

Kate Seagrave – September 2017

## Women leading larger churches

### Summary

This brief report seeks to create a road map for some ways forward in the appointment of women to senior ordained posts in larger churches (USA>350). It has been written by a woman in a senior ordained role in such a church, and with the input and cooperation of leaders of every major large church network which affirms women's ordained leadership. It contains a further review of some of the questions which impact very large churches in particular, which has not been noted explicitly in prior work, together with longer term recommendations for cultural change, more immediate implementation points, and questions for further research and consideration.

The report considers the consequences for women of the very different clergy team structures, role requirements, cultural assumptions and wider influence of very large churches (USA>800). Recommendations are made for bishops and archdeacons who are unfamiliar with these particular circumstances to pay attention to these roles, for incumbents of very large churches and church network leaders to understand the influence they wield in wider church culture, and for intentional steps to be taken to ensure that a male-dominated ordained team environment can be one which welcomes and fully includes the presence of ordained female leadership. Events which encourage women to view themselves as church leaders are urged to look wider than just the boundaries of their own networks, and to expand in scope and reach.

Long term, cultural change recommendations begin with the need for a more adequate popular theology of ordination in large churches, and the unintended consequences for women of their current culture of lay ministry. Incumbents of large churches with largely lay staff teams need to expect that women in those teams will be called to ordained ministry on the same basis that men are, and therefore need to be encouraged to take up leadership and public ministry opportunities. All with positions of influence and authority need to name and make visible privilege based assumptions which exclude women and create barriers to their vocation, and there needs to be a spirit of courageous grace in hearing and discussing what will be deeply uncomfortable truths. The report recommends facilitated gatherings of large church incumbents to see the challenges at each stage of a woman's vocational journey and to think creatively about ways forward in their particular contexts. The tension around training, succession planning and diversity is acknowledged, with a recommendation for greater honesty from churches where this is taking place.

The complexity of gender and pastoral relationships in church culture is addressed, and the need is stressed for an articulated and confident biblical case for ordained female leadership, communicated to the whole church as part of basic discipleship and pastoral care. The legacy of the 'Modesto Manifesto' policies for many men is raised and recommendations are made to increase the number of male incumbents who are confident in mentoring and meeting with women.

More immediate recommendations for implementation are centred around several themes. In the area of appointments, there must be a consideration of the wording of advertisements and parish profiles so as to ensure true gender inclusivity. More consistent training needs to be in place for those on interview panels, especially in the area of subconscious bias. Such bias also needs to be tackled on an everyday basis in local church, diocesan and network contexts through training and creating ways of drawing attention to where it is at work.

Further research work is recommended, especially on clergy couples, family care responsibilities, consequences for women of different training pathways, and the representation of evangelical ordained women in other types of posts. A particular concern is raised in the area of women leading church plants and resource churches. The importance of having good parental leave policies is underlined together with pathways back into ministry following that leave. Finally an implementation review schedule is outlined.

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## 1. Introduction

This short report aims to indicate a road map for ways forward in the appointment of women to senior ordained posts in larger churches. The scope of the challenge before us has become very clear in recent years as the anticipated 'trickle up' effect appears to have occurred in many other areas of church life and ministry yet has failed to emerge in churches with a USA of more than 350 in terms of female clergy appointments of any form, and most markedly those of overall incumbents.

In the production of this road map I have leaned heavily upon the work produced by Dr Liz Graveling<sup>1</sup> to seek strategic areas where there might be either relatively small changes which make a substantial impact, and also to make some proposals for wider cultural change which will only be possible in the medium to long term time frame. I have also sought to support, encourage and connect those who are seeking within their own spheres of influence to see change in this area.

As has already been detailed through other research, this is a complex issue which will demand a multi-pronged approach over a timescale of years in order to make visible progress. Many of the questions which arise around the appointment of women to these churches can also very legitimately be raised regarding wider issues of diversity in vocations and appointments. Some of the recommendations I will make, I hope will also aid progress in releasing and supporting progress in these areas too.

In addition to the initial briefing of larger churches generally (defined as those with an USA of >350), I have also sought (for reasons detailed below) to specifically engage with very large churches (USA > 800) and networks, with a keen awareness that the issues facing the appointment of clergy generally, and women in particular, in these contexts are more complex and have a different set of demands than those of other churches defined as 'large'.

