

How are you, vicar?

**A study in scripture, psychology and
clergy wellbeing in an English
diocese**

Why are clergy worth studying?

- Peculiarities of the role
 - C of E Common Tenure is not employment or worker status
 - Freedom and autonomy bring their own challenges
- The job may be getting harder
 - Fewer stipendiaries, still as much work
- I'm a bishop, I'm meant to care
- We have the data

Why another study?

- Wellbeing is less studied than stress
 - The concept of balanced affect
- Updated national context
 - *Guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy*
 - *Clergy in a Complex Age*
- Scripture largely peripheral to the literature
- And we have the data!

What does the data contain?

- 101 responses from stipendiary clergy in parish ministry in the same diocese (another 80 SSM)
- Questions around:
 - Sources of support
 - Positive experience in ministry
 - Work-life balance
 - Housing
- No data on age or sex, to protect anonymity

Stability – the context

- House and stipend form the stable base from which ministry is exercised
- Dual function of the house as home and workplace
- A standard house in a wide range of settings
- Living and raising family in an area out of one's natural cultural context
- Partners and children needing access to work

Stability – the Scripture

- Leviticus 25:32
 - As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption of the houses in the cities belonging to them
- Matt 10:11-14
 - Disciples accommodated by and among those to whom they are sent
- John 10:27
 - The shepherd who knows and is known by his flock

Stability – the results

<i>Satisfaction with clergy housing</i>	Yes
	%
My house...	
provides me with a suitable living environment	87
provides me with a suitable working environment	87
is secure	91
is adequately maintained	79
is adequately heated and insulated	84

Success and Support – the context

- Balanced affect suggests successes matter
- Dioceses provide a range of services which might provide support
 - MDR, Training, Chapters, Synods
- Poor support from above may leave clergy feeling isolated and exposed
 - Bishop, archdeacon, rural dean
- Poor support from the locality may add to stress
 - Church wardens, PCC

Success and Support - Scripture

- Genesis 1:26; Exodus 35:30-35
 - Made in Creator's image; human work as creative and worthy of celebration
- Luke 10:18
 - Jesus celebrates his disciples' achievements
- Luke 10:1
 - Disciples sent out in pairs
- Mark 9:33-34; Matt 20:20-21
 - Disputes about status
- John 21:15-16
 - Peter takes up responsibility for supporting the flock

Success and Support – the results (1)

<i>Positive experience in ministry</i>	Yes
	%
I enjoy my ministry in the Diocese	87
The ministerial development review was a positive experience	77
I value the services of clergy support and training	74
I find chapter meetings valuable	63
I find deanery synod meetings helpful	32

But..... 7 clergy disagreed with all 5 items

Success and Support – the results (2)

<i>Feeling affirmed in ministry</i>	Yes
	%
By the Bishop	76
By my archdeacon	81
By my area dean	75
By the churchwardens	92
By the Parochial Church Council	89

But.... 4 clergy felt unaffirmed by all 5 sources

Success and Support – the results (3)

<i>Sources of support in ministry</i>	Yes %
I have a spiritual director	75
I have a work consultant	15
I am a member of a cell group	25
I get support from a prayer group	14
I get support from members of my congregation	9
I get support from family and friends	82

But.... 5 clergy accessed none of these sources of support

Sabbath – the context

- 6 day week in a society that has settled on 5
- Clergy stipendiary numbers have reduced more rapidly than churches or congregations
- Ever increasing complexities of regulation
 - Safeguarding
- Surveys show a persistent pattern of clergy working excessive hours

Sabbath – the Scripture

- Genesis 2:3
 - God rests on the seventh day
- Matt 12:8-12
 - Sabbath is for human benefit, good actions should not be prevented
 - But clergy always have more good works to do!
- Biblical pattern of annual cycle eg Luke 2:41-44
- Jesus lives a balanced life of activity and withdrawal
- James 5:13-16
 - The priority of restoring the sick to health

Sabbath – the results

<i>Managing work-life balance</i>	Yes
	%
I am happy with how my time is divided between work and leisure	25
One day a week taken off	78
Full holiday entitlement taken	52
No time taken off sick in past year	57

Sabbath – the follow up

Why do many clergy not take their full holiday entitlement?

- Don't need that much
- Hard to be off work whilst in the parsonage
- No bolt hole and too expensive to go away that much
- Too much trouble to get cover for all the services expected

Conclusions

- Scripture can bear the weight of being a basis for discussing wellbeing
- Overall high levels of satisfaction with the living environment
- Overall high satisfaction with support and affirmation available
- A small number of the deeply dissatisfied
- Work life balance remains a concern
- There's always room for more research!

Thank You!

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