

A decorative illustration of a vine with leaves and a bunch of grapes, positioned at the top left of the page.

# Calling Far and Wide Project: Assistant Ministers

## Summary Report

May 2017

*Prepared by Dr Mike Clinton and Dr Keely Frasca of School of Management, King's College London, on behalf of the National Continuing Ministry Development Panel*

### Preface

This brief report sets out some of the headline findings of research undertaken into the experiences of Assistant Ministers on behalf of the national CMD Panel. It would not have been possible to produce without the participation of research respondents. Thank you.

This work forms part of a larger programme of research and consultation, the Experiences of Ministry Project, that began in 2011 and aims to find out what helps clergy to become and remain both faithful and effective in ministry. Findings from earlier strands have been reported regularly to the Ministry Council and are informing consultations with Bishops and Directors of Ministry. Whilst there is much still to learn about what will sustain and energise clergy in a future that promises to be demanding as ever, this report, and the ongoing research that underpins it, is an important contribution to that learning.

Thank you once again for taking part.

**Dr Tim Ling**

Head of Ministry Development  
Ministry Division, Archbishops' Council



## Overview of Project

- The Calling Far & Wide project is formed of a mix of qualitative and quantitative studies, conducted via a series of interviews, focus groups, surveys and diaries by a team from King's College London. Groups of assistant ministers, pioneers and HE Chaplains have taken part in the research. Data on incumbent ministers was also collected as part of a previous project. The research has been supported by the National Continuing Ministry Development Panel.
- This report presents an overview of the research on assistant ministry.
- In June 2016, a sample 265 clergy identified as being assistant ministers were invited to take part in a survey. Willing participants were also invited to take part in a subsequent seven-day diary study. The first part of this report is based on survey data collected from 81 assistant ministers; 69 subsequently took part in the diary study shortly after.
- In September and October 2016, 12 semi-structured interviews with assistant ministers were conducted. This offered an opportunity to delve more deeply into the experiences of assistant ministers.

## Survey and Diary Findings

- Who took part in the survey:
  - A mix of men and women took part
  - The average age was 61 years and less than a third had dependent relatives
  - 93% were part-time; a mix of locations and dioceses were represented

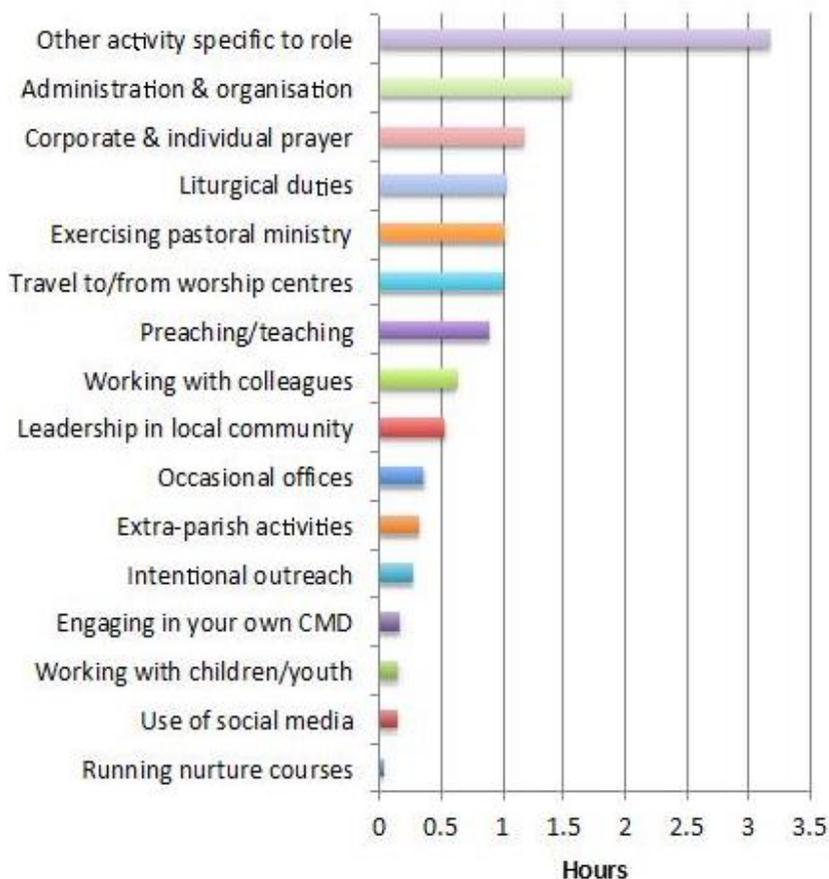
**Table I. Sample demographic background**

