



Insights from recent research on clergy wellbeing

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- What helps clergy to flourish in ministry?
- Following 4 cohorts through 10 years of training and ministry
- Mixed methods: large-scale survey and in-depth qualitative study

<https://www.churchofengland.org/living-ministry>

Methods

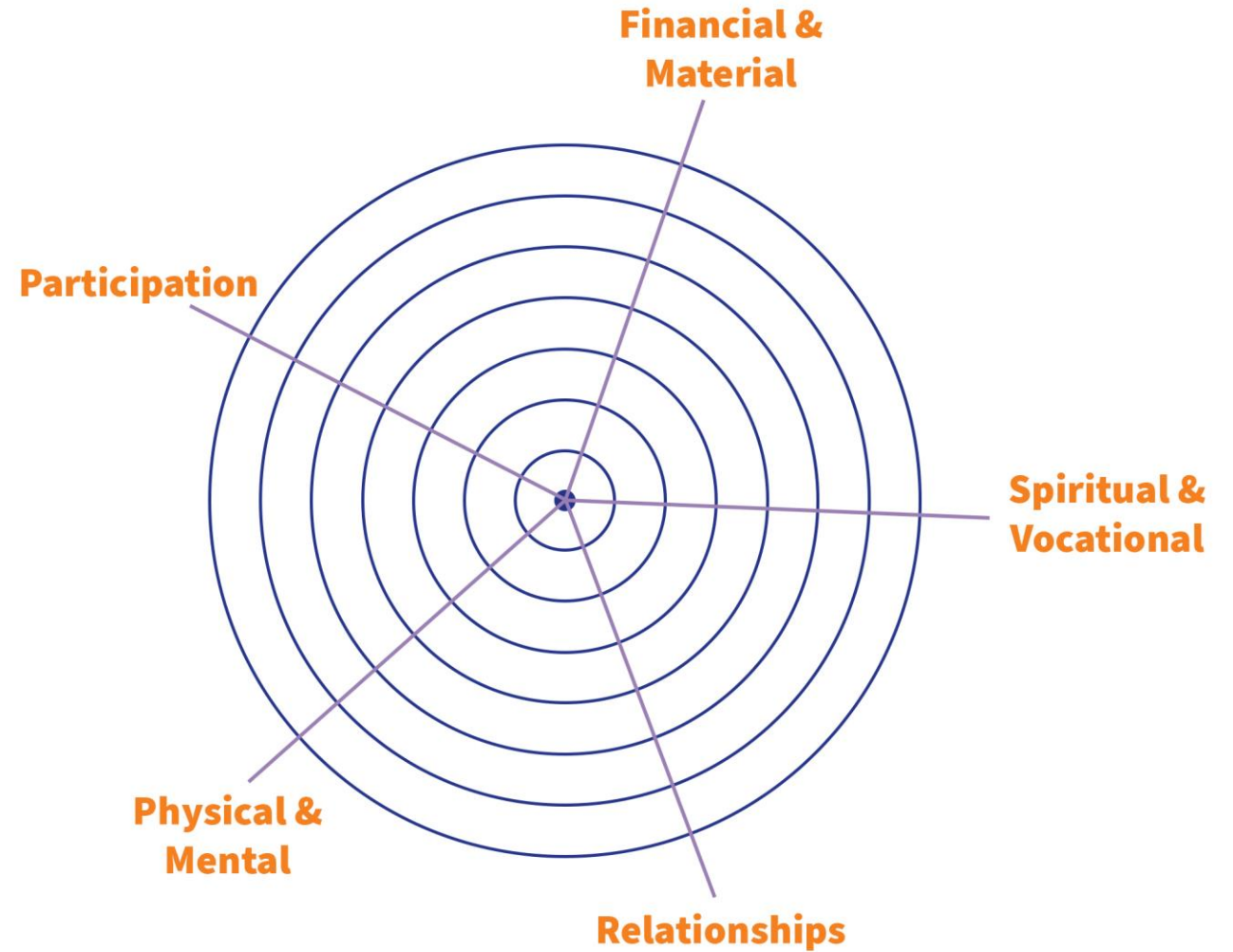


Quantitative panel survey (every two years 2017-2025)

Qualitative panel study (every two years 2018-2026)

Focused qualitative studies (2018-2025)

Clergy Wellbeing



Approaching Wellbeing

- Wellbeing is varied
- Wellbeing is holistic
- Wellbeing is negotiated
- Wellbeing is the responsibility of multiple actors

Spiritual & Vocational Wellbeing

81% of respondents agreed that they felt they were fulfilling their sense of vocation.

