

*General Synod House of Clergy***Clergy Wellbeing**

1. The ordained ministers of the Church of England are a vital part of the Mission of God to the nation. As part of its commitment to be ‘A Christian Presence in Every Community’, the work of its clergy – in parishes, dioceses, chaplaincies, and places of secular employment – is a key element in the offering of worship to Almighty God, the visibility of the Church in the public space, and the equipping of the whole People of God to fulfil their vocation as baptised disciples. In financial terms alone, the Church of England spends much of its income generated through sacrificial and generous giving on the training, remuneration and housing of its ordained ministers. As both good stewardship of this vital resource and in exercise of its duty of care, the Church needs to ensure that its clergy find their ministry life-giving, sustainable in the long-term and properly supported in crisis as well as in less risky moments. The wellbeing of the clergy is crucial to the health of the Church at worship, in mission and in pastoral care.
2. Over the past six months, the House of Clergy Standing Committee (HCSC) has begun to look at the issue of clergy wellbeing. In recent years the House explored with the General Synod issues of professional conduct, which resulted in the publication and use of revised *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*<sup>1</sup>. The *Guidelines* provide advice to the clergy about how to conduct themselves in ministry (and, to a lesser extent, in personal life); they offer a vision of the duties of the clergy to the wider Church and those whom the clergy encounter in the conduct of their ministries<sup>2</sup>. The HCSC, in consultation with the National Chairs of Houses of Clergy, has begun to explore whether it is now time, alongside the *Guidelines*, for the wider Church to explore what duties it owes to its ordained ministers, in terms of ensuring that the clergy have proper support, guidance, practical help, and assistance in the conduct of their ministries. As a shorthand for this wide-ranging area of possible resource, it has used the phrase ‘wellbeing’.
3. The HCSC is aware that matters of clergy wellbeing have been considered in several earlier reports, most recently by *Affirmation and Accountability*, a 2002 report produced by The Society of Mary and Martha at Sheldon, which focused on preventing clergy stress, sickness and ill-health retirement. Apart from the significant passage of time since this report, there have been a range of developments in the intervening 15 years which make the need to give this matter further consideration. The question of whether *Affirmation and Accountability* has made a significant impact in the Church of England needs to be considered as well.

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<sup>1</sup> See 2015 Revised Edition at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/about-general-synod/convocations/guidelines-for-the-professional-conduct-of-the-clergy/guidelines-contents.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> The *Guidelines* do speak of the duty of the wider Church to the clergy, but the focus is primarily on the responsibility of the ordained ministers of the Church.

4. In introducing this subject, it is important to be clear about two matters:
  - i) To consider this matter is not to assert that the wellbeing of the whole People of God is somehow of lesser importance than that of the clergy. Each of God's people needs good pastoral care and, at times, urgent intervention and support. However, this piece of work is concerned with recognising the issues arising out of the challenges of ordained ministry with a focus on stipendiary clergy.
  - ii) Neither is it the case that the duty of care is all one way (from the wider Church to the clergy); each member of clergy is responsible for their own wellbeing and self-management as part of their own discipleship. The proposals below seek to ensure that, as much as possible, clergy themselves are active participants in ensuring their own wellbeing.
  
5. This paper introduces the scope of the issues that are involved. It attempts to make an initial assessment of the 'state of play' of clergy wellbeing, based chiefly on a relatively informal consultation with the national Chairs of Houses of Clergy. Finally, it offers a specific proposal as to the way the whole Church – individual congregations/PCCs, dioceses, the national Church, interested charities/partners and clergy themselves – might helpfully be engaged in a renewed effort to ensure that, as much as possible in a world of fallen people and imperfect institutions, a unity of purpose could be discovered to ensure that the clergy of our Church are as well supported as they can be in fulfilling the call to minister among and alongside the wider People of God.

