

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

REPORT 2009

1. Membership

<i>House of Bishops</i>	<i>Standing Committee</i>
Rt Rev KR Good, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe (Chairman) Rt Rev RCA Henderson, Bishop of Tuam	Mr HRJ Totten
<i>General Synod – clerical</i>	<i>Pensions Board</i>
Ven GL Hastings Very Rev SM Patterson	Rev ECJ Woods
<i>General Synod – lay</i>	<i>Representative Church Body</i>
Ms R Handy Mr AN McNeile	Ven DS McLean Mrs LM Gleasure
<i>Director of the Theological Institute</i>	<i>Honorary Secretaries</i>
Rev Dr MJ Elliott	Mr SR Harper
<i>Co-opted</i>	<i>Consultation Director of Non Stipendiary Ministry</i>
Mr G Fromholz	Vacant

Mrs CH Thomson retired from the Representative Church Body and therefore also from the Commission on Ministry after the General Synod in May 2008. Rev OMR Donohoe and Rev TW Gordon also retired from the Commission. The Commission records its appreciation of the contribution made by Mrs CH Thomson, Rev OMR Donohoe and Rev TW Gordon during their tenure.

2. Terms of Reference

The Commission on Ministry was established by the General Synod in 1996. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Commission makes recommendations concerning the Christian Ministry, both lay and ordained. This includes the deployment of stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy appropriate to the requirements of the Church of Ireland in the future. Matters relating to ministry may be referred to the Commission by the House of Bishops, the Standing Committee and the Representative Church Body.

3. Summary

The Commission on Ministry concentrated on the following issues:

- Lay Readers
- Non-stipendiary Ministry
- Young Ordinands
- Retirement Planning for Clergy

4. Purpose

To reflect on and propose changes to ministry training, deployment and support as will assist the Church to achieve its mission and sustain and nurture the clergy already in the Church's care throughout their lifetime.

5. Aims for 2009 to May 2010

The Commission on Ministry aims:

- a) to collaborate with other Church of Ireland committees where areas of work may coincide;
- b) to examine ministry development;
- c) to examine best practice for diocesan and parish missional structures;
- d) to assist in furthering the development of missional ministry in the West of Ireland;
- e) to structure and provide a mid-career programme for clergy;
- f) to continue to provide pre-retirement courses for clergy.

6. Development of Mission/Pioneer Leaders

In September 2008, the Commission on Ministry appointed Mr AN McNeile, Mr HRJ Totten and Rev ECJ Woods to meet with representatives, as requested by the Council on Mission, Mr C Taylor, Mr S Tucker and Mr I Smith, to discuss the issue of training and leadership requirements for new church developments.

The meeting of the joint Commission on Ministry and Council for Mission took place in November 2008. The group made a proposal regarding its central focus and terms of reference, but felt that before it could proceed, this would require the support of the Council for Mission, the Commission on Ministry and the Governing Council of the Theological Institute. The group suggested that the focus of their work should be the development of mission/pioneer leaders. A joint motion, from the Commission on Ministry and the Council for Mission, to further this work is attached as Appendix A on page 320.

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Early indications from the three sponsoring bodies are that some reflective work in this area would be a welcome contribution to the Church's ministry and mission.

In light of the Very Rev SM Patterson's work on mission in the west of Ireland, the Commission on Ministry have asked her to join this working group.

7. Lay Readers

In February 2008, the Warden of Readers requested the Commission on Ministry to consider the biblical and theological understanding of the ministry of Readers in the Church of Ireland.

The Commission on Ministry agreed to carry out an anonymous survey of Diocesan Readers. The Very Rev SM Patterson compiled a questionnaire that examined the length of service of Diocesan Readers, their training, ministry, other duties, geographical areas of work, support, satisfaction levels and expenses and also invited them to describe how they see their ministry developing in the future.

There was a 50% response rate from the Diocesan Readers. The Very Rev SM Patterson then compiled the information into a full report and a subsequent simplified summary report (Appendix B, page 321) that does not include the statistical terminology. The full and summary reports are also available at the following web addresses:

http://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Information/Resources/CommMin/09-rm_full.pdf

http://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Information/Resources/CommMin/09-rm_sum.pdf

The Commission on Ministry presented the summary report to the Warden of Readers, Rev Canon RC Neill so that he could disseminate the report to the Diocesan Readers.

The centenary anniversary of readers in the Church of Ireland will be celebrated with a special service in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin on 28 November 2009. The event is being organised by the Warden of Readers and the Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh.

8. Mid-career Programme for Clergy

The Commission on Ministry has begun the initial planning stages of introducing a new mid-career programme for clergy. The overall aim of this programme is to provide a support for clergy who, after many years of ministry to others, would benefit from refreshment and encouragement to re-invigorate them in their vocation and mission.

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The specific objectives of the programme are the following:

- To enable clergy to assess where they are in relation to their vocations and their personal lives, how they got there and where they want to go;
- To enable clergy explore the strengths of their particular ministry and consider how they might develop it;
- To encourage clergy to identify and discuss issues which make ministry difficult and/or cause personal problems;
- To provide an up-to-date view of theological thinking;
- To provide views on what both the church and unchurched perceive the role of the priest should be;
- To enable people consider methods of effectively managing their own stress and health levels.

It is envisaged that the programme will consist of a residential course that will include Bible study, current thinking in theology, personal reflection and address what being a priest means today, healthy living and work/life harmony.