Although I am very aware that there are a variety of church traditions represented among larger churches, this study does primarily focus upon solutions for churches who would self identify as charismatic or open evangelical, who do make up the substantial majority of the list according to Church of England statistics and have generally declared their position to be one of affirming the ministry of women in ordained leadership<sup>2</sup>. These churches exist within a variety of networks and subcultures which from 'outside the tribe' seem to be fairly synonymous, yet within are viewed as quite distinct for a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this paper. Engaging with these subcultures and working with them to provide the best possible context in which women may thrive in their ordained ministries is an absolute priority if we are to make progress. Taking time and care with discerning narratives, trajectories and perceptions is therefore crucial to constructive work.

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[http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/TRIG/Vocational\\_pathways\\_large\\_churches.pdf](http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/TRIG/Vocational_pathways_large_churches.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The other major grouping among large churches is the Reform network who have almost all passed resolutions A+B, and there are a few 'flagship' churches mostly from a Liberal Catholic tradition.

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It is vital for the promotion of solutions to the question of the representation of women in ordained church leadership that we also do not fail to acknowledge the leadership of lay women in churches in the whole variety of their roles. From those in licensed ministry, to those who play a significant role in lay leadership, and those who have taken places of leadership while supporting their ordained husbands. The temptation is great to point out that the cultural model we have received is somehow stifling women, or is part of the problem. Although there are most definitely elements of truth in this, such a harsh interpretation of the narrative must be resisted if we are not to fall into error in the quest to correct a problem. Many of the churches examined as part of these studies had until fairly recently a theological stance which restricted ordained leadership to men. Many of the women in these lay leadership roles (whether official and licensed or not) have overcome substantial challenges of their own for their leadership to be seen and respected. The challenge is how we can enable women to build upon the foundations which have been laid, and in honour be equipped and encouraged to take their place in all parts of the body of Christ.

## **2 Very large churches**

Research so far has examined in detail large churches defined as >350 USA. Following much church leadership and growth literature, and my own personal experience of the differences of ministering and training others to minister in churches of 350 to that of 1200, it is important that a particular examination is made of which roles women are (not) taking in very large churches (USA >800). This is for several reasons, not least that although these churches are small in number they are massive in influence and are seen as role models by many of the clergy and church cultures in smaller large churches. They have the potential to wield immense power in seeing change and influencing their networks. They also are a rich source of vocations to ordained leadership and have a younger age profile than average.

### **2.1 (In)visible women and Collegiate leadership**

The clergy team structures necessary to run a very large church necessitates typically a number of clergy with 'incumbent status' who serve below the actual incumbent, but who take on substantial responsibilities which would normally be the preserve of an incumbent. One very large church team includes someone in one of these roles who is also the Area Dean, and another who is acting as training incumbent to their curates for example. The vast majority of such posts are PCC funded, and the appointments tend (but not exclusively) to be made slightly outside of standard clergy application channels (though many are openly advertised). The idiosyncratic culture of these churches means that they do not fit well the standard assumptions of clergy roles in the Church of England, and are often not well understood by the wider Church. The nature of the 'incumbent status' roles are also such that they are not really either recorded or examined in official statistics, so the number of women in them is not seen.

Of the 13 very large churches recorded in Ministry Division statistics, 6 have passed resolutions A and B. Of the remaining 7, 4 have had or currently do have women in these 'incumbent status' posts carrying substantial and public ordained leadership ministries, and of these 4, 3 have been building traditions of identifying and nurturing vocations in young women. The presence of senior ordained women on their teams is beginning to make a substantial difference to their culture of vocation.

The women who are in these senior posts are also those who are on the whole, extremely competitively placed to apply for any other large church role, and so it is vital for the final aim of

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increasing substantially the number of female incumbents of large churches, that these appointments are paid attention to with understanding that they are vastly different roles from what might be expected of an 'associate minister' in a smaller church.

Bishops and Archdeacons need to be aware that if they are not familiar with one of these churches, there is a substantial risk that they might misunderstand the nature of the actual role and experience of someone with one of these roles in their background, and if needed should acquaint themselves with the actual responsibilities undertaken. This applies not only in shortlisting and recruitment for clergy posts, but also in how places are allocated on various further leadership training courses or development programmes.

## **2.2 Understanding responsibilities**

Alongside their higher profile these very large churches need to take seriously their responsibilities as influencers of wider church culture- whether they seek to do so intentionally or not. They need to ensure that their teams are places where the presence and leadership of senior ordained women are expected and where a welcoming place is created on a team which will inevitably be initially male-dominated. Other clergy in these teams need to be prepared to understand the social dynamics from the woman's point of view of being a minority on their team and positively support their colleague in this. A concerted effort and intentionality in seeking 'positive action' to promote the ministry of ordained women is required- a default hope of 'trickle up' or 'time will take care of it' simply will not see results.