### Scope of the Issues

6. The HCSC believes that the issues involved in clergy wellbeing are complex. There are a great number of issues and concerns which arise in people's minds when asked to think about wellbeing. The following list offers an insight into the variety of conversations and responses that have been emerging (in no particular order):
  - *Self-Management*: the importance of clergy developing strategies and patterns of self-care in ministry and the encouragement by the Church (in Initial Ministerial Education[IME], Continuing Ministerial Development [CME] and the exercise of pastoral oversight) of such healthy practices.
  - *Preventative Education & Training*: the need to identify what makes clergy resilient in ministry both during IME and in ongoing ministry and to offer strategies and programmes that can build resilience.
  - *Supervision, Coaching, 'Life Coaching' & Reflective Practice*: the need to provide clergy with opportunities to reflect upon their ministry and its ongoing development in a 'safe' environment (i.e. where, among other things, they are not exposing themselves to those who might have roles in Clergy Discipline in the diocese or involved in future appointments), to explore and develop good practice, and to find spaces in which to solve problems in ministry either with colleagues or with professional support.

- *Stress, Counselling & Mental Health*: the need to ensure clergy who are experiencing personal challenges in ministry find opportunities to explore those through clearly-signposted access to advice, counselling and, if necessary, mental health services; the need to equip clergy to manage the normal stresses of ministry healthily.
- *Occupational Health*: the importance of developing good patterns of working life that are sustainable, renewing and life-giving and to provide clearly-signposted access to Occupational Health where medical advice is necessary.
- *Spiritual & Theological Resourcing*: the need to have access to spiritual direction/accompaniment in prayer and discipleship is a vital aspect of maintaining vocation, as is the opportunity to study. There is some evidence that spiritual direction is proving harder to find and that more clergy are having to pay for a ministry that was once offered free-of-charge. Furthermore, an evolving and sustaining theology of ministry needs to recognise the importance of wellbeing and human flourishing ('life in all its fullness') as part of what it means to be a created, baptised and called person in relationship with God. For example, one theological issue involved is that of 'sacrifice' in ministry. We believe that the language of 'sacrifice' needs to be understood more carefully. Sacrifice is always given, never to be expected, and it is important that the personal sacrifice of vocational living is understood and lived healthily, without ever denying the humanity and the proper needs of the individual minister.
- *The Role of the Ordained Minister*: in a fast-changing world, the role and place of the Church's ordained ministers has changed drastically. There are clearly laid out professional standards and a much greater variety of ministerial styles; clergy minister with a less clear or comfortable place in society and community; and the trusted 'status' of clergy has undoubtedly been diminished in public perception by the reputational damage of clergy sexual abuse scandals. Clergy also have always had many emotional and psychological demands placed upon them but, unlike the other professions where similar demands are encountered, the level of institutional support or reward is less well-developed. With a welcome return to the importance of young vocations, the need to sustain ministry across a 45 year 'career' is challenging.
- *Emerging Priorities & Perceptions in Church Life: Renewal & Reform* is a major thrust of missional energy in the years ahead and presents new challenges to, and different expectations upon, many clergy (some of whom sense, whether accurately or not, the emergence of a 'target' or 'quantitative' culture). However perceived, *Renewal & Reform* is an unquestionably *intentional* programme that may require significant changes of approach and pace in the life of the Church. A number of clergy may find adapting to this change harder to accomplish. Working outside 'comfort zones' is always stressful and more consuming of time and effort. Alongside this, there is an ongoing tension between the multiple roles of clergy – especially incumbents and bishops – as pastors, leaders and managers. Perceptions about this tension, which may or may not be accurate, affect a wide range of issues, especially in the relationship between bishops and their clergy. If

left unaddressed these tensions are often a major driver as to why clergy morale and wellbeing can be negatively affected, or why clergy are perceived to disengage and retreat into a narrow parochialism, or get 'stuck' in a particular place or style of ministry.