9. Non-stipendiary Ministry

At the General Synod 2008, the Commission on Ministry was asked to examine the issue of non-stipendiary ministry through the following resolution:

That the House of Bishops and the Commission on Ministry be requested to make arrangements for the introduction of a Bill in the General Synod of 2009 to extend the provisions of Chapter IX, Section 34(4) of the Constitution relating to part-time stipendiary ministry, to be amended as necessary, to members of the clergy serving in the Non-Stipendiary Ministry.

The Commission on Ministry appointed a sub-group to address this issue and the group held a number of meetings between June and October 2008. A survey of the Diocesan Secretaries was conducted to examine the number, deployment and reimbursement of non-stipendiary ministers currently within the Church of Ireland. It was also noted that this will be a finite population as the new Ministry Formation does not differentiate between stipendiary and non-stipendiary training.

The Commission on Ministry received the recommendations from the sub-group in November 2008. The Commission on Ministry agreed on a proposal that was then sent to the House of Bishops and to the Stipends Committee for opinion. The House of Bishops stated they were satisfied with the proposal. The Stipends Committee made recommendations as to the payment of expenses.

The Commission on Ministry presents Bill No 5 to the General Synod for consideration.

10. Retirement Planning for Clergy

As reported to the General Synod 2008, the Commission on Ministry held two retirement courses for clergy, one in Northern Ireland and one in the Republic of Ireland.

Both courses were well received and the RCB Stipends Committee has secured funding for further courses in 2009.

11. Younger Ordinands

The consultation held in Dublin in May 2006, entitled *Younger Ordinands and the Church*, highlighted the present rather high age profile of ordinands and the need to attract younger candidates.

The Central Director of Ordinands, Rev Canon KM Poulton, undertook to produce a promotional DVD in conjunction with Mr G Fromholz, aimed at attracting younger candidates.

The DVD has been completed and includes interviews with third year students from the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, the school Chaplain from Newpark Comprehensive School, a member from the Wells Project in Belfast and a number of serving clergy from a variety of different parishes.

12. Missional Ministry for the West of Ireland

The Very Rev SM Patterson has produced a significant document on missional ministry for the west of Ireland. A summary of this report is included as Appendix C on page 330. This document will be a substantial resource for the work of the Commission on Ministry in this area in the coming year.

APPENDIX A

RESOLUTIONS TO BE PROPOSED TO THE GENERAL SYNOD

1. Development of Mission/Pioneer Leaders

This General Synod recognises the need for training and developing leaders equipped to serve in a variety of pioneer contexts, both lay and ordained in Ireland. This General Synod directs the Commission on Ministry and Council for Mission to jointly develop proposals for how such leaders might be trained and deployed, duly consulting with all appropriate and relevant bodies.

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF REPORT ON READER MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

Very Rev Dr Susan Patterson

Introduction

The Commission on Ministry, in consultation with the Bishop in charge of Reader Ministry, decided that it would be appropriate and helpful for a survey of reader ministry to be carried in advance of the Conference being held to mark the occasion of the Centenary of reader ministry in 2009. The aims and objectives of the survey were to elicit information and provide an opportunity for reader feedback of various kinds, including expression of feelings, in the hope that this would help focus discussion at the Conference and, further, assist any reviewing of policy with regard to reader ministry. It was also hoped that the survey would in itself assure readers that their opinions and concerns were valued and worthy of serious consideration.

The following is a less technical summary of the full report, a copy of which is available on the resource page of the Church of Ireland website.¹

Methodology

A questionnaire was sent out by post to all diocesan readers listed in the 2008 Church of Ireland Directory. We regret that some readers, whose details were not listed in this edition, were missed, also that some retired readers still listed in this edition as serving were included. The questionnaire was designed to include 'tick the box' multiple choice answers plus the opportunity to add further comments on training, vocation, ministry direction, and anything else considered relevant. The areas surveyed were training (pre-commissioning and ongoing), duties (including expenses and whether a written ministry description had been agreed), vocational questions, support, and overall ministry satisfaction. To guarantee confidentiality and thereby allow a full and frank response to questions, the questionnaire was anonymous. The foregoing of collection of personal data did limit the analysis but was felt to be essential in the circumstances. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter from the Chairperson of the Commission on Ministry (Rt Revd Ken Good) and the Bishop in charge of Reader Ministry, (Rt Revd Ken Clarke).

Research questions

The following were the questions to which it was hoped the data would provide answers:

1. To what extent, if any, does the type and scope of pre-commissioning training affect deployment and overall ministry satisfaction?
2. To what extent, if any, are the existence, nature and extent of ongoing training reflected in both training and overall ministry satisfaction?
3. To what extent, if any, does scope of deployment (size of area covered and range of duties) influence ministry satisfaction?

¹ This summary should be read only as a guide to the full report which presents the data in statistical form with the usual indicators of significance in relation to particular results.

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4. To what extent, if any, is the level and type of expenses paid reflected in satisfaction or dissatisfaction with support and overall ministry?
5. To what extent, if any, is the type and amount of ministry support reflected in satisfaction or dissatisfaction with support and overall ministry?
6. What are the respective relative importance of initial training, ongoing training, scope of deployment, and ministry support in regards to overall ministry satisfaction?

Analysis and results

The intention was to survey the entire population of readers. However, of the 298 questionnaires sent out, only 171 were returned. Of these, 3 were blank and 45 others were incomplete to a greater or lesser degree. Wherever possible the results from these incomplete questionnaires have been included in the analysis. *Because of the low response rate it is important to be conservative in drawing conclusions and take the trends revealed, however strong, to be suggestive rather than decisive.*

The analysis carried out comprised in the first instance descriptive statistics. [These are contained in Appendix B of the full report.] The following is a summary of these results.