## **2.3 Conferences and Networks**

Many of these churches are involved in leading conferences and wider networks. The positive practices that they install in their own church teams need to be extended to their conference planning and training opportunities for other church leaders in their sphere of influence. Conference seminars, day events and training aimed specifically at women to encourage them to see themselves as church leaders are being planned and promoted, and these are all very encouraging signs of long term progress in this area. Where networks or conferences are not running such events they need to look to and learn from the organisations and churches who are. There may also need to be some degree of 'cross pollination' from such events which can help go beyond the boundaries of a network and show the extent that others are also seeking to encourage and equip women.

For all those involved in leading the many and various church networks, such events are obviously going to be key in showing institutional support and encouragement to women. Those leading these networks need to appreciate that given what is seen on a week by week basis in large churches around the country in terms of female ordained representation, such support is not always assumed, and therefore needs explicit events in order to make a position clear. This truly is an area in which 'platform presence' speaks much louder than words. This may feel like over-compensation, but the tug of subculture and the current default mode is pulling in the opposite direction, and a stronger affirmation is required in order to counteract these tides. Public statements of affirmation are often far more powerful than those who have made them think they are. As a first mention of a recurring theme in this piece of work, these tides are felt far more powerfully by women than men.

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### **3 Proposals for cultural change**

I was under no illusions when undertaking this work that there would be no particular quick fix solution. Deep cultural change is required in order to truly affect change. Cultural change requires a certain critical mass of proponents and determined stamina, yet is possible. It also largely depends upon the unseen attitudes of the many, yet can also be impacted by some concerted effort at action. The list below contains some recommendations for action to be taken by current incumbents of large churches, those with responsibility in church networks and in conferences as well as those in senior diocesan posts. I am very aware that some of these will require some further work for practical implementation.

#### **3.1 Lay leadership and large churches in an evangelical tradition**

In many respects, evangelical churches are viewed as a successful study in how lay people may be empowered to take on substantial church leadership responsibilities. Pertinent to the question of women's leadership however is the shadow side of the culture of lay ministry in these churches.

Unintentionally the strong emphasis of the 'priesthood of all believers' reduces the perception of the need for ordination to do a wide range of ministry. Culturally, however, there is an inadequate theology of ordination which has taken root, and those considering ordination from an evangelical background often need careful coaching from their clergy and/or vocational advisors/ DDOs in forming and articulating a reason for why they think that being ordained will make any difference whatsoever to their ministry. A strange sort of ceiling is created where a lay person may progress quite far in an influential ministry before realising (often in shock) that in order to lead a church themselves they must be ordained. This ceiling becomes a glass one for women, who see lay women speakers on platforms at major conferences, or preaching in their churches, or leading ministries, yet these women are not seen as the leader of a church.

Quite apart from considering vocational pathways for women (see 3.2) there needs to be a challenge to a more adequate popular theology of ordination for men and women which maintains the strength of the culture of every member ministry, yet also does not cut off long term vocational options from them. Church and network leaders need to check their communication (both verbal and in action) that they are not portraying ordination as a mere hoop to jump through just in case one wishes to lead a church.

#### **3.2 Career and vocational pathways leading to ordination**

One of the major routes taken to discerning a vocation to ordained ministry in these churches is that of some from of specialist lay ministry (whether among youth, students, young adults, worship leading etc). It would seem that the numbers of young men and women entering these sorts of lay ministries are reasonably equal (again from wide ranging anecdote, statistics not available). The difference between those entering ordination training from these backgrounds, however, seems to be quite substantial. It seems that generally women seem to remain in these lay ministries with a minority training for ordination by their late 20s- early 30s, whereas these proportions seem to be reversed in the case of men. Another striking anecdotal trend is that the women training for ordination tend to be single, and those remaining in lay ministry tend to be married, whereas marital status seems to have no correlation with the men entering training. Precise statistics for large churches are not available, but The Living Ministry cohort study seems to be showing some related trends.

