

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Introduction

Any curacy is built on the relationship between the Training Minister and the Curate. A great deal can be 'wrong' with a curacy, but the post may well be successful if this key relationship is functioning well. However, like any other relationship, there will be times when the Curate and Training Minister are finding things to be a bit difficult. Similarly, this main relationship may work well, but other key relationships in the context of training may not be easy. This, too, can distort the experience of training and lead to some personal discomfort. There is also the possibility that what is wrong in a title post centres on the issue of performance. For example, a Training Minister may offer poor supervision or the Curate may fail to undertake work appropriately. While major breakdowns in curacies are rare, it is important that action is taken to address emerging issues and to resolve problems as they arise. This can prevent a small matter from becoming so large in its scope that it threatens the continuation of the curacy. So, what can be done when it feels like things are going wrong in the training context?

Step one

Some preventative steps should be taken to try to head off trouble before it gets beyond a sense of discomfort.

Reflection: Curates and Training Ministers alike need to build a routine of self-reflection. A Curate who finds that things are not going well with the Training Minister needs to acknowledge this and weigh the matter carefully. Similarly, a Training Minister needs to be aware when issues are arising in the working relationship, and consider their own part in the situation.

Taking responsibility: Reflection should be partnered with accountability. It is important that each person involved looks at their own responsibilities, considers what can be done to change the situation and acts appropriately. Often this action will be quite small, but little changes can have a dramatic effect.

Learning agreement: The Interim Learning Agreement is an important document, and great care is usually taken in drafting it. It is worth revisiting the learning agreement at regular intervals, both to consider the aspirations it reflects and to weigh up whether the present discomfort actually relates to something that is built into the work pattern, perhaps unconsciously. There may be a need to discuss some aspect of the learning agreement again.

Step two

Sometimes, despite taking preventative action, misunderstanding or even conflict may arise. At this stage the persons involved need to work together to resolve the emerging problems before they become so difficult as to be beyond restoration. The tools outlined below should be used.

Communication: Before things get too bad, there needs to be an honest conversation about core problems. Consideration needs to be given to what is important and what isn't. Lines of communication need to be kept open. Where someone is in the wrong, the value of apology needs to be recognised and given its due weight. Support may be needed from a spiritual director or out-of-parish prayer partner as open communication is demanding of personal and spiritual resources.

Learning: It is important that in raising an issue, consideration is given to the learning opportunity it represents. Discomfort within training relationships and contexts may need to be tackled as a benefit rather than as something that must be changed. For example, it may be important to learn to be under authority. This should be discussed between the Curate and Training Minister.

Take time out: Rest and relaxation are important in getting things into proportion. Curate and Training minister alike may need time away from each other (for calm consideration of the situation and prayer). The return to contact and working together needs to be gradual and gentle.

Return to basics: There may be value in discussion. What is the core work that is being undertaken? What has gone well? How important is the point of discomfort? This conversation may include a return to the learning agreement. It may help to have a third person in the room; perhaps a churchwarden or other lay person can usefully be involved.

Additional Support

Whenever you are going through a difficult time, it is natural to feel isolated. You may need to draw on others as you work through the situation. There is support at hand. Among others, you can turn to the people listed below.

Ministry Development Group (and Animator): The Curate may find it helpful to talk through the issue(s) and clarify matters in a confidential environment. The MDG can discuss a variety of approaches and group members can offer a reality check. The Animator may be willing to offer some one-to-one support. Similarly, a Training Minister may find it useful to talk to a trusted peer, possibly someone who also has had a curate in the not too distant past. This, again, may help with the identification of possible approaches.

Director of IME: A brief conversation with the Director of IME is possible, who may assist in looking at options and in offering support to both Curate and Training Minister. Either party can ring to chat through issues. However, this should not be seen as decisive mediation. Rather, the Director of IME can offer a chance to air issues and consider the way forward.

Harassment Advisers: It is worth highlighting here that if the matter involves an element of bullying and harassment, in addition to the steps above, you may want to use another valuable support, that of the Harassment Advisers. These are the nominated officers in the Diocese who provide support in such cases. As part of our commitment to implement the Dignity at Work policy we seek to provide this resource for clergy in our diocese.

