

## Clergy Wellbeing

### Discipline (Chapter 11, Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy)

The Guidelines primary aims are: to encourage clergy to aspire to the highest standards of conduct, to identify certain basic standards of behaviour, to ensure the welfare and protection of those with whom the clergy work, and of clergy and their families, to provide safe and effective boundaries for clergy and to encourage personal and corporate ministerial development.

***Will you work with your fellow servants in the gospel for the sake of the Kingdom of God? Will you accept and minister the discipline of this Church, and respect authority duly exercised within it?***

There are two main themes running through this chapter – an understanding and a respecting of, the legalities and the framework in which clergy work and their participation in the life of the Church with both clergy and lay colleagues.

The chapter contains the following headings:

Ecclesiastical Law

Respecting the authority of bishops and lay officers

Participate in the life of the Chapter, Deanery and Diocese – with both lay and clergy

Public figures – impact of their words and actions

Communication – confidentiality; social media; data protection

Standards – personal relationships, safeguarding, arrest, divorce, CDM.

While discipline may not seem to be at the heart of clergy wellbeing, a knowledge and understanding of how these elements impact on the life of clergy, and how dioceses might support them in their understanding, could have a considerable impact on their wellbeing.

- Ecclesiastical Law

*Clergy should know how ecclesiastical law shapes the exercise of their ministry and respect regulations put in place by the Church; they should be familiar with the Canons and any internal regulations.*

- Respecting Bishops and Lay Officers

*The authority of churchwardens and church officers is to be respected. At every appointment clergy swear an oath of allegiance to their bishop and to abide by the frameworks which govern the Church of England.*

- Participate in the life of the Chapter, Deanery, Diocese – with both lay and clergy

Many clergy are often very isolated, either by accident or design. If there were to be more emphasis through training on participation – praying together regularly, working with and supporting colleagues, both clerical and lay - working collaboratively – if this was part of a culture and ethos, then it may be possible to prevent some of the isolation many clergy feel and this in turn might prevent the, not insignificant incidences, of depression among clergy.

- Communication – confidentiality; social media; data protection

*Clergy must be discreet in all forms of communication – spoken, written, social media. Clergy are encouraged to have a separate email address for their ministry to ensure confidentiality. They should be particularly careful about using any insecure forms of data transmission.*

These areas can all be dealt with good training sessions; a clear understanding of the issues or who they can turn to for help, will give confidence to clergy.

- Standards – personal relationships, safeguarding, arrest, divorce, CDM.

*This section covers clergy marriage breakdown (which may result in CDM, depending on the grounds for divorce or separation), arrest, allegations of misconduct, safeguarding incidents and breaches of conduct in respect of personal relationships.*

- Impact of being a Public Figure

*Clergy must remember that as public figures their opinions have weight and significance.*

Standards and the impact of being a public figure can be a huge burden for some clergy, but for others, they may not realise the impact they have in their communities.

Knowing and understanding that, because they are prominent figures in their local communities, there is an impact on others (and the Church) if clergy behaviour is not of a high standard, is essential. How do we define – the highest standard?

Many clergy are only too aware of this and feel the burden of setting a standard, and therefore any problems, in their family life, for example, can lead to feelings of failure.

Specific training for all in relation to all these legalities - the discipline of the Church - would be a very useful part of IME and CMD. The aim of which would be to ensure that clergy are clear about the legal framework in which they operate - their responsibilities, but also their rights. They could be given information and/or links to it, so that in the future if they need it, they know where to access it or who in the diocese to contact. So while the curates/incumbents may not necessarily absorb all the information, or perhaps they won't retain all of it, delivering the training ensures that dioceses take responsibilities seriously, and allows clergy the opportunity to ask questions around these issues. Also having an understanding of Common Tenure and their Statements of Particulars ensures all clergy know about time off, holidays, flexible working, support of dependants etc, as well as grievance, capability and CDM. This helps them to understand the support provided for them and their entitlements.

One other element to be emphasised at the training sessions is that counselling can be provided; it is not provided as a last resort but at any time, if an independent listening ear is needed. Talking with a counsellor when clergy are overwhelmed by any kind of burden can in itself be a form of discipline; it may initially be something that individuals would rather not do, but like the many other supportive practices in place, it can be something which enhances and gives a freedom within the structures.

The benefits of giving time to helping newly ordained clergy and later well-established clergy, to understand the discipline of the Church is to give them the tools to understand the boundaries and the framework of discipline and accountability, but also of support; and with their rights, come responsibilities, and vice versa.

Debbie Child  
Diocesan Secretary  
Diocese of Leeds

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