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Current incumbents with staff teams of young adults need to ensure that cultural trends (both secular and within the church) are challenged so that women do not assume nor are presented with the view that ordination and marriage/motherhood are mutually exclusive vocations- in the same way that no young man would think that in following a call to ordained ministry he is setting aside the possibility or practicality of marriage and fatherhood. Unspoken subcultures are often the most difficult to challenge as they are assumed often unquestioningly and without awareness. Yet the trends are striking and will have serious implications for the next 20-30 years in terms of the representation of women church leaders if they are not called into the light and dealt with now. Action needs to be taken in terms of facilitating parental leave for men and women (see below) yet, a culture of encouragement, affirmation and celebrating the vocation of all women regardless of marital status to ordained ministry needs to be firmly established. This action can come through having the expectation that women on their team will be called to ordained ministry (in the same way that assumption is made about the men), women need to be encouraged to take more up-front ministry roles (service leading, preaching etc where appropriate) and encouraged in line management meetings, pastoral mentoring etc to consider their long term vocation regardless of their marital status.

### **3.3 Facing and hearing the truth**

One of the most encouraging signs of the conversations and interviews I conducted in the preparation of this piece of work is the extent to which church and network leaders were able to see the need for action and change. There appears to be now a growing sense of momentum and desire to see the status quo change, and that desire extends to individuals and groups who have had in the past a somewhat poor reputation when it comes to advocacy of women's ordained ministry.

What may hinder this momentum however is the echo chamber of privilege. Many men are very aware that there is an issue, but are less able to see or relate to the particular barriers for women they are seeking to encourage, or the challenges that women in their teams experience. One very large church leader who is very keen to encourage both vocations in his congregation and appointments to his clergy team, and was mystified as to why women post curacy were not applying for roles at his church. He asked me to tell him my experience of ordained ministry and his response was shock and deep sadness (I do not consider my experience atypical or unduly negative.) He had simply not been able to imagine the reality of the situation for a woman, and the lack of ordained women in his church leader network circles resulted in having a far more partial sight than he imagined of the situation. A number of other men (all of whom would declare themselves as 'allies') expressed with a great deal of confidence that 'all we need is time and it will take care of itself' with very little awareness expressed of the complexity of wider trends in the church and in culture which demonstrate that without positive action this is simply not the case. Nor were they aware of the disjoint between their perception and those of most women. Only one woman I spoke to shared this point of view.

One bishop who was very keen to participate in these conversations, and who has a significant number of large churches under his oversight, is seeking to gather the incumbents of those churches together in order to encourage them to see the issues which are present, and to think of creative solutions which will help women at every stage of the process (from pre-vocation to appointment as incumbent). Such a meeting has potential to be very creative and a good catalyst for change in those churches. I would strongly recommend that other dioceses/ episcopal areas or

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church and patronage networks consider this as a useful action point and I look forward to hearing of the outcome of that meeting. My caution, however, is that in these meetings the voices of women must also be heard and a very conscious effort must be made to counteract the powerful and often subconscious echo chamber. This would mitigate the constraints of limited perception and privilege based blind-spots, given that otherwise the room will be full of white men of a certain age. Some parts of the truth might be challenging or difficult to hear, but unless it is communicated with love and grace, and heard with humility, progress will be difficult to make. Conversely, there is also much to celebrate (see 3.4) which needs to be received with love, grace, and commitment to a posture of positivity and honour for the ministries of all.

### **3.4 Celebrating the baby steps**

The history of the ministry of ordained women in some of these churches has not all been good. There have been some areas in which it has been, frankly, deplorable. The negative stories have come to dominate the narrative outside the echo chambers of these subcultures, yet such negativity is far from an accurate portrayal of the current situation.

Every single one of the people who contributed to this short piece of work is actively engaged in trying to think creatively about how to 'set the situation right'. Naturally, there is still a lot of work to do, but there is a lot of energy, time and commitment being invested in trying to find ways forward. Active encouragement, affirmation and celebration needs to be offered where this is the case. The situation may not be where we would want it to be, yet positive action should be celebrated with courageous grace, and spoken well of. The vast majority of action being taken is the sort which is 'unseen' and therefore uncredited by external observers - for example, individual conversations with women considering ordination (see 3.6). A posture of partnership from the wider Church which sees and honours this work rather than criticises a perceived lack of progress is required to foster the areas of growth.

The complexities surrounding the situation within church cultures as well as in wider society mean that in some cases a lot of effort and energy is needed to produce what looks like a baby step from the outside. As any parent knows, however, baby steps are small but of huge significance and taking them requires a growth of strength and determination. Any healthy church culture needs 'critical friends' who challenge with a voice outside of a cultural bubble, yet whose motivation above all is the encouragement and well being of that church or network. I would encourage all I have spoken to for this work to seek these friends and their perspectives, and to be courageously open to hearing their voices.

