

Synod Clergy Well-being Working Party

Care and Care for the Carers are intrinsically linked not least by the concepts of responsibility and accountability proposed by the setting up of a Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing. As is recognised in the helpful paper, Bishops and Senior Staff Statement of Intent on the Flourishing, Wholeness & Support of Ministers, Lay and Ordained, October 2017, it is nigh impossible to deal with the two areas entirely separately.

I have attempted to approach the first of these, **Care**, from the perspective of the personal responsibility of the clergy to acknowledge their need and access services in support of their well-being where that provision exists. The questions, “who will support, enable and require this of them?” I will address in part 2, **Care for the Carer**.

Clergy are called in the Ordinal to be servants, shepherds, messengers, watchmen and stewards, pastoral care may be involved in each of those roles.

The clergy are called to be accountable to God, to the Bishop through their vow of obedience and to their parish or post in accepting reasonable parameters of their role and remaining resilient in their ministry.

Self-care is a pre-requisite for the care of others.

Preventative care

Many clergy embrace their roles and engage joyfully in the challenges of ministry. These clergy recognise the very real demands of the job and engage in preventative care to enhance a safe and creative ministry. They develop healthy relationships, effective support mechanisms and the skills and habits which strengthen their resilience.

As Bishop David Walker says this should be described as, *“Doing normal and doing it well”*.¹

The clergy’s role in offering pastoral care to others cannot be separated from their responsibility for self care to ensure the viability, safety and creativity of their ministry. The quality of the first will be dictated by the second. Clergy need to be exhorted to put on their oxygen masks first!

¹Bishop David Walker Clergy in a Complex Age

- *“Self-care is not the same as self interest. Christ looked after himself (by taking himself off to quiet places and in prayer), in the interest of recuperation, spiritual recharging and recovery, in the service of God and of others. There is theologically no paradox if self care is seen through the same lens as sacrificial and humble service to God. We look after ourselves in order to be spent sacrificially in God’s work, not because it is merely beneficial to ourselves; it is beneficial to God and to others”.²*

The latin root of the word sacrifice is *sacrum facere*, to make sacred. Sometimes ‘sacrifice’ is primarily understood as a process of giving up or denying oneself and this can result in clergy creating unrealistic and unhealthy demands upon themselves and others.

- *“It is impossible for us to give something to another if we don’t first have it ourselves. Likewise if we find ourselves unable or unwilling to empathise despite our best efforts it is usually a sign that we are too starved for empathy to be able to offer it to others.”³*
- *“If we are to be a blessing to others we must learn how to be compassionate, to engage in self-care and be a good companion to ourselves”.⁴*
- *“It may be true that the role of carer in many professions requires an ability to guard against public display of vulnerability however this can be developed into an art form by the clergy who, whilst engaging in multiple experiences of high emotional content may find it difficult to acknowledge feelings to others or even themselves”.⁵*
- *“Sometimes clergy keep going relentlessly, not stopping for rest or to make sure that the tools they are using are both the right ones and are in good order”⁶.*

By far the most important tool is that of the *one* who ministers.

All these quotes indicate the expectation of the role of clergy, the demands of ministerial life and the responsibility of the clergy to engage in self care.

Clergy need to be well equipped, to understand the core principles of safe practice, to recognise the impact of work upon themselves and where they may get pushed beyond their knowledge or comfort zone, be ready to refer to other resources and prepared to ask for help.

²Revd Professor Peter Gubi Chester University

³Marshall Rosenberg Non Violent Communication

⁴ Canon Stephen Cherry

⁵Professor Gail Kinman Bedford University Research into Emotional Labour in Clergy

⁶ Canon Stephen Cherry Clergy in a Complex Age

Achieving these standards of self awareness, psychological insight, healthy boundary setting, resilience and personal and ministerial development requires the clergy to have received a rigorous education in these areas at theological college, well supervised practice in curacy, good training opportunities within Continuing Ministerial Development and preparedness to engage in robust pastoral supervision. And this needs to take place within the context of meaningful pastoral dialogue and spiritual accompaniment.