- *Clericalism*: the Report of the Lay Leadership Development Group has again uncovered the way in which embedded clericalism in our Church creates artificial boundaries between fellow-baptised Christians through the perception of being 'lay' or 'ordained'. This naturally has a deleterious effect on the People of God as a whole; but it is perhaps less-acknowledged that it has significant implications for clergy in terms of wellbeing. At the same time, clergy can often feel a similar way about their bishop as do lay people about their vicar. In both relationships the expectation/fantasy that one man or woman can do and be everything for another (and the perception, often unacknowledged, that by virtue of their office or 'the grace of orders' they are able/should be able to do or be this) creates a culture of expectation and the self-fulfilling prophecy of disappointment.
- *Particular Groups of Ministers*: although the HCSC believe much of this report focuses on the concerns of and for stipendiary clergy, there are particular needs of **Self-Supporting and Non-Stipendiary Ministers** that need to be explored, especially in work/ministry/life balance. **Retired** clergy provide an invaluable source of ministerial support and are easily under-valued as fellow bishops, priests and deacons. The HCSC notes the lack of representation of this group in the Councils of the Church. **Bishops** face their own challenges in terms of maintaining personal wellbeing, especially as part of the role of a bishop is to model good practice and to be seen to demonstrate good self-care to their fellow priests and deacons. Much of this report applies equally to bishops as it does to other clergy. **Archdeacons** often find themselves caught between the pastoral needs of a particular minister/parish and the institutional needs and policies of the diocese and its bishop. That they can often do this isolated from a regular worshipping community, with which most of them will have been used to in previous ministries, needs to be acknowledged as an issue concerning their wellbeing. Finally, although **chaplains** usually have access to the often more extensive wellbeing resources of their secular employers, they can experience isolation from the wider church, which creates a particular set of needs for recognition and affirmation as partners in ministry and mission.
- *Clergy families*: the spouses and civil partners of parochial clergy usually live in the 'goldfish bowl' of the vicarage. The Church has historically given some attention to the wellbeing of 'clergy wives' and is slowly learning to find ways of engaging, where desired, with the husbands of women clergy.<sup>3</sup> However, the children of

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<sup>3</sup> Further to the House of Bishops' Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships [<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2005/07/pr5605.aspx>], the recent statement of the Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham following the appeal arising from the 'Pemberton Case' [<http://southwell.anglican.org/employment-appeal-tribunal-ruling/>] viz, "The Church of England supports gay men and women who serve as clergy in its parishes, dioceses and institutions...and supports clergy who are in

clergy have not chosen the ‘vicarage lifestyle’ and often face particular stresses and strains in a post-Christian culture.

7. The HCSC is grateful to the national Chairs of Houses of Clergy who have also begun to explore the issues involved, and are enthusiastic to see this work grow. Their insights come from the specific context of their dioceses and individual problems they have encountered in their role, but their list of concerns amplify the list in paragraph 6 above with some quite specific issues:
- *Clergy Housing*: the speed, effectiveness and quality of the way in which parsonages are maintained and repaired (both at ingoing works stage and thereafter) has a significant effect on wellbeing. Budget constraints appear to be increasing the significance of this issues as it relates to clergy wellbeing.
  - *“Disengaged” Clergy*: people most in need of support can often avoid support networks.
  - *Ministerial Development Reviews*: While many appreciate it, there is a need to ensure that MDR is being delivered across the Church, in a way that is fit-for-purpose, and at a sufficient standard to be of use. The question of whether there ought to be national guidelines has been raised.
  - *Pensions*: There is some anxiety about the capacity of the Church of England to provide what it has promised to its future pensioners; there is some perception that the ‘goalposts’ have been/will be moved, resulting in further diminution of long-term value of the clergy pension, with a knock-on effect on morale.
  - *Senior Appointments*: As we look for bishops and archdeacons to perform roles in terms of vision and strategy, who is looking at the pastoral dimension? As one Clergy Chair put it, “no one lifts the phone.”
  - *Increasing perception of “doing more with less”*: e.g. increasing expectation on Area/Rural Deans, posts being advertised as “half-time” accompanied by full-time job descriptions, House for Duty posts.
  - *CDM & Safeguarding*: the use of the Measure over relatively minor complaints and as a potential vehicle for bullying. A similar view has been expressed about the way safeguarding procedures are sometimes implemented.
  - *Capability*: Poor practice by some clergy can place a drag on the whole profession. The clergy chairs were unanimous in believing that the cumbersome capability procedures needed urgent review by Synod so that those who are unable to perform the role could be removed more easily<sup>4</sup>.
8. The HCSC has also had some early conversation with charitable bodies which exist to provide further support to the clergy and their families. St Luke’s Healthcare and the Friends & Sons of the Clergy are currently both exploring redirecting some of their work

