

## Living Ministry Research Briefings

Full report: *Moving in Power: Transitions in Ordained Ministry* [www.churchofengland.org/living-ministry](http://www.churchofengland.org/living-ministry)

### Curacy to Next Post

The move from curacy to their first position of responsibility is, for many clergy, one of the most challenging steps they take in ordained ministry. Statistical analysis of the experiences of Living Ministry participants compared between the first two waves of the research tell us that the transition into first incumbency is the only moment at which a consistent change – a statistically significant drop – in wellbeing is observable.<sup>1</sup> Wellbeing can be supported through structures, practices and training that allow personal agency and provide experience; support with managing workload; connection with peers; and a sense of belonging within the diocese.

#### Wellbeing challenges

- Because curacies are fixed term, for stipendiary clergy, the **pressure to find a post** before their job and tied accommodation end can be extremely stressful.
- Those who remain in their own home (often self-supporting clergy) and have difficulties finding a suitable post risk being **left in limbo** for months or years.
- Relocation brings with it **temporary demands on energy levels** of familiarisation with a new role, new relationships and the local area, along with the physical challenges of moving house.
- **Families** also face the loss of established support structures and networks and the challenges of relocating to a new place.
- A sharp increase in levels of responsibility can lead to:
  - **Heightened workload** (both quantity and range of work), sometimes with a sense of urgency to address issues immediately on arrival, and impacting on spiritual, physical, mental, relational and participation wellbeing.
  - **Isolation** stemming from: a sense of responsibility for outcomes; loss of support structures; relational boundaries with parishioners; and workload limiting capacity for further diocesan participation.
  - **Increased vocational fulfilment** through occupying a leadership role; an increased sense of agency; growing confidence; job security; and sometimes supplementary roles. This may mitigate stress to some extent but can also intensify workload and isolation.

#### Suggestions

##### For the curate/ new incumbent

- Consider changes and continuities in support structures: which to continue (e.g. contact with IME 1 or 2 peers; spiritual direction; support from family, friends and colleagues); which new ones to start

<sup>1</sup> See 'Ministerial Effectiveness and Wellbeing: Exploring the Flourishing of Clergy and Ordinands,' Living Ministry Wave 2 Panel Survey Report (2019). <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Living%20Ministry%20Panel%20survey%20sm.pdf>



(e.g. new colleagues; community groups; local church networks; mentoring; coaching; diocesan groups); which to protect and nurture (e.g. time with family and friends); and which to let go of.

- Take time to prepare families emotionally as well as practically for a move.
- Consider how to access preferred ways of worshipping if these differ from the new ministry context.
- Pace yourself during the first year instead of trying to address every issue immediately.

### For the diocese

- Consider what kinds of support the person moving is likely to need and how this can be provided, e.g. facilitated groups, buddying, mentoring, coaching, counselling and ongoing accompanied vocational discernment. Increased workload and responsibility both impact strongly on wellbeing, so structures such as mentoring that support in these areas without aggravating them are key.
- Ensure clergy receive pro-active, periodic contact to check how they are doing, especially during the first weeks and months of their post.
- Consider the situations and needs of families during transition periods, including regarding schooling, encouraging family time and connecting clergy spouses as appropriate.
- Invite clergy to connect and participate in the diocese early on following a move, e.g. through clergy conferences, bishops' social or study invitations, and discussions with CMD or wellbeing officers.
- Consider wellbeing issues during recruitment processes.

### For parishes and patrons

- Consider wellbeing issues during recruitment processes.
- Ensure housing is adequate and ready in time for moving day.
- Consider the situations and needs of families during transition periods, including regarding privacy, expectations and family time.

### Resources

- **Dioceses** offer support, advice and resources, including specific support for first incumbents.
- The National Ministry Team's **How Clergy Thrive** resources are available online at <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry/ministry-development/living-ministry/living-ministry>
- The **Sheldon Hub** offers an independent online community for those in ministry and a bank of resources on wellbeing, including a section on 'changing roles.'
- **Facebook** groups for peer support: 'Newbie Vicars,' 'Clergy Family Network' and 'Clergy Mummies.'
- **St Luke's** works with dioceses to provide reflective practice groups and other wellbeing support.
- **Clergy Support Trust** offers financial support (including health and wellbeing grants) and other initiatives to promote clergy wellbeing.
- Claire Pedrick & Su Blanch (2011), **How to Make Great Appointments in the Church: Calling, Competence and Chemistry**, SPCK.

