

Clergy Wellbeing Working Group

Faith & Faithfulness

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy ¶ 8

Do you accept the Holy Scriptures as revealing all things necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Will you faithfully minister the doctrine and sacraments of Christ as the Church of England has received them, so that the people committed to your charge may be defended against error and flourish in the faith?

“For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian” (Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 340). Augustine’s famous words highlight the way in which the “effectiveness” (if that’s not too loaded a word) of the ordained minister is sustained by the shared faith between the ordained and the wider People of God. Augustine’s sermon reflects on the challenges of episcopal ministry – for this purpose read that as all forms of ordained ministry – and the comfort of shared faith with others. “Finally, as if in the open sea, I am being tossed about by the stormy activity involved in that one; but as I recall by whose blood I have been redeemed, I enter a safe harbour in the tranquil recollection of this one; and thus while toiling away at my own proper office, I take my rest in the marvellous benefit conferred on all of us in common”. In a brief paper, I offer discussion starters on the interrelationship between the office to which the minister is ordained, and the vocation to Christian discipleship which all the baptized share.

Assuming and Sustaining the Office:

- Taking up any role presents challenges, but the role of the ordained minister as ‘public (and usually visible) Christian’ confers particular trials and joys.
- Among those presented to the newly-ordained are those of working out the differences between “being with” and “being for”. This highlights the importance of accompaniment in the journey – spiritual direction, reflective practice and what is often simply called induction into role. Developing healthy habits of ministerial life which sustain and give life to self as well as to others – patterns of prayer, study, working practice, good health and recreation – are key.
- Learning the skill of appropriate vulnerability within the ministerial context, as well as developing a sensitivity to one’s own needs and the risks of being taken advantage of are vital. Experience of reflective practice groups at stages of my ministry has helped me reflect on the nature of boundaries in ministry and these present ongoing challenges to most ministers, chiefly around the inability of self or others to distinguish between “being with” and “being for.”
- The congregation or other context in which the minister serves has a much greater role to play than historically acknowledged in assisting with the “being for/being with”.
- Knowing when and how to lay down an office takes self-awareness, and a willingness to be open to the insights of others.

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- The Ordinal and Guidelines invite assent to the faith as received by the Church of England. However, there needs to careful distinction between what we might call “the Faith (of)”, for

which we might read the Good News as the Church has received it and the more malleable idea of 'faith (in)', which will develop, mature and sometimes falter during life. The Guidelines encourage clergy who reach a point where they do not accept "the Faith" to take the opportunity to seek help in considering their future. It is to be expected that the second concept of faith (in) will change and deepen in any Christian life worth the name (I recall the person I trained with at college who was proud to say he had learned nothing from three years residential training.). These two different experiences need clear distinction.

- The Church of England offers considerable advice to clergy in their faith development and programmes of CME should include ample opportunity to deepen discipleship as well as ministerial skills and knowledge. The earlier report raised a number of emerging challenges in this area – the increasing cost of spiritual direction and the competitive spirit of many deanery chapters among them.
- The Epistle to the Romans contains a grammatical conundrum that offers a useful gift to the minister: are we saved by faith in Christ (the objective genitive) or by the faithfulness of Christ (subjective genitive)? We can use this as an opportunity to consider faithfulness in ministry as well as the content and shape of believing. Professional *conduct* implies subjective faithfulness as well as objective faith and MDR, properly understood and presented, can helpfully offer the opportunity to reflect on faithfulness. The Capability procedure of the Church is also under review and needs to be revised.

"Defending against...flourishing in"

- This polarity envisages a ministry that will involve both conflict and success. Conflict is a key expectation of Jesus in his ministry and of ours. Conflict without self-awareness and humility is a short step from tyranny.
- Bullying is increasingly reported by clergy as a shared experience. Clergy who work alone are often most vulnerable to the bullying individual or group. We need to think more carefully as a church about how we handle this concern, especially when there is an imbalance between the clergy and the non-ordained when it comes to redress.
- 'Flourishing' is most fashionable of concepts in the Church of England. In respect of Augustine's 'for you', if churches are to flourish, clergy need to be well-trained, well-equipped, happy (or at least vocationally satisfied), adequately housed, and properly remunerated. In respect of Augustine's 'with you', if clergy to flourish then clericalism (which I see as essentially inhabiting the role at the expense of the person) and anti-clericalism needs to be challenged.
- There is a danger in response to a document entitled "Guidelines for the *Professional* conduct of the clergy", the focus should be on a profession. Nevertheless at the heart of the clerical profession lies the call of Christ, in which an individual person, with gifts and failings, is invited to follow Christ into a particular life of ministry among many others. As such, it is clearly about professing vows made in baptism before it is anything else. If the minister, the people of God or the church as a whole forgets this basic fact, none will flourish.

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