

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

REPORT 2013

1. Membership

House of Bishops

The Rt Rev Michael Burrows (Chair)

Standing Committee

Rev Brian Harper

General Synod - Clerical

Rev Canon Terence Scott

Rev Dorothy McVeigh

Very Rev Katharine Poulton

Pensions Board

Rev Edward Woods

General Synod – Lay

Mr Andrew McNeile

Mr Denis Johnston

The Representative Church Body

Mrs Lorna Gleasure

Venerable Leslie Stevenson

Director of the Theological Institute

Rev Dr Maurice Elliott

Honorary Secretaries

Rev George Davison

Co-opted

Mr Greg Fromholz

Central Director of Ordinands

Venerable Robert Miller

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 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 archbishops and bishops, the Standing Committee and the Representative Church Body.

3. Summary

The Commission on Ministry concentrated on the following issues:

- The Future of Ministry Provision, particularly in changing urban environments and in small rural communities that have become heavily reliant on Non-stipendiary Ministry (NSM);
- Retirement Planning for Clergy;
- Mid-career Vocation Programme for Clergy;
- Self-care for clergy.

4. Emerging Priorities

The Commission, after significant changes in membership following the expiry of the terms of office of a number of members at the 2012 Synod, decided to take stock of its agenda and priorities. It would wish to place on record its debt to the outgoing commissioners, and especially to the Bishop of Derry who provided visionary and energetic leadership and focus for its work through the years.

It was felt that the continued provision of pre-retirement courses for clergy and opportunities for 'mid-career' review and training remained vital tasks. The Commission was also grateful to be afforded the opportunity to complete its contribution to the review of the tied housing situation for the clergy initiated by the Standing Committee.

It was also felt that the provision of Continuing Ministry Education (CME) for bishops and induction training for newly elected bishops were issues deserving of urgent attention and suggestions have been forwarded to the House of Bishops. Close contact is also being maintained with the Commission reviewing the nature and provision of Episcopal ministry across the Church. This is one example of where the tasks of Church committees concerned with ministry and mission overlap and due care must be taken, in a structured and sustained way, to ensure that such committees feed into the work of one another instead of appearing to operate simply in parallel. The Commission is grateful for the attention to this matter being given by the Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod at this time.

Other areas, some more novel, identified for consideration by the Commission during the year are identified in paragraph 7.

5. Retirement Planning for Clergy

The Commission has continued with its very helpful and practical pre-retirement courses for clergy.

At the time of writing a further course is planned for 29 and 30 April 2013. The Commission are very grateful to the work carried out by Ms Ruth Handy and Ms Lorna Gleasure.

6. Mid-Career Vocation Programme for Clergy

There was a very positive response to the Mid-Career training course. It was agreed that the Mid-Career programme was a valuable one and should be maintained. The next programme is planned for 28 and 29 May 2013 in the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. The Commission are very grateful for the work carried out by Ms Ruth Handy and the Very Rev Chris Peters in organising this programme and equally grateful to Canon Terry Scott for agreeing to step in as convenor following Ms Handy's stepping down from the role.

7. The Future of Ministry/Urban and Pioneering Ministry

Following the visionary paper offered as a challenging parting reflection by the Bishop of Derry to the Commission and to the wider Church (as reported to the General Synod of 2012) the Commission continued to reflect at length on the future trajectory of the Irish Church, its emerging ministry needs and the need for courage and imagination particularly in urban areas where issues such as Church planting and training for pioneer ministry need to be taken much more seriously than heretofore. Assisted by a paper produced by Mr Andrew McNeile which was discussed at two of our meetings, the Commission decided to place before the 2013 Synod a motion which would aim to articulate the commitment of the Church to pioneer ministry and training for it, and seek 'to tip the balance' with regard to achieving action in that area. It is recognised that the Church's future in many areas demands willingness to embrace those with particular gifts in terms of outreach and Church planting, but that our existing models of ministry and methods of training make it problematical for the Church to handle fruitfully the distinctive vocations of those called to pioneer-style ministry. A resolution seeking the engagement of the Church with this matter and the provision of some sense of direction will be put to the General Synod, and the text is quoted at the foot of this report.