1. Length of service: approximately one third of readers had served for more than 20 years, another third for between 11 and 20 years, and the remaining third for 10 years or less.
2. Education and training: just over half had a tertiary qualification prior to training. Most readers were given training prior to commissioning of between 2 and 4 years in duration involving 4 or more subjects. In roughly two thirds of cases this was delivered via regular classes supplemented in a quarter of these situations with other teaching methods. The remainder were taught via either distance learning or less formal methods, including one-to-one sessions with a tutor or warden. Only one fifth of readers received any award or certificate for their training as such, apart from a readers' licence. Just over one third of readers were receiving no ongoing in-service training. Less than one fifth of readers expressed themselves as less than happy with their training.
3. Duties: almost two-thirds of readers performed one or more other duties as well as taking services and all but a small minority worked beyond their own parish, group, or union. Mileage was paid in two-thirds of cases and half of these received other allowances in addition. Of those not receiving mileage, just over half received fees for services. Only just over one fifth of readers had agreed written ministry descriptions with wardens or rectors.
4. Satisfaction: readers were asked to rate their satisfaction with training, expenses, and their ministry overall. Satisfaction levels were generally high, over four fifths being moderately to completely satisfied with their training, four fifths being moderately to completely satisfied with their expenses, and all but four individuals considering

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that their expectations of reader ministry had been moderately to completely satisfied.

Further analysis was carried out to establish what relationships, if any, existed between these variables or factors. It is important to recognise that in a study of this kind ‘significant relationship’ can only be taken as suggestive of possible causality between variables. We may have established here that a pair of variables co-relates but to try to confirm that one causes the other would require a different study. Second, it has also to be emphasised that the statistical correlations found between these variables were, at best, only moderate in strength [Appendix C in the full report contains all the statistics relating to these findings]. With these points in mind we can examine the eight significant statistical relationships that were found: three negative and five positive. They are listed here in decreasing order of strength.

1. The longer the length of service, the *less* the satisfaction with training.
2. The higher the level of education prior to ministry, the *less* the overall satisfaction with ministry.
3. The higher the level of pre-commissioning training, the *less* the overall satisfaction with ministry.
4. The greater the amount of support given in ministry, the *greater* the satisfaction with that support.
5. The greater the amount of support given in ministry, the *greater* the satisfaction with training.
6. The greater the satisfaction with training, the *greater* the satisfaction with ministry overall.
7. The greater the scope of deployment in terms of territory covered, the *greater* the satisfaction with ministry overall.
8. The higher the level attained with training, the *greater* the satisfaction with training.

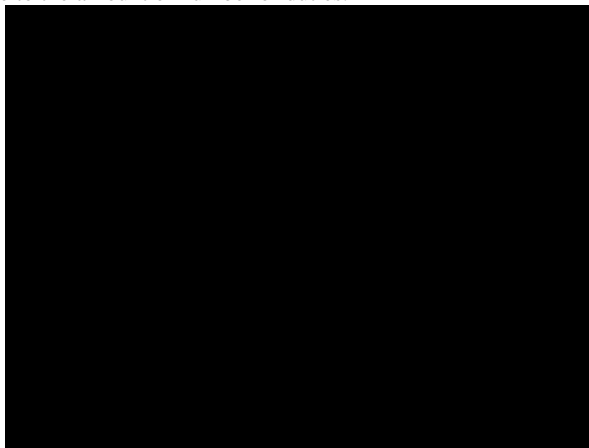
Some of these relationships may seem entirely unsurprising; others (such as the first three) seem puzzling. Would the inverse relationship between length of service and satisfaction reflect an improvement in reader training over the years? And could the inverse relationships of both prior education and level of pre-commissioning training with overall ministry satisfaction have something to do with level of expectations?

It was hoped that analysis of some of the other non-numerical data through grouping into categories would cast some light on these findings. One interesting discovery was that significantly more ministry satisfaction appears to derive from pre-commissioning training involving one-to-one sessions with a tutor than from any other of the methods surveyed. However, no relationship was revealed between *ongoing* training type and ministry satisfaction.

Another finding was a possibly significant relationship between a preference for the status quo in duties (compared to an increase or decrease in duties) and ministry satisfaction. However, the present level of work needs to be taken into account when interpreting this. This finding may appear inconsistent with no. 7 above, but it must be noted that the relationship there is between extent of territory covered – whether one or

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more parishes or groups or unions, or an entire diocese (or more than one diocese) – and does not relate to the amount or number of duties.



We are now in a position to consider what answers may have been revealed to the questions posed earlier:-

1. To what extent, if any, do the type, level and scope of pre-commissioning training affect deployment (number and geographical scope of duties) and overall ministry satisfaction?

There is a significant relationship between level of pre-commissioning training and satisfaction with training, as might be expected. There also appears to be a significant relationship between the type of training received prior to commissioning and subsequent ministry satisfaction – one-to-one sessions with a tutor standing out in this regard (see graph above – statistics are given in the full report). However level of training does not appear to influence the number (or range) of duties subsequently undertaken, the territory covered by such duties, or overall ministry satisfaction. Interestingly, it is the level of education prior to training which is seen to have the connection with number (range) of duties. And this variable (level of prior education) also relates strongly to subsequent ministry satisfaction. One might speculate that this variable constitutes a measure of ability, at least as perceived and acted upon by others in a position to decide on deployment (see below). As well, the scope of pre-commissioning training as reflected in the number of subjects studied relates significantly but probably unsurprisingly to the number (range) of duties undertaken subsequently in ministry.