### **3.5 A discipleship and pastoral priority**

The promotion of the ministry of ordained women needs to not be yet another thing on a to do list for busy vicars. Thinking needs to shift so that people in general (and in this case women in particular) being released to faithfully walk in their vocation is basic discipleship. If this is not present in our churches, we are omitting one of our basic duties of pastoral care to those in our congregations.

A particular challenge for evangelical churches which seek to affirm women in church leadership is the communication of a solidly biblical rationale for that position. For many reasons (and most of

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them very well intentioned) the traditionally contentious passages in the New Testament have often been avoided when the topic of women's ordination has been addressed within many churches, and instead they have leant upon the unambiguously positive passages or an appeal to a rights-based rational outside of Scripture. In other settings the topic simply has not been addressed. Although the decisions behind such approaches were seeking to do the right thing, the unintentional side effect is that at a popular level there seems to be a poorly defended biblical position on this topic. This is a particular issue for a tradition which highly values arguments from Scripture, and leans on them for many other areas of church life, doctrine and practice. Sidestepping the difficult passages, even when done with the best of intentions, has the unintended consequence of a cultural lack of confidence or ease with a position. Those who are involved in teaching and preaching need to recover or even gain a confidence in a biblical basis for the ordination of women and their leadership in all roles in the church. They need to teach this confidently and publicly to the whole church and not just at a conference or seminar on women's leadership.

### **3.6 Seeing, affirming and talent spotting (gender and mentoring relationships)**

A major strength of the evangelical tradition is the long established culture of looking out for and mentoring those called to full-time or ordained ministry. Some women have benefitted from this strong tradition, but unfortunately many more have not as there is an equally strong tradition of avoiding one to one meetings with those of the opposite sex<sup>3</sup>. This means that there is a chronic shortage of church leaders willing to mentor women in these roles.

The assumptions and fears which church leaders feel about these one to one meetings need to be spoken about and talked through. They need to be heard, but equally the consequence of well-intentioned decisions on limiting women also need to be listened to carefully. There are a number of (male) incumbents and network leaders who are breaking these cultural taboos and intentionally seeking to mentor emerging female vocations. What is striking in talking to them is that they do not seem to realise just how unusual they are in their position and what an exceptional thing they are doing. They are probably in the best position to help other male incumbents to follow their example. By simply increasing the number of men who are willing to cross the gender divide, this would make a very significant difference and ensure that evangelical women are not in a 'parish postcode lottery'.

### **3.7 Including in the club**

A striking aspect of the conversations that I have had with men for this report is that very very few of them were aware of the 'club' dynamics of male dominated leadership, that an appointment in a large church was also the start of what can be (unintentionally) quite an exclusionary social circle for women with men unable to see the need to empathise with the experience of walking into a room as an 'other'.

This is a challenge for many other male-dominated work places. A senior NHS consultant told me

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<sup>3</sup> Following the example and teaching of Billy Graham's Modesto Manifesto <https://billygraham.org/story/51705/> The full examination of the impact of equating meeting with women as a threat to ones ministry is beyond the scope of this piece of work, but it demonstrates the extent of the work which needs to be done.

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of his plans to 'ban football conversations' in order to open up social interactions in his workplace to his one female colleague who was unintentionally excluded from an otherwise friendly culture by not being able to participate in a heavily gendered conversation. Such a strategy may be seen as extreme, and I am not advocating its adoption wholesale in the Church of England, yet the ability of the consultant to see the team dynamics beyond the purely professional or functional is an ability that is needed by incumbents of large churches and leaders of networks as they examine how they can not only be seen to be 'allowing women in' but fully welcoming us. Awareness of the exclusionary impact of gendered conversation (even knowing what one is!), and of the gender and cultural dynamics involved in 'networking' (see 3.6 for similar ideas) amongst others, would go a long way in achieving this.

### **3.8 Minding our language**

In some dioceses work is already being done to look closely at job advertisements and person specifications in parish profiles in order to mitigate language which may unintentionally communicate that the desired candidate is male. In dioceses where this is not being already done, this must be implemented.

In conferences and networks there is already a degree of care taken from platform announcements as to assumptions being made as to the gender of the church leaders present. Such care is to be applauded and encouraged. It must however become an internal care, not just an externally presented editing of pre-considered remarks. A number of women I spoke with felt that such language considerations were on occasion 'merely cosmetic'. In other words, that there was a lack of awareness in other conversations, and indeed even in the planning of meetings or conferences for gender representation concerns. An example was given of a conference organising committee who from the platform very carefully employed gender inclusive language, (even though their entire speaker slate was male) yet the only woman on the organising committee was consistently ignored when she raised the issue of female speaker representation in meetings. We must all take care to mind the heart behind our language, and ensure that our attitudes are aware and attuned so that what is behind closed doors is consistent with what is publicly visible. Without such integrity the care taken in public will seem hollow.