8. Models of Rural Ministry

Meanwhile, with the assistance of the Very Rev Katharine Poulton and the Venerable Leslie Stevenson, the Commission carefully considered the future ministry needs of small rural congregations, particularly in terms of Eucharistic provision and pastoral care. There is some concern that, notwithstanding the general quality of current ordination training and the need to avoid reviewing its basic principles over-hastily, there is likely to be a decline in the number of NSM clergy available in the coming years especially in the rural dioceses. Some other parts of the Anglican Communion have addressed this by the provision of a locally ordained ministry, where in effect the worshipping community raises up for itself an acknowledged leader and pastor who is also in due course ordained for sacramental functions. While such priests are emphatically priests in every sense, there are definite boundaries in relation to their deployment and mobility; some come to such a ministry after significant service as a reader, or at a stage of life where training for wider ministry would not be envisaged. Ordained local ministry in such settings does not become a kind of 'back door' to other wider ministries but has its own integrity and indeed boundaries. It is recognised that, notwithstanding the relative urgency of the matter in several dioceses, significant issues of principle and of formation are raised here and the Commission has decided to organise a substantial encounter between its members and representatives of certain Church of England dioceses where Local Ordained Ministry has been used and the challenges as well as the benefits have been carefully assessed. This process may lead to the offering of fuller reflections and possibly recommendation to the Bishops and to the General Synod in due course.

9. Self Care for Clergy

The Commission also considered a paper from the Rev Dr Maurice Elliott on theology and practice of self care for clergy (Appendix). This was considered both timely and invaluable, and worthy of reproduction in full for consideration by the General Synod and the wider Church. While fully cognizant of the privileges and joys of a calling to ministry, the paper makes salutary comments about the challenges facing its practitioners in these times, and the need for the Church as a whole as well as the individuals themselves to face up to these.

10. Ministry and The Religious Life

The Commission has begun to consider the importance to the Church and to the refreshment of its ministry of engagement with religious orders and their community life of prayer. Many in the Church of Ireland find spiritual direction and nourishment not just through visits to Anglican religious communities (often outside Ireland) but also through centres of spirituality in Ireland such as the Benedictine houses at Glenstal and Rostrevor. Religious communities have long been a significant if small strand in Irish Anglicanism in both Dublin and Belfast and their role in encouraging renewal and in providing a spiritual heartbeat of prayer and witness among us needs perhaps to be considered in a more structured, receptive and ecumenical manner. This is one of the major themes the Commission has identified for the next phase of its work.

Acknowledgements

The Commission wishes to record its appreciation to outgoing members Mr Samuel Harper and Mr Peter Hamill and welcomes the Rev Brian Harper, the Venerable Robert Miller and the Rev George Davison to the Commission.

Resolution

That this House instructs the Commission on Ministry and respectfully requests the House of Bishops;

- To identify the issue of vocation to, and training for, Pioneer Ministry as a priority in the ministry strategy of the Church;
- To appoint a working group representative of both above mentioned bodies and of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute to explore ways forward in this matter;
- To report their findings to the General Synod via the Commission on Ministry as soon as possible.

APPENDIX A

Self-care for Clergy: Theology and Practice

IN THEIR survey of the history of personal identity, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*, Raymond Martin and John Barresi are surprisingly gloomy in their assessment of certain aspects of philosophical engagement with the subject. In one sense the notion of 'self' represents for them an attempt on the part of humanity to elevate itself above the rest of the natural world. That said, they do recognise the crucial role played by the Christian tradition in shaping much of what can only be properly understood as an 'expression of concern with the self and its ability to endure'.¹ In consequence, whilst it is implicit that such a sense of 'self' can often lapse into selfishness and an unhealthy level of introspection, it is affirmed that only on the basis of such self-hood do human beings develop a capacity to relate, a propensity to love, an ability to communicate or even a desire to worship.