2. To what extent, if any, is the type of ongoing training reflected in satisfaction with training, satisfaction with support, and overall ministry satisfaction?

The analysis showed little or no relationship between the type or ongoing training and any of the areas of satisfaction measured, perhaps surprisingly in the light of comments made about the need for more training in relation to frustrations in ministry. (See above).

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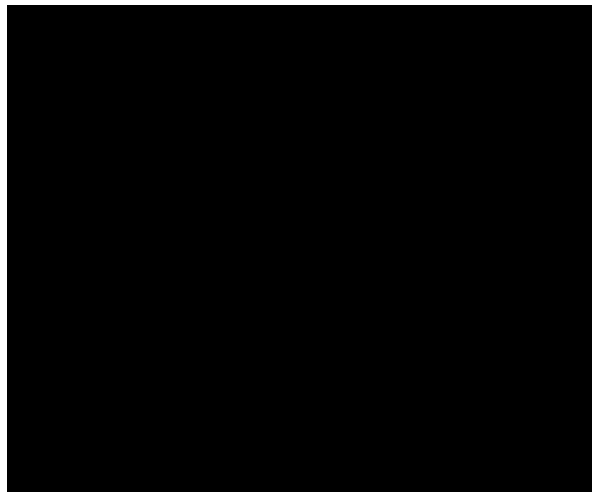
3. To what extent, if any, does scope of deployment (size of area covered and number of duties) influence ministry satisfaction?

The internal association between the two ‘duty’ variables is in itself insignificant – perhaps surprisingly. Number (range) of duties does not correlate significantly with overall ministry satisfaction; however there is a significant positive association between geographical scope of duty and satisfaction with ministry. Those readers who are deployed on a diocesan-wide basis seem happier with their ministry.

4. To what extent, if any, is the type of expenses paid reflected in satisfaction or dissatisfaction with support and degree to which expectations of ministry have been realised?

In the first instance it seems reasonable to relate types of expenses paid to satisfaction with expenses. Unsurprisingly, those who received no expenses or do not claim them appear significantly less happy with their expenses than those who receive the various types, who appear undifferentiated.

While there appears to be no relation between type of expenses paid and satisfaction with support received, there appears to be a decisive if odd connection between type of expenses paid and ministry satisfaction. The three types of regular expenses seem on a par, averaging ‘mainly satisfied’. Readers are less satisfied with the second, more occasional category of expenses if paid these alone. But they are most happy with their ministry when they are receiving no expenses at all – or when not claiming them where they would be entitled to them! This quirky finding should be explored further. It certainly should not be used as policy ammunition!



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5. To what extent, if any, is the type of ministry support reflected in satisfaction/dissatisfaction with support and realisation of ministry expectations?

The relationship between support type and support satisfaction is a positive one. *Personal* support from a support person such as a rector, warden, or spiritual director is valued more highly than courses in spiritual development or ministry formation. Unsurprisingly, all of these are preferred to no support at all.

6. What are the respective relative importance of level of initial training, type of ongoing training, scope of deployment, and ministry support in regards to overall ministry satisfaction?

This ‘relativity question’ is made difficult to answer by the differing types of data here as the varying amounts and types cannot be compared simply. However, what appears to have emerged is that the types of training and support that most influence ministry satisfaction are those which offer personal one-to-one contact with tutor or support person. That the relationship between training, support, and ministry is an important one is underlined by the strong relationships between the degree of satisfaction expressed in relation to these. More understanding of the components of ministry satisfaction is provided by readers’ grouped comments, the most significant of which (collectively accounting for almost half of the responses) were:

Affirmation and support from people.
Sermon preparation & preaching.
Pastoral work/visiting/contact with people.
Joy/privilege/happiness in serving/helping.

The relationship between scope of deployment (number of duties) in relation to geographical spread of work (territory covered) also seems a significant determiner of ministry satisfaction, although it is interesting that it does not feature in the main grouping above.

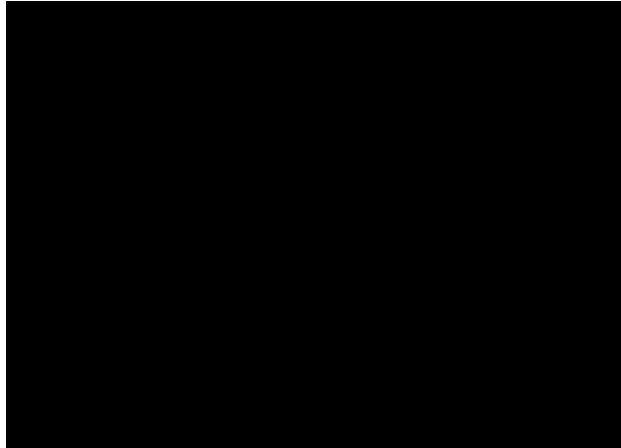
The negative relationships are rather harder to explain. Why should level of education prior to training have a negative impact on ministry satisfaction? Is it because better educated people have higher expectations? And why should level of pre-commissioning training have a negative impact on satisfaction with support? Is it because those who received superior training tend to be disappointed with the subsequent level of ongoing training and support? Areas of frustration mentioned might have provided a clue, but collectively they account for only just over one third of respondents. The two most ‘popular’ were mentioned by just over one tenth of respondents. These were

Poor relationship or treatment or lack of contact with rector/clergy.
Insufficient training.