Your doctor: If the situation is causing a lot of stress, it may well be worth talking to your doctor who can offer important help. This may include work with another person,

medication, time off work or simply the reassurance that no other health issues are arising in a difficult period.

Your union: If you are a member of a union, they may have facilities to assist in resolving problems. These don't need to be kept as a last resort. Often the opportunity to discuss matters with a union representative can help a person find a way through a difficult situation.

Mediation (independent facilitated conversation): The involvement of a third person, skilled in the area of conflict resolution may be useful. The purpose of mediation is to help the two parties to talk to each other and reach a clear agreement about priorities, any changes, reassessment of plans, reasonable goals and concrete ways of measuring them. Mediation may empower people for change and encourage appropriate assertiveness in unequal situations. The Diocese of Oxford can offer names of people who have been trained for this work.

Formal

On occasion, despite all the efforts to put things right, no positive outcome is achieved. In this case, you have the right to seek redress if your concerns cannot be resolved during the normal course of your duties. As office holders on Common Tenure appointments you have this 'right to seek redress' formally recognised in the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009. The formal grievance procedure and other resources relating to 'when things go wrong' may be found in the Clergy Handbook.

www.oxford.anglican.org/clergyhandbook

On the other hand, if the issue is one of performance, as identified in the introduction to this document, the curate or the training minister (depending on whose performance needs improvement) may have to go through the capability procedure. If you want to familiarise yourself with the capability procedure, you should visit

www.oxford.anglican.org/clergyhandbook .

If there are any issues of misconduct identified during the curacy relating to the Curate or the Training Minister, they will be handled by the clergy disciplinary procedures.

Handling outcomes of the formal processes:

This guidance does not try to outline all the possible outcomes of the formal processes. Further guidance may be found in the grievance procedure document. However, we would like to stress that one of the possible outcomes may be to end the present curacy with the Training Minister. If this is the result, then the Director of IME together with the Archdeacon, and in some cases the Area Bishop, will look into potential new curacy placements. The Curate will be invited to a meeting with the Archdeacon and the Director of IME to discuss: the type of curacy we are seeking; the potential location; preferences with regard to the qualities of the Training Minister and so on. We hope that this will help us find a satisfactory placement.

When a satisfactory result is achieved, the Curate will be offered:

- ❖ Induction to the new placement
- ❖ A new learning agreement which will take into consideration (and acknowledge) what was achieved during the first part of the curacy.
- ❖ Consideration as to whether an extension for the curacy is possible and desirable.

We very much hope that reflection and learning from the initial curacy combined with the skills and experience of working with the new training minister and team environment will enable the curate to be positively assessed as having met the benchmark statements by the end of the curacy.

From experience we know that the identification of a new curacy may prove difficult for a variety of reasons. We will require the co-operation of the parties at all stages if a fruitful new curacy is to be achieved. Finding a new title post is a laborious process that involves many individuals. Despite all the effort and commitment of those involved, the result may not exactly be as hoped: under some circumstances, a renewed curacy may prove impossible. While we recognise that this would be a huge disappointment, all need to accept that this may be the end of the journey for the time being. The decision that there will not be a renewed curacy will be formally acknowledged by the Bishop who will also revoke the licence.

While the person involved will remain on the diocese's list of potential curates for the following year, there can be no guarantee of a new curacy placement. During this time the Curate may wish to continue IME. Doing so will need a conversation with the Director of IME. The Curate also may need to consider the exploration of opportunities in other dioceses. Again, the Director of IME should be able to help in the consideration of the issues involved in this possibility.

First point of contact: We have always emphasized that the Training Minister is the first point of contact for everything to do with any curacy. However, for obvious reasons, when a difficult situation or a breakdown of relationship involves the Training Minister, then the first point of contact throughout is the Director of IME, who should be approached to arrange a formal conversation. The Director of IME will then liaise with others involved in the formal processes (such as the Archdeacon or the HR Team Leader), and support you as the matter evolves. A discipline of shared confidentiality is carefully maintained between the Director of IME, Archdeacon, Area Bishop and the HR Team Leader.