		Background survey sample (n=81)	
		n	%
<i>Gender</i>	Male	37	46
	Female	41	51
	No answer provided	<5	-
<i>Dependent relatives/children</i>	Yes	24	30
	No	54	67
	No answer provided	<5	-
<i>Ethnicity</i>	White – English / Welsh /Scottish / Northern Irish / British	76	94
	White - Other	<5	-
	No answer provided	<5	-
<i>Age</i>	25 – 34 years	-	-
	35 – 44 years	<5	-
	45 – 54 years	13	16
	55 – 64 years	31	38
	65– 74 years	33	41
	No answer provided	<5	-

*NOTES: To maintain anonymity, responses less than 5 are not presented*

- Assistant ministers report very clear and strong callings to assistant ministry
  - 94% of the assistant ministers agreed that “My sense of call is as strong as it was when I was first ordained”
- Assistant ministers also have personalities traits highly suited to assistant ministry, reporting to be highly conscientious and agreeable
  - For example, 85% of the assistant ministers agreed that being “Dependable and self-disciplined” applied to them and 81% of the assistant ministers agreed that being “Sympathetic and warm” applied to them
- Assistant ministers indicated activities to which they feel particularly called:
  - Preaching and teaching (89% rated as important or very important in relation to calling)
  - Participation in prayer (88% rated as important or very important in relation to calling)
  - Other activities specific to the assistant minister role (41% had such activities and, of those, 91% rated them as important or very important in relation to calling)
- Turning to the diary findings of the 69 participants, how assistant ministers spend their time during an ‘average’ day is shown on the following page.
- Some mildly concerning findings from the survey and diaries suggest that assistant ministers can experience relatively modest levels of daily calling fulfilment and a sizeable proportion of assistant ministers believe that the sacrifices made as part of ministry are seldom worthwhile (20% state this is the sacrifices made are worthwhile only once a month or less).
- However, positive findings were much more common; assistant ministers begin the day feeling generally optimistic and positive about themselves, they engage in activities during the day mainly out of autonomous motivation (they do things because they see them as enjoyable or important, rather than out of guilt), and they frequently experience positive mood and low exhaustion at the end of a day.

**Average time (hours) spent engaged in activities on an average day**



## Interview Findings

- Six male and six female assistant ministers then took part in the interview study, which was conducted by telephone. The ages of interviewees ranged from 46 to 72.
- The number of hours worked by the assistant ministers ranged from 5 to 50 hours during a typical week, with an average of 25 hours.
- Positive experiences were very common: sources of satisfaction were plentiful, for example:

*“There are two things. One is a sense of doing God’s work – being part of what he is about, and then when there is a sense that I am accepted and appreciated in the roles that I do.”*

*“sometimes it all seems joined up in the sky... When that happens, it is just wonderful”.*

Another minister described simply *“feeling privileged”*.

- Some assistant ministers discussed how supporting the incumbent of the church or other clergy members was an important part of their calling:

*“Inevitably I am supporting other ministers, so effectiveness is if what I do enables the mission of that church, that of the vicar/incumbent.”*

- However, this supporting role was not easy for everyone:

*“I would say even now, at the moment, I am still trying to work out where that vocation is different ...one time I seemed to feel that that was where I should be – in primary leadership, yet now it is not where I find myself, in a non-stipendiary role.”*

- Other challenges were noted too: One minister reported the concern of *“being able to give enough time to each activity to make sure each is done well”*, another reported *“not having clear boundaries”*. Another noted a substantial degree of bureaucratic administrative work that is considered *“unnecessary”* and leaves one feeling *“tied to the desk”*.

- Several interviewees indicated that the experience of assistant ministry could be highly influenced by the nature of the relationship with the incumbent. A positive relationship seemed to be accompanied by a good level of communication, autonomy and support for the assistant minister; less positive relationships seemed to be based more on direct delegation and often a lack of recognition, and could lead to some problematic outcomes.
- Interviewees discussed the need for greater administrative and practical (e.g. building maintenance) support, wider and more accessible training, and opportunities for frequent interactions with senior members of the clergy during stressful periods. Moreover, the ministers felt that they needed greater recognition by the Church for their extensive and unpaid contributions.

## Concluding Points

- Both the surveys and interviews paint a broadly positive picture of assistant ministry; however both also identify several challenges.
- Importantly, the nature of assistant ministry clearly differs in important ways from other forms of ministry. There is scope to better recognise and support assistant ministers in their roles and scope to enrich their roles to enhance the enactment of their callings. These findings have been presented to policy makers.