The various comments supplied by respondents are summarised in Appendix B of the full report.

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The other main comment areas are to do with calling and general comments about reader ministry (see below). The information about calling is summarised here in a graph:



Suggestions made by respondents regarding what would make their ministry more effective

These were as follows:

- More/ongoing training (31%)
- More contact with other readers (13%)
- More support (including provision of retreats/quiet days (10%)
- Being used more often or more widely (incl. pastoral work and H.C.) (13%)
- Better clergy/reader relationship/better communication (7%)
- Better fee structure (2 %)
- More than one of the above (12%)

Recommendations made by respondents regarding Reader ministry

These are best left to stand alone. They have been collated into five categories:

1. Training issues: [31% of respondents]
 - Better use of distance learning
 - Bi-monthly meetings to develop communication and belonging
 - Clarification of role of warden
 - Common curriculum and qualification
 - Voice-production training
 - Annual diocesan training weekends
 - Use of internet as resource
 - More flexible training options

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More practical training including preaching practice
Cross-diocesan reader meetings
More reader-focused training
Fast-track training options to take account of experience
Running in-service training concurrent with final stage of preliminary training.
Standardized and relevant ongoing training.
Weekend refresher courses.
Structured training for deployment of readers in vacancy situations.

2. Personnel issues: [30% of respondents]

Better clergy-reader communication/relations
Clarification of mutual expectations between rectors and readers
Development of Reader involvement in team ministries
Under- and over-deployment – lack of ministry descriptions/agreements between incumbents and readers.
Lack of contact with and support by rector.
New ways of affirming quality and status of reader ministry.
More appreciation of reader ministry.
More opportunities for readers to get together for fellowship, support, mutual learning.

3. Deployment issues: [13% of respondents]

Better spread of Readers in a diocese – too many in some parishes.
Training of clergy in how to utilise readers in team ministry
Concern youth leaders may supplant Readers
Continued development of the distinctiveness of lay ministry
Development of spiritual direction as a Reader ministry
Fuller ministry role for Readers
More Holy Communion by extension
More involvement of Readers in Holy Communion services
More pastoral care work
Reader exchanges between parishes and further afield
Administrative role for Readers
Oversight of vacant parishes
Sensitivity to travel cost issues
Sensitivity to context when deploying

4. Structural issues: [7% of respondents]

Clarification/review warden/s role as enabler of reader ministry
Lay Presidency
Review of expenses/fees structure
Relation of clergy and Reader roles
Readers as permanent Deacons
Readers as ministers-in-charge (in long vacancies or remote areas)

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Readers taking weddings and funerals
Readers as administrators.
Role exchanges between Methodist lay preachers and Readers.
Some relaxation of rules and regulations needed.

5. Recruitment issues: [5% of respondents]

More flexible training options
Encourage reader ministry among young people.
Give opportunity for greater use of gifts in reader ministry – wider, more varied role.
More encouragement of reader ministry by clergy.
Better marketing of reader ministry by Church.

6. Commendations/warnings: [5% of respondents]

Thank you for opportunity to rant!
Will be great to see anniversary properly marked
Pleased interest being taken in readers.
Concern survey might dictate rather than facilitate.

Final comments and policy implications

This research cannot be a basis for drawing hard conclusions about reader ministry in Ireland because of (1) the low return rate of questionnaires (more than 40% of readers failed to respond at all), and (2) the largely moderate level of statistical association between the factors under consideration. Notwithstanding these qualifications, it can be said that sufficient concerns were registered about training and support measures to suggest steps should be taken to refine and strengthen their impact. Overall, the things that readers valued most was *personal* support and encouragement in the areas of pre- and post-commissioning training and ministry support, but the results suggest that there is some room for improvement in these areas.

Arguably there also needs to be more ongoing *monitoring* of satisfaction concerning training and support measures as well as overall ministry satisfaction and I believe this study underlines the present plans to institute more quality of control and standardisation of training and support measures. If the survey helps to focus concerns to be addressed at the conference and beyond it will have succeeded in some measure.

I believe that the other major aim of this survey has been achieved: namely, to offer readers a long overdue opportunity to express their views and feelings about their training, vocation, support and practical ministry issues. There were many cries from the heart on the questionnaire forms! I hope the respondents will feel they have been heard and taken seriously, both in the report and its repercussions.

September 2008 – February 2009

APPENDIX C

MISSIONAL MINISTRY FOR THE WEST OF IRELAND²

Very Rev Dr Susan Patterson

Introduction:

My interest in this topic arose out of the research I did in 2007 in relation to alternative ministry models in the west. As I looked at the scene in the western dioceses, it became clear that scattered people and overstretched resources were only part of the problem: there were large areas of country, ostensibly contained within existing parish groupings, in which the Church of Ireland had effectively ceased to exist – that is, churches had been closed and the nearest churches were too distant to be a realistic option for people living in these areas. These areas are typically, although not always, on the margins of dioceses, whether coastal edges or near borders with other dioceses. This revelation of not merely struggling areas of ministry but actual abandonment of ministry led me to ask two questions: first, why had this occurred? Second, what could or should be done about it?

The ‘why’ question: geography, history, and demography

The ‘why’ of the dying out of at least the visible Church of Ireland – the worshipping church – in the areas identified could be said to be due to a complex interaction of geographical, demographic and historical factors.