Aspects of vocation:

- Ordained ministry
- Institutional identity
- Shape of ministry
- Places and posts
- Tasks of ministry

Initially the calling to do this was very, very strong and confirmed by various sources ... when times get hard I can always go back to that story ... and go yes, I'm supposed to be doing this. (Female SM)

I definitely feel that I'm in the right place, the place that God has called me to at this particular moment in time. I think I've got the skills for the job I've got ... I feel like the other half of my life has been preparing me for this half of my life. (Male SM)

Spiritual Wellbeing: self-care

For the first time ever I have booked a retreat before I need it ... that felt quite a step forward, to actually do it before I hit the point where I really felt I needed it. (Female SM)

Retreats (regular or crisis)

Healthy rhythms of prayer

Existing routines (walking, driving, running, dog-walking)

Additional roles & identities (teaching, chaplaincy, religious communities/orders)

Revisiting original call

Additional input (books, sermon podcasts, conferences, 'off-duty' worship)

Creative arts

Spiritual Wellbeing: support from others

*What would we do without WhatsApp?
You've always got someone if you need
emergency prayer support.* (Female SM)

Spiritual direction

Mentors/critical friends

Colleagues

Prayer & support groups (cell/cohort groups, local ecumenical, online huddles, colleagues, networks, email/social media)

Spiritual Wellbeing: support from others

Yes! Everybody should have this! ... But I didn't know about it. (Female SSM)

Diocesan-supported groups

Counselling provision

Pastoral supervision

Pastoral support

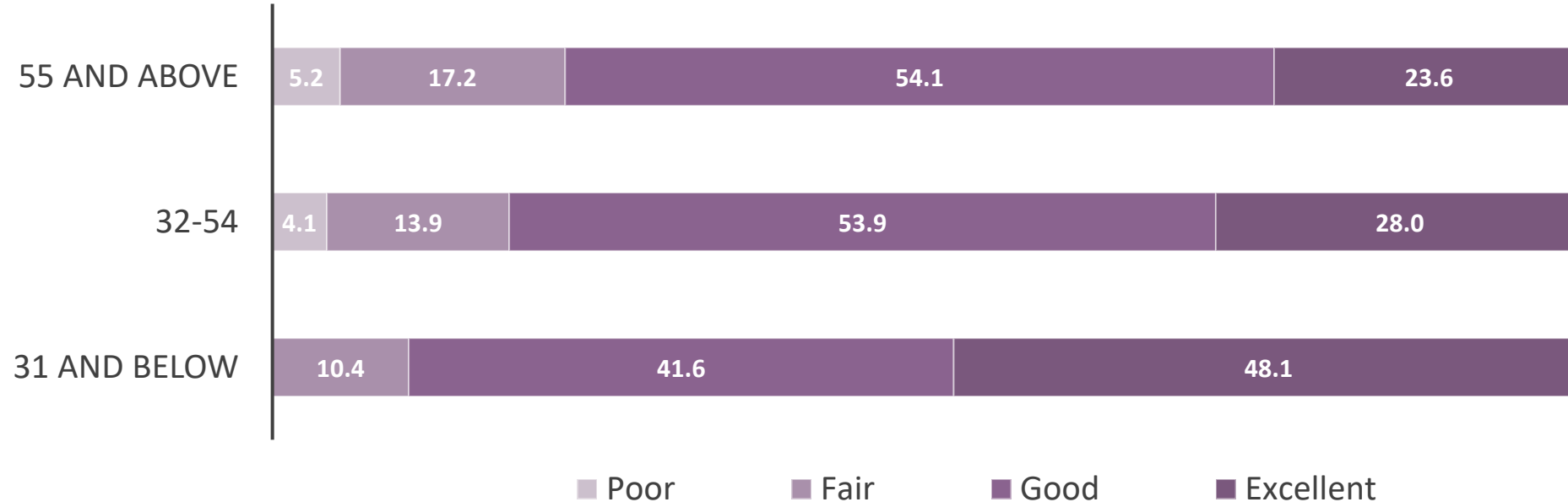
Permission-giving

Ongoing vocational discernment

Ministerial Development Review

Physical & Mental Wellbeing

‘Over the last twelve months, would you say your health has on the whole been...’



