

Clergy Wellbeing Group: Section 7 Learning and Teaching 31.1.17 (rev. 25.9.18)

NB. References to the *Guidelines* refer to the *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* (Revised edition, 2015)

The Ordinal:

Will you be diligent in prayer, in reading Holy Scripture, and in all studies that will deepen your faith and fit you to bear witness to the truth of the gospel? Will you lead Christ's people in proclaiming his glorious gospel, so that the good news of salvation may be heard in every place?

"With their Bishop and fellow ministers, [priests] are to proclaim the word of the Lord, ...," "they are to teach and to admonish." "With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love. "They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God." However, "You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened."

In the Ordinal, the teaching role is thus inextricably linked with learning. Learning and study not merely underpin teaching, but are vital for the priest's own strength, resilience and growth. (*Guidelines* 7.6 "Continued theological learning is an essential discipline for preaching and teaching, as well as for personal growth.")

***The Bishops and Senior Staff statement of intent on the flourishing, wholeness & support of ministers, lay and ordained* (2017)**

Bishops and Archdeacons will work to "ensure the provision of training, support, development opportunities and other resources for clergy in ways which are accessible and timely." This commitment is the same for stipendiary and self-supporting clergy and Chaplains,

Clergy (including SSMs, retired clergy and Chaplains) are encouraged to "consider what will enable them to flourish in their lives and roles, and seek out and use the resources and provision they need" from whatever source it is offered.

Interestingly however, nowhere in the Churchwardens and congregations section is there an equivalent encouragement to laity to understand and support their clergy's need for training, to accept their own requirements for learning, to make themselves available for and open to the same as part of their own discipleship and ministry, and, as appropriate, to share the responsibility for the teaching and learning role with their clergy colleagues.

While congregations/communities are encouraged to support and pray for their self-supporting and retired clergy, again there is no expectation on the laity of more active involvement in their learning and teaching, as suggested above for stipendiary ministry.

Caring for Church Leaders: a code of best practice (Living Leadership)

In the document that Simon sent us, the section on *Personal Support and Opportunity for Ministry Development* proposed:

- b. In addition to holiday entitlement, [ministers] should be encouraged to undertake ministry (including an agreed number of Sundays) outside the church, sharing gifts and resources with the wider body of Christ;
- c. They should be encouraged and enabled to attend appropriate conferences and other training and development opportunities (e.g. mission events, courses, overseas trips, ministry support groups, academic study), such as will develop ministry usefulness. The number and nature to be agreed;

- d. Arrangements should be considered for a mentor with the cost to be covered by the church;
- e. Arrangements should be considered for agreed periods of study leave at appropriate intervals;
- f. The church should consider the principle and practical implications of giving regular periods of sabbatical leave (described in some churches as ministerial development or refreshment leave)

All the above are valid proposals that the Church of England could do well to embrace in whole or in part, and many dioceses already have some comparable arrangements in place. Initial reactions might nonetheless be, “But where is the time to come from?” The counter to that is to ask, “If we don’t find the time to provide such support, can we realistically expect our clergy to fulfil the roles they are called to, year in year out, with freshness, renewed vigour, and new insights?”

As at point d. above, a key element of learning in support of clergy well-being and teaching is the support of a spiritual director or mentor. In the *Guidelines*, 7.4 “The use of conversation with a chosen companion such as a spiritual guide or with others sharing the ordained ministry is commended, ...” In many dioceses, all going forward for training are now required to have a spiritual director, which can pose the challenge to find sufficient numbers of appropriately trained and experienced mentors to take on this role. More courses are being offered to potential spiritual directors, both lay and ordained, in some dioceses, but there may be a time-lag. It is nonetheless essential that all clergy, of whatever age and experience, have a trusted confidant(e) with whom they can share, in a safe space, all that they are going through, in total confidentiality and in shared experience.

Points c. and e. are mirrored in the *Guidelines* 7.7 “The clergy should set aside time for continuing ministerial education and development, including the consideration of contemporary issues and theological developments, so that their faith engages with the perceptions and concerns of this generation.” 7.8 focuses on “Keeping abreast of a whole variety of communicating skills” as “crucial to the effective and ongoing proclamation of the gospel,” 7.9 on the “part of the clerical vocation in both preaching and teaching” that “is a prayerful openness to being prophetic and challenging as well as encouraging and illuminating,” and 7.10 properly calls for care to be taken “that illustrative material from personal experience” should not “involve any breach of confidentiality.”

Some initial considerations for the Clergy Wellbeing Group

The obligations are thus many, varied and pressing, and key to devising appropriate covenant commitments is a clear understanding of the respective responsibilities for appropriate provision and engagement by clergy, church institutions and congregations.

The Clergy Wellbeing Group might usefully discuss the balance of different types of CMD, and the balance of obligations and responsibilities between clergy themselves, senior clergy (whether Archdeacons, Bishops, or Archbishops), and congregations/communities.

- * How best can MDR be used as a developmental opportunity for identifying learning, training and contemplative needs?
- * Who should determine the appropriate amounts of time for CMD in all its variety?
- * From where should the resources come to fund courses, conferences, sabbaticals?
- * How best can we encourage Churchwardens, PCCs, congregations, chaplaincy communities, to understand their particular responsibilities for clergy’s training/learning needs, and to take responsibility for their own learning needs, and for sharing in the clergy’s teaching roles (with appropriate training)?

Further reflections

Many have reflected on the “gradually tightening expectation of what CMD should mean.”¹ In particular the setting aside of five days a year for their own development as well as a spiritual retreat can be seen by many clergy as an additional burden, and certainly not as a support. Canon Tilby further commended that CMD should be about following Jesus’ own practice with his disciples of “gathering around scripture, renewing our knowledge, listening and talking to one another, and deepening our insights,”

Jesus Shaped People has the five key elements of Christ’s ministry at its core: People; Teaching; Team Building; Prayer; and Speaking Truth to Power. Integral to that ministry were times of withdrawal to pray alone, to spend time talking with those closest to him in that ministry, coaching them, explaining the Scriptures (and his own fulfilment of them), breaking bread with them, and praying with them.

This section of the Clergy Covenant must on no account give the impression of making Learning and Teaching a further stress-laden burden on already hard-pressed clergy, yet another demand on their scarce time, or another “stick” to beat them in MDR.

Teaching and learning are Christ-like and Spirit-led essentials for personal and spiritual growth, strength and resilience, for equipping oneself to be a better teacher (and learner), and for developing fresh insights. They are a key part of discipleship, and are to be shared not only with fellow-clergy but also with lay colleagues. By encouraging, equipping and empowering the latter to take on leadership and teaching (and further study) themselves, teaching and learning not only enrich and enhance lay individuals’ growth, but also help spread the load for clergy. Aside from such practical considerations, learning and teaching are integral to following Our Lord’s example and practice, to being and making disciples, and are not an optional extra.

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¹ *Church Times*, 19 January 2018, Canon Angela Tilby *What is Continuing Ministerial Education for?*