First, geography: my study of maps of civil parishes in relation to diocesan data and physical maps revealed, first, that where they occur on the coastal edges of dioceses, these de-churched areas tend to relate to isolated far reaches with low population densities, although, paradoxically, difficult terrain has preserved some small churches from amalgamation or closure. Second, where they occur in inland diocesan border regions, de-churched areas are not confined to one diocese but occur on both sides of the border, in one major case, affecting three dioceses.

Second, history: many parishes with churches built by the Board of First Fruits were not ever really viable parishes – the population was too thin to sustain the number of churches which was based on the civil parish system. Some of these disappeared or were amalgamated very early on. Those parishes which had not acquired the habit of self-sufficiency following disestablishment – sometimes because their main funders, the gentry and civil servants, left too soon – were far more likely not to survive. More recent shrinkages may be attributed to

² This paper is a summary of the full report which contains more detailed analysis and specific material including maps and graphs. This can be accessed on the Church of Ireland website resources page: <http://www.ireland.anglican.org/index.php?do=information&id=175>

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rural depopulation, both during the tough times in the mid twentieth century when many emigrated to find work, and then more recently with children in rural areas leaving for education and not returning.

Third, demography - people movements: physical factors in relation to isolation can and have been reduced by better infrastructure. Demography is another matter. In recent years the exodus of people from the west of Ireland has been reversed with an influx of migrants as Ireland opened its doors to refugees and later to economic migrants from an enlarged E.U. In

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and building maintenance in this place. If the tail of survival is not to wag the dog of outreach, it will be important not to confuse the *work* of mission as such with church growth strategies on the one hand, and community service on the other – although these things are intimately linked with it. A church ‘must constantly examine its own self-understanding’ in order to become truly missional and not guilty of ‘only tactical attempts to breathe new life into old structures’.³

So who does mission and how do they do it? The ‘ordinary Christian’ in our churches is likely to believe that mission is something others do; their responsibility is to help fund their activity. Another related misconception is that mission is a professional area of ministry to be undertaken only by those properly trained for it. The ‘ordinary parishioner’ is not to be expected to have the skills or to be granted the authority to carry out such work. This is not to suggest that training is unimportant; yet to concentrate on professionalism overlooks another factor which is not common lay parlance – that of vocation. To be called to mission must be the fundamental requirement for missional ministry, and to be so called is not to presuppose existing training (although it will require training – not necessarily formal academic training), and it is not to presuppose a call to ordained ministry, although it may be expressed through that.

If the people presently occupying the pews – and perhaps also the prayer desks and pulpits – are unable or disinclined to be involved in mission, then it follows that the people who will do the mission are likely to be people other than these: people who come in from outside. This may well be a significant way forward as ‘using the difficulty’ of the shortage of internal resources gives newcomers a vital role and lets in fresh thinking and energy. These people may then model missional ministry for others. Working alongside is important, even if this is more permissive than active, because local ownership is important if spiritual unity is to be preserved. A real effort needs to be made to reach and involve residual local church populations in areas where churches have been closed, giving them a sense of ownership in a new local mission project however foreign in church terms it may seem to them.

The ‘what’ of mission

When it comes to type of project, traditional Anglican notions of local mission along the lines of church-plants have been recently supplemented overwhelmingly by the various new ventures loosely termed ‘fresh expressions of church’.⁴ The fresh expressions of church movement is a burgeoning mission-focused initiative that has grown and spread ahead of analysis and formal structuring, although those are beginning now to catch up. The term ‘fresh

³For a definition of mission for the Church of Ireland, see the House of Bishops Mission Statement for the Church of Ireland: <http://www.ireland.anglican.org/index.php?do=information&id=170>

⁴ See the Fresh Expressions website www.freshexpressions.org.uk

expression of church' was first used to describe a range of twelve different types of activity 'all of which reflected a desire and movement to go to where people are and let the culture, the context and the mission of God shape the resulting new community.'⁵ Fresh expressions of church are very much grass-roots local initiatives. The common thread is that they are focused on going out to where people are – whether in pubs, streets, community centres, nightclubs, or cafés – and meeting them at their point of need. As initiatives develop, it is important that there is movement toward being explicitly, identifiably church, which of course is not the same thing as becoming traditionally church, although the co-existence of traditional and new ways of being church has the potential to be mutually enriching. Then there are the questions of how to address quality-control and accountability issues, and how to address the structural issues in relation to authority and working ecumenically. We in the Church of Ireland face the challenge of coming up with indigenous solutions: a simple import of structural remedies will not work due to differences in structures and ethos.

I believe this style of mission would work in the west of Ireland for two reasons: first, over recent years the west has had an influx of migrants, some from elsewhere in Ireland, most from overseas. The non-Irish majority of these are unfamiliar with the Church of Ireland and would find its ways alien – this can be the case even for people from neighbouring Anglican churches! Second, the exponential increase in secularism means that many people living in the west, in particular young people, have no experience of church at all and are most unlikely to seek out an existing traditional church or attend a parish mission. New ways of doing mission are needed for a changing population.