Boundaries

- Time
- Space
- Mind
- Relationship
- Role

Time Boundaries

78% of respondents said they normally take at least one full day off every week.

The workload is just phenomenal. I don't know if there's any concept about how many hours. When I try to do an add-up I don't think I ever work less than 60 hours a week and most weeks it's probably more like 70 because all meetings take place in evenings. (Female SM)

There's a huge amount of flexibility if you can give yourself permission to do those things. ...Yeah, I couldn't work full-time in the job that I had before I was ordained if I wanted to see the children. (Female SM)

Healthy rhythms of prayer, work, rest and exercise (designated times or built into routines)

Ring-fencing time off during day, days off, annual leave (long enough to relax) & time with family/friends

Switching off the telephone

Recording hours worked

Spatial Boundaries

Where do I ever stop, because I work from home? I think that's the thing – I might go and pick the kids up from school and come home and the phone rings. ... It is that blurring of what's work and what's home. I think that has an impact on mental health. (Female SM)

I did have one neighbour who used to go through my recycling and count the wine bottles. He's like, 'Ah, David, eight this week.' (Male SM)

Leaving the parish during time off
Moving meetings (and the parish
office) out of the vicarage

Mental Boundaries

Only 19% of respondents reported being able to mentally detach from the tasks of ministry more than once a week.

I'm never really off, I think that's the thing, you're never really on leave if you're in the vicarage. (Female SM)

It's the shifting gear, that's what's exhausting, it's the shifting gear. (Female SM)

You spend all your time resourcing everybody else and you forget yourself ... other people are always more important. (Female SM)

Separate work/personal phone lines
(or dual-sim)

Writing down work-related thoughts
to 'park' them during rest time

Non-work recreational activities

Holidays – long enough to switch off

Relational Boundaries

You can have friends, but you have to be very careful about it.
(Male SM)

I have a lot of difficulty determining what is work and what is friendship. ... So, day off, somebody phones you, is that work or is that friendship if they are in trouble? (Female OLM)

Even though I'm always ordained, if I've not got my collar on I'm just now being Mummy. (Female SM)

Honest conversations about expectations

Purposeful use of clerical dress, e.g. collar

Role Boundaries

I sometimes find myself completely knackered and absolutely worn out because I've been doing things that I shouldn't be doing, and then feeling like a failure because I haven't got anybody to do it. (Male SM)

I do continually recognise the impossibility of the job and have to keep saying, okay Lord, I can't do everything, what do you want me to focus on? Because if I try and do everything and I try and meet everyone's expectations I will just not be able to cope mentally. (Male SM)

Honest conversations regarding personal limits (e.g. curate/TI, incumbent/congregation, colleagues)

Prioritising

Physical & Mental Wellbeing: general strategies and resources

Support networks: groups and/or individuals; face-to face and/or social media

Healthy diet & exercise

Pastoral supervision, mentors, spiritual direction, counselling

Support from charities e.g. Sheldon, Clergy Support Trust, St Luke's

Self-help books and courses

Permission-giving and healthy examples from senior clergy

Relationships

- 26% of respondents (including ordinands) said they felt isolated in their ministry or training.
- Friends and family are the strongest sources of support, but these relationships often suffer due to demands of ministry.

Friends and Family

- Workload
- Blurred boundaries
- Geographical and housing constraints
- Financial concerns

I've become incredibly ruthless with my diary as a way of maintaining my family relationships ... family holidays are fixed and non-negotiable. (Female SM)

My friends live all around the country and I find it really supportive being able to get in touch with people via social media privately. That's where I get a lot of support. (Male SM)

Honest conversations with family about expectations and church involvement
Spatial boundaries (moving meetings and parish office out of vicarage, time away from the parish etc.)

