

## The wellbeing of clergy in mission

### From the Guidelines:

#### **Mission**

**4** 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. They are to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith ... they are to preside at the Lord’s table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

**4.1** Mission belongs to the whole church worldwide and is a primary calling of the clergy. Parish priests are charged with the “cure of souls”, not solely the chaplaincy of congregations. As such, they have a clear responsibility, with their people, to develop appropriate practices of mission and evangelism in their parish, network or other context.

**4.2** The clergy should ensure that services are thoughtfully and thoroughly prepared, matching the need and culture of the parish or institution within the Anglican tradition. Where appropriate, they should involve others in leading worship, having ensured that they are equipped to do so by providing training and preparation as necessary to support them.

**4.3** The clergy should ensure that appropriate and accessible courses and discussion groups on all aspects of the Christian faith are available at regular intervals to parishioners seeking to explore, deepen or renew their faith.

**4.4** Suitable preparation for Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage is a primary responsibility for the clergy.

**4.5** The clergy should recognize, affirm and encourage the ministry and witness of lay people. This should include acknowledging their mission in workplaces and communities.

**4.6** All schools, along with other institutions within a parish, may provide opportunities for mission and ministry, and a church school is a particular responsibility for the clergy. The clergy should seek to enhance opportunities for themselves and appropriately gifted and trained laity to contribute to the worship, religious education, pastoral care and governance in local schools and colleges.

**4.7** In an increasingly “mixed economy” Church, which fosters pioneer ordained ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church as well as traditional parish ministry and mission, ministers who lead such pioneering mission are subject to the same call, responsibility and accountability.

#### Commentary

Many, if not most clergy would see this section as being the core of their vocation. It is what motivates us, and drives us with a passion in our lives. It can be all consuming, and for some, sadly, can consume absolutely.

The difference between the two outcomes can depend greatly on personal and even theological attitudes towards mission and wellbeing. The guidelines place a clear responsibility upon members of the clergy properly to take care of nurturing their own faith (13.1-3 specifically), relationships (10.1-4) and well being (13 generally), but this is designed to be a responsibility shared with the Bishop and diocesan authority as well as those among whom the minister is stationed, be that a parochial setting or otherwise (14).

Specifically in regard to the section on mission above there must be a shared responsibility between the clergy themselves, and the diocese to ensure that appropriate ongoing training takes place to continually refresh and enhance the skills of the clergy in the light of the constantly evolving context of the society in which we all minister. Clergy who fail to take advantage of appropriate training on a persistent basis should be challenged about their practice by an appropriate person identified to supervise this. Equally clergy should be able to demand access to training they believe is reasonably necessary to assist them in the promotion and conduct of their mission in the context of their station. In particular in relation to 4.3 & 4.4 training should be offered regularly around the availability and appropriateness of materials available to conduct this ministry of discipleship.

Similarly training should be regularly offered concerning the ministry of all the baptised working together, and specifically how to identify, call out and nurture the ministry of lay people in order that they may practice their faith in tune with the unique calling that God in His grace will have for them as individuals. In some cases this may lead them to identify a calling to licensed or ordained ministry themselves and this should be welcomed, encouraged and subjected to appropriate discernment.

Sadly some colleagues perceive such ministry as a threat to their own calling, and that needs to be challenged both as it speaks to the soul of the ordained person, but also as to how it restricts the lay people to whom they are ministering. An examination of how members of the clergy have fostered lay vocations could be a regular part of MDR or an alternative process whereby the Bishop is able to make proper enquiries as to the shared care of souls on the cure to which the clergy are licensed.

Clergy should not be afraid of encouraging feedback of their work, including their leadership of worship and preaching, though care needs to be given to ensure this is done in a context that is supportive and that it supports a culture of good reflective practice. Bishops and diocesan structures should consider ways in which this might be done in their own local culture.

The nurture of children is key to the future of the church. Few clergy, however, are trained as teachers, and it can often be assumed that by virtue of their office clergy are

well equipped to preside at school collective worship and to assist in the teaching of RE. This is an unkindness both to clergy and children. Unquestionably it is appropriate for clergy to have a deep ministry in the schools to which they are licensed as a key part of their mission, but it needs to be recognised that if this is to be effective there must be regular and rigorous training in order to keep clergy abreast of the latest policies, techniques and expectations in the midst of a constantly changing school context. Given the recent Ofsted comment that 'Christianity is the worst taught faith in the worst taught subject' the clergy need to be supported by Diocesan Boards of Education in ensuring that their usual role as foundation governors of Church schools is resourced effectively. Furthermore clergy need to be supported in enhancing the standards of collective worship generally in schools that sadly are often lamentable.

In an evolving church where patterns of ministry are changing clergy need to be not only kept abreast of new developments and possibilities but also given practical examples of such work, where appropriate, and the possibilities it might hold for them. Colleagues ministering differently should be encouraged, perhaps through chapters to share stories and to honour one another's contributions to the life of the church. Where new ministries are being considered in an area chapters should be briefed and given examples of how they might work in practice.

Whereas it is acknowledged that clergy may often run the risk through their passion for mission that they burn out an equal danger exists when that calling is restricted. Few clergy are trained as administrators, and still less do they enter their vocation to undertake such work. Nonetheless in recent years the increasing burden of administration in parishes and dioceses has led to a culture where, through the requirements of office holding and associated responsibilities the administrative burden falling upon the clergy has increased significantly. If this is true for all clergy, it is especially so for Bishops and senior staff. The church needs to be mindful of the sum of such responsibilities, and how they may be appropriately managed so that the church fulfils all its proper duties to ensure compliance with legal requirements, and also that it continues to be a safe and nurturing place for the spiritual development of all its members, ordained and lay.

Further possibilities for frustration can come where members of the clergy are expected, by themselves or others, to lead a community forwards in ways they are reluctant to pursue. In such circumstances Bishops need to exercise their joint cure of souls diligently by ensuring appropriate support is in place for those who are finding ministry exhausting. This may mean supporting them in place, or in some circumstances working with them to find appropriate new positions where their desire for mission may be better released. Proactive and collaborative career planning is a proper part of the care of a chief shepherd and has increasingly become a somewhat neglected aspect of episcopal ministry.

For most if not all clergy mission is a profoundly life-giving exercise. It may be tiring, frustrating, and even exhausting to exclusion of all else, but where properly managed and supervised will also go a long way to ensuring the healthy spiritual life of all who are involved in it.

Simon Cawdell  
Bridgnorth  
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