The 'how to' question: structures and scope, strategy and method

The type of mission initiative will vary both with what is contextually appropriate and with distance from the resourcing church or churches which will affect both what might be done and the numbers available to do it. This is likely to be particularly the case in the west of Ireland where resources are thinner and distances greater. There are both principled and pragmatic reasons why mission projects, however remote in location, should not be simply a diocesan responsibility. Most importantly, the work of mission is an imperative for all Christians. The proclaiming of the gospel to all nations begins with the love of neighbour that reaches those in the midst and then in the hinterland of existing parishes, where that hinterland may extend for some distance and could be the joint responsibility of several parishes. Unless local people are involved the project will lack the impetus of prayerful local ownership and encourage people back into the trap of thinking that mission is something that other people do. Ideally parish and diocese would form a partnership in mission, the diocese providing the motivation through policy, encouragement, and support, allaying fears that the thing is going to outstretch local know-how and bankrupt local resources, and keeping the project on track in

⁵ See Steven Croft (ed.) *Mission-shaped Questions*, London: Church House Publishing, 2008; p. 2.

terms of accountability and progress. The parish would in turn be the source of vision, prayer, and local personnel – who may well be supplemented by people attracted from the outside to what is going on.

While it is good to have in mind a particular sort of location and type of premises, it is important not to let assumptions about these prevent openness to other, possibly better options. Likewise, it is also important not to limit the scope of the project according to the present vision but leave room to allow the Spirit to do a new thing in future. Generally speaking, the less mechanistic the approach the better. Things that grow organically to fit their context are more likely to be effective. Where ‘top-down’ is effective is in the area of support – resourcing and enabling local ventures through facilitating, training and funding that could be vital in getting things off the ground and helping them to continue to function. Regarding size of project: evidence suggests that small is actually better, provided there is careful planning, research, and patience in implementation. Small beginnings are good, and small scale as a goal may be good too. Most fresh expressions of church are small and modest. Size is in no way correlated with success in reaching people with the gospel.

Information gathering:

It is vital that this stage in planning a project is not left out. Census population information is mostly in the public domain and readily available on-line.⁶ Some ‘where’ and ‘what’ questions may be provisionally answered even before a community audit is undertaken in deciding the. Which areas have seen an increase in people identifying themselves as Church of Ireland and/or as having no religion? These are the target populations for a church already established in the area, or, where there is no church, for a church seeking to plant a mission project either within the boundaries of its union or group, or beyond. An examination of the 2006 census data on religion by area for western counties reveals a considerable if unsurprising overlap between those areas identified as de-churched and an outnumbering of Church of Ireland people by those who claim to have no religion. A corollary of this is that re-churching these areas is more a matter of reaching the un-churched than re-engaging residual de-churched Church of Ireland populations (although it may involve that as well). Unsurprisingly there is an urban factor in this, the cities of Galway and Limerick having far higher proportions of people claiming to have no religion. Traditionally, rural people have been both more conservative in their beliefs and less exposed to secularising influences. From this information it is obvious, before any mission audits are carried out, that the old notion that mission would inevitably be an exercise in sheep-stealing can be regarded as effectively dead in the water. There are many un-churched or de-churched people in our midst. The task is then to discover the characteristics of these people, and where they might be clustered.

⁶ <http://www.cso.ie>

Who is out there?

The particular people who may be reached by a particular project in a particular *place* can in part be answered from census information relating to age-structures, therefore it is important to consider the age-profile of a particular location? What does that tell us about the sort of mission strategy that should be employed - or for that matter, whether that location is a suitable one for a mission project? (*See the full report for more information on how to interpret census data*)

Young un-churched people are a priority in any mission situation. While Irish society (Northern and Republic) is not yet post-Christian, secularisation is increasing and it is significant that the majority of our un-churched and de-churched populations are young people. Every parishioner knows that the biggest group who are absent from our churches are the teens through twenties. It is simply no use inviting these young people to come (back) to church. It is necessary to go out to where they are and meet them at their point of want or need. Such programmes, to be effective, require the involvement of gifted members of the peer group in leadership, mentoring, and team roles. These people are likely to be newcomers to the parish, people attracted by the vision of mission because that is where their gifting and their passion lies.

Plans of action

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all model of mission. The fundamental principle is that the plan must be God's plan and the project must be to do Christ's work in the world. For this reason, if prayerful envisioning is the first task of mission, discipling is the next. It is instructive to consider the way the first Christian missionaries were trained: they were called to follow, to learn by observing, instructing and doing - to form a team, an apostolic community of apprentices learning on the job, taught and mentored by their Master. Therefore the first plan of action is to locate, teach and mentor the ones who will do the mission in his name. The project-focused praxis model emerges both out of and alongside this discipling model: envisioning, information gathering, action, then reflection upon the action followed by adjustment of the vision where necessary, more information gathering, more action etc.

There is also need for specific training in mission to equip people for the work of proclaiming the gospel in the world in word and deed. This may happen along the way, as training needs are identified in a gathering group of people. The primary task of training in missional (or 'pioneer') ministry is to develop the twin skills of biblical-theological reflection and cultural sensitivity in a given context. The context-particularity of such training means that it cannot be carried out in some central location or by distance-learning unless it also involves an adequate proportion of time spent on placement in a real mission situation.