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civil partnerships” appears to signal that the partners of clergy in civil partnerships may be given similar consideration in wellbeing terms in the years ahead.

<sup>4</sup> The Remuneration & Conditions of Service Committee (RACSC) is reviewing the capability procedure and intends to bring something to General Synod in due course.

into issues around clergy wellbeing. The Community of Mary and Martha at Sheldon is currently rolling out a new online hub ([sheldonhub.org](http://sheldonhub.org)).

9. The HCSC has also had some early conversation with staff in RACSC and MinDiv. There is clearly a national responsibility for issues of clergy wellbeing in bodies under the authority of the Archbishops' Council, and some initiatives are under way touching on this area (e.g. the Ministry Division's Vocational Pathways longitudinal research into what enables ministers to flourish). The House should be aware that these proposals are not intended to undermine or marginalise work being done in Church House; rather, we believe that issues for which Archbishops' Council are responsible are but part of a wider set of issues in the area of wellbeing. We are therefore keen to work in partnership with RACSC and MinDiv.

### **State of Play**

10. This initial report is not the means to assess the extent or quality of existing wellbeing provision across the Church. Such an assessment would naturally form part of the future work proposed below. However, in such a diverse institution ranging across a large number of dioceses, there will be a variety of approaches and priorities, of varying effectiveness and quality.
11. It has been possible, in preparing this paper, to conduct an informal survey of the national Chairs of Houses of Clergy about existing provision. Such a broad-brush tool is inevitably partial, but it does reveal some matters of encouragement and concern. Other more detailed surveys are available based on information provided by the dioceses to RACSC and St Luke's Healthcare. These have proved useful in scoping terms.
12. It is clear from these surveys that the scope of provision varies widely across the Church of England. In some places, there is significant consideration given to matters of clergy wellbeing. Need is assessed through regular surveys, input provided through training days and support offered through clear sign-posting of professional services. Many of the issues listed in paragraphs 6 & 7 are under active consideration, both nationally and in a range of dioceses. Some local surveys reveal high levels of contentment with support offered, while at the same time providing guidance to dioceses about what could be improved. In other places, matters of clergy wellbeing are less well-developed, with very little information available to the parochial clergy, or an expectation that people will simply ask for help when they need it. The focus in these places is often on crisis intervention rather than preventative work. In some places, responsibility for clergy wellbeing is assigned to an individual (such as a Diocesan Adviser); in others wellbeing is seen as a responsibility of a wider group of people. In one or two places, the extent of provision is limited solely to encouragement to take time off.
13. It would be wrong to say that provision for clergy wellbeing is at its best in urban dioceses, where access to professional services is easier. There is evidence of good

practice in rural as well as urban dioceses and there are some urban contexts where provision is poor. Nevertheless, our informal survey does reveal a considerably greater level of provision in urban areas, while there is some evidence that there are particular challenges to clergy wellbeing faced by ministering in rural contexts which are currently under-addressed.