This paper aims to open up a conversation which bears directly on the issue of self-care amongst members of the clergy. At its best ordained ministry ought to be a supremely joy-filled expression of Christian discipleship. The call is to enter a way of life that is God-given, Christ-centred, Spirit-enabled and ecclesially sanctioned. Yet in reality too many clergy, some of them after an alarmingly short time, find that the actual experience of ministry falls short of the ideal which such theory and theology suggest. In a recent letter to the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, a newly instituted first-time incumbent, writing in the wake of a colleague's funeral, noted with commendable honesty:

This is a very lonely life...It is a life that requires one to be constantly aware of one's own vulnerabilities. It requires one to be mild-mannered in the face of others' agitation and frustration. It can require receiving abusive phone calls simply because one's number is in the public domain...It is a life where there is constant self-examination as to whether one was present enough, helpful enough and engaged enough (often in difficult circumstances), but it may be impossible to ascertain whether a task was completed well.²

These are sobering words and the experiences which lurk behind them are familiar to all clergy.

From a fable set in the world of commerce Patrick Lencioni pinpoints 'three signs of miserable job', observing that individuals begin to suffer demoralisation when issues of 'anonymity', 'irrelevance' and 'immeasurability' are present.³ By these he intends, respectively, a sense of isolation, no one apparently being aware of what the individual is faithfully trying to accomplish; a inner questioning as to whether the intended result of the

¹ Martin, R. & Barresi J., *The Rise and Fall of Self*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p.290.

² COI Gazette Letters, 17 August 2012.

³ Lencioni, P., *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007)

contribution is one that will actually make a difference to others; and an increasing awareness that no real progress is being made. Lencioni's analysis again rings uncannily true to the experience of many clergy. For a significant number of clergy the daily grind of faithful pastoral ministry leaves them wondering whether anyone else is aware of the, at times, grim reality of their context. As the parish perhaps plateaus, or even begins to stagnate and decline, it can be very tempting to question whether the message of the Good News, the original motivating factor in bringing the individual to a sense of commitment and vocation, is in fact bearing fruit in any of the ways that were anticipated. As such negative trends become more deeply engrained, the annual cycle of parochial demands can become intolerable, and over time feelings can emerge not only of disillusionment and cynicism but even of abandonment by the very Church which enacted the seal of ordination in the first place.

A recent and significant piece of primary research carried out by Dr Gill Hendron amongst serving Church of Ireland clergy bears out the intuition that many are already suffering from identifiable forms of stress-induced 'compassion fatigue'.⁴ Dr Hendron observes that ministers deal on a regular basis with all manner of demanding pastoral situations – viz. bereavement, including the loss of infants or children, suicide, illness, abuse, marital problems, assault, rape, families of murder victims, murderers themselves, human responses to man-made atrocities and natural disasters. The same clergy are expected to be present in the immediate aftermath of traumatic events, and are exposed to further trauma through their ongoing pastoral connection with survivors; indeed they may also have to witness at first hand the actual 'trauma' itself. In their role as counselors, clergy can be used as quasi-mental health professionals and this role becomes all the more complex when the parishioners involved are themselves friends. Such experiences are a natural by-product of the caring which they willingly offer; however, as Dr Hendron notes, the caring is not without a cost to the carer. When the right kind of support structures are not present, the personal outcomes for clergy themselves can be cumulatively devastating - headaches, sleep disturbance, poor concentration, gastric issues, over-eating, alcohol/substance abuse, uncharacteristic behaviour, disproportionate reactions, nightmares, hyper-arousal, apathy, cynicism, aggression; then ultimately, in a total reversal of pastoral integrity, a desire to blame those who are themselves meant to be the objects of care. In worst case scenarios feelings of hopelessness and helplessness may emerge, leading to the dismantling of faith itself and a consequent withdrawal from inner spiritual life and necessary support networks. Such terminology is reminiscent of Lencioni's analysis, and against this backdrop, a genuine theology of, and praxis for, clergy 'self-care' is clearly mandated.