Who should lead the project? Not necessarily the trainer. Sometimes the project will dictate this. Probably more often than not – it will be a matter of who is available and who has the

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energy for it. Obviously lay leadership does not simply emerge out of the air! Any project will begin with the vision of a few who may not necessarily stay on as leaders through to the running stage of the project. Those who are versed in such projects stress the importance of lay leadership and the formation of a core group of people committed to the project who will meet together to pray and envision and then be a means of drawing others in. Paradoxically, when it comes to local mission development, the church may in fact be the very worst place from which to reach the un-churched because the horizon of understanding will be no wider than what is already known, understood, and appreciated within what is probably an inward-looking community with particular vested interests which will relate to tradition, identity, survival, familiarity, and comfort zones. Teams formed out of people 'on the edge' for which clergy and/or lay leaders are facilitators and enablers (rather than front-runners or solo-flyers), and into which other church members may be drawn as they are encouraged by developments, are far more effective. *The logic is to place the epicentre of energy and commitment where the project is to be and then attract the people and resources to that point.*⁷

Training the trainers. If clergy and lay leaders are to be able to facilitate and enable new local leaders and members of mission teams, they themselves need to be trained for this rather different role. At present in the Church of Ireland, only Church Army officers receive this training. The apostolic nature of mission means that the diocesan bishop is the primary Missioner, who delegates apostolic authority to those charged with the carrying out of that mission, whether clergy or lay. This means that the bishop is also the primary *enabler* of mission, and as such, has the responsibility of enabling those charged with the carrying out of mission, including those to whom s/he delegates the enabling of missionary teams. If clergy are to undertake this enabling work in a devolved way, they themselves need to be trained to do it. This training is now identified and about to be implemented as a part of pre-ordination theological education, but something has to be done about in-service training of current clergy.

The decision also has to be taken at episcopal/diocesan level as to whether the enablers of mission – incumbents or other leaders - will also be the *trainers* of mission teams. There are pros and cons to this. The pros are that such training can be organic and informal in nature, undertaken as the need arises and building on existing relationships. The cons are that this may be an inefficient (and inconsistent) delivery system involving far more time and energy on the part of individual people who are already carrying too heavy a workload. Training may be more effectively organised and consistently delivered at diocesan or even inter-diocesan level, which is not to say that it should be overly formalised or centralised.

Moving on from where things are: some conclusions....

Reviews of the history behind de-churched areas in the west and of the present status quo reveal, I believe, a Church of Ireland in the west which has, for a long time, been marginal in

⁷ See Martin Robinson, *Planting Mission-Shaped Churches Today*, p. 78ff.

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much of its ‘territory’ and now faces disappearance, possibly in a generation, outside of the main centres of cities and large towns. This situation, though dire and seemingly terminal, does not in any way excuse those of us who minister in the west from the imperative of mission. Mission is not an option; it is a command. We have to trust that God will enable his mission to happen in this land. However, lack of resources – people and money – hinder any sort of mission activity in a region where the scenario is that of medium to large groupings or unions of parishes with barely enough clergy and lay leaders to maintain them. It is a catch 22 situation in which the growth and activity which would attract and engage the newcomers who have been identified as those most likely to become involved in mission may be beyond the energies of the committed core, even if the vision is there. And so there is the vicious circle of missing out on the revitalising effect that engagement in local mission brings to a church.

The advantage of going down the ‘fresh expressions’ pathway in the west is two-fold: this is a flexible approach to mission that enables, in fact requires, a grass-roots contextual structure; fresh expressions of church may be developed that pick up on particular aspects of culture and religion in the west. Second, because this is now an established missional approach, there are already resources available in the north and elsewhere in the U.K. Any developments at central church level which would enable clergy to be licensed specifically for ‘pioneer’ (mission-focused) ministry (as with the Bishop’s Mission Order in the Church of England) will further assist with the implementation of such a programme. I believe that the establishment of a distinctive diaconal ministry in the Church of Ireland should be an integral part of such a development.

However, in order for such a vision to be realised, there is, first and foremost, the need to encourage and facilitate the discipling that is fundamental to equipping for mission. By its nature, teaching requires small groups. Scattered communities mean a multiplication of these without an accompanying multiplication of people capable of leading and teaching. In addition to more people-resources, there is also the need for in-service training that would equip rectors and potentially lay leaders (as additional people-resources) for a discipling, teaching and enabling role, but also for the task of strategic leadership.

Structural implications

For these things to happen, I see diocesan/parish mission partnerships underwritten by a thorough-going diocesan policy of and commitment to mission as being an urgent necessity. Failure to have a policy that addresses the shrinkage of the western church is in effect to have an unstated default policy that pays lip service to a parochial structure while permitting a trend in the direction of a gathered church, as stronger urban and large town churches attract members from their hinterland, thereby increasing the size of the de-churched areas, and eventually making a parochial structure unviable for most of the diocesan territory. Given scant diocesan resources, policy and implementation may well be best achieved on a regional, rather than diocesan basis. There is undoubtedly commitment to being a missional church at

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episcopal level. How to get it to filter down to promote and support local grassroots initiatives is the challenge. Centralised commitment to the planning and resourcing of mission developments is essential, yet I believe that this will be ineffective unless something is done to bridge the yawning gap between central and (in the west, very stretched) diocesan structures which at this point simply cannot consistently reach beyond the maintenance task.

A regional approach in which western dioceses work together to come up with a vision, strategy, and plans and joint resources for mission structures and related deployment is, I suggest, a remedy that may overcome these obstacles. Resource and policy sharing at that intermediate level allows an economy of scale as well as the ability to address regional particularities (issues and problems shared at this macro-local level which are not necessarily the focus or priority of the Church of Ireland as a whole), or simply to deal with things such as continuing ministerial training which seem to be the bridge-too-far for both central educational structures and individual dioceses. In their book, *Church Next*, Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey⁸ talk about the ‘plan-do’ strategy that needs to characterise the church of tomorrow if it is to flourish in 21st century society. I believe the time is overdue to both train and prepare and plan and do if the Church of Ireland in the west is to transform itself into the missional church that will both honour its Christian calling and ensure its survival.

December 2008

⁸ Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey: *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2001;