14. Furthermore, while there is a well-developed sense of the importance of clergy wellbeing issues in the national Church and in many dioceses, and while there is some awareness of the importance of self-care among many clergy, one area where there appears to be little focus is in the resourcing of parish churches and PCCs as potential partners in caring for the clergy. Given the importance of partnership between clergy and laity, especially in the light of the report on Lay Leadership, this appears to be an overlooked aspect of the way in which the whole Church can support the work of the clergy. The HCSC believe that to ask the question “When did your PCC last discuss how your Church is supporting and caring for its clergy?” (perhaps as part of Articles of Enquiry) would prompt revealing responses.
15. As always, there is concern about the so-called “disengaged” clergy, i.e. those clergy who perhaps most need support and help, but are the least willing or able to access it.
16. Informal conversations have inevitably raised the question of funding available for issues of clergy wellbeing. In financially challenging times, especially in many dioceses, resources for clergy wellbeing can easily be seen as ‘nice to have’ rather than essential, say by comparison with the need to maximise the number of parochial clergy. The question of finance is undoubtedly challenging the Church at the moment; however, the question of whether the balance is correct between providing the maximum number of clergy versus the need to provide proper support to those already in post is one that needs further exploration.
17. **In the light of these remarks, the purpose of this report is to invite the House of Clergy, and through it the wider Church of England, to ask itself whether, alongside the proper focus on professional standards as outlined in *the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*, the time is right to ask whether there ought to be some commitment to some form of ‘minimum standards’ in the field of clergy wellbeing.** Such ‘standards’, to which all should at least aspire and be working towards, could be a parallel set of ‘expectations’ to accompany the set of ‘responsibilities’ laid out in the *Guidelines*. How best such expectations should be framed to ensure the most positive, tangible outcomes, is an important consideration.
18. There is recognition across the Church that clergy wellbeing is important. Conversations in preparation for this paper have revealed a level of excitement, enthusiasm and support for taking this matter forward now. We need resilient clergy in post as well as in training as we face the challenges of the current moment.

19. Taking this matter forward at this stage would enable greater sharing of good practice, as there is much that could be commended. Unnecessary duplication could be avoided. Diocesan structures sometimes mitigate against the sharing of good practice, but there is also acknowledgment that, at national level and in the charitable and health sectors, that such silo working has also existed. A way to share the best we can be and do would be widely welcomed.

### Shaping the Proposal

20. In the light of the work done by the HCSC, we would like to propose to the House that now is the time to take this matter forward. We make two observations that shape this proposal:
- The question of tone is vital. Rather than making recommendations that can be accepted, rejected, or quietly ignored through pressure of other matters, the best approach is one of grace, encouragement and aspiration. What is required is deeper awareness leading to action more than anything else. We therefore wish to propose an approach that avoids finger-wagging and the apportionment of blame. There are some specific areas where there are concerns that the Church's duty of care is being ignored, or where existing guidelines are not proving to be effective or properly implemented, or where there is need for much clearer guidance and the challenge that comes from healthy mutual accountability. Nevertheless we do not propose anything that would 'name and shame'. Instead, we believe that a proposal that invites the whole Church to own the issue of the wellbeing of its clergy, combined with a culture of mature self-reflection is a better approach, with a greater chance of making a difference.
  - The question of ownership is important. We believe this is an issue for the *whole People of God, not simply its clergy, its bishops and dioceses, or its national institution*. Thus, we wish to propose an approach that can draw all parts of the Church, lay and ordained, into giving attention to this work. Our proposal is not a specifically central initiative.

### A Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing

21. The approach we wish to propose to the House is that of a Covenant, specifically **A Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing**. Covenants are strongly biblical approaches, binding agreements made in love and grace, where both parties have a commitment to the other and where both, out of the same love and grace, call the other to faithfulness and remembrance of the promised commitment. The *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* include a Theological Note. Such a note would provide welcome context and grounding to any future proposal that emerges.
22. The HCSC has considered the Military Covenant (MC) and sees this as a potential model for the Church. The MC is as follows: *"Soldiers will be called on to make personal sacrifices – including the ultimate sacrifice – in the service of the nation. In putting the*

*needs of the nation and the Army before their own, they forgo some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service. In the same way the unique nature of military land operations means that the Army differs from all other institutions, and must be sustained and provided for accordingly by the nation. This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity and responsibility which has sustained the Army throughout its history. It has perhaps its greatest manifestation in the annual commemoration of Armistice Day, when the nation keeps covenant with those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in action.”*