### **3.9 Succession planning**

The topic of succession planning emerged as one of the most controversial in conversations. There was a fairly equal divide between those who were utterly opposed to it in all its forms and in all circumstances on grounds of diversity and fairness of appointment, and those who saw it as a crucial way to ensure that church leaders had received adequate training and an appropriate skill set in order to be able to take on an incumbency of a large or very large church. This divide ran across female and male clergy, bishops, those involved in theological education and those involved in patronage.

One of the strongest expressed felt needs for the incumbents of larger churches was the necessary training in order to take on the role. Someone involved in patronage described the current situation as a 'crisis of skills' based upon his observation of the difficulty in filling some large church appointments that he has been involved with. He described multiple recent vacancies

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where very attractive roles, with very large numbers of applicants (male and female) took multiple rounds of advertisement and interview process as the candidates were unable to demonstrate that they possessed the adequate management skills to manage a larger staff team, nor 'an understanding of the dynamics of complexity in a large congregation'. Succession planning was therefore viewed as a sensible and wise means by which patrons and parish representatives might be assured that the candidate had the necessary skills and experience to flourish in the role.

The need for training is a real one, and one which applies to both male and female clergy. Yet, given the boys' club culture of evangelical church leadership which still does persist, the unintended consequence of rigid succession planning is that women are further locked out of the network and appointments are suspected as being 'stitched up' (thus not even worth applying for) even when a genuinely open recruitment process is being held. I could not find one incidence where a woman had been appointed through a succession-planned appointment (although as statistics are not kept, this is purely anecdotal). The perceived felt needs of training and diversity thus appear in tension. In some unfortunate cases, what was a very open recruitment process has been assumed by reputation to have been closed, and therefore did not receive the variety of applications that the patrons, diocese and parish representatives were hoping for.

An additional challenge for recruitment in the sorts of posts which are often succession planned is that the path of many men who are currently in these posts grew these churches to those sizes while they were incumbents. This may go some way in explaining some of the complex challenges faced in appointing their successors, especially in the event of retirement. In any case, I would recommend that consideration in each case is given to the practice of succession planning and its impact upon the appointment of women. Particularly, that those appointing are aware of the consequences for diversity when they make the decision. In addition, incumbents need to be prepared to seek out suitably gifted and experienced women and train them as successors in the same way that they would train men.

### **3.10 Leading society (a little plea!)**

While working on this report a story broke of a controversy in the tech giant, Google, regarding both their recruitment statistics for women coders and the perception of women in the tech industries. In compiling these recommendations, I have had numerous informal conversations with senior men and women in such diverse fields as law, finance, academia, medicine, the military, the security and intelligence services, defence and politics. In every sector the same questions are being raised as to addressing gender balance, social inclusion in the workplace, subconscious bias and outright discrimination. As a church let us stand up and be an example to society. Let us seek to lead in identifying and working to demolish structural and cultural barriers to women standing up and taking the roles they have been gifted and called for in the Church.

## **4 Recommended Next Steps and Priorities for Implementation**

Aware of the complexities and the long time scale of cultural change, there were a number of immediate actions which could make a substantial difference to the situation immediately, and which would also have benefit for the wider church.

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#### **4.1 Training for those making appointments**

All those contributing who were involved at some level in appointments very strongly expressed the need for further training for parish representatives on interview panels, and a more systematic approach than relying on what might or might not be provided by patrons and their diocese.

Particular training needs were identified as identifying the vulnerability of all of us to subconscious bias, and better briefing for those interviewing as to the similarities and differences between interviewing for an incumbent for one's church and other interview processes they may have experienced in their professional lives. Where there is little prior experience of conducting interviews, a greater degree of support must be given prior to the interview process. During the process itself, if subconscious bias is manifested it must be challenged in an appropriate way (if necessary after the candidate has left the room!) and there must be agreement within the panel that such challenges are not personal criticism but rather helping each other in the process of discernment.