The image of God

The Christian view of 'self' is grounded in its Hebrew ancestry and pushes to a much deeper level than comparable Platonic ideas. The Greek view insisted on the 'soul' alone as the

⁴ Hendron, Gill, *The Cost of Caring*, (Research Presentation to C.I.T.I. Intern Deacons, April 2012)

essence of personhood. By contrast, and consistent with its own doctrine of creation, Christianity emphasises a theology of the 'body' in a holistic sense. Accurately construed, the human 'self' is the totality of the human person, which is necessarily inclusive of the body, the soul, the emotions, the aspirations and the personality. It is this amalgam of personhood in its fullest sense which is blessed and created according to the image of God. To deny the created significance and essential humanity of the body is a form of Gnostic heresy, and this has implications for matters of rest, leisure and appropriate balance as imperative aspects of clerical self-care. For the reason that the divine image is constituted in both 'body' and 'soul', it cannot be overlooked that there remains a persistent tension between ontological and functional aspects of ordained ministry; the tendency for many clergy is that they lapse over time into an imbalance between 'being' and 'doing'. Given that so much of ministry revolves around outcomes which are unseen, it can be tempting for them to hide behind the various 'visible' tasks that have to be fulfilled and to neglect the appropriate, but necessarily hidden, nurturing of both the body and the soul. Such an imbalance eventually becomes unsustainable and does not conform to any true appreciation of what it means to be made in the image of God. Moreover, since all of this is necessarily grounded in an appreciation of the Godhead as Trinity, a properly rounded understanding of 'the image of God' insists on self-realisation emerging from reciprocity, dialogue and meaningful interaction.⁵ In itself such engagement with others must counter isolationism and inappropriate withdrawal.

The grace of God

The divine image is an expression of divine grace and serves as a reminder that from beginning to end Christian living is entirely dependent upon divine enabling. As a parent who yearns after his dispersed offspring, God the Father moves in love towards impenitent humanity; as a mediator who fulfils what the Torah demands, the incarnate Son offers his own life; as an limitless source of inspiration, the pentecostal Spirit is imparted as the sole provider of genuine spiritual vitality. Moreover, given that the Gospel itself is rightly understood as 'justification by faith', and that the same Gospel presupposes a covenant partner who is reliable, it follows that Christian ministry will always find a more than ample resource within the grace of God for all it needs to be effective.

A theology of grace asserts that we can do all things through the power of Christ which strengthens us, the only condition being that focus is maintained on a relationship to be cherished and not on a series of programmes to be completed. Such understanding will alleviate the 'everything depends on me' mind-set to which many clergy fall prey. If we believe in grace, such egocentricity is patently deluded. In the New Testament one of the most striking metaphors for ministry is that of running the race, with the associated idea of a handing-on of the baton as in a relay.⁶ This analogy is at once indicative of both the need to

⁵ See, for example, the discussion of Miroslav Volf's thinking in Frances Ward, *Lifelong Learning*, (London: SCM, 2005), pp.102-104.

⁶ For example, Acts 20:24, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 2:2, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1

exercise due diligence in the fulfillment of duty, and the objective fact that the 'baton' is not the sole responsibility of the individual runner, but will at the right time be transmitted to someone else. It is the grace of God and not personal endeavour which likewise will carry forward a necessary succession of ministry and its responsibilities.

Apostolic injunction

In Acts 20:17-38 Paul makes his farewell address to the elders of the nascent church in Ephesus. Having carefully grounded his words in personal commendation and a theology of God's gracious initiative towards all of humanity in the gospel, the apostle then continues,

'Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son' (v.28).