23. Although the parallels with the Church are not exact, the MC offers a pattern of mutual commitment that does helpfully model the way the Church and its ordained ministers understand their calling to serve and to support those who do so. It has a quasi-vocational tone and offers expectations on both sides that in some way mirror the responsibility that the ordained minister has to care for themselves and that of the wider Church in ensuring appropriate pastoral care, access to professional services, and other resources are offered to support the ordained minister in their ministry. We recognise that this needs to be teased out in greater theological and pastoral depth.
24. The Armed Forces Covenant, introduced by the Government in 2010-15 Parliament puts flesh on the bones of the MC. It also provides for what it calls ‘Corporate Covenants’ to be signed by businesses, local authorities, charities and the like. The Church of England signed such a Corporate Covenant at a ceremony at Lambeth Palace in February 2014.
25. Because the bodies involved in offering pastoral care to the clergy are varied (parishes/PCCs, Bishops, Dioceses, Charities and the National Church) and have different roles to play, the model of a National Covenant backed up by an equivalent to Corporate Covenants seems to the HCSC to offer an initially attractive model which could invite participation at all levels of the Church. We should be grateful to hear whether the House takes a similar view, or has other suggestions to make.
26. The exact scope and content of the Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing would need to be determined by a piece of work which we believe needs to be done by the whole Church, rather than simply the House. We therefore propose a process below, and a potentially specific outcome, to which the whole Church could – ultimately – have regard.

### **Our Proposal**

27. We propose that the House brings to the General Synod a motion which does two things: first, to invite the whole Synod to acknowledge a shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the clergy of the Church of England; second, to establish a Working Group

or Commission which could prepare a report to the whole Synod in the current Quinquennium that would result in a form of Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing. We note that the mechanism of an Act of Synod enables the Synod to express the mind of the Church on an issue.

28. Should the House agree to these proposals, the HCSC would use this report as the basis of a Report to be tabled at the July 2017 Group of Sessions and would draft a motion in the light of the views of the House.
29. The HCSC has had some initial thoughts about practical issues surrounding the process:
- In terms of membership of the Working Group or Commission, we believe that in the first instance this work should be seen to be led by the House of Clergy itself, while fully involving members of the Houses of Laity and Bishops. We would like to suggest that, with Synod's backing, the Prolocutors (in consultation with the HCSC) invite members to serve. We believe that the Group should also involve professional people in the field of wellbeing in consultancy roles.
  - In terms of funding, work needs to be done between now and July 2017 to establish the costs associated with our proposal and possible sources of funding. Several ideas have been suggested but work remains to be done to identify the best approach.
  - In terms of ensuring maximum support for the Covenant in the Church, we believe that a more iterative process of consultation and reflection be adopted with key partners, chiefly the House of Clergy itself (via the HCSC), the Houses of Bishops and Laity (via their own Standing Committees) and the Archbishops' Council (via RACSC and/or the Ministry Council). Experience has shown that such a proactive approach can spot potential risks to success at an early stage.
30. At the meeting of the House in February 2017, we wish to gauge the views of the House as to the proposals outlined in this report. Should the House approve the direction of travel, the HCSC will take forward this matter under the leadership of the Prolocutor of Canterbury.

On Behalf of the House of Clergy Standing Committee  
Canon Simon Butler, Chairman  
The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord 2017

**Membership of the Working Group**

Canon Simon Butler (Southwark), Chairman

Reverend Paul Cartwright (Leeds)

Prebendary Simon Cawdell (Hereford), Convener of the Diocesan Clergy Chairs Forum

Reverend Amanda Fairclough (Liverpool)

Reverend Julian Hollywell (Derby)

Reverend Stephen Trott (Peterborough)

Dr Yvonne Warren (Coventry)

Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith, Secretary to the House of Clergy