Time boundaries (time off, telephone etc.)
Social media e.g. family WhatsApp groups
Selective friendships

Ministry Context (congregations)

- Relational boundaries
- Support and collaboration in ministry

88% of respondents feel generally supported by the people among whom they minister.

They don't realise that they are work for me. (Female SM)

A deep in-growing into the community. (Male SSM)

The difference between what people understand of your role and the reality is so stark that it's funny.

(Male SM)

Honest conversations with congregations
about role expectations and personal limits
Purposeful use of clerical dress e.g. collar

Colleagues

- Support based on shared understanding (practical, emotional, spiritual)
- Identity in relation to the Church

81% of respondents were satisfied overall with collegial relationships.

Because we're all chaplains and we understand ... I know if I've been to some particularly difficult death or a baby who's been stillborn ... I know I could talk to one of the other chaplains about it. (Female Chaplain)

You go along, you have a nice cup of tea and a lovely piece of cake ... and you chat about things. It's no huge movement or change that comes out of it but it's good because it's unity, so it's worth doing for that alone. (Male SM)

Safe spaces with local peers, e.g. immediate colleagues, chapter, local ecumenical clergy
Investment in peer relationships beyond the parish/deanery, e.g. action learning sets, reflective practice groups, cell groups, training/development courses, social media groups, role-specific communities
Team-building and team facilitation tools, e.g. personality profiling (MBTI, Belbin etc.)
Away Days

Financial & Material Wellbeing

- 80% of respondents said they were okay financially; 7% said they were finding it difficult.
- Key characteristics linked to struggling financially:
 - Not having additional income
 - Being in the middle age band (32-54)
 - Having children under 16 at home
 - Being an incumbent

Financial & Material Wellbeing

- Subjective experience
- Symbolic value of money
- Parish finances

Some of [our parishioners] go on skiing holidays together and they all drive Range Rovers and things like that. In one sense that puts us outside of some of the social things they might do and they might look down on us because we just don't have the things other people might have. (Male SM)

I quite like the fact that I'm not paid ... because I feel that gives me the autonomy to say I'm not doing that. (Female OLM)

Budgeting, saving

Financial/retirement advice, life insurance, private pensions

Diocesan gifts/loans; charities and trust funds; support from family

Lodgers

Government benefits and tax credits

Claiming expenses

Wedding/funeral cover (for some)

Participation

- Social, theological and structural difference
- Pressures: attendance and parish share
- Local, diocesan and national connectedness

I think they look down at some people because they're not like them. (Female SSM)

[The Church] assumes everyone is a parish priest still, and a paid parish priest. (Female SSM & Chaplain)

[The importance of] top cover, the sense of someone externally saying, 'you are okay, you are doing okay. I approve of what you are doing and I support you.' (Male SM)

Proactive engagement with diocesan officers, synod, chapter etc.

Flexible timing and location of meetings

Rationing meetings

Proactive engagement with and follow-up of MDR

Participation in diocesan clergy events

How to THRIVE

- **T**une your life to healthy rhythms
- **H**andle expectations
- **R**ecognise times of vulnerability
- **I**dentify safe spaces to be heard
- **V**alue and affirm
- **E**stablish healthy boundaries

Questions for Groups

- What resonates? How is your experience different?
- What strategies and resources have you found helpful in this area at different times during your ministry?
- Which things are for a particular moment or season, which are for the future, and which should be lifelong practices?
- What are the barriers to wellbeing? Which things could be impacted by a small, doable change, which is it hard to know how to tackle, and which would require significant cultural or structural change?
- What might make a difference to the wellbeing of other clergy?

Questions to Take Away

- Over the course of today, what has struck you most about clergy wellbeing? What troubles you?
- Where do you think you are doing and feeling well at the moment, and what are you finding challenging?
- What could you start, stop, do more (or less) of, or do differently to improve your wellbeing?
- Which things could be impacted by a small, doable change?
- What can you do yourself and what requires other people?
- What practical steps will you take to follow this up?
- Who can you talk about it with?