Since these words are expressly targeted towards those who are to serve in a ministry of collaborative church oversight, what is most striking is the causal and reciprocal connection which Paul makes between effective pastoral care and necessary self-care. To keep due watch over oneself is not only an essential aspect of personal vocation, but in fact serves as a key trigger in releasing and sustaining the meaningful delivery of that vocation through ministry. Conversely, to ignore the critical aspect of self-care will be detrimental to the exercise of fruitful ministry. The essential is that clergy enable themselves to deepen their self-understanding. Leadership consultant Daniel Goleman has identified self-awareness and consequent self-regulation as the primary indicators of emotional intelligence and necessary relational capacity.⁷ In order to keep watch over themselves, then, it is imperative that clergy are in tune with themselves - their strengths, their weaknesses, their individual psychometry and their given personality drivers.

This point can be reinforced by consideration of the full sense of *enkrateia*, being the New Testament word typically translated as 'self-control'.⁸ The general trend is to apply this term within a hermeneutic of moralism, as in the maintaining of appropriate boundaries of behaviour. There is an obvious sense in which the absence of stable character and a propensity for scandal will be damaging for the church and for the Gospel. Nevertheless, the wider application of the word *enkrateia* is indicative of a more generic call for those in positions of church leadership not to be negligent in caring for themselves. 'Self-control' can be taken to mean 'self-governance' in the sense of holding in control the various competing sub-egos of the self. To achieve this balance is *enkrateia*; its antithesis is *akrasia*, understood as a form of chaotic and disintegrated personhood. Equally, it can happen that vocation to ordained ministry is heard as a call to 'self-denial'. Whilst in one sense this is true,⁹ it must

⁷Goleman, Daniel, 'What Makes a Leader?' (Harvard Business Review, 1998).

⁸ Galatians 5:23, 2 Timothy 3:3, 2 Peter 1:6.

⁹ See, for example, Mark 8:34ff, where the discussion centres on both 'self-denial' and a willingness to 'lay down one's life', the latter being related etymologically to the notion of 'ordination' through the Greek verb *tithemi*.

be understood as addressing the motivational and not the structural self. It does not indicate the need for either self-neglect or an abandonment of self-care.

Ecclesial reality

In attempting to develop a theology of self-care, the final element which cannot be overlooked is the ecclesial reality within which clergy exercise their ministry. In the contemporary and post-modern context there are myriad factors which militate against clergy being able to exercise due diligence in the matter of caring for themselves. For example, few clerical appointments do not burden the individual with significant external expectations; clergy apart, the entire nature of church-life is predicated upon the voluntary faith-commitment of the members, which can in turn raise the problematic matter of insufficient resources. For clergy, 'church' and 'work' coalesce with the result that there can be an unhealthy intensity and no other obvious focus or outlet. In too many parishes pre-existing and often long-standing forms of conflict combine to exhaust even the most enthusiastic incumbent; the unfinished nature of the pastoral task can deprive conscientious clergy of any sense of fulfillment. As in most professions, clergy are often prone to comparing themselves with their colleagues; and there is an increasing sense of prevailing cultural hostility to contend with.

Statistical findings in the UK are seriously disturbing: 3 in 10 clergy have felt like leaving Christian ministry for a prolonged period; a similar proportion find that family life is intrinsically diminished by their work; 4 in 10 feel pressured because of inadequate income; 7 in 10 describe feeling heavily overworked; and across the UK over 200 clergy miss Sunday duties every week on account of stress-related illness, while as many as 1500 church leaders have left ministry over a ten-year period.¹⁰ In the face of this reality, it can be exceedingly difficult not to grow cynical and succumb to those miseries of which Lencioni so pertinently speaks.

The Praxis of Self-care

Turning from theology to practice, it is evident that responsibility for clerical self-care must be a shared enterprise between the individual minister and the institutional church. When difficulties do emerge, clergy tend either to withdraw or to give up, apportioning blame to the parish, the bishop, the diocese or the church in general. It cannot be denied that a measure of responsibility does attach to the community of faith in the life of the institution. Against that, there are many elements of self-care of which only clergy themselves can take ownership. Tolstoy famously declared that too many people think about changing humanity and not enough think about changing themselves, and so we begin with the onus laid solely upon the individual cleric.

