

Ministry Statistics 2020 Commentary

As always, these Ministry Statistics are a numerical review of our ordained and licensed lay ministers around the country. They help us to look back and to look forward, to notice trends, to assess impact and to make plans. They highlight to us God's calling and provision and they tell us something of the collective story of ministerial vocations, lay and ordained, across the Church of England. In the following commentary, we will look at some of the particular headlines from this set of data. But first, it is important, perhaps in 2020 more than ever, to acknowledge that every number, graph and data set in this report represents a person or people. People who have gone beyond themselves to serve and enable others in extraordinary ways as our communities have worshipped, suffered, grieved and, on occasion, celebrated in the shadow of a global pandemic. 2020 saw the very best of the parish system come to the fore when our worshipping communities found myriad creative ways to broadcast the unchanging love of God in very uncertain times. I am so grateful for each one. Thank you.

One example of the tenacity shown across the church was the prompt building of a temporary online discernment process for ordained ministry. This enabled candidates whose Bishops Advisory Panels had been cancelled to continue to be assessed. The pandemic rendered residential gatherings impossible overnight but rather than halt things entirely, the online process was devised and established at speed. It is therefore extraordinary to report that a total of 591 people were recommended to train for ordination, the highest number for over thirty years. It is also good to read that 230 people began training for Reader/Licensed Lay Ministry. God continues to call women and men to enable the ministry of the whole church and this is a great encouragement.

2020 was also a year where racial injustice was seared into our minds through the murder of George Floyd and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. At the February meeting of the General Synod, Archbishop Justin Welby confessed that the Church of England continues to be institutionally racist. It is against that backdrop that we celebrate cautiously the increase in the proportion of people of UK Minority Ethnic (UKME) heritage being recommended to train for ordination (10.9%) and indeed, ordained (8.9%). These increases are encouraging but, as the *Lament to Action* report shows, we still have much work to do to improve the environment in which these ministers serve to ensure they can grow in flourish in ministry without fear of discrimination. We also have further work to do to ensure our Church leadership reflects the congregations and indeed the communities we serve.

Once again, more women than men were both recommended to train for ordination and were ordained, as was the case in 2019. It is pleasing to see that for another year, broadly equal numbers of women and men began training for incumbent roles (table 9) and were ordained into stipendiary ministry (table 13). The proportion of stipendiary ordained posts held by women continues to rise albeit slowly and we would like to see this accelerate. Almost a third of stipendiary posts are now held by women. Gender balance in senior appointments also remains some way off and growth remains slow – although the increase in the proportion of female Archdeacons from 27% in 2019 to 32% in 2020 lends some encouragement.

Chaplaincy will be the subject of renewed focus under the Vision and Strategy for the Church of England. We commend all those sent out from the Church to represent Christ in industry, in the military, in schools and many other spheres of life. We celebrate that the main role of over 1,000 clergy is a chaplaincy role alongside the many many others, lay and ordained who undertake formal

or informal chaplaincy work in the community. We would like to pay particular tribute to all chaplains who served in healthcare settings during 2020, accepting risks to their own health in order to serve those who were unwell.

My thanks to all who have expressed a ministerial vocation during 2020. It is a privilege to share with you the task of declaring the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and of enabling others to do the same.

Chris Goldsmith

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