

THE CARE AND WELLBEING OF MINISTERS AND THOSE IN LEADERSHIP IN A CHRIST-LIKE CHURCH

Why does this matter?

The times we are in have underlined how much we need each other and how much everyone in any kind of church leadership needs to hear St Paul's words to watch over ourselves and over the whole church (Acts 20.28). The Church is the whole people of God – clergy and laity, gathered and sent – participating in the mission of God. The recent report *Setting God's People Free*,¹ made it clear that lay people and clergy are equal partners in the life of local church.

As we form Christian community together, we do it on the basis of our baptismal calling which undergirds our understanding that in God's eyes we are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting, mutually accountable and equal partners in God's mission.

Those in ministry roles, both lay and ordained, need support and encouragement in their vocation and ministry, protection from unreasonable expectations and projections, safeguarding of their time off and time with friends and family, and the love of a Christian community around them.

Those in lay positions of responsibility in our churches need to be affirmed and supported as they serve the local church in partnership with clergy and licensed lay ministers (LLMs); they need to be in roles which fit their gifting and interest, protection from being overburdened, and to be able to give up or change responsibility without guilt.

Our churches need to be places where all are valued, as we move more and more deeply into God's love for us. They need to be communities of respectful listening in which we discern together how God is at work.

For a number of years now, work on clergy wellbeing has been taking place at a national, diocesan and local level. As a Diocese, we have been paying careful attention to how we enable our ministers to flourish in their calling and vocation. And as this work has developed, we have seen more and more clearly that the focus needs to widen and embrace the flourishing of all God's people in their calling and vocation.

Let's look at the landscape...

At National level

In 2017 the national Church, spurred on by a motion in its General Synod began work on developing a 'clergy covenant'. A huge amount of work and wide consultation ensued,² and at the February 2020 Group of Sessions of the General Synod, the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing [[LINK TO COVENANT](#)] was made an Act of Synod (see final page of this paper). This signals a major commitment by the national Church on behalf of us all, to take care of those who take care of us; to honour the often sacrificial self-offering of clergy and the cost of this to them and their families, as they teach, lead, pastor and guide God's beloved people in the ways of Christ.

¹ GS2056. See <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%202056%20Setting%20God%27s%20People%20Free.pdf>

² If you would like to look at the very comprehensive and helpful background work, including an excellent theological reflection by our own Revd Dr Margaret Whipp, see page 9 onwards of [GS 2133](#).

Alongside the Covenant, a working group has produced resources which have been designed to help those in ministry and the whole church to reflect on and hold good discussions around clergy care. It is very much hoped that these discussions will be held in Deanery Synods and Chapters and in PCCs around the Diocese so that a widespread 'Big Conversation' on clergy care and wellbeing takes place. These resources are for:

- Clergy themselves [A DOCUMENT FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION FOR THE CLERGY](#)
- Local congregations [A DOCUMENT FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION FOR LOCAL CONGREGATIONS](#)
- The wider Church [A DOCUMENT FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION FOR BISHOPS AND THE WIDER CHURCH](#)

At Diocesan level

The Diocese has been working in parallel with, and sometimes ahead of, the national Church on structures and resources to support the wellbeing of clergy and in 2018 published *Flourishing in Ministry* – a resource booklet for clergy and lay ministers – which was sent to those in ministry across the diocese. This was very well received, and several other dioceses have used *Flourishing in Ministry* as a template for their own similar publications.

We have, in this diocese, a long history of making provision for support to those in ministry (through ministry accompaniers, mediation services, counselling, grants for retreats, etc) and have been working to bring all the strands together and audit and identify where there are weaknesses or gaps. The flourishing of clergy and lay leaders continues to be a diocesan-wide priority and underpins our vision to be a Christ-like church for the sake of God's world.

- This Autumn we are launching a companion booklet to *Flourishing in Ministry*, called [Flourishing Together](#). The purpose of this is to affirm and support the partnership between clergy and lay people, so that they may work effectively together, understand and acknowledge their respective needs and boundaries and develop better and more trusting relationships of mutual accountability. It is intended as a workbook for all in church leadership (Churchwardens, PCCs & DCCs, leadership teams) and will be sent in the coming weeks to clergy and others.
- A not uncommon friction in parish relationships is, sadly, bullying and harassment, ranging from that which is minor and subtle, to real unpleasantness and inappropriate use of power. As a diocese we are clear that this has no place in our Church. In response to this Bishop's Council has approved a new [Dignity in Ministry and at Work](#) policy, which is both more comprehensive and more useable than the policy it replaces, and we hope it will give encouragement to anyone who feels that they have been the victim of these sorts of unacceptable behaviours to take action. It gives examples of unacceptable behaviour, but also sets out how we can model good relationships and help one another to flourish.
- Also new is the [Clergy and Employee Assistance Programme](#) – a one stop shop where clergy and their families and diocesan employees can access a range of support and advice from a trusted third party provider. This is entirely confidential (the diocese will not be advised who has contacted them).
- There is ongoing provision to support clergy and LLM self-care offered as part of the CMD programme, and this is kept under review to make sure that it is relevant and helpful. We have already held 2 study days on self-care and wellbeing and there will be a further 2 ½ days of online resilience training in 2021.
- Since 2018 the diocese has been an active participant in ongoing consultations on clergy wellbeing issues led by St Luke's Healthcare. We continue to work with St Luke's and other

dioceses across the country in report and developing our work in this area, sharing resources and learning and building lateral networks.

When we meet as a Synod we will have an opportunity to hear in more detail about some of these developments, and to give our support formally to the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing.

At local level

Of course none of this will have much impact unless it becomes a practical expression of our desire to be a more Christ-like Church at local level, in our parishes, benefices and deaneries – a Church where we are known by our love and care for each other and our honouring of the vocation of each.

All PCCs and Deanery Synods are encouraged to consider and adopt the Covenant themselves, engaging in the Big Conversation. The Diocesan *Flourishing Together* material, which is very accessible and practical, is offered as a resource for these discussions, as well as for ongoing relationships of mutuality between clergy and lay people. The *Dignity in Ministry and at Work* policy is also well worth PCCs considering, as we look with honesty and humility at our culture, and put it alongside our desire to be more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous.

When we meet as a Synod we will have the opportunity to discuss in small groups how we can create or improve a culture of mutual respect and mutual flourishing in our parishes and deaneries, and to consider together where the blockages are in improving our interactions.

I commend these materials to you, and look forward to an energetic engagement with them when we meet in Synod.

+Olivia
Bishop of Reading
October 2020

The Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scripture and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in every generation.

In its formularies, the Church of England recognises that God calls some to serve as deacons, priests and bishops to build up and equip the whole People of God.

Conscious that such a calling is both a privilege and a demand, we commit together to promote the welfare of our clergy and their households.

We undertake to work together to coordinate and improve our approach to clergy care and wellbeing so that the whole Church may flourish in the service of the mission of God.