Clearly the clergy's weighty responsibility to achieve best practice in all these areas which are inherent to, and informed by, self care must be matched by quality provision and explicit expectation from Church and diocese.

Boundary setting

- *“Clergy need to develop strong self awareness and to maintain healthy boundaries if they are to keep watch over themselves and over the flock entrusted to them.”⁷*

There is considerable emphasis in the Guidelines on the necessary boundaries to which clergy should aspire and which they need to have confidence represent the formally adopted views of the Church.

- *“All should guard themselves and their family against becoming victims of harmful levels of stress. It is the calling of all Christians, whether married or not, including those with a vocation to celibacy, to take the necessary steps to nurture in holiness their lives, their friendships and their family relationships”.⁸*

The Ordinal states that the clergy are responsible for keeping a check on their working hours, days off and holiday entitlement, they need to aim to be a healthy model to their community.

Setting and holding realistic boundaries where there is an inexhaustible source of need requires support from colleagues and the community. If clergy are able to have compassion for themselves they tend to be more open to asking for help. There is a theologically sound ministry of receiving as well as of giving.

⁷ Margaret Whipp Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing Draft Outline for a Theological Framework

⁸ Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy

Valuing the encouragement and support of others

- *“As he washed the feet of his disciples so they must wash the feet of others”⁹*

The Ordinal also recognises that caring for one another is the responsibility of the whole church and that one of the clergy’s tasks is to enable other members of the community to share in the pastoral care. And that may be from time to time the pastoral care of themselves.

- *“Finding individuals who feed us as we feed others is key. There is nothing more draining than loneliness and isolation in ministry”¹⁰*
- *“The clergy should discern and acknowledge their own limitations of time, competence and skill. They will need to seek support, help and appropriate training”.¹¹*
- *“They should take care of their physical well-being and have someone outside the work situation to whom to turn for help.”¹²*

Pastoral Supervision – sharing ministerial practice

Along with other practitioners working at the coalface of pastoral care clergy need to take time out to reflect upon their experiences and pay attention to their feelings to enable them to remain congruent in their ministry. This cannot be done in isolation; we all need others to help us develop our self awareness, insight and skills in pastoral relationships.

- *“Clergy must learn to reflect theologically upon psychological phenomena and psychologically upon spiritual experience.”¹³*
- *“Those who are called to the most regular and intense pastoral work will almost certainly benefit from having supervision in the form common in the counselling world.”¹⁴*

⁹ The Ordinal

¹⁰ Bishop James Newcombe Facing Disappointment the Challenge to Church Leaders

¹¹ Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy

¹² Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy

¹³ Margaret Bazely and Ruth Lazell Enriching Ministry Pastoral Supervision in Practice

¹⁴ Bishop David Walker Clergy in a Complex Age

In a testimonial to its value a member of a Clergy Reflective Practice, (pastoral supervision), Group describes a good practice of care for himself in support of his ministry:

- *“It’s directly and indirectly helped me focus on Christ and deepened my faith. It’s given me a bigger vision of ministry and it is very precious somehow holding the tension between being human, being Christian and being a priest. There’s something essential about nurturing our spirits, as a person as well as a priest.”¹⁵*

Reparative Care

In addition to the general demands of ministry there are specific job related stresses that may require access to additional support through consultancy or mentoring. Known examples of such pressures arising within the Church context would be Safeguarding Cases and involvement with Clergy Discipline Measures.

Some ministry related stress can be described as vicarious trauma, a response to the accumulated exposure to the pain of others. Clergy may also experience secondary trauma when they are witness to the trauma experienced by another and in these and similar situations reparative interventions through mental health services, counselling or therapy may be required.

It is important that clergy can recognise the need for such services as normal in relation to their humanity not as some failure of faith or calling.

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¹⁵Clergy member of Reflective Practice Group

