

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND COVENANT FOR  
THE CARE AND WELL-BEING OF CLERGY

A DOCUMENT FOR  
REFLECTION AND  
ACTION FOR LOCAL  
CONGREGATIONS

Approved by General Synod February 2019



# Introduction

You may have heard that the General Synod of the Church of England voted overwhelmingly in 2019 to support a new way of improving the approach to the care and well-being of clergy across the Church. *The Covenant for Clergy Care and Well-Being* invites parishes, dioceses and the wider church, as well as individual clergy, to share responsibility for the welfare of ordained ministers and their families/households.

On behalf of the whole Synod – bishops, clergy and laity, all of whom have come to a shared view – we now invite you to join us in talking about this. We are particularly keen to encourage you, as local churches and congregations, to give time and thought to how best to support your clergy. We believe that congregations and clergy working together to support one another in partnership is the way the Bible teaches us to serve, as fellow disciples.

The facts show that, when clergy are healthy and well-supported, they are able to focus on others, while also looking after their own needs with the strength and realism which that support gives them. That way the whole church is blessed and enriched. It's not that those who are clergy are more important than any other part of the People of God, but they are going to be able to serve our congregations and communities best when they feel loved and supported.

You can read the simple text of the *Covenant* below, as well as a set of guiding principles. Following each of those are some questions you may wish to take some time to reflect upon – perhaps at a PCC meeting, or in some other context that works for you. The clergy are also being asked to reflect on their own set of questions too, as are

those serving in the wider church (e.g. bishops, the National Church Institutions, etc.). As you are having your conversation, you may find it useful to think about how best you can talk about clergy care and wellbeing with your local clergy, in a way that is supportive, but definitely not intrusive. The clergy are being asked to think about this too.

If we all engage in this work, we hope clergy may find more sources of support, encouragement, challenge and love as they go forward in their ministry.

Thank you for your ministry in our Church.

+Justin Cantuar:

+ Sentamu Eboracensis

Reverend Canon Simon Butler, Prolocutor of the Province of Canterbury

Reverend Canon Chris Newlands, Prolocutor of the Province of York

Canon Dr Jamie Harrison, Chair of the House of Laity

Canon Elizabeth Paver, Vice-Chair of the House of Laity

# 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.



## Our Shared Commitments and Questions for Reflection and Action

We are inviting local congregations to give some thought to the care and wellbeing of the clergy who serve you. Not all the questions below will be directly relevant in your context: use them or ignore them as you see fit, but we encourage you to take them seriously and to adapt them to what is appropriate for you and the congregation and community you are part of. It is up to you what action you take as a result of these conversations. We encourage you to undertake this as part of a conversation with your local clergy, while respecting the boundaries that they may wish to put on the exercise. Don't be afraid to show your support and concern, but do so sensitively.

We hope you have a useful conversation about how best to care for those who serve your congregation and neighbourhood.

# Reflecting on Our Shared Baptismal and Ministerial Calling



Scriptural Insights: Matthew 28:1-20; John 10:1-18;  
John 21:15-19; 2 Timothy 4:1-5



Ordained ministers are called to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people and to be willing to work with and respect others. Ordained ministers are disciples and teachers, who follow Christ in prayer, reflection and study, and grow in faith themselves and thus in resilience. Learning and teaching are part of shared discipleship, empowering and encouraging the people of God. Ordained ministry is about relationship, partnership, professionalism and accountability.

*To help clergy fulfil this calling, we ask the local church to:*

- Support clergy in prayer and action in their calling to serve, and so to help their ministry thrive
- Review its expectations of its clergy in the context of new projects or initiatives and within its own vision and strategy
- Ensure that the clergy both have and take opportunities for rest, recreation, training, retreat and study
- Understand how the life of the local church is perceived and experienced by the ordained minister. (Try to imagine what it would feel like if you were in their shoes!)

## Some Questions You Might Like to Ponder:

- How do your clergy know you care and are concerned for them? Do you know how this is received?
- When you set local aims and plans (e.g. your Mission/Vision Action Plan), what will you include about the care and well-being of your clergy?
- Do you know when your clergy have their Ministerial Development Review (a regular guided discussion reflecting on their ministry) and what is involved? Is there an opportunity for you to feed into this process or for your ordained ministers to share what has come out of it with you? (This needs to be tactful and not intrusive!)
- How confident are you about talking with your clergy about matters relating to their personal wellbeing? In cases of significant concern, how confident are you about raising such matters with the bishop?

# Reflecting on The Way your Clergy Look after Themselves and Others



Scriptural Insights: Galatians 6:1-10; Hebrews 13:17; 1  
Thessalonians 5:12-13



Ordained ministers are called to offer pastoral care and guidance to others. They are also asked to receive these. There is a strong association between physical and psychological health and wellbeing, which means the ordained minister is asked to give attention to their own health and fitness to promote resilience, so their care for others is as good as it can be.

*To help clergy fulfil this calling, we ask the local church to:*

- Be active in offering care for the wellbeing and development of the minister
- Do what it can to safeguard the minister's availability for pastoral ministry, especially at times of deepest need (e.g. when they are called on to care for people who are dying or grieving, especially for a child, young person, or suicide). The local church can help at such times by taking on tasks that it doesn't need a minister to do. It also means arranging for help for those with disabilities (when such help is welcomed).
- Express its concern for the health and wellbeing of the minister directly to the minister, and where appropriate, to those with pastoral oversight of the minister (Bishops, Archdeacons, Area/Rural Deans, etc.).

## Some Questions You Might Like to Ponder:

- What do you expect of your ordained ministers? How realistic and reasonable are these expectations, and have you discussed them with your ministers?
- How do you encourage your ordained ministers to give the best of themselves in their care of others?
- How can you help ordained ministers to spot or avoid developing unhealthy patterns of work and ministry (e.g. overworking and not taking time off!)
- How do you support the ministry of your ