which the norm is now singular). Of the random sample, curate 6 did change curacy, his TI was unfit for work due to sickness, yet for many other curates this could have been an opportunity to flex their muscles and experience being in charge until the TI returned.

³⁷ <http://www.crockford.org.uk>.

Indeed curate 3's main complaint was that he was treated by parishioners as the parish priest when he was only the curate. Unprompted, others too, shared their thoughts of moving. Curate 3's response to crisis was to threaten to leave for another curacy.

"I picked the phone up, phoned my rector and said to him 'You need a new curate, I'm gone.'"

"I've got friends in the London diocese, it (*changing curacies*) was quite common .. yes, it's his (*a friend's*) second curacy."

Curate 5, the only curate who considered herself to have flourished, suspected those who were less fortunate in their choice of TIs than her, should make arrangements to change curacies,

"I think sometimes people stick at things that are not helping or nurturing anybody, and there's a time to move on."

Cusk suggests there is confusion about the place of marriage in a non-patriarchal society. Certainly changes in a society which places a high value on personal choice has changed the nature of IME 4-7. There is a growing conditionality related to commitment. Couples remain in a marriage whilst it fulfils their requirements of well-being and often divorce when expectations are not met, and so too curates commit to TIs whilst the training relationship fulfils their requirements and often opt to change when their requirements are not met. Both in marriage and in IME 4-7, the permanence of the relationship depends on delivery of required outcomes. The expectations placed on both marriage and curacy are much harder to deliver as the success criteria increasingly depend on the quality of

relationships. There exists some confusion about both the nature and purpose of marriage and of the curacy.

Today, the confusion about the changing nature of marriage is clearly evidenced in discussions taking place in society and the media in 2012 as the government proposes changes in the law to allow same sex couples to marry. The pivotal point of the argument is whether the definition of marriage can change to incorporate people of the same gender rather than a man and a woman. If the understanding of the nature of marriage equates to its definition, which pragmatically it must, then the definition of marriage changes in each generation. As the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 is now generally recognised to have had little to do with relationships and much to do with the safeguarding of the inheritance of property of the rich to their legitimate heirs, so too there have been more recent changes in expectation. My parents married in 1945 in order to have sex and to raise children, the alternative of cohabiting would have meant disinheritance for my father, and whilst couples in 2012 may still wish to ensure inheritance rights, marriage is no longer necessary for childbearing, the majority of children that I baptise each year are raised by cohabiting rather than married couples.

Many Christians challenge the possibility of marriage ever changing as the letters pages of the Church Times in June and July 2012 bear testament. Some church leaders are adamant that marriage must not change. The issue was addressed by the catholic Bishops of England and Wales by requesting a letter on marriage be read out at all services on the 10th March 2012.³⁸

³⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17329902> accessed on 12/03/12

Yet greater gender equality in society and in the workplace has been achieved and this necessarily changes the perception of marriage and the nature of the marriage relationship. Where once marriage defined an unequal partnership where the man held authority over the woman, the man earned the income, the woman stayed at home to raise children, now the relationship is regarded by most couples to be one of equality, where decisions are reached together, both partners may choose to work and childcare and household tasks are shared.

Even for secularists there is a perception that the nature of marriage cannot change, which for some nullifies it. I was surprised by a comment by Martin Prendergast, a Guardian journalist on the issue of same sex marriage. “ I am not a supporter of same sex marriage for myself. Marriage essentially depends on the subjection of one person to another, even if it's a mutual subjection, in the exchange of vows. So I don't seek such status. Civil partnerships are based on equality, legally expressed in a joint signing of a contractual covenant, rather than through vows.”³⁹

I was surprised by the use of the term subjection, and the notion that there was a difference between a relationship based on an exchange of vows which implied such a condition, whereas the signing of the covenantal document of civil partnership did not. Having been present at registry office civil partnership ceremonies involving promise and exchange of rings, I believe the argument flawed, the difference between marriage contract and civil partnership contract is not so apparent. But it is evident that confusion is rife.

³⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/mar/09/same-sex-unions-not-marriage?INTCMP=SRCH> accessed on 11/03/2012

Even the liturgy of the Church of England marriage service has changed to acknowledge changes in society. In the Book of Common Prayer, the introduction to marriage service states three reasons for getting married, to bear children (procreation), to have sex (avoid fornication) and for companionship (mutual society, help and comfort).⁴⁰ The Common Worship service is more wordy and less directive, it states “It (*marriage*) is given that as man and woman grow together in love and trust, they shall be united with one another in heart body and mind⁴¹.” In Common Worship there is a change in that the consequence of the togetherness is sex, children and companionship. There is a distinct movement towards a more relational understanding. Similarly in the Book of Common Prayer the bride must vow to obey the husband, in Common Worship the word obey drops out of the main text and becomes an option. The growing gender equality evident in society is acknowledged.

It follows when a marriage analogy is applied to the curate/TI relationship that it could be expected that aspects of relationality would be more highly valued and balance of power between the two parties more equal. If either party to the relationship understand either the marriage or the curacy differently, the couple are unlikely to flourish.

The pastoral introduction to the Common Worship Marriage Service states,

“Marriage is intended by God to be a creative relationship.”⁴²

If curate and TI are to flourish their relationship too must flourish.

⁴⁰ Book of Common Prayer, p. 301/302.

⁴¹ Archbishops’ Council. Common Worship – Pastoral Services, (London:Church House Publishing), 2000, p.105.

⁴² Archbishops’ Council. Common Worship – Pastoral Services, p.102.

The foundations of training

Gradually distinct building blocks upon which future training of curates might be based in the twenty first century are emerging, yet contain a recurring theme. The interviews identified the importance that the interviewees placed on forming good quality relationships with their trainers. It is clear that the changing parish context demands more collaborative patterns of ministry which requires a more relational style of working. At the same time changes in society indicate less hierarchical methods of exercising authority are more prevalent and models demonstrating greater mutuality and equality are valued. All of these observations suggest that priests of the future must become less reliant on positional authority bestowed at ordination and more reliant on their own ability to form the relationships of trust required when working in with others rather than alone. The ability to be a leader within such a changing context is even more demanding and requires a degree of maturity of being, self understanding and personal integration not previously recognised as an essential component of a parish priest's skill set. In the next chapter I will seek to draw together these features of the changing context of ministry in order to make final recommendations as to how IME 4-7 may be better structured and delivered in the future.

7. TRAINING CRITERIA AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter seeks to draw together insights from previous chapters in order to make practical and realisable recommendations for the future training of mature curates in the Church of England. Whilst the research has, from the outset, been primarily directed at the specific case of mature curates, it is anticipated the majority of recommendations will be applicable across all age ranges. Specifically age related issues are discussed at the end of the chapter. Firstly I intend to draw together the main building blocks of the research in order to demonstrate how they contribute to final conclusions before moving on to content and method of training. The nature of the task is such that in order to enable each priest's unique priestly identity to emerge, a detailed training manual would be too restrictive. Recommendations relate more closely to the conditions which must be created to facilitate development and seek to ensure curates are empowered in training rather than experiencing deskilling.

1. The Building Blocks

The curate and training incumbent relationship

The methodology of this research is inductive in that findings directly flow from interview data. Recapping, the research reveals that the foundation of good ministerial practice involves the formation of relationships between curate and TI that illustrate mutual regard and trust. Where these qualities have been evident, primarily in the accounts of curates 5 and 6b, these priests emerged from the training process with a positive self concept and

less residual anger and criticism of the training process than in the remaining interviewees. Where the TI/curate relationship was problematic, in the accounts of curates 2, 3, 4 and 6a, there was a greater sense of hierarchy within the relationship, mutual regard and trust were less evident and the criticism of the training experience more significant. Whilst curate 1 attributed her dissatisfaction with the training process to its limitations in being focussed on outcomes assuming a later parish context of work rather than chaplaincy, she too acknowledged a training context in which hierarchy of relationship inhibited good reflective working. She found there were issues central to her understanding of priesthood, that she did not feel able to explore with her TI.

Where a well developed awareness of self and associated maturity of being was evident in the trainer he or she was able to facilitate similar development in the trainee. In the course of analysing the data the marriage metaphor offered a useful tool to explore the nature of the trainer and trainee relationship. Conversely, it was evident that for the research sample of mature curates that, where their previous professional experience was valued and their individuality respected and honoured by the trainer, the relationships flourished. Five out of six interviews illustrated problems with the trainer/trainee relationship, such that the flourishing of that relationship has a direct bearing on the perceived effectiveness of the training process. There were also significant omissions from the interview material, with the exception of curate 5, the curates took little or no personal responsibility for addressing the challenges they encountered. Curate 2 spoke of seeking support outside the parish but still failed to address the presenting problems within it, she was almost paranoid about her identity being revealed in the research following detailing her experiences. Any recommendations for future training would need to address this reticence and encourage

curates of mature age and significant previous life experience to take greater responsibility for their training.

The Hind Report

The research adopted the Hind report as a theoretical starting point and the basis from which current training practice has developed. The main focus of this report is that pre and post ordination training should have greater continuity of content and purpose. Whilst this sounds logical, seamless continuity may be neither practical nor desirable. A dilemma exists in establishing greater links between IME1-3 and IME 4-7. Ordination acts as a fulcrum between the two parts and alters both the context and nature of training. Authority is bestowed at ordination, and ordination takes place at the beginning of IME 4-7, such that a primary function of this phase of training must be to learn to exercise that authority appropriately. The locus of training is now in parish rather than college, the theoretical and protected has become, tangible and vulnerable. Relationships with parishioners and colleagues, church going and not, become of primary importance. The training environment has changed dramatically from the more private and potentially hidden location of a residential theological college to the public and visible context of the parish. As such it requires greater awareness and sensitivity in the trainer and training institution to the pressures and challenges of relational ministry.

Collaborative Ministry

The observation that training is not providing the incumbents that bishops require must be taken seriously. In the contemporary context of declining finances, declining numbers and greater organisation of parishes into multi-parish units, this means curates must be

prepared to be collaborative leaders, which can only realistically be achieved by developing a collaborative model of training. Whilst Pickard warns against an overly simplistic prioritising of relational ministry within an episcopally ordered institution such as the Church of England, he notes a requisite quality of relatedness that is both powerful and gift releasing.

“Precisely because the collaborative venture involves a measure of self-forgetfulness and desire to see others develop their gifts and potentialities, the way of collaboration is also a delicate and fragile mode of togetherness. Its strength is in weakness; trust can be betrayed, competition can appear in subtle ways, creativity can be denied or thwarted, an ethos can be weakened and disappear.”¹

and adds,

“The spirit of collaboration is nothing less than the Spirit of Love that connects and inclines every member of the body of Christ towards the other.”²

The ability to establish and develop relationships of trust is fundamental to the development of a collaborative model of ministry which is required in parish ministry in the Church of England today. Yet the task of training within such a context is challenging. The training demands a degree of vulnerability in participants to succeed, yet must not allow the level of vulnerability to tip into creating damaged individuals. Considerable safeguards must be placed around the participants to prevent disasters.

A first response

In the contemporary parish training context, the skills required by TI are becoming increasingly specialist and it is doubtful that sufficient TIs can be found who possess them

¹ Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry, p.7.

² Pickard, Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry, p.7.

or have the time or inclination to deliver them. To maintain the exact current structure of training much greater care would have to be taken to appoint as trainers only those priests whose competence in the building of relationships, collaborative leadership and reflection on practice were excellent. The combination of skills required is diverse and complex, they are unlikely to be found in sufficient numbers of trainer priests to meet the supply of trainees. For any one individual to take sole, or even primary responsibility, for the curate's training he or she would require the ability to teach ministerial tasks, demonstrate sophisticated people skills, possess supervisory experience to aid reflective working and a level of humility and empathy to understand the trainee's perspective. The associated pressure on that individual to succeed could only add to the challenge.

Very few individuals possess all these qualities, but across a team with shared responsibility for training it becomes a real possibility. Whilst the TI/curate relationship remains central, I suspect that too great an emphasis on curate and TI and their development of a good and creative relationship may be self defeating. Relationships do not function best when under scrutiny and pressure to succeed from outside influences. They are best worked at more spontaneously and informally. As in the marriage metaphor, where the institution of marriage cannot deliver relational outcomes in the modern context, within a changing ministerial working situation, the traditional curacy will not always be able to deliver the sophisticated training required. Rather than adding stress to the training relationship, and make too great demands upon it, better to spread the load of responsibility across a wider group of people.

Here the marriage metaphor indicates the ways in which the closeness of relationship beneficial to a flourishing marriage, is less appropriate within a professional training context. Whilst in a marriage, husband and wife bear the responsibility for the quality of their relationship, the curate/TI context is more multi-faceted, its purpose is to produce priests readily deployable by the contemporary church, the relationship is a means to an end and not the end in itself.

Whilst the training incumbent must be capable of building a positive relationship with the curate and should practice a collaborative model of ministry, responsibility for the training process must be shared across a wider range of professionals. Reflective practice during training requires both ministerial tasks and the TI/curate relationship to be reflected upon. Whilst the former may fall within a TI's competency, the latter benefits from outside facilitation. The supervisory role requires sophisticated self-reflective practitioners capable of facilitating the growth of the curate in both his or her functional ministerial tasks and personal understanding of priestly identity. This role may need to be shared between two or more people.

2. The Content of Training

The difficult but essential task of training is to enable a maturity of being to develop in the trainee priest which will allow each new priest to discern and inhabit his or her priestly identity in a challenging and changing context. At present curacies within the Church of England take place in a parish, where the majority of priests are still deployed. A change to less single parishes and greater numbers of multi-parish units requires a model of collaboration which demands exceptional maturity of being of the priestly leader. The

recent emphasis of selection of curates for ordination on their possessing wisdom commensurate with age is an important starting point in the process, but invites more detailed analysis as to how this might be assessed, a task beyond the scope of this research. This research confines itself to exploring the nature of maturing so that appropriate conditions may be put in place to facilitate the process.

A trinity of being

The profound and unbidden comment from curate 1's interview indicated the individual yet specific nature of the development of priestly identity. I repeat it here as an important starting point in analysing the nature of the maturing which must be nurtured in the trainee priest.

“Any one person can be any one curate as a priest, as a person as a Christian, that's a trinity of being, that's an interrelationship of being that should be allowed to flourish, and often one of those is not allowed to flourish,” so goes curate 1's much repeated words.

Her comment encompasses an integrity of being that incorporates aspects common to all human beings, aspects applicable to those who adopt a Christian belief system and aspects applicable to a Christian leader. The implication is that in the trained priest, these three aspects will all have had the opportunity to flourish in order to produce a balanced and mature priest.

A trained priest must have the maturity of being commensurate with his or her age and including the development of self awareness and self knowledge that all adult humans can aspire to possess, secondly he or she but must also possess a developed understanding of his or her Christian faith in order to encourage others to grow as Christian disciples and to

model authentic Christian living, thirdly each trained priest is also a leader within the Church of England, so they must be competent priestly leaders. To adapt Sadgrove's terminology of wisdom, this could be described as holistic priestly wisdom.

I intend to consider the content of training through the categories of human, Christian and priestly development. Whilst growth of these specific aspects of priestly wisdom overlap and are coterminous in the training of the priest, and acknowledging that addressing each aspect separately is easier in theory than in practice, such an approach does ensure no fundamental constituent part is neglected to the detriment of another. Adopting these categories creates some difficulty in ascertaining where some material fits but tidiness of category has been sacrificed in order to ensure the entirety of being as addressed.

Before recommending how such maturity of being may be facilitated and nurtured within IME 4-7, it is necessary to explore briefly the nature and extent of the undertaking. It is an immense field worthy of many completed theses, my intention is to introduce methods of approach which emerge from the interview data and offer a small sample of thought and theory surrounding the growth and development of firstly every human being and then specifically a person who is training to be a leader in the Christian church. Issues surrounding maturity of being are particularly relevant to the sample group of curates over the age of forty, in whom this process might be assumed to be already partially developed. It is to avoid confusion that the adjective mature will continue to be consistently used to refer to curates over forty years of age and the term maturity of being or maturation to refer to the a developmental process of learning and growth that takes place throughout a lifetime.

In the research sample of mature curates it could be assumed that they have already achieved a maturity of being that will be beneficially utilised in the curacy, that their wisdom would be commensurate with their age. Whilst this was true for curate 5, who had trained in psychology, it was not so for all. Curate 1 spoke of feeling de-skilled, curates 3, 4 and 6a proved to be inexperienced at dealing with difficult relationships and curate 2 spoke of her longing to utilise previous skills in a future post.

It would be reasonable to assume that a previously developed habitus of being would be longer established, more embedded and less likely to be disrupted in older curates, this was not the picture that emerged from the interviews. There was significant evidence to suggest that when the sample curates encountered difficulty and conflict with either congregations or trainers, their methods of handling this were disappointing. Whilst curates, 2, 3 and 4 referred to their age as a factor in surviving their curacies, it is not evident whether this was so or whether better developed coping strategies would have facilitated an improved training experience. Curate 3 withdrew from collective diocesan IME 4-7 training in protest at its content, curate 4 acknowledged shouting down the phone at his TI, curate 6a suffered a nervous breakdown, curate 2 was terrified of being identified after granting the interview, none of these examples illustrate significant maturity of being.

Examples from the interviews

Further analysis of the data confirmed that some interviewees had perceived that one or other aspect of their development had not been adequately addressed during their training.

Personal and spiritual development was sacrificed by curate 2 as an overfull diary meant she had no time to pursue her hobbies of theatre going and gardening. She noted,

“One of the things I used to really enjoy was gardening.”

She resolved to have time to address these shortcomings in her next post where she anticipated having greater control over her time and spoke of its benefit to her,

“the sense of creativity and order, because I like to be ordered ... and I just think it(*gardening*) is something that I’ve achieved, something I can nurture and (*helps*) relaxation as well.”

For her, the opportunity to garden fed her body, soul and spirit.

Curate 1 spoke of feeling de-skilled in theological college and referred to lacking sufficient confidence to establish her own rule of life and develop and be nurtured by her prayer. At the beginning of the interview this lack of confidence was evident in answers that lacked detail and I include the full exchange between interviewer and interviewee to illustrate this.

Interviewer “So your confidence needed building?”

Interviewee “And it didn’t in that first year, you do the next one thing. It was only in the second year when I was able to bring some of my own things that my confidence started to build again.”

With prompting she was encouraged to expand on the things that she had brought with her that had helped her to build confidence, though still haltingly, she was able to fill in the details.

Interviewer “What were those things?”

Interviewee “Beginning the Ignatian , facilitating Ignatian groups, which again, the whole spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, that feeds me, and I was able to. That had gone largely by the way in the first year, so that didn’t help my confidence really.”

All the interviewees referred in length to their development as priest as was to be anticipated when they had been briefed that they would be asked to share their joys and sorrows of curacy. Less explicit in the interviews was reference to continuing the developmental journey common to all people or all Christians yet it follows that only by addressing the development of the whole person can a fully integrated priest be nurtured.

What is maturity of being?

What does it mean to say a human has maturity of being? It is related to the capacity to be independent, autonomous, responsible, self aware, the ability to recognise and establish one's own identity and simultaneously respect the identity of other people, to be able to make close relationships but not to be dependant upon them, to be aware of the use and abuse of power, to be whole, in short to be a grown up.³ The Church of England report, 'Being Human' report identifies in contemporary society a search for wisdom which it equates with maturing of being, though often described by other names:

...a better perspective, standing back from things, taking everything into account, thinking about something from various people's standpoints, considering values as well as facts, mentoring, counselling, therapy, having an integrated personality, taking an ethical approach, evaluating, practising a spirituality, consulting an 'agony aunt' and so on. Emotional Intelligence⁴ is recent terminology which is relevant to a definition of maturity of being and is related to an understanding of the power an individual's emotions and the effect of those emotions on others.⁵

Some terminology may be new, but the need for the human person to develop to a point where they have developed self understanding is not. In 1947 Fromm identified the importance of people developing skills in order to analyse their own behaviour and to act

³ The term 'grown up' was used by curate 5 in describing the developed maturity of being of her training incumbent.

⁴ For a more extensive explanation of this phrase see Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence – why it can matter more than IQ, London: Bloomsbury, 1996.

⁵ Archbishop's Council, Being Human, p.5.

knowledgably and responsibly but also their increased vulnerability if this takes place in an adverse or over authoritarian environment.

“Man is capable of knowing the truth and he is capable of loving, but if he – not just his body, but he in his totality – is threatened by superior force, if he is made helpless and afraid, his mind is affected, its operations become distorted and paralyzed.”⁶

Human development theories

For curates 3, 4 and 6a, it was crisis situations which inculcated negative interpretations of their curacies. There is a strong body of literature which supports the theory that crisis situations are requisite in the maturing process. Among theologians, whilst Sadgrove and Ramsay speak of identification of the priest with the pain of others, Heyward speaks of a deeply personal pain that has formed the priest she is.

Sadgrove recalls hearing of the violence in Soweto on the same day that he celebrated the Eucharist for the first time and seeking to make sense of what he was doing,

“I knew I must never forget this, how priesthood means celebrating with and suffering with. Priesthood connects us with the whole of life.”⁷

and himself quotes Ramsay,

“In your service of others you will feel, you will care, you will be hurt, you will have your hearts broken. And it is doubtful if any of us can do anything at all until we have been very much hurt, and until our hearts have been very much broken.”⁸

Heyward writes,

⁶ Fromm, Man for Himself, (London:Routledge Classics, 2003), p.184.

⁷ Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p.113.

⁸ Ramsay, The Christian Priest Today, quoted in Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p.113 but exact reference not cited.

“So many of us have been so badly wounded by forces of homophobia, misogyny, racist fears and hatred, class injury and other forms of violence and abuse. But to be blessed by God – and this blessing draws us as close as we will ever get into the heart of God – is, in the beginning and the end, to be empowered in our woundedness.”⁹

Whilst these are explicitly Christian and priestly interpretations of events encompassing personal suffering and empathy with universal tragedy, the way in which individuals deal with crisis is a crucial element of personal development which can result in either an enriched or diminished personality and ministry.

Others, notably Henri Nouwen¹⁰, have written at length about, and introduced the terminology of the wounded healer to Christian teaching. The basic premise is that there is greater power in acknowledging and speaking from a position of vulnerability where personal wounds are exposed than from a position of strength and power. Such an approach is compatible with and reflected in the tenets of crucifixion and resurrection fundamental to the Christian faith. God has the capacity to bring forth new life from death and create new possibilities from human failure.

Learning to exercise ministry within public view and having personal relationships under the spotlight can be immensely stressful as curates begin public ministry. Maturity of being, initially of the trainer, but to be developed in the trainee, has the capacity to use these crisis points as springboards for growth. This is not the same as setting up training pairings that are likely to fail, such an act is abusive, but it is to acknowledge that the nature of the priestly task is relational and stressful and adequate specialist support must be

⁹ Heyward, *Staying Power*, p.27.

¹⁰ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*. London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1994.

available. This support would encourage reflective practice so that the trainee's self knowledge grows and serious crises are avoided.

Crisis theories

Whilst particularly concerned with women's faith development, Nicola Slee notes there are many different human development theories.¹¹ She offers a detailed summary of different approaches. The lifespan theories, such as that of Erik Erikson, identify each individual's moments of life crisis and opportunities for decision as foundational to the way that individual will develop in the next stage of life. Positive outcomes at each point of crisis, strengthen the personality and create inner stability, negative outcomes can destabilise and damage future development. The types and nature of crises a person has experienced will affect their emotional stability and effectiveness to operate as an ordained minister. This has obvious implications for ministerial education and development, and the importance of ensuring crises experienced in the early years of parish ministry are transformed to contribute positively rather than negatively to the ongoing process of maturation.

Erikson's description of someone who has weathered life's crises positively is an adult who has a strong foundation of basic trust grounded in the belief that life has meaning. Such a person is independent and can stand alone on matters of principle. He or she can make considered choices. He or she will have the capacity for initiative and be clear about purpose, will have developed a set of competencies which enable a positive contribution to society. Such maturity is accompanied by a strong sense of personal identity, a capacity for intimacy and sufficient self assurance to engage in conflict without being too passive or too

¹¹ Nicola Slee, Women's Faith Development – Patterns and Processes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.17-32. See also Watts, Nye and Savage, Psychology for Christian Ministry (London: Routledge, 2002), p.106.

aggressive. Fowler declares Erikson's vision of fulfilment in life to be both religious and prophetic deriving as it does from "caring for the conditions that enable present and future generations to develop the full range of human virtues."¹² In fact the ideal healthy personality sounds totally compatible with the ideal priest.

Sequential theories

Other theorists offer more ordered and sequential theories for understanding human development, Freud and Jung have much to say about religion and human development using the language of psychodynamics, Piaget and Kohlberg look at human cognitive development, then there are dialectical theories which focus on power relations and the effect this has on those groups who have experienced limited access to social power.

Closely allied to more sequential theories of development Fowler notes,

"The human calling – which we take to be universal - is to undergo and participate in the widening inclusiveness of the circle of those who count as neighbour, from the narrowness of our familial beginnings toward real solidarity with a commonwealth of being."¹³

Thus Fowler links human maturing with a broadening of concern for fellow humans from the local and familial to the universal which indicates if not a breadth of relationships, certainly a breadth of connectedness with fellow human beings. Such an increase of concern for others is part and parcel of the task and attitude of a priest.

Many of the definitions of a whole person or mature personality offered by theorists such as Erikson and Fowler resonate with an understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

¹² James Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian – Adult Development and Christian Faith (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), p.22.

¹³ Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian, p.60.

Fowler develops Erikson's work to make a more explicit connection between the Christian goal of loving God and loving neighbour and Erikson's qualities of the fully formed personality.

"Human development towards wholeness is, I believe, always the product of a certain *synergy* between human potentials, given in creation, and the presence and activity of Spirit mediated through many channels."¹⁴

My own conclusion is that the universality of calling to be fully human comes from God who has created us with the capacity for wholeness, and who through our life experiences can mediate his Spirit if we are to both see it and accept it. Secular human development theorists can offer helpful insights into the process. Faith development theorists, such as Fowler, integrate secular theory with understandings of God as Creator. In so doing, they do not alter the theory but offer different sources of transformational power, whether solely an inner human process or a process emanating from the divine. Simplified, the what and when are identical, only the how is explained differently.

Universal priesthood

William Countryman links human and faith development even more directly by utilising a very broad definition of priesthood,

"priesthood is a fundamental and inescapable part of being human."¹⁵

He espouses a universal priesthood to which every human being belongs, and so growth and maturity as a person is synonymous with growth and development as a priest.

¹⁴ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, p.59.

¹⁵ William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy – Renewing the Priesthood of All* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), p3.

His definition of a priest is someone who has a hidden secret to reveal to others, he argues that each human being is in possession of such a gift or secret, which he terms ‘arcana’¹⁶, and the process of revealing that to others constitutes priesthood. The basic contention is that everyone has something that they know that they can teach another and in so doing he or she exercises ministry as a priest. The secret they have to give is a gift of God and thus holy. As God permeates the whole of creation, the secrets of that creation are also holy. In Countryman’s terminology to be fully human is to be a willing participant in the universal priesthood, to be a Church of England priest is a particular way of fulfilling that call. Again the training priest must be facilitated in discovering his or her unique gifting.

The Church of England definition

The Church of England has also adopted the notion of being fully human and linked it inseparably to faith in the report ‘Being Human’. The aim of the report is to address “what it means to be a person”.¹⁷ The method of analysis is explicitly theological and focuses on four key elements. The first is to take Jesus as the example of what it means to be fully human, the second identifies the acquisition of wisdom as foundational to maturation and the third notes the continual process involved in the acquisition, irrespective of a person’s chronological age or stage of development. Thirdly, gaining wisdom is always about “increasing, growing and developing”¹⁸ and the desire to increase in wisdom is described as a core dynamic in good living. Fourthly the report refers to the Bible as the primary written source of the information about the nature of wisdom. The report understands the pursuit of wisdom, as defined through the life of Jesus and Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, as foundational to the journey towards becoming fully human. Thus the search

¹⁶ Countryman, Living on the Border of the Holy, p.3.

¹⁷ Archbishop’s Council, Being Human, p.1.

¹⁸ Archbishop’s Council, Being Human, p.2.

for and journey towards wisdom, and the guiding of others in the quest, becomes a central part of ministerial development and training. The naming of our species as ‘Homo sapiens’, the Latin for wise humanity, is cited as evidence that growing in wisdom has always been central to becoming fully human. The training of future priests must take seriously the nature of growing in wisdom and self awareness. This definition of being human resonates with Sadgrove’s concern that priests must seek wisdom, but neglects the contribution secular theorists can contribute to the task.

Maturity of Christian discipleship

Countryman illustrates that every human journey has its spiritual element, yet it would anomalous and lacking in integrity if the life of a Christian priest was not intentionally and explicitly based on the life, teachings and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The journey towards personal integration for a Church of England priest must incorporate a personal faith journey which some might describe as a growth in holiness. Whilst this might seem obvious, Burgess notes in his research that,

“Some (*curates*) were also clear that they felt their Christian faith to be compromised by the work they were doing, or the person they were expected to be.”¹⁹

Part of oversight or supervision must be to enable the curate to integrate faith and practice.

Sadgrove summarises this succinctly,

“So a spirituality for ministry must have at its heart the relentless pursuit of inner transparency and integrity.”²⁰

He expands this explanation in the context of Christian priesthood,

¹⁹ Burgess, *Into Deep Water*, p.18.

²⁰ Sadgrove, *Wisdom and Ministry*, p. 68.

“To see God is the ultimate aim of living. To help others see God is the ultimate aim of ministry. To become pure in heart is therefore an inescapable requirement on all who are leaders in the Church. Without it, all ministry is fatally compromised.”²¹

In a chapter devoted to prayer in his book of pre-ordination addresses, Ramsay writes, “We are called, near to Jesus and with Jesus and in Jesus, *to be with God with the people on our hearts.*”²²

Rolheiser believes spirituality is a universal concept whether an individual describes themselves as religious or Christian or not. He describes it, not as an optional overlay on life, but a life force within us. The way in which we choose to channel that life force is termed our spirituality.

“Thus we all have a spirituality whether we want one or not, whether we are religious or not.”²³

He adds, “It is also about being integrated or falling apart,”²⁴ and

“irrespective of whether or not we allow ourselves to be consciously shaped by any explicit ideas, we act in ways which leave us either healthy or unhealthy, loving or bitter, in community or alienated from it, what shapes our actions is our spirituality.”

He assigns so much power to this inner life force or creative energy that he understands it as capable of destruction of the individual as of his or her completion. If indeed our inner spirituality is so strong, its nurture and development cannot be left to chance but must be intentionally channelled and structures put in place during IME 4-7 in order to facilitate this.

²¹ Sadgrove, Wisdom and Ministry, p. 69.

²² Ramsay, The Christian Priest Today, p.14.

²³ Ronald Rolheiser, Seeking Spirituality – guidelines for a Christian Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998, p.6.

²⁴ Rolheiser, Seeking Spirituality, p.6.

Rolheiser identifies four non negotiable elements of a specifically Christian spirituality as a discipline of private prayer inseparably linked to an understanding and practice of private morality, a desire to work for social justice, a mellowness of heart and spirit and membership of a worshipping community. Thus, for a Christian, a balanced spirituality demands both an interior element of relationship with God that directly influences the way life is lived both in personal and global spheres. The mellowness of heart he describes is an attitude of joy and delight quite contrary to some of the more challenging and diminishing parts of some of the curates' stories and can be understood to overlap with the quality I have described as integrity of being. He summarises the need to be part of a worshipping Christian community because he considers

“an individual not in community lives an “unconfronted life””²⁵

Once again the process of maturation, this time explicitly spiritual and Christian, is linked with a confronted life. If confrontation with difficulty is so essential, it is vital that curates operating in the public eye be helped to process that encounter positively.

I am reminded again of the psychotherapist friend who insisted that the curate/TI relationship must in some way fail in order to succeed. Rolheiser admits,

“It is no easy task to walk this earth and find peace.”²⁶

The difficulty is that contemporary western society is more attuned to pain avoidance than pain confrontation. It is difficult process to re-orientate individuals to such a counter cultural concept.

²⁵ Rolheiser, Seeking Spirituality, p.66.

²⁶ Rolheiser, Seeking Spirituality, p.63.

It is so difficult that the teacher or trainer must be one for whom this confrontation and subsequent growth is evident.

Priestly development

A priest is a Christian who has been selected and trained to be a leader in a Christian community, and in the context of this research specifically the Church of England. They must have attained a degree of Christian maturity in order to teach others about the faith. They must be adept at ministry, yet Lewis proposes that

“Ministry is the calling of all Christians, not just the ordained clergy.”²⁷

The difference with priests is that they are also called to be leaders. As noted in chapter 5 priests are given authority at their ordination, and it is learning the nature of that authority and how to exercise it that is the central to a personal understanding of priestly identity and which sets priests apart or makes them different from other mature Christians. The exercising of that priestly authority has to be learned and practised within the gathered community of Christians, the Church. The interviews illustrate that the exercise of that authority is the most difficult aspect of priesthood to learn and to discover.

Curate 3 experienced considerable problems when his parish failed to understand his inexperience in leadership of a parish and curate 4 especially, experienced the distress of having a trainer priest who found appropriate exercise of authority difficult. This research has established a collaborative model of leadership as one most applicable to the current parish context. Collaborative leadership demands an even greater overall maturity of being

²⁷ G.D.Lewis, Meeting the Moment – leadership and well-being in ministry, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). p.14.

in the priest to enable him or her to effectively delegate or ceded authority to others without experiencing too great a degree of anxiety.

Pickard summarises the situation of the priestly leader,

Ordination places the minister in a new relation to others in the community as a designated leader. The person is given a new status in the community, not in terms of hierarchical advantage, but in its proper sense of a new ‘standing place’, in the same way marriage places two people in a new relationship with each other which will never be the same again. Similarly, ordination does not place a minister ‘over’ the rest of the community, but in a new status within it.²⁸

It is this maturing in understanding of authority bestowed and exercise of it that can only be developed by doing and which requires a competent mentor by the curate’s side. It requires a human maturity and a Christian maturity before it can be attempted.

The characteristics of the priestly leader also have much in common with descriptors offered by secular authors. Botatzkis and McKee write,

“Great leaders are awake, aware and attuned to themselves, to others and to the world around them. They commit to their beliefs, stand firm in their values and live full, passionate lives.”²⁹

The particular example of the priestly leader is that these beliefs and values are Christian.

D’Souza summarises,

“If leaders want to exhibit authentic Christian leadership and to make a vital difference, they must learn to provide Jesus’ leadership style.”³⁰

²⁸ Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, p.160.

²⁹ Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, “Resonant leadership”. Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2005, p.3.

³⁰ D’Souza, *Leaders for today, hope for tomorrow*, p.11.

It takes time as a growing Christians and time as a maturing human before any such competence can be achieved. This would suggest mature curates should be better placed to understand the complexities of their bestowed authority and yet this was not immediately obvious.

I believe it is mistaken understandings of priestly authority being necessarily associated with hierarchy that causes most problems. Within an established hierarchical structure of leadership, leadership is likely to be more authoritarian and less servant like which then has associated consequences within relationships.

An authoritarian leader *imposes* the desired behaviours in an organization whereas the servant-leader models the desired behaviour. The authoritarian approach may achieve temporary *compliance*, but it will also be accompanied by an attitude of resentment. People will carry out commands because they *have to* and be on the lookout for ways to circumvent the order imposed. In contrast, the servant-leadership approach creates a spirit of ownership, involvement and *commitment* among the people. They will do the work because they want to.³¹

The situation for mature curates is complex. Those whose previous professional lives have been in more hierarchically ordered organisations, are likely to find more collaborative styles of working difficult. Curate 3, who had been in the army inferred he would have liked more direct and authoritarian intervention by his TI during his curacy.

“(I kept) looking to make sure I was still in line and nobody drew me back.”

Curate 5, previously a psychologist, was pleased that her TI let her “...get on with it.”

So what constitutes the content of training for priestly leadership? In many ways, the argument is circular. It requires a fully integrated mature personality to make a good priestly leader and for a person who believes themselves called by God to priestly

³¹ D’Souza, Leaders for Today, hope for tomorrow, p.19, author’s emphasis.

leadership, ordination helps them to become fully human. Lewis' view of leadership in ministry is that,

“The art of leading is to be fully human.”³²

Cotter takes issues of maturity of being so seriously in the training of priests that he goes so far as to conclude that if human and spiritual maturing was really taken seriously,

“...we would not then extract the inexperienced out of the community and train them too early for a leadership that all too often has become detached from their and other's humanity. There is a wisdom in not allowing people to take on the ministry of leadership until they have reached the age of thirty.”³³

I would resist the introduction of such an inflexible age limit as I am increasingly persuaded that chronological age does not necessarily equate to maturity of being.

The content of training will vary according to style, previous experience and aptitude of both trainer and trainee. It is important that an outmoded model of priestly leadership is not taught and modelled by a TI, that all trainers and trainees are committed to less hierarchical and more collaborative understandings of priestly authority and that leadership styles for the modern church are taught, modelled and practised. It incorporates a maturity of being that is not threatened by the success and achievement of colleagues but is grateful for their success, it speaks of a mature Christian faith and personal Christian wisdom and holiness that indicates an authentic knowledge of and relationship with God and a leadership style which demonstrates a willingness to give away some of the power and authority invested at ordination for others to share. It requires time to learn and support and supervision in the

³² Lewis, *Meeting the Moment*, p.108.

³³ Jim Cotter, *Yes ... minister? Patterns of Christian Service*, (Sheffield: Cairns, 1992), p.56.

learning. It requires wise trainers who can offer the right level of supervision and know the right time to introduce the opportunities to practice leading. It involves a bespoke, rather than off the peg approach. It requires training be flexible enough to meet the circumstances of the trainee as well as producing the priests the contemporary church requires. It is a tall order.

3. The Delivery of Training

It is important that training should be an empowering experience for curates, whether mature or younger in years. In the interviews it was surprising that many of the mature interviewees seemed unable to address adequately the many shortcomings they identified in their curacies. It is not always clear whether they were prevented by institutional structures and expectations or whether by their own personal disempowerment, deskilling or inherent immaturity. Whatever the cause, it is important that an overarching principle of any training must be to reverse this tendency.

Compatible with the praxis method employed in the research and its foundation in liberation theology, I am keen that those who perceive themselves as oppressed may be offered a context in which they are capable of effecting their own empowerment. Several comments of Paulo Freire illustrate the ideal with which I would wish to drive the research.

“One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness.”³⁴

³⁴ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.6.

It is my opinion that there is little value in recommending changes in training which do not awaken curates to take greater responsibility for their own futures, but rather provide them with further imposed conditions to which they must submit and about which they complain.

“Functionally oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can only be done by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.”³⁵

This is not to minimise the challenge of persuading an established and historic institution such as the Church of England to grasp the need for change and acted upon new research findings such as these. The landscape of curacies had not changed substantially since Burgess’s published research of 1998, despite his recommendations. Freire notes, “It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education”³⁶

Yet neither should the task be neglected because it is difficult, rather this gives greater urgency to the research.

In making recommendations as to how future IME 4-7 be undertaken, I return to the chronology of the marriage relationship established in chapter 4. I remain convinced that ministry is relational and that whether a curate be surrounded by an individual TI or a team of trainers, relationships matter. It is in experiencing the ups and downs of relationship that growth can be facilitated as both human and priest. It is for this reason I retain the relational metaphor of marriage at this stage of analysis.

³⁵ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.6 and previously quoted in chapter 2.

³⁶ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.8.

Returning to the marriage metaphor

In this section I intend to pick up the headings of marriage, life together and divorce employed in chapter 4, and address them in relation to training. Where both the task of ministry and the process of training has been identified as relational matchmaking becomes an very important first step in establishing a positive training environment. I begin by establishing a principle of empowerment of the curates at the outset of the training process and consider the relative decision making power that the different stakeholders should hold at the beginning of IME 4-7.

Matchmaking

The stakeholders

The curate.

The prospective curate must be empowered to take a more informed and influential role in making decisions about his or her future. At this stage continuity between IME 1-3 and 4-7 is crucial because active involvement requires trainees are properly prepared in their training institutions to make informed choices about their future training context. This research has not examined IME 1-3, so the precise detail of how this might be achieved would need to be the subject of further research. However the marriage metaphor suggests that for any long term pairing to flourish it is helpful that the couple spend a significant length of time getting to know each other. One possibility would be for curate to spend a month of his or her penultimate year of training on practical placement in the intended curacy location. This would better equip the curate to asses the suitability of his or her match with TI.

The diocesan bishop

Throughout this research the authority wielded by bishops in their dioceses presents a dilemma because there is no standardisation of process of training across different dioceses and no central oversight of its delivery. The episcopal structure of the Church of England bestows considerable power on bishops, meaning they can choose to adhere more or less closely to Ministry Division recommendations as they see fit. Whilst it is not the purpose of this research to address these ancient and hierarchical structures or attempt fundamental restructuring of the Church of England, it is clear that not all bishops are selected for their expertise in training.

If training is to receive the priority it should, then the system should be capable of monitoring and oversight. It becomes important that specialists oversee the selection of curates and their training contexts from the earliest stages of the process. So whilst a diocesan bishop must have input into selection of curates in his diocese, the current inconsistencies which allow curates to be allocated for reasons of reward, tradition or housing provision must be eradicated. This can best be achieved by Ministry Division dedicating a group of people, or a department, to national deployment of curates, their precise responsibilities being addressed under a separate and following heading in this section. Some of the information required by Ministry Division in order to build up files on TIs would necessarily be supplied from the dioceses but the responsibility of bestowing or withdrawing the right to train would be distanced from local diocesan politics or quirk.

Diocesan director of ordinands

The DDO, would have a central place in the process as link between diocese and the national placement body within Ministry Division. Whilst this is easier where ordinands return to their sending diocese for ordination, it is quite within the bounds of organisational possibility to predict numbers for training, import or export, at least two years prior to deployment, and plan accordingly. The diocesan bishop would retain the choice of how directly or indirectly he was involved in the process. The DDO would also be responsible for overseeing a team of people within his or her diocese who would be responsible for supervising the delivery of IME 4-7, ensure training outcomes were achieved and address any emerging, unexpected problems during the process. DDOs are involved extensively in the selection of candidates for training prior to IME 1-3, their involvement through IME 4-7 maintains continuity although will add significantly to personal workload. It is therefore important that the DDO too, is capable of leading and working with a team of assistants and delegating work appropriately.

Training Incumbents

Training incumbents must want to train. They must be willing to train as trainers, possess the necessary leadership qualities and relational aptitudes explored in previous chapters and take seriously the responsibility of providing the priests of the future. There can be no circumstance in which men and women ill-equipped through health, temperament or aptitude should undertake the task of the training of priests. This would include being prepared to undertake training to train and could include a recognised qualification for so doing. The content of such training would incorporate understandings of collaboration, leadership and the nurturing of individual priestly identities in each new priest. It would

also require analysis of their suitability to train prior to every new curate being placed, so that files on TIs remain up to date. Whilst further training makes increased demands of time in an experienced priest's already busy working life, it is important that the TI can demonstrate his or her commitment to training as a welcomed and additional ministerial task, rather than the opportunity to reduce his or her workload by acquiring an additional pair of hands. It is also important that prospective TIs can demonstrate leadership and management skills which enable them to delegate some of their ministerial tasks to others in order to create the necessary time and space to be trainers. They must demonstrate significant personal integrity and maturity of being. Whilst they may be recommended locally by diocesan bishops, their training and qualification to train must be overseen centrally by Ministry Division.

The IME 1-3 training establishment

Relevant but beyond the precise remit of this research, the training establishment curriculum must link closely with the context in which priests will eventually be deployed. This could be managed within the existing inspection system but would include an expectation that ordinands be trained in collaborative ways of working more applicable to increasing numbers of multi parish units.

The research data revealed that many of the training establishments at which the interviewees had been trained had made informal input into the matchmaking process to a greater or lesser degree. The matchmaking process would benefit from drawing on the IME 1-3 training establishment's knowledge of the ordinand's skills and aptitudes by including them in the matchmaking process in a more formal way. This would extend beyond formal

written reporting to input into discussions between the stakeholders. This has the dual advantage of bringing a more personal and detailed knowledge of the prospective curate's potential to the process and of making college principals' and staff's input more transparent and accountable and potentially less covert or divisive. It also establishes a clear link between IME 1-3 and 4-7.

Church of England Ministry Division.

The central body with overall responsibility for matchmaking would need to establish, monitor criteria for training and trainers and provide training for TIs, whether delivered centrally or regionally. Such a body would have the added advantage of having full oversight of all IME 1-3 training establishments, residential and non residential and all trainees, young, mature, part time, full time, stipendiary and non stipendiary and so would operate a much broader perspective than the particular rationale of this research. In conjunction with diocesan bishops and DDOs, they would also hold records of prospective TIs' previous training records, so avoiding placing curates in known unsatisfactory training environments. This group would have access to all files from before selection for training, through selection conference and IME 1-3, to curate placement. They would hold responsibility for ensuring trainers maintained adequate standards and had an appropriate positive record with any previous curates. Their remit would include assessment of TIs' physical and potentially mental health and appropriateness of their parish context for training. Ministry Division would also hold a national overview of anticipated ministry numbers and deployment patterns and would maintain responsibility and accountability for a professional process being maintained. Further research would be needed to establish the

best method of gathering input from all the stakeholders but I would anticipate regional diocesan meetings at which, at some stage, all parties were consulted.

The training context

All parties take equal but slightly differing responsibility for deciding the precise training context. The bishop and DDO have knowledge of the numbers and types of future personnel requirements in the dioceses, the curate will have an understanding of the nature of their personal callings, the IME 1-3 training establishment of actual competencies and aptitudes, and ministry division will act as matchmaker. Pragmatically, matching of personal understanding of calling of the curate must match with actual competencies identified by the IME 1-3 training establishment and with future ministerial requirements of the church. Ministry Division must maintain responsibility for offering appropriate training contexts where ordinands have been selected for training in specialist contexts such as curates 1 and 3 indicated³⁷. Whilst the Church of England remains predominantly geographically structured and parish based, training for this model of ministry will remain a priority but flexibility must be incorporated to meet particular individuals.

The current model of the Church of England remains geographically and parish orientated, this must remain the primary setting for training to maintain both an understanding of the national church and meet the human resource requirements of that church. However within that parish structure there must be ample space and flexibility to offer additional or more specialist training experiences such as parish ministry in a contrasting geographical or structural context. Thus for example, IME 4-7 may include rural and urban elements,

³⁷ Curate 1 indicated she had clearly stated at selection that she was only interested in a chaplaincy rather than a parish context and curate 3 that he required specialist training in adapting his previous ministerial experience to a specifically Anglican parish context.

single church and multi-parish settings or different chaplaincy or theological educator placement opportunities. As each curate progresses in training, he or she may develop different ministerial aims or ambitions which might require a complete change of curacy in order to fulfil them. Hopefully sufficient flexibility can be retained within the curacy to regard change as a positive training opportunity rather than an exception or problem.

Life Together

Unreasonable expectations

In employing the marriage metaphor, the focus of this research has been on the relationship between TI and curate. To recap, use of this metaphor has led me to conclude that the increasingly collaborative and relational nature of the priestly task places an impossible demand upon the quality of the TI/curate relationship, which the current model of curacy. Just as the institution of marriage was designed to deliver concrete outcomes of respectability, housing possibilities and recognition in the community and now has attached to it undeliverable emotional expectations, so too the curacy has informally evolved into something it was never designed to deliver. Where once an accepted, more hierarchical style of leadership meant a TI could demand certain behaviours in a curate and also parishioners had a more formal expectation concerning the nature of their relationship with their priest, things have changed. Today, society does not so readily accept a priest's authority, neither does a curate so readily accept the relative positional status of his or her TI. Curates are more likely to be older than in previous generations and possess significant previous professional experience.

The interview data indicates that curacies have evolved to include an expectation that the curate has greater involvement in deciding the content of his or her training and that that training fulfils certain emotional and relational expectations as well as the development of functional competencies. The changes in society whereby hierarchical and more formal structures are being replaced by more horizontally orientated groupings of greater equality and mutuality in both work and domestic settings are necessarily also reflected in the working relationship of the traditional curate and TI pairing. This risks placing unreasonable expectations for managing emotional as well as functional outcomes on the trainer. The team of two, curate and TI, is not capable of delivering all that is demanded of it. The team must be expanded to meet changing training needs.

The training team

The importance of relationality.

In chapter 6, it was noted that Rossdale has developed the concept that collaboration must be modelled in the process of training priests for collaborative ministry. He offers a structure for achieving this but his recommendations have shortcomings. In particular the responsibilities of the constituent members of the training team are over compartmentalised and do not lend themselves to flexible use. Thus in Rossdale's model, the TI becomes the facilitator, the person responsible for overseeing the development of the functional competencies of the priest, the reflector has responsibility for encouraging theological reflection and a supervisor ensures everything takes place as it should. Whilst this model has much to offer as a starting point for discussion, I am concerned that the respective people are integrated more fully to form a functioning, relating team and that the curate's responsibilities in the training process are acknowledged. I am anxious to avoid

disempowering the curates and encourage them to hold greater accountability for training outcomes. I would also resist renaming the TI, a facilitator, as by definition the facilitator downgrades the importance of the working relationship, it is a functional rather than a relational definition of task. It is quite possible to facilitate an activity without the need to either establish a relationship or maintain any accountability for outcome which is inappropriate within a model of collaborative working.

It is easier to place greater emphasis in training upon acquiring functional competencies for example, leading, planning and designing worship, funeral baptism and marriage ministry, preaching and teaching skills and pastoral visiting. Each of these contains a relational element, more explicitly in pastoral or hospital visiting but also in understanding or intuiting the ways in which to relate better to worshippers in a liturgical or teaching setting. When discussing this research with an experienced priest trainer he suggested that curates must be taught priestcraft, but was less helpful in defining what he meant by this. The acquisition of functional tasks is not a mystery, any attached mystique is more closely related to the degree of relationality within ministry. The challenge is how this may be nurtured in and through the training team.

Rossdale suggests a training hub where groups of curates are trained together, I am concerned that such a structure works well in more densely populated or urban areas where churches are closer together, congregations bigger and parishioners more numerous. This limits the choice of training context. A more flexible structure is required facilitative of a greater diversity of ministerial settings. I therefore offer headings relating to responsibilities within a training team for firstly ministerial tasks, secondly reflective

practice and thirdly overall supervision for the process. The way in which these responsibilities are delegated amongst the training team will differ according to individual competencies, similarly the size of the team may vary but with an expected minimum of three and more usually four people. I am anxious to identify the features of a team surrounding the curate, rather than dictate the precise way in which this could evolve in different contexts. I offer one possible system of training to more easily illustrate the team's responsibilities, but different allocations of responsibilities and skills would be quite feasible.

Ministerial tasks

Day to day ministerial tasks are undertaken by TI and curate, sometimes in conjunction with a wider ministry team of lay or ordained people. This practice of ministry remains the backbone of the Church of England parish system and it is within this model that the majority of curates are and will continue to be trained at present. It has already been recommended that there should be an extended placement for the prospective curate in his or her pre-ordination phase of training that would establish that both setting and trainer/trainee pairing fulfil perceived training requirements. Regular review of ministerial tasks, work load, work/leisure balance and training needs should take place initially weekly and at least fortnightly. TI would have completed requisite training courses and be known to be capable of offering a positive training experience for the curate.

The curate would continue to access additional regional training IME 4-7 according to need. The provision of continuing regionally based training to support parish based learning would be flexible enough to address the specific needs of each curate and

encourage them to access other opportunities further afield as appropriate. It would also need to be monitored centrally so as to ensure courses offered were of sufficient high standard and fit for purpose. Where a particular parish could not offer a sufficient breadth of ministerial experience, there should be an expectation that such opportunities would be sought elsewhere.

The crucial difference in the recommendations of this research is that TI and curate do not become isolated from other people. Thus a third person would be involved in regular reflection on practice. This would concentrate on the more relational aspects of ministry and the development of the curate's personal priestly identity.

Reflective practice.

The person responsible for ensuring reflective working is taking place ensures that there is adequate supervision of the training process. I would anticipate his or her presence initially fortnightly and a minimum of monthly throughout the curacy. Particular methods of theological reflection and supervision would vary according to the skills of the reflector and the aptitudes of curate and TI. The reflector would be responsible for setting the agenda for these meetings but would invite suggestions from both TI and curate and expect both to reflect. I would anticipate the flexibility for additional individual meetings between the reflector and TI or curate should that be perceived necessary. The aim of the inclusion of a third person is to ensure issues of concern can be raised or identified at an early stage without growing to become major issues on contention. The system of oversight becomes more regular and hands on, it is ensured that supervision sessions are delivered and the likelihood of problems being ignored or swept under the carpet by curate and TI is

minimised. Both curate and TI are held accountable for ensuring training achieves its potential. Thus any disagreement between curate and TI would automatically become an item for reflection and curate and TI would remain personally accountable for ensuring such issues were discussed and not concealed.

Whether the person taking responsibility for reflective practice was ordained or lay, full or part time, paid or unpaid, responsible for one curacy or many, worked across one diocese or several would vary according to supply of specialists, regional need and the numbers of curates in a particular diocese. The reflectors' aptitude and suitability for the task is paramount. Pragmatism suggests responsibility for the selection, training and deployment of reflectors should take place at a regional and probably diocesan level. However central oversight of the process to ensure maintenance of a high quality of practice would ensure some standardisation of practice. Where theological educators within residential or regional theological training establishments were nearby, it would be beneficial to recruit from within existing IME 1-3 trainers. This would aid continuity of process between pre and post ordination training.

Overall supervision of the process

The problem with many good ideas is that they fail to be implemented effectively. Many diocesan handbooks and published literature already exist to ensure IME 4-7 is adequately supervised and delivered, yet the interview data supports the view that excellent post ordination curacy training provision is at best patchy and at worst rare. The system is exacerbated by the existence of many different dioceses under the leadership of many different bishops with differing priorities and agendas. Currently curates are paid from a

central training budget so it is logical that a section of Ministry Division be dedicated to the training of curates. The numbers of parishes within the Church of England make central supervision of the training process problematic. Yet there must be in place for each trio of TI, curate and reflector a person responsible for the overall supervision and regular monitoring of the training process. Such supervision could be effected in different ways with pilot schemes operated and evaluated to establish the best way forward.

One possibility would be for DDOs to enlarge their diocesan teams with paid or unpaid volunteers whilst maintaining regular oversight and reporting systems centrally. Alternatively, greater continuity with IME 1-3 would be achieved by linking this supervision with the RTPs recommended in the Hind Report. A third option would be to supervise the process centrally from Ministry Division from within the suggested extended training team. A combination of these methods could also be effective. Whilst it is difficult to predict the best way to ensure training recommendations are acted upon, it is essential that such oversight takes place. Within a reflective praxis methodology, continued analysis of practice must be ongoing at parish level, regionally and centrally in order to ensure a culture of excellence on both ministry and training within the Church of England.

Divorce.

Some TIs and curates will find themselves incompatible. Sometimes it may be necessary for curates to move and change their training environment. Yet it is important to neither under protect nor over protect trainees. Earlier in this chapter the importance of using crisis points in life to enable personal growth was established. Where the training partnership is extended from two to three people to include a trained reflector, many problems should be

capable of being addressed before they become irretrievable. In many ways the reflector's role may also include aspects common to marriage guidance counsellors and the work of Relate. Where the reflector is unable to resolve conflicts between TI and curate there should be counselling and psychotherapist help as backup and a culture established which makes accessing such additional help acceptable.

A further issue

None of these suggestions preclude TI or curate from seeking additional personal support through spiritual director networks of work consultants, to seek such help is a responsible act. The one issue that has not been addressed is the need for especially curates and by implication also TIs, to be able to access a listening ear outside existing reporting and institutional structures. Curates can be inhibited in raising issues for discussion with colleagues, which could be deemed critical of those colleagues and potentially negatively influence future reports and references. Some concerns are too difficult to reveal to those with whom one works closely. For most and possibly all of the curates that I interviewed, this was the first occasion they had had to be debriefed about their curacies with someone outside formal reporting structures. The freedom this offered them to explore previously undisclosed concerns was evident. Such a confidential avenue outside training and reporting structures must be made readily accessible.

Within Oxford diocese there has been recently been a trial of Balint style groups, being used in Bristol, which volunteers could opt into in order to reflect with contemporaries on issues of concern. The material within these groups remains strictly confidential within its membership but the pilot has not developed into regular provision. Just how it is offered

may differ according to local resources but a list of psychotherapists, listeners and accompaniers should be made readily available to be accessed in this way. A change in culture from valuing total self reliance when life is challenging to understanding the seeking of appropriate support as indicative of a deeper wisdom, could be encouraged simply by making access to such support easier.

Potential obstacles to the process

This research is predicated on establishing collaborative leadership styles and less hierarchical understandings of ministry. It values the development of the training priest as a holistic entity such that the priestly leadership element cannot be separated out from more generalised understandings of human flourishing and maturation. To some of my colleagues I suspect I might be accused of making the task too complex or that such a training philosophy and regime would require too great a change of culture within the Church of England. The viability of the Church of England and its continuation demands a careful tightrope be walked between adaption to the work practices of the prevailing culture and the maintenance of a prophetic and critical attitude towards the world within which it operates. My observations suggest that many priests undertake the act of tightrope walking intuitively and without even realising the complexity of that which they do. They do not look down, they serve their God and their parishioners with an attitude of love and generosity. It is not too great a change in culture to be more intentional about this.

The biggest change is within the organisational structuring of the parishes. Decreasing finances and lowered church attendance demand each priest works across larger numbers of parishes such that familiar ways of working are no longer viable. It is not possible to

know the majority of parishioners personally or even be known in every parish, to continue with the old models of working creates stress and breakdown. Ways of managing the new working environment involve ceasing to be an individual and becoming a constituent part of a team, ceasing to make decisions as an individual and learning to share the decision making process with others, ceasing to have total authority over one's work practice and being prepared to make space for others who interpret faith and the practice of ministry differently to share that authority.

To those who have developed wisdom commensurate with chronological age and experience, these changes can be seized as opportunity rather than threat. Those who experience insecurity in the new environment must be supported and helped. However hard decisions must be taken and the training of future priests in the Church of England must be entrusted only to those trainer priests whose security does not rest on status or positional authority but on humility and a willingness to cede the authority bestowed at their ordination to others. Such is the foolishness of the Gospel.³⁸

Age related issues

The title of this thesis relates specifically to mature curates training within parish ministry in the Church of England. It is thus requisite that the significance of the age of these curates be identified in the ensuing examination. The recommendations for changes in training and the focus on relational styles of ministry are applicable to curates of all ages. What then is so particular about the needs of older trainees? The research has highlighted the added complexities associated with training mature curates associated with previous

³⁸ See NRSV 1 Corinthians 1:18ff. where Paul speaks of the message of the cross being foolishness

life experience which for the purposes of this research I will identify as work experience and inner maturity.

Work experience

Within the interviews all of the curates understood themselves as having been selected for ordination training with previous life skills and work experience that could usefully be used within the church context. Whilst lip service had in some cases been paid to the value of skills and competencies acquired in previous working environments, there was disturbingly little evidence to suggest that anybody intended drawing on this resource in the new church context. Burgess had identified the same problem in his research of the nineties. So it remains a conundrum why an institution experiencing reducing finances and resources and needing many of the skills the curates possess does not access them.

The interviews do not directly offer reasons but hint at possibilities. It is concerning that curate 6 had a manual he had written on child protection issues thrown back at him because it was not in the TI's corporate style. It is disappointing that curate 2 was not able to utilise previous people management skills in the service of the church. It is appalling that curate 4's previous experience in church based children's work caused unmanageable tensions between him and his TI. What was actually going on? Curate 6 described his TI as a control freak, curate 2 felt that her TI always needed to prove he could do better than her. Curate 4's TI resented being displaced as "queen bee" at the children's holiday club. Why the need to control? Why the fear of being upstaged? Why the jealousy? Sadly the answer must be that these TIs were not ready for shared or collaborative ministry, they needed to retain the power of being in charge, they did not possess an adequate level of maturity and

personal integration to enable them to share leadership. It sounds as though they may have felt threatened, in curate 5's terminology, they needed to grow up, in mine, they needed to get over themselves.

I believe that by establishing a training team of at least three, that these issues could be raised and the right reflector could help TI as well as curate towards greater self understanding and maturity. Any basic TI training would alert trainers to the potential challenges of working with curates who have potentially considerably more experience of secular working than themselves. The reflector or the overall supervisor of training should expect and encourage the curate to name the gifts they bring to the curacy prior to devising a work, or better named learning, agreement and the training team could then identify opportunities to use them. With a culture of regular reflection on practice and genuinely shared ministry, previous expertise can readily be appropriated for parish life. It is about taking personal responsibility, the curate in offering his or her gifts, the TI in managing his or her response, the reflector or supervisor in ensuring personalities, giftings and opportunities integrate within the parish. The requisite qualities of humility and sensitivity in both curate and TI needed to be practised and nurtured. The importance of all parties growing in wisdom and understanding is crucial. Both curates and TIs must be encouraged to understand the training experience as a learning process for both, hence my preference for referring to a learning rather than a work agreement. If we are to believe that we all have the capacity within us to learn and mature, then conditions can be provided in the training environment which facilitate growth for all. We must all help each other to grow.

Inner maturity

Much of this chapter has been used to explore aspects of personal maturing, yet levels of maturity remain phenomenally difficult to assess. Collaborative working requires a developed personal maturity of being and a developed understanding of personal priestly identity. These are not easily assessed by tic box methods. It is especially important that a trainer priest displays these attributes in their life and ministry, without them they cannot encourage them in others. Without maturity of being, TIs will feel threatened by a colleague who displays greater proficiency than themselves at some tasks. Their style will tend to be more hierarchical and authoritarian and less relational, so careful selection of TIs is paramount.

However that is not the only issue. Two opposite but equally negative tendencies emerge from the interviews. Because curate 3 was mature in age and had previous ministerial experience, it was assumed he could manage a situation that he could not. His age and past work experience disguised his lack of wisdom in the new working context. Conversely curate 2 complained of being treated as someone with no relevant experience when in fact she had a considerable experience of managing people in a secular context. Simply assumptions must be checked and trainees properly and flexibly supervised in their new roles.

New selection criteria make much of identifying individuals for training as priests who exhibit wisdom commensurate with age. As a regional vocations advisor, I have undertaken two half day courses to help me to do this. I have been alerted to those things I

must look out for, but still need to check out initial perceptions of any individual more fully with other colleagues, but I am more alert to the requirement.

Mature curates face the twin and opposite risks of having their degree of maturity and wisdom underestimated or overestimated. Wisdom and maturity are not always commensurate with age and where wisdom and maturity is lacking the training team must identify this and offer additional and appropriate support. The selection criteria indicate an increased awareness of the necessity of determining levels of maturity, this must also be supported by more explicit teaching exploring the contribution of wisdom and maturity to relational models of collaborative working throughout IME 1-7. An awareness of the importance of wisdom in ministry has been raised by Sadgrove, now he needs to be heard and the quality more explicitly valued and nourished.

Summary and reflection

The subject of the research has been an examination of the post ordination experience of mature stipendiary clergy within the Church of England in the first three years of parish ministry. The experience has been examined through careful sampling and open ended interview. The praxis methodology has valued experience as a starting point, the process of moving from experience to action has been undertaken to ensure examination did not result in the expending of many words to no purpose. The importance of training in collaborative and relational ways of working in order to better meet the church's needs in multi-parish settings has been identified and recommendations for future training made. A holistic approach to training valuing reflective practice as a means to developing greater personal maturity and integrity of being has been recommended. My hope is that recommendations

can be taken seriously. My own journey towards greater self understanding and maturity of being through reflective practice has taken place in parallel to the research and has confirmed the importance of the process. My belief is that the potential rewards for adopting this approach are immense for both individual priest and the national church. Effective training in which trainees flourish and achieve their full potential must be good news, but this is not to underestimate the complexity of the task.

Assessment will always remain difficult, it is so much easier to measure concrete functional outcomes of, for example, numbers of funerals or baptisms taken or of family services planned. It is much harder to both nurture and assess degrees of maturity and wisdom, they are intangible assets, that is why the challenge has sometimes been neglected. As more priest practitioners become more relational in their working and reflective of their practice the culture will change. It will be easier to share the load, stress levels will be reduced, occasions of breakdown and burnout minimised. Advantages will be gained. The next chapter summarises the research findings and reflects on the research process.

8. FINAL REFLECTIONS

This final chapter summarises the main findings of the research, reflects upon the usefulness of the research methods adopted and identifies the contribution this thesis makes to the task of training curates in the Church of England. I have therefore subdivided the chapter into three sections of main findings, methods adopted and the particular contribution this thesis makes to the training debate.

1. The Main Findings

IME 4-7 is failing to prepare curates adequately for their first posts as parish priests.

Autobiographical material was an important component in the impetus to complete this research. On entering training my understanding had been that the combined pre and post ordination stages of IME 1-7 would prepare me to lead a parish as its priest, in my case this constituted two years in residential theological college and three years in a practical parish setting. I believed I had an advantage in being over forty and consequently possessing significant previous work and life experience. I believed this would better prepare me for being a priest. I had spent most of a lifetime in my local parish church and undertaken two theology degrees. The great shock was the degree of frustration and anger I felt during the post ordination phase of IME 4-7 and the extent to which I found myself ill prepared as a leader in my first parish post. If the purpose of training was to prepare me to be a parish priest it had failed.

The research sought to check out whether my experience was unusual. I set out to examine the post ordination experience of mature stipendiary clergy within the Church of England, like myself, in the first three years of parish ministry. I employed methods of selection in order to sample as wide a selection of mature curates as possible whilst maintaining depth and length of interview. I discovered I was not alone. Five out of the six curates interviewed identified significant shortcomings in their IME 4-7, post ordination training. Only one curate described flourishing in her curacy. Another flourished in the second half of post ordination training, when after a breakdown he had changed curacy and trainer. IME 4-7 was failing to reach its potential. Later in the research process this was confirmed in a Church of England commissioned report where bishops also complained the training system was not producing the types of parish priests they were looking for. This confirmed that the initial autobiographical impetus for the research was sound and not for example, a disproportionate emotional response to my own curacy experience.

Undervalued and underutilised

The mature curates interviewed generally felt under valued and little respected. Most felt the value of the previous life and work experience they brought was wasted by not being utilised in the parish setting. Related to this, most felt they were undervalued as people, and displayed discomfort in being treated disrespectfully as ‘possessions’ or prevented from taking responsibility for even the smallest of tasks such as preparing intercessions or offering hospitality to parishioners. Criticism was often deemed harsh and was received as personal diminishment rather than constructive support. The only exception to this being two of seven curacies where the curates’ experience was valued, and the curates themselves were treated with greater respect and personal regard. The most significant

correlation was between the degree of flourishing the trainee experienced and the quality of the relationship they established with their trainers.

Flourishing within IME 4-7 is directly related to the quality of the training incumbent and curate relationship.

Several reasons why IME 4-7 is failing to deliver were identified. It became evident from the interviews that where the relationship of curate and TI flourished, the curacy was also deemed to have flourished. Relationships exhibiting greater mutuality were more successful than those exhibiting greater distance and hierarchy. It was evident that the degree to which effective training was achieved depended on the building and nurture of professional yet warm, trusting and friendly relationships between curate and TI. Relational styles of ministry were more successful in maximising the potential of the training experience. The interviews also indicated that the degree to which TIs demonstrated a secure sense of being and personal identity contributed positively to their ability to form good relationships.

Good training relationships enable each curate to develop his or her unique priestly identity

Significant parallels were identified between a good marriage relationship and a good training relationship. Detailed analysis of the interviews employing a marriage metaphor offered valuable insights into qualities of a good training relationship. A good relationship was identified as one in which the two parties retained closeness but also allowed the other to mature according to their own unique giftings.

There was insufficient care in identifying good trainers and matching them with appropriate curates.

It was disappointing to discover, not only in my personal experience but also in the ensuing research interviews, that frequently, the allocation of curates to trainers was not approached in a sufficiently professional way. Within the interviews, the matching of curate to TI reflected varied and surprising agendas. These included using a previous non conformist minister now training to be a Church of England priest to fill a gap for an experienced vicar, helping out a priest who was experiencing ill health, supporting one who was deemed to be particularly busy and even allocating a curate as a symbol of the seniority of the training priest. It was apparent that the training task was not being given sufficient priority within dioceses and levels of professionalism were poor. It was thus not surprising that bishops were finding the system was not producing the types of priests they were looking for. More disturbing was the fact that this was not new news. Burgess had identified similar issues in his research published in 1998.¹ It was unclear what it would take to encourage the church institution to take research findings seriously and act upon them promptly and appropriately. Little change following the publication of Burgess's research fourteen years ago, suggested that either a lack of inclination or motivation to effect change must be present.

Less hierarchical understandings of priestly authority should be modelled in the church.

The interviews indicated mature curates experienced problems where TIs exercised their authority in more hierarchical ways than where less authoritarian and more consultative and collaborative styles were evident. Analysis of material published by a range of priest

¹ Burgess, Into Deep Water, p.23ff.

theologians over the last fifty years indicated a range of understandings of priestly authority from the authoritarian and hierarchical to those exhibiting greater equality and mutuality. A parallel reduction of hierarchies was identified across the wider society over a similar period of time. Where the previous experience of mature curates had been working within a more mutually accountable team, the move into a curacy where greater authority was invested in one person and the curate's compliance expected, could be particularly challenging. The move to more collaborative ways of working over time in the parishes is also evident and trainers especially must be competent in collaborative styles of working.

More multi-parish units demand a more collaborative style of working

Parishes within the Church of England are increasingly being grouped into multi-parish units which demand a more collaborative style of working. It is important that training incumbents are experienced in collaborative ways of working and that these are taught and practised across IME 1-7. The tendency to perpetuate historic, hierarchical leadership styles in the new context is not workable.

Curates must be encouraged to confront crises in ministry in order to grow.

Consideration of human development crisis theory combined with the desire to see increased empowerment of curates in training resulted in the conclusion that it is very difficult to categorise curacies as successes or failures. Whilst it would be abusive and unacceptable to deliberately introduce crises into the training scenario, curates will face serious challenges and have to confront difficult problems during training. When this happens they should not be over protected and either removed from the difficulty or have it solved for them, rather they should be encouraged and supported in confronting, analysing

and reflecting upon the presenting problem in order to facilitate personal growth. This may require providing more specialist psychotherapy or counselling support than the training team can offer but this can be easily managed.

