

## National Covenant of Clergy Wellbeing Paper two

Trust. When thinking about the word Trust in the context of Clergy Wellbeing it is helpful to start with Proverbs 3: 5 and 6. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight'.

For those feeling called to the ordained ministry and then working in ministry trust is about:

- 1) Trust in God.
- 2) Trust in the Church. That is in the Institution, the Bishop's and Archdeacons and other Church Hierarchy.
- 3) Trust in the people of God. The congregation, Church Wardens and PCC members and congregation.

Trust in God.

From the first call into ministry there may be many intervening years. Many say that they first felt God calling them when they were children. This call may be tested many times over the years as people are taken down different roads. By the time someone is ordained there is usually a huge sigh of relief and a sense of awe that God could be calling them. As the years go by and they become more used to the various facets of the role and ministry in all its multitude of demands, they can lose some of the joy in the feeling of weariness and the everlasting nature of the work. Nothing ever seems to be finished. Trust is vital here. For Clergy Wellbeing rests on their deep-down belief that God has called them, however inadequate, helpless and vulnerable they may feel. It is absolutely paramount, that they still trust in the knowledge that God has called them and will equip them to fulfil their task. Part of the Covenant of Care is to ensure that clergy in each diocese have access to:

- a) Regular Spiritual Direction.
- b) Continuing development in keeping a rule of life which is about their own personal walk with God in a way that feeds and nourishes them spiritually rather than for their congregations.
- c) Maundy Thursday when clergy gather with their Bishop to renew their ordination vows together. This is a chance for clergy to know they are part of the world wide church of God represented in the smaller

Diocesan family of sisters and brother clergy. It should provide a real sense of adhesion.

- d) Real pastoral care and concern from the Diocesan Bishop and Archdeacons in where the clergy see God's call on their lives. Praying with their Bishops and knowing the Senior staff pray for them as individuals assures them that they matter not only to God but to God's representative on earth ie: the Bishop.
- e) Conversations now and then with a Bishop or Archdeacon about how things are going in their work, and when and if they feel God is calling them to something new. This shows that the hierarchy really knows and values the clergy.
- f) Concern from the hierarchy, or whoever is designated to fulfil that role, about how the families of the clergy are shows that they are seen as whole people with a life beyond work as well.
- g) Affirmation from the laity as to how helpful their ministry is through word and sacrament. Just saying, 'what a great sermon, that really helped' and thanking them for their ministry.

In all these ways the clergy person can feel their trust in God is being acknowledged through the words and care of others. It is here in the Spiritual calling that the person needs most to know they are not only trusting God but being directed by Him in every way.

Trust in the Church.

The Bishops and Archdeacons represent the church in every way. The Bishop ordains and license the clergy, and with the Archdeacon they are responsible for the conduct of the clergy. They are the ones who set the tone of the diocese. It is from this starting point that clergy either feel supported or neglected by their Bishops. Trust in the church has been eroded over many years for several reasons. Our Diocesan Bishops are required to do more and more outside their Dioceses. Because we are a National Church they are called upon to offer their wisdom in the House of Lords. Within the House of Bishops they are required to oversea and chair major pieces of work to do with, Education, Safe-guarding, Overseas development, Anglican Communion, Anglican and Methodist conversations, Faith and Order and many others. Not only are these pieces of work vitally important, they also take an enormous amount of time which inevitably takes the Bishop out of their Diocese. Clergy consequently see little of the Bishop. The Bishop will often delegate their role

of the care of clergy to someone else such as a suffragan Bishop or an Archdeacon. This sense of working in partnership with the Diocesan can then be totally lost. There needs to be a real in-depth rethink about whether the primary role of a Bishop of a Diocese is still to oversee and care for their clergy or whether this role is obsolete. If it is then there needs to be real thought as to who within The Church has that care and oversight. It is because of this lack of clarity that so many clergy feel dislocated and displaced by The Church they seek to serve and trust in. Bishops who do manage in spite of everything to continue this care, know that it only takes a quick phone call to someone and ask how things are going, for that person to feel their own Bishop really cares and understands. As it is the Bishop that ordains and licenses the clergy, this matters hugely. They know that the Bishop sees their work as part of the Bishop's as well, as it is 'their and my cure of souls'. Without this it is not a very far step for the clergy to lose trust in the Church.

Trust in the people of God.

The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of clergy and laity ie: the whole people of God – the Laos. Neither can fulfil the mission of Jesus on earth without the other. We are all in this together. That is not just Readers, Church Wardens, Lay licensed ministers, Youth workers, but every Christian lay member of a congregation. Because we have lost that sense of everyone being given a vocation by God, there is sometimes a real gap between clergy and laity. For clergy to trust lay people more the gap needs to be eradicated. Yes, ordained ministry is vital for the Gospel, for the people of God and for the world. But so are the everyday lives of ordinary people. If clergy acknowledge that lay people have roles and skills that are complimentary to theirs, hopefully they can all work together. For clergy to trust lay people is vital, but so is it that lay people trust the clergy. Where a whole congregation sees themselves working in partnership with the clergy, there is a real sense that anything is possible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this covenant of care work needs to be done with the laity to look at ways they can care for their clergy, and learn to work with them, offering their own skills and not expecting the clergy to do it all. But the laity need to be really affirming of all that the clergy bring to their work. Laity need to make a real effort to support and care for their clergy and to support their families appropriately as well. Laity need to value the vocation of their clergy.

Trust is very important in the Covenant of Care. In the OT covenant between God and His people was built on trust. Often the people of God let God down, but He never let them down. Here in this work we know that that is still true today. God is still constant and will never let us down. As we look and examine the wellbeing of clergy we need to look at ways we can ensure that clergy can continue to trust in God, renew their trust in Bishops and for clergy and laity to grow in their trust of each other.

Yvonne Warren February 2018