##### **4.1.1 Wider awareness raising of subconscious bias**

Every day subconscious bias issues also need to be tackled in wider ministry networks in order to make them a welcoming place for women. Every woman I have spoken to who has had an ordained post in a large church reported repeated experiences of the assumption being made that they are either a clergy wife, or the PA to the incumbent- these encounters most frequently happening during networking time at conferences or in church leader meetings, but on occasion had also involved senior diocesan figures including bishops. It is so important that male clergy are made aware of the fact that such assumptions serve to deeply exclude women as they demonstrate an assumption that the woman in question 'doesn't really belong there', and that all clergy go to such events or meetings with the expectation that they will be networking and meeting with women as well as men.

#### **4.2 Strategic collection of data**

Work needs to be done with researchers to find out what useful data is not being collected at the moment. Data collection needs in part to be driven by a utility question of what is needed so that we can really see what is going on. In many cases it seems that the information has been gathered, but incidentally, or with little awareness of how significant it might be for someone's work. In other cases there is little to no clarity as to whose responsibility it is to collect and collate the data (patron, archdeacon, diocese, someone else?)

A good example of this would be the sending churches of ordinands. This is information held on every ordinand in training, yet statistics by gender of vocations from a particular church (this especially applies to very large churches with substantial numbers of ordinands sent for training each year) seem not to be kept.

Equal opportunities monitoring forms need to be available to researchers to see gender balance of applicants, and gender balance of those shortlisted for various roles. Dioceses need to pay attention to trends shown in these forms and track where there may be imbalances.

This data also needs to be collected on other clergy appointments in large churches (especially where a PCC funded post) so we can see where women may be present but appear 'invisible' in some statistics at the moment.

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First post after curacy data needs attention- where are the women applying to/ being shortlisted/ being appointed to?

Data on the numbers of 'clergy couples' both those sharing roles and those with separate roles. The number of wives in these couples who are taking SSM/ part time roles also needs examining together with whether they had been selected for stipendiary or self-supporting ministry roles at BAP stage.

### **4.3 Children are a gift not a hinderance (AKA Parental leave)**

A far more substantial piece of work is being undertaken on this, so largely I refer to that work for the purposes of this paper. However, in the course of some conversations some very creative implementation ideas were raised which are detailed below.

#### **4.3.1 Strategic use of appointments with fixed term licenses.**

As well as the work currently being done on parental leave provision, further work needs to be done to not just examine, but create vocational pathways for those returning from parental leave- especially where that leave has been of substantial duration.

Although there may have been other motivations driving the easing of the process surrounding such appointments with fixed term licenses of around 3 years, there is an opportunity to use them highly creatively to accelerate the process by which clergy may gain the necessary experience in a shorter time frame in order to be positioned to take on a greater variety of roles. A bishop was particularly insistent that I include a strong recommendation to use these appointments to promote and accelerate the career paths of women clergy, and that from his point of view such an approach would strongly counteract barriers to women acquiring necessary experience to consider a full range of potential posts.

### **4.4 Wider care responsibilities**

Seeing as informal and unpaid care duties are taken disproportionately by women<sup>4</sup> (for elderly, disabled or long term sick relatives for example) there needs to be thought given to a framework which can enable these women, if they wish, to return to (if they take time out) or continue in stipendiary ministry, including in incumbency roles. Care roles must be understood as being wider than solely of raising young children.

### **4.5 Greater flexibility in imagination of clergy couples ministry**

There needs to be investigation and learning from the experience and career paths of clergy couples. One of the women I spoke to fitted many of the rare criteria which would give her a similar footing in advantage to a man as potentially the incumbent of a large church (young vocation fostered in an very large church, theological college placements in high-profile large and very large churches, curacy in a large church) but on her engagement and marriage to another priest during the course

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/articles/changesinthevalueanddivisionofunpaidcareworkintheuk/2000to2015>

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of her curacy was advised by her bishop that the only viable option ahead of her is self-supporting ministry on a part time basis, a trajectory confirmed when she became pregnant. She is currently in a part-time house for duty role in a small multi-church rural benefice.

Some other women in clergy marriages reported a more positive experience, but there was a generally articulated frustration that many dioceses seemed baffled by the concept that the couple could be ordained and minister together, and that where the couple are not both wanting to share a role and have different posts, that this can also prove unreasonably problematic. There is also a recurring issue of an assumption that it will be the wife who takes a non-stipendiary role in the event of only one stipend being available, or that she does not require one 'as her husband will support her.' In these situations, bishops need to consider the long term career implications of a part time or non-stipendiary post for women as a key aspect of their pastoral care, not just as a budget line factor.