In the first place there has to be an insistence that in virtually every circumstance, no matter how bleak it may appear, individuals continue to have the ability to exercise choice. Rev Dr Heather Morris asked recently, 'Will we live [out our calling] like demi-gods; busy, self-

¹⁰ James Lawrence, 'On the Long Haul' (CPAS: Arrow Leadership Publication, 2004)

absorbed, independent, self-rather than God-glorifying? Or will we *choose* (italics mine) to live it as dependent disciples?'¹¹ In many instances it could be contended that the primary issue for clergy is not a ministerial or pastoral one, but a personal and discipleship one. Hart expresses this point as follows, 'Most ministers do not burn out because they forget they are ministers; they burn out because they forget they are people.'¹² Only the individual can ultimately take responsibility for regular rest and the essential provision of vital, spiritual nourishment, and of course there is an abundance of helpful material in the area of personal spiritual disciplines to which individual clergy can turn. Some words of Henri Nouwen are apposite:

We have to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw every day, shake off our compulsions and dwell in the gentle healing presence of our Lord. Without such a desert we will lose our own soul while preaching to others... Ministry can be fruitful only if it grows out of a direct and intimate encounter with our Lord.¹³

Closely related to this, individuals must realise that they are in a position to seek out help and put in place a system of spiritual direction. As Edmondson notes, every clergyperson needs to be afforded a safe space in which they can be listened to and prayed for on a regular basis.¹⁴ Such a context can act as an antidote to isolationism and will yield much in the pursuit of self-awareness as someone else is permitted to hold up a mirror and offer the possibility of disclosure. The encounter which is facilitated through spiritual direction can enable the individual cleric to face up to the reality of whatever is causing stress or even fear. Honesty in the naming of such matters is an important first step towards dealing with them appropriately. For this reason it is desirable that a foundation for the sustaining of ministry be established as early as possible, and within training therefore ordinands are encouraged, not least for example within courses that deal with 'Spirituality' and 'Church Leadership', to pursue the helpfulness of spiritual direction.

Furthermore, since human persons made in the image of God are intrinsically relational, there is much self-care to be found in a more general sense through the nurturing of friendship networks as opportunities for openness, and also from private journaling as a form of self-supervision and inner dialogue. Nevertheless, only clergy themselves can meaningfully take the initiative in the establishment and implementation of such practices. Beyond this, clergy can help themselves through enhancement of simple skills in combating the onset of stress-related conditions. More effective planning and administration, noting and celebrating achievements, realistic target-setting, appropriate delegation, learning to say 'No', definitively

¹¹ Heather Morris, 'Pursuing Appropriate Support in Ministry', (Paper given to Church of Ireland and Methodist Clergy in Belfast, 2010)

¹² Cited in Brain, P., *Going the Distance* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2004) p.20.

¹³ Nouwen, Henri, *The Way of the Heart*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1981) p.30.

¹⁴ Edmondson, Chris, *Minister – Love Thyself* (Cambridge: Grove Booklets) p.27.

structured relaxation and a brighter sense of humour are helpful areas in which individuals might be encouraged to develop their own personal capacity.

Turning to the other dimension, there are tangible aspects of clergy-care for which the institutional church must carry responsibility. As is rightly emphasised within the Ordinal, 'none of us can bear the weight of this ministry in our own strength'. Many denominations are not unmindful of this and, increasingly, support structures are being put in place to assist clergy in times of particular need and with the aim of protecting them from crisis or collapse. For example, the Diocese of Connor has developed a scheme of clergy pastoral supervision which is commendable for the reason that it seeks to be proactive.¹⁵ A dedicated team prioritise individual meetings with clergy in an effort to forestall and address difficulties before they become either pressing or unbearable. Another way of delivering good practice in clergy self-care might be closer consideration of the introduction of a system of annual ministerial review. The Church of Ireland could usefully learn from the system being implemented in England, which is carefully crafted to offer an encouraging moment of affirmation rather than a threatening appraisal:

The Ministry Review scheme provides a regular opportunity to consider calling and the practice of ministry. This is one of the ways in which [clergy] can become more open to the renewal of [their] spirituality and competence as servants and leaders.¹⁶

The crucial matter here is that the church at an institutional level aims to set and maintain an appropriate culture of nurture and encouragement. The most natural way to engage with this is through relevant and rigorous Continuing Ministerial Education (CME). The fact that this is now being delivered both centrally and locally within the Church of Ireland has ensured a necessary raising of standards. The next challenge must be to insist that such provision is stretched beyond the initial three years and, as appropriate, across the totality of a lifetime in ordained ministry.

