

Clergy Wellbeing Group
Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy
Calling and Public Ministry

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Calling

Christ the Good Shepherd is the pattern of priestly ministry. This is therefore fundamentally a Christological calling, that is a pastoral calling in the name or story of Jesus.

For the Church of England this is a call to:

- **Ordered Ministry:** Ordered implies a source and a shape. God through the Church sets a minister in role. It is therefore
 - a profession as **a religious calling from God** which is inhabited and therefore is a social, shared and ecclesial identity rather than a singular, solitary identity. It requires the cultivation of Christ-like habits and their attendant virtues. It is therefore about grace which is why there is no payment for ministry.
 - a profession as **a craft embodying the wisdom of a shared tradition of practice and reflection on the unfolding story of Jesus Christ.** The professional makes ministry judgements as a trusted exponent of this shared craft rather than being managed or operating autonomously and is called with fellow practitioners to craft the church into the likeness of Christ so that it is able to speak and sign the Gospel as an embodied apologetic.
 - a profession as **a responsive relationship** rather than a self-generated relationship. It is formed and grows in conversation with God in Christ and the Church.
- **Apostolic Mission:** Matthew 28 v1-19: implies connection with the apostles as an authorised and faithful improviser of this mission across all nations. It is
 - **a mission to all people** and so it is public mission and ministry rooted in tradition as Scripture and Church History, centred on the meaning of Jesus Christ and outwardly engaged (parochial from *para oikos, those around rather than in the house*).
 - **a mission to build the church** as a community of disciples or followers of Jesus who carry the Gospel sign of baptism and are being formed to live in the way of Jesus as a prophetic sign to their society.
 - **a mission to creation** in the name of the Trinity which makes possible and sustains creation narrates how this creation is to be respected.
- **Ecclesial Ministry:** servants and leaders in the ministry of the Church. This implies
 - **servicing before leading** which means prioritising the wellbeing of the community as seen through the story of God in Christ. Ministry is therefore pastoral.
 - **leading implies helping the Church to see the way ahead,** to interpret faith within a changing world and to weave the community into a sign of the Gospel. Ministry is therefore spiritual.
 - **servicing and leading involve exemplifying the way** so the role of parson as a trusted person is vital. Ministry is therefore representative.

- **Ministry of character:** displaying the grace and pastoral virtues of Christ as Good Shepherd.
- **Accountable ministry:** this ministry is answerable to more than itself or to a private conversation with God. It is not autonomous.
 - The Oath of Canonical Obedience implies that the calling is shared with and accountable to the whole Church represented in the office of the Bishop
 - The Oath of Allegiance implies that the calling is shared with and accountable to the its society represented in the office of the anointed Sovereign
 - The Law as nomos or agreed way of living together in any society implies that this calling is about citizenship.

Wellbeing issues:

Positives:

- Ministry is never solo but always collegial.
- Ministry is relational rather than contractual.
- Ministry as professional is about agency anchored in wisdom
- Ministry is about following Jesus whose social life today is the church rather than self-determination
- Ministry is Christ's not ours
- Ministry is situated rather than unbounded
- Ministry is grace rather than calculus

Stress Challenges

- Isolation if collegiality is formal rather than effective. Chapters help here but many clergy especially in rural pluralities have little contact with other colleagues and episcopal relationships may be very occasional and therefore feel more contractual than covenantal
- The pressures of managing complex livings can make clergy feel like technicians on a survival course rather than wise practitioners rooted in a rich tradition.
- The buck stops with the cleric rather than with God is how is can feel given expectations and the way congregations feel they 'pay for and therefore employ' their clergy.
- In the pressure of ministry today grace is often in short supply and people feel squeezed between parish or other role and diocese or other employer and between ecclesial and social expectations. They often feel less than professional and conflicted in their sense of accountability.
- Agency and professional officeholder status mean that boundary management is in the hands of the office holder which puts more pressure on clergy in complex and often isolated roles.
- Servant language can easily elide into exploitation experience
- Mission language can easily mask anxiety driven survivalist agendas which add pressure to pressurised ministries.

Public Ministry

The role of the ordained is located in and exposed to the public: that is to all people irrespective of confession. This is central to the understanding of ordained ministry in the Church of England and reflects the religious settlement of the English Church and its host society which is captured in the concept of establishment. It resists any temptation for clergy to become congregational chaplains to sectarian communities of the devoted and sees ministry as a particular form of public service with a focus on reconciliation and peace making.

Public Ministry therefore is:

- seen in the role of the Parson or the person set apart to exemplify what it means to live as a reconciled community person in the gaze of society. Visibility with humility aware of hypocrisy is therefore intrinsic to the role. This is the Church of England as chaplain to English society.
- about presence and engagement, visibility and accessibility by the public in ways that enable reconciliation and peace-making to be realised between God and this public and within this public.
- about being with the public particularly amongst those who find themselves unreconciled and at enmity with God, other people or indeed society. This is most tested by walking with the most marginal and powerless. It means avoiding any sense of partisanship especially with the powerful.
- about having a role in civil society which sets before that society the kingdom values of justice, integrity, peace, creation care and the needs of the poor whilst being aware that there is context about what these mean even within the church and so need to be carefully articulated.
- prophetic in the sense first of challenging the people of God in the light of the story of God in Israel and Jesus but also by setting before society the prophetic sign of Jesus and his community.
- about bearing the reputation of Christ and his church at all times whether visible or not which has implications for the commitments clergy enter into.

Wellbeing issues:

Positives:

- Church of England clergy have a role in society which offers remarkable possibilities for influence and corresponding responsibilities. However it does suggest that a significant amount of their time should be involved with those not yet in the church. I would suggest about 50%.
- Such 'being with society' keeps the clergy engaged in wider societal issues and relativizes their congregational and institutional life. It keeps them better grounded.
- In the main there remains a welcome for Church of England clergy in civil society which can be very affirming. Remarkably trust remains for clergy to broker and mediate difficult relationships etc., enabling them to be reconcilers and peace-makers.
- This historic relationship enables clergy to speak into the public space though their speech will only be listened to if it is appropriately calibrated and wise.

Stress Challenges

- Clergy often feel that they and, if they have family, their family lives are lived in a goldfish bowl and it is difficult to relax when in that public gaze. Housing compounds this for stipendiary clergy as is the difficulty with a spouse in employment of having time away from a parochial context.
- Clergy are easy targets for blame, caricature and anger because of their public and accessible character. Hence the relatively high number of assaults on clergy.
- A public role makes boundary management challenging and can be stressful where guilt and conflicting demands on time impinge.
- Interest groups often wish to get the church on side through the vicar which can be difficult where issues in the community are contested and not necessarily clearly a confessional issue. This adds stress when clergy have to exercise discretion as public representatives of the church rather than private citizens.
- Congregations contributing to the costs of ministry can seem like employers and there is some evidence of bullying if clergy seem not to be engaged with congregations to the extent that these 'payers' feel.
- Many clergy seem to be introverts which means the public character of ministry is very tiring.