Dioceses need to be prepared for clergy couples to be a 'normal' possibility and plan accordingly so that the response to an enquiry about a post is not bewilderment, but rather a positive and creative opportunity for ministry and mission. It may be useful to note and seek to learn from the example of the Salvation Army, where ordained couples have been in ministry since the 1860s (granted with some very different denominational structures).

#### **4.6 Widening training pathways**

Incumbent status posts in large churches need to receive some kind of acknowledgement that they are a specialist ministry, and not a 'promotion' from a small church. Therefore due consideration needs to be given as to how training pathways might be opened up to allow experience of this type of ministry to ordinands and curates in training. Some dioceses are making short in-curacy placements an option in order to broaden the experience of IME 4-7. Short placements in which curates observe/ shadow ministry in a large church would provide valuable experience and a greater understanding of context which may open up vocational pathways which otherwise were not considered or appeared closed.

That said, there needs to be a more realistic understanding from those on placement as well as those placing ordinands or curates as to what ministry might be done when on placement. While writing this I was challenged as to why a placement ordinand on an 8 week long placement was not given the opportunity to preach at a Sunday service at St Aldates. In the exchange, there seemed to be little to no appreciation of the challenges and pressures (both in terms of demands of the task and also pastorally for the placement student) of putting an ordinand with little experience of preaching in front of 500 people to give a 30 minute sermon.

The Leading women programme has been rightly praised for helping to promote women to Senior Appointments. With a growing understanding that the role of incumbent of a large church is a different type of appointment to that of another parish priest, it is time to ensure that there is a stream which could include women who are potentially incumbents of large churches.

#### **4.7 Resource churches and planting**

Put simply, women should be recruited to be planting and leading resource churches. These

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churches, although some not large to begin with, are almost without exception being planted out of large charismatic evangelical churches, and have the potential to become (as some already have) large. Even in the smaller-non resource plants, the recruitment of women to lead them should be a priority. There are women in these networks who are as able and qualified as many of the men who have planted these churches, and a number of female ordinands and curates I have spoken to have expressed a sense of vocation to church planting. An approach of headhunting these women should be taken in order to ensure that the substantial amount of missional and financial resourcing that is being given to these churches has some representation of ordained female leadership. This headhunting approach is necessary given that the perception among ordained women is that these church appointments are not open and available to them. Extraordinary effort is needed in order to counteract the statistics of the past 10 years regarding the number of plants which have been led by women.

#### **4.8 Further research considerations for implementation**

##### **4.8.1 Representation of evangelical women in other appointments**

Many women clergy I spoke to in preparation of this report, mentioned that even though the total representation of women in Senior Appointments is good, the number of them who are evangelical women was perceived to be low. A difficulty in gathering the statistics for this means that I was not able to verify the accuracy of the perception, but the salient point being that this was a widely held point of view. Even though slightly beyond the remit of this paper, some consideration of how evangelical women might be encouraged to consider a vocation to Senior Appointments would be very useful. A further point for some research and statistical analysis is the number of evangelical women who are the incumbent of a smaller church, and to examine trends there.

##### **4.8.2 Is this a question of women, of evangelicals, of large churches or of all of them?**

The question was raised repeatedly as to the interrelated concerns surrounding social and ethnic diversity in larger churches as well as gender. Of the 13 very large churches according to 2013 statistics, for example, none have a state-school educated incumbent. One of the perspectives repeatedly voiced was that of seeing this entire question as being about a wider diversity than solely gender, although only one ultra-large church incumbent explicitly drew comparison with questions of BAME representation in ordained leadership. A number of participants also raised the issue of the low representation of women of any church tradition in incumbency roles of all sizes of churches and of all church traditions, together with the perception that this situation is even more marked when concerning women from an evangelical background.

There is obviously a lot of scope for further research to be done on these questions as it would appear to be a reasonable conclusion that progress for women from on church tradition in one sort of appointments cannot truly happen in isolation without wider progress for all women in all kinds of appointments.

##### **4.8.3 Impact upon women of changes to theological education funding**

Concerns were raised by a number of participants as to the longer term consequences for women for the changes to the funding of residential training. A close watch needs to be kept on gender trends as the changes come into effect so as to ensure that women are not excessively disadvantaged by different training pathways.

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#### **4.9 Scheduling reviews.**

Reviews need to be scheduled in order to track progress. In particular in the number of women entering training from large churches (see 5.2), number of women as curates in large churches, number of women taking an associates role as a first or subsequent appointment after curacy in a large church and obviously application, shortlisting and appointment data for incumbencies. I would recommend a 3 year review to allow time for some changes to be made, and then subsequent biannual reviews.

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