It has been suggested that clergy broadly fall into one of three categories: the 'motivated' (those who are young, recently ordained and intent on keeping abreast of societal and ecclesial changes); the 'freshly motivated' (those for whom ordained ministry is a genuine 'second career' and who bring with them a clear expectation of quality 'in-service' training); and the 'middle-aged' (by which is meant not an age-bracket but a mindset that has settled for simply 'trudging along').¹⁷ Within such a *schema*, meaningful delivery of CME clearly needs to target the last group, and it will be essential to provide opportunities for checking and refining established patterns and unduly settled rhythms of ministry. In particular, attention needs to

¹⁵ For a more general discussion of pastoral supervision, see Ward, *op.cit.*, pp.87ff, and Leach & Patterson, *Pastoral Supervision – A Handbook*, (London: SCM, 2010) and *Search* Vol. 35:3, (Autumn, 2012), pp.200-207.

¹⁶ 'Ministry Review Handbook', Rochester Diocese, cited in Edmondson, *op. cit.*, p.16.

¹⁷ Edmondson, *op. cit.*, p.13.

be given to the marking of important ministry milestones. For example, alongside current recognition of mid-career and pre-retirement phases,¹⁸ research suggests that critical moments in the sustaining of healthy ordained ministry come around the 5-7 year and 15 year marks.¹⁹ In addition, new courses need to be developed for those who are entering into first incumbency, for those who are called to episcopal ministry and for those who divert into sector ministries. In terms of work-life balance, consideration should be given by the institution to realistic expectations of workload. One recent survey uncovered the fact that most clergy were putting in hours far above that which was expected of them by members of their parishes.²⁰ Of similar import is the fact that the Methodist Church in Ireland has recently embraced a Conference resolution that its ministers should be entitled to two days off per week. This policy, along with further implementation of clergy sabbaticals and a sensitive yet open re-appraisal of the obligation laid upon parishes in the event of a prolonged clerical absence due to stress, illness or disciplinary process, ought at least to be afforded consideration by the Church of Ireland.

Conclusion

Many clergy do, and will continue to, struggle with the realities of ministry, with their own exercising of self-care and with the lack of resources made available to them by the Church. It is true that none of us can ever attain the perfection of balance as found in Christ himself; also that within any genuinely Christian community there must be permission for failure. Nevertheless, whereas one strand of gospel understanding affirms the beauty of brokenness, it is important to see this as speaking into the fallen nature of our human condition, not as an excuse for laxity in either personal diligence or inherited ecclesial systems. In apostolic terminology the goal must be a God-honouring ‘finishing of the race’. The contention of this paper is that in pursuit of this goal, responsibility for clerical well-being must be an intentionally shared endeavour between clergy themselves and the institutional church within whose polity they serve. Issues of caring for oneself go to the heart of discipleship, vocation and an appropriately Christian worldview. Alongside this, it is indisputably the case that the institutional church cannot shirk its own responsibility for the well-being of those who are its frontline workers and foot-soldiers.

For further reference:

‘Being Human – A Christian understanding of personhood illustrated with reference to power, money, sex and time’ – A Report of the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England,
(London: Church House Publishing, 2003)

This paper was first published in Search Volume 36.1

¹⁸ Such courses are already provided annually by the COI Commission on Ministry.

¹⁹ Edmondson, *op. cit.*, p.14.

²⁰ Brain, *op. cit.*, p.17.