Training for collaborative working cannot be delivered adequately within the current curacy structure of one trainer and one trainee.

Further observation suggested that the expectations placed on the institution of marriage were changing from functional to emotional outcomes and were becoming undeliverable so increasing the likelihood of the marriage failing. Similarly the expectations placed on curacies today are more relational and informal in nature than they once were. Notions of ordination being more related to transformation than conformation are prevalent.

Relational styles of working place much greater demands upon the trainer in terms of expertise in supervision and reflective practice and are more difficult to for one person to deliver, so increasing the likelihood of the curacy failing. Training in IME 4-7 can no longer be delivered adequately within the current curacy structure of one trainer and one trainee, it requires a group or team of trainers who can offer a range of specialisms.

It is also necessary to offer more diverse training opportunities to include for example, chaplaincy and theological educator experience, where such directions are identified as potential future working contexts for the curate. The context of IME 4-7 should no longer be limited to solely parish based ministry but offer greater diversity of opportunity.

The curate should be supported and encouraged to find a place where he or she can explore issues arising in training and ministry outside existing reporting and assessment structures.

The most urgent and easily deliverable of the findings arising from the interviews is the need for curates to have a safe place to talk. For many, if not all of the curates, the interviews were the first opportunity they had had to have a confidential place, unrelated to the reporting system, to be debriefed on their training experiences. Whilst this was not necessarily explicitly stated, it was evidenced by the curates' enthusiasm to participate in the research and the energy they invested in the interviews. Explicit comments by curate 1 indicated clearly that this was her first opportunity to talk freely about her curacy. Existing diocesan debriefing opportunities operate within formal church structures so potentially negatively influencing future report writing or references and inhibiting full disclosure. Curate 2 demonstrated extreme anxiety about confidentiality indicating she had no safe place to talk about her training concerns. Such lack of provision of a safe environment in which to explore problems is disempowering and can become stressful to the point of breakdown, as curate 6 found.

Such provision should be quick and easy to implement. Curates can be encouraged and guided towards contexts in which confidential self disclosure is possible. Availing themselves of such provision should become the expectation rather than the exception. This might vary from the Balint style groups to informal meetings with other priests or counsellors living outside the curate's local area. It would be important that the listeners were familiar with Church of England training structures but not part of any reporting structure so that conversations remained entirely confidential to curate and listener. Whilst

it might be anticipated that the role of spiritual director might fill this gap, it is important the listener understands the curate's training context. The challenge is not delivery but a change in culture to regard the seeking of such support as a strength in the trainee rather than a weakness. By introducing this practice during the college based period of IME 1-3 its importance would be reinforced.

Practical ways must be sought to actualise continuity between pre and post ordination stages of training.

The continuity between the pre and post ordination stages of IME, recommended in the Hind Report needs to be further examined. The main challenge is that the context of training pre and post ordination is quite different, the curate changes from being community based to being independent, from privacy into the public eye, from lay person to ordained. Such changes require different training provision. However the reservoir of knowledge of the curates' strengths and weaknesses can valuably be carried from one part of training to the other and the teaching and practice of collaborative ways of working should be maintained and reinforced across the whole of the training period. This cannot be achieved by words alone but by tangible efforts to share trainers and resources.

2. A Reflection on the Usefulness of the Methods Adopted.

Valuing experience and gathering data

In order to fulfil twin objectives of allowing mature curates to comment freely upon their curacy experience and empower them to take greater responsibility for themselves in the future, a praxis model was adopted. This placed emphasis and value on experience as a starting point and encouraged movement through analysis and reflection to new practice. It

was important that examination of the mature curates' experience resulted in action so as to empower the curates and prevent reinforcement of the belief that nothing can ever change.

The open ended style of interviewing employed fitted well with the overall aim of curate empowerment, the success of which was especially evident in curate 1's closing comments, where she acknowledged having discovered facts about her curacy she had not previously recognised or acknowledged. It required sophisticated skills of listening and probing but these were deliverable as they were within the skill set and previous experience of the researcher. The problems arose in analysing the data.

Analysing data

Quantity

The biggest challenge was analysing and processing over 100 pages of single spaced A4 interview transcripts. Transcripts were typed up by a professional in order to speed up the process, but required careful checking against the voice recorder. Lack of acquaintance with church jargon and the interpretation of different dialects caused some inaccuracies. For example, a sharp slightly hissing intake of breath followed by the single word 'not' became 'shot' in the transcript, the acronym ICME (Initial Continuing Ministerial Education) became 'I see me', regional intonation of the word 'sending' was interpreted as 'ascending' and 'skills' turned into 'scales'. I was concerned about deleting the voice recordings as this was the primary source of data but was convinced of the necessity by the requirement of complete anonymity for the interviewees.

Focus and selection of themes

Analysis was exceptionally time consuming and involved several false starts in trying to identify common themes. It was possible to identify many and diverse themes emerging in several interviews, more than could be reasonably addressed in one thesis. It became necessary to make a judgement about which ones were related in order to create a cohesive focus for the research, yet any such selection implied a degree of interpretation. Whilst the validity of the interview findings could have benefited from interviewing a greater number of curates, it would have been very difficult to process more data within time and word constraints. More open ended interviews were also likely to introduce even more diverse issues leading to further selection. Future research could follow isolated arising issues of interest more effectively.

An acceptable compromise was reached and validity established by justifying the prioritising of experience and the presence of the researcher as participant observer and practitioner. I believed as someone inhabiting the same context as the interviewees, I was in an advantaged position in understanding for example, how the same experience or concept could be expressed using different language or examples. It is my belief that interviewees assumed sympathy and affinity existed between researcher and researched because of our shared past experiences. This meant that they spoke more openly than might have been expected in the first hour of meeting. A common experience of training inspired spontaneous trust.

To remain faithful to the research title it was also necessary to be alert to issues that were more likely to be pertinent in exploring age related issues. This was the most difficult part

of the research, I found it difficult to identify which emerging issues were specifically age related. Thus age related conclusions are largely tentative, it would require extending the research to compare the findings with younger curates to establish firmer conclusions.

Objectivity

My intention was that the findings would be directly induced from the interviews, so minimising the influence of the researcher's pre-existing opinions. It was difficult to ensure any preconceived hypotheses were not being promoted, as they were not necessarily fully conscious or discernable. I repeatedly questioned myself and analysed my motivation to develop specific themes, in the desire to prevent skewing the research findings. I intended that analysis would aid objectivity. It is difficult to assess the degree to which personal interests influenced me in making connections. I reflected repeatedly on my reasons for following certain leads and was reassured in the reflection stage of the praxis circle when literature and church reports supported my findings and some degree of triangulation was achieved between interview data, church reports and theology.

I believe all research whether quantitative or qualitative in nature is to some degree steered according to the researcher's interests and aptitudes. Only by being alert to the dangers can the influence be minimised. The research maintained greater integrity by acknowledging the importance of autobiographical material than by ignoring or omitting it. The role of the researcher as participant observer and practitioner added depth to the levels of empathy required in gathering the data, and contributed to the level of specialist knowledge required in analysing it.

Use of the marriage metaphor

In the course of data analysis it became clear that a method of exploring the TI/curate relationship in more depth was needed and the marriage metaphor was adopted. It served well in both establishing the sequential development of a relationship through stages of matchmaking, life together and divorce and in exploring the nature and quality of a nurturing relationship through use of the Gibran poem, The Prophet. I found the use of the Prophet especially valuable in deepening my understanding of the conditions which must be established to allow two closely connected individuals to be simultaneously united in purpose and also create space for different potential outcomes. The poem helped confirm the importance of providing a positive training environment in which each curate could discover and learn to inhabit his or her unique priestly identity. It was more useful in establishing the big picture than determining the detail of delivery. This was acceptable in research which declared its intention as the examination of an experience rather than prioritising precise recommendations. The marriage metaphor has served well to establish the importance of the TI/curate relationship and nurture the emergence of diversity.

I became less convinced of the value of the metaphor in exploring new models for delivering IME 4-7 to facilitate the understanding and practice of more collaborative ways of working. Until, that is, I realised that the metaphor was not working because the current model of training was inappropriate. The current model of training could not rely so exclusively on the coupling of only two people as, by definition, a marriage must. Within training, like marriage, the new context was placing unreasonable expectations upon the existing model. The metaphor had been valuable in discovering the reasons for inadequacy of the current model of IME 4-7 training, but I was cautious that the marriage metaphor be

developed too far. I was anxious that any such tool employed in deepening understanding of the issues should not be overused to the point of restricting possible outcomes. Any such tool has its limitations and it is not possible to fully determine the effectiveness of using the marriage metaphor without repeating the research using a different analysis technique and comparing the findings. That would require a second thesis and even then any subsequent version would lack the freshness of the original because potential recommendations and possibilities are now embedded in my consciousness.

Reflection

The third stage of the praxis cycle required the introduction of theological and theoretical material pertinent to the issues emerging from the data. I sought to discover priest theologians whose views represented a continuity and range of thought over curates' and TIs' lifetimes. Ramsay was an early example but his inclusion could be justified because of his continued use as a classic author in IME 1-3. My conclusion was that his work was no longer helpful for more relational and collaborative ways of working. Ramsay and Heyward contrasted well in their understanding of authority but did not necessarily represent sequential development of thought over the decades, rather the contrasting styles of academic and feminist theologians. Sadgrove's input was useful in emphasising the importance of wisdom but less helpful in suggesting how this might be acquired.

I had committed to using the praxis method of analysis and reflection, and valued the enrichment offered by these theologians, yet retained the concern that the interviews should still direct the research and not be superseded by subsequent material. By focussing

more deliberately on the priest theologians' attitude to authority, an emerging theme of the interviews, the priority of the interview data was maintained.

The inclusion of contemporary material from Church of England reports on training maintained the relevance of the research but it was difficult to call a halt on adding material as additional reports were published. The context of ministry and training is undergoing huge changes, the challenge is to keep up with current thought and so maintain relevance of the research. The time involved in completing and submitting has the potential to make the material outdated before it can be published or disseminated, but this is the risk of research.

Is further research necessary?

I remain convinced that older curates require different conditions in order to emerge from the training process as competent priestly leaders than do younger ones. Previous life and work experience may make the mature curate more or less adaptable to their new working context, but such history remains an additional and significant ingredient in the training mix. I have until now avoided the use of terminology relating to formation and have found it unhelpful in being suggestive more of conformation than transformation. Human development theory suggests that the process of human development advances further with the years. I still wonder what it means to 'form the formed', whether older seedlings require the same growing conditions as smaller ones, whether the outcome of the training process is to some extent already predetermined by the age at which it begins.

I have concluded that the provision of training must focus on the overarching principles undergirding training rather than be restricted by the detail of more precise recommendations. I have emphasised the importance of allowing every curate the freedom to discover his or her unique priestly identity. If training can be this flexible, the specific needs of older trainees can be accommodated within the same model of training as younger ones, so it is not necessary to further validate this research by interviewing a cohort of younger curates and comparing the findings and yet surprises could be discovered in so doing.

I was surprised in this research to discover that older curates dealt so poorly with conflict when they had a wealth of life experience behind them. I conclude that whilst a comparative research project is not necessary, the ongoing praxis spiral must be travelled. As any new training recommendations are acted upon, data must again be gathered, analysed and reflected upon to determine its effectiveness, changes made accordingly and the process repeated. Reflective working must be so embedded in the culture that it becomes second nature, only then will priests in the Church of England be equipped to respond to the ever-changing times.

3. Contribution of these findings to the training debate

The original contribution of this research is to recognise the importance of every priest developing and inhabiting his or her unique priestly identity and focusing training provision on the provision of conditions that will facilitate his or her growth, it values internal qualities over external competencies. It is a change of emphasis in the training process from practising ministerial tasks of leading services, preaching, teaching and even

visiting to practising disciplined and regular reflection on the ministry. It proposes that the learning is done in the act of reflecting rather than the delivery of the task. In so doing, the lived experience of the trainee is valued. In this research the trainee has been given a voice, and recommendations have been formed from the data gathered. This pattern is echoed in the training process where the reality of the enacted ministerial task or human encounter becomes the starting point for reflection. This maintains the integrity of research method and training recommendations.

The desired outcome of training is that the trained priest has sufficiently developed inner qualities of self assurance, self awareness and self knowledge that he or she is able to share with others the authority invested in him or her by the church, and by implication God. The research acknowledges that collaborative models of working are both desirable and necessary in the current context, but that to operate as priestly leader in such a setting requires a maturity of being and integration of self not previously recognised as essential. The priority of training must be to facilitate such maturing rather than concentrating on practical proficiencies.

It is acknowledged that the current system is over reliant on the relationship of training incumbent and curate and is inadequate to deliver required outcomes. The theological difference is to recognise that hierarchical understandings of priestly authority imply hierarchical understandings of God and that a theology of mutuality, as espoused by Heyward, implies a relational understanding of God and address the present context more effectively. An over emphasis on leadership reliant on the positional status of the priest has

led to the neglect of attention to the importance of being able to establish and maintain relationships of mutuality and equality.

The process of undertaking the research has valued the contribution of the researcher as both participant observer and participant practitioner. Whilst this is not a new methodology, the consequent authority attributed to the experience of the trainee seeks to challenge the assumed superior authority of the trainer. The research values full immersion in context, and the subjectivity this implies, over the traditional objectivity and neutrality of distance.

Final comments

Future ministry models in the Church of England, depend more on humility than status, more on cooperation than competition, a greater desire to see the other flourish than receive personal reward. These qualities all sound very close to those I expect to see in the Kingdom of God, where the proud are scattered, the powerful removed from their thrones and the lowly raised up.² That must be the right direction and worth every effort in trying to get there. The primary task must be to encourage the church to listen, to have them believe that the lowly curates have a valid contribution to make in their reflections on training experience and that bishops may not be the best people to determine future training methods.

² See NRSV Luke 1:46-55 for the full text of The Magnificat referred to here.

APPENDIX

TEMPLATE CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: The Making of Priests

Institution: Birmingham University studying through Sheffield Urban Theology Unit

Thank you for considering to take part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.

If you have any questions arising from the explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I understand that if I decide at any other time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study.

Signed

Date

Researcher's Statement:

I _____

confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the volunteer.

Signed

Date

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL. Common Worship – Pastoral Services. London: Church House Publishing, 2000.

ARKSEY, Hilary and KNIGHT, Peter. Interviewing for Social Scientists. London: Sage Publications, 1999.

ASTLEY, Jeff. Ordinary Theology – Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

BALLARD, Paul and PRITCHARD, John. Practical Theology in Action – Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society. London: SPCK, 1996.

BEVANS, Stephen. Models of Contextual Theology, Revised edition. New York: Orbis Books, 2002.

BOFF, Leonardo and BOFF, Clodovis. Liberation Theology. Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1987.

BONHOEFFER, Dietrich. Life Together. London: SCM, 1954.

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER. Reproducing 1664 edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, no publication date.

BOYATZIS, Richard and McKEE, Annie. Resonant Leadership. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005.

BURHESS, Neil. Into Deep Water. Stowmarket: K. Mayhew, 1998.

BURNS, James. Leadership. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

BURNS, Robert. Self-Concept Development and Education. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

CHARMAZ, Kathy B. Constructing Grounded Theory – a practical guide through qualitative analysis. London: Sage, 2006.

COTTER, Jim. Yes ... minister? Patterns of Christian Service. Sheffield: Cairns, 1992.

COUNTRYMAN, William. Living on the Border of the Holy – Renewing the Priesthood of All. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999.

- CRESSWELL, John W. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. London: Sage, 1998.
- CULLEY, Sue. Integrative Counselling Skills in Action. London: Sage, 1991.
- CUSK, Rachel. Aftermath – On Marriage and Separation. London: Faber and Faber, 2012.
- DENSCOMBE, Martyn. The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003.
- D'SOUZA, Anthony. Leaders for today, hope for tomorrow – empowering and empowered leadership. Nairobi. Paulines Publications, Africa, 2004.
- DULLES, Avery. Models of the Church – A critical assessment of the church in all its aspects. London: Gill and MacMillan, 1976.
- DULLES, Avery. Models of Revelation. New York: Doubleday, 1983.
- EGAN, Gerard. The Skilled Helper. California: Brooks/Cole, 1994.
- FOWLER, James. Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian – Adult Development and Christian Faith. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- FREIRE, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- FROMM, Erich. Man for himself. London: Routledge Classics, 2003.
- GIBRAN, Kahlil. The Prophet. London: Heinemann, 1980.
- GOLEMAN, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence – why it can matter more than IQ. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.
- GREEN, Laurie. Let's Do Theology. London: Mowbray, 1990.
- HEYWARD, Carter. A Priest Forever: One Woman's Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1976.
- HEYWARD, Carter. Staying Power. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1995.
- HEYWARD, Carter. Saving Jesus From those Who are Right – rethinking what it means to be a Christian. Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1999.
- HEYWARD, Carter. God in the Balance – Christian Spirituality in Times of Terror. Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2002.
- LAKE, Frank. Clinical Theology. London: DLT, 1986.
- LAMDIN, Keith. Finding your Leadership Style. London: SPCK, 2012.

- LAMDIN, Keith and TILLEY, David. Supporting new minsters in the local church – a handbook. London:SPCK, 2007.
- LEWIS, G.D. Meeting the Moment – leadership and well-being in ministry. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997.
- LITVINOFF, Sarah. Better Relationships – Practical ways to make your love last. London: Vermilion, 2001.
- MARTYN, Elizabeth. Before you Say I Do. London: Vermilion, 2003.
- MAY, Tim. Social research – Issues, Methods and Processes. Maidenhead: OUP, 2001.
- NIEBUHR, H. Richard. Christ and Culture. New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1951.
- NOUWEN, Henri. The Wounded Healer. London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1994.
- PICKARD, Stephen. Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry. Farnham,U.K.:Ashgate, 2009.
- PRITCHARD, John. The Life and Work of a Priest, London: SPCK, 2007.
- RAMSAY, Michael. The Christian Priest Today. Revised Edition. London: SPCK, 1985.
- ROBERTSON, David. Collaborative Ministry. Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007.
- ROGERS, Carl. On Becoming a Person – A Therapists View of Psychotherapy. Revised Edition. London: Constable, 2004.
- ROLHEISER, Ronald. Seeking Spirituality – guidelines for a Christian Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998.
- RUBIN, H.J. and RUBIN, I.S. Qualitative Interviewing – The art of hearing data. London:Sage,2005.
- RUSSELL, Letty. Church in the Round – Feminist Interpretation of the Church. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- SADGROVE, Michael. Wisdom and Ministry. London: SPCK, 2008.
- SCHON, Donald. The Reflective Practitioner. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 1983.
- SCHON, Donald. Educating the Reflective Practitioner. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1987.
- SILVERMAN, David. Doing Qualitative Research - A practical handbook. 2nd Edition. London: Sage, 2005.

SLEE, Nicola. Women's Faith Development – Patterns and Processes. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

SPEARS, Larry C. (ed.). The Power of Servant Leadership - Essays by Robert Greenleaf. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008.

SWINTON, John and MOWAT, Harriet. Practical Theology and Qualitative Research. London: SCM Press, 2006.

WARREN, Yvonne. The Cracked Pot – The state of today's Anglican parish clergy. Stowmarket: K. Mayhew, 2002.

WATTS, Fraser, NYE, Sara and SAVAGE, Rebecca. Psychology for Christian Ministry. London: Routledge, 2002.

WITCOMBE, John. The Curate's Guide – From calling to first parish. London: Church House Publishing, 2005.

WRIGHT, Walter. Relational Leadership – a biblical model for leadership service. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2000.

All biblical quotes are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of The Bible.

Journals and reports

ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL. A summary of the criteria for selection for training for ministry in the Church of England from July 2010. London: Church House, 2010.

ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL. Code of Procedure – reports on Sponsored Candidate and Arrangements for First Appointments. London: Church House, 2010.

ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL. Formation and Assessment in Curacy. London: Church House, 2012.

ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL. The Trajectory of Vocation from Bishops' Advisory Panel to First Incumbency, London: Church House: 2011.

GENERAL SYNOD. Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church – the structure and funding of ordination training. London: Church House Publishing, 2003.

GENERAL SYNOD. Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church – Reviewing Progress London: Church House Publishing, June 2005.

GENERAL SYNOD, Advisory Board of Ministry. Stranger in the Wings. Policy Paper no.8. London: Church House Publishing, 1998.

JORDAN, Elizabeth Ann. Monarch, Shepherd or Parent? Interim Ministry and the Church of England in Practical Theology. Vol 5.1. (Croydon: Equinox Publishing, 2012).

LEE, Carl and HORSMAN, Sarah. Affirmation and Accountability – Practical Suggestions for Preventing Clergy Stress, Sickness and Ill-Health Retirement. Sheldon: Society of Mary and Martha, 2002.

OXFORD DIOCESE, Developing Servant Leadership. Unpublished: 2006.

ROSSDALE, David. Developing a collaborative model for beginning public ministry. Unpublished: 2011.

TRAVIS, Mary. Supporting Clergy in Post-modern Ministry – bridging the gap between provision and need. Unpublished: 2008.

Websites

BBC NEWS. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17329902 accessed on 12.03.12.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Ordination Services.
www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/deacons.aspx
accessed on 01/05/12.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Ripon College Cuddesdon Inspection Report.
www.churchofengland.org/media/56194/RCC%20Report on 16.11.2012.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Call Waiting. callwaiting.org.uk accessed on 26/10/11.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Selection for Ministry.
www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/ministry/ministryinthecofe.html/#priest, p4
accessed on 14/05/06.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Selection for Ordination
www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/ministryinthecofe.html#priest accessed on
14/05/06.

COLLEGE OF THE RESURRECTION.
www.mirfield.org.uk/college/ accessed on 3/02/06.

COLLEGE OF THE RESURRECTION
www.mirfield.org.uk/formation/ accessed on 30/04/12.

COMMON WORSHIP. The Ordination of Priest, also called Presbyters available at
www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/ordinals/priests.html
accessed on 14/05/06.

CRANMER HALL. www.dur.ac.uk/st-john's.college/cranmer accessed on 3/02/06.

CROCKFORD'S CLERICAL DIRECTORY. <http://www.crockford.org.uk> accessed on 10/08/12.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF. Matchmaker lyrics.
www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/fiddlerontheroof/matchmaker.htm accessed on 27/01/12.

HARRIES, Richard. What Wales can teach England. Church Times.
www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2012/27=july/comment/opinion/what-wales-can-teach-england accessed on 02/08/2012.

OAK HILL. www.oakhill.ac.uk/ordination/anglican.html accessed on 3/02/06.

OAK HILL. www.oakhill.ac.uk/programme/ordination/anglican-formation.html accessed on 30/04/12.

PRENDERGAST, Martin. Same Sex Marriages. The Guardian Newspaper.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/mar/09/same-sex-unions-not-marriage?INTCMP=SRCH> accessed on 11/03/2012.

RELATE. www.relate.org.uk/about-us/index.html accessed on 11/09/2012.

RIDLEY HALL. www.ridley.cam.ac.uk/calling.html accessed on 3/02/06.

RIDLEY HALL, Cambridge. www.ridley.cam.ac.uk/calling.html accessed on 30/04/12.

RIPON COLLEGE. www.oxford.anglican.org/rcc/MinisterialFormation accessed on 3/02/06.

THE GUARDIAN. Divorce Statistics.
www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/Jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons accessed on 8/09/2012.

TRINITY COLLEGE. www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/index.php?id=29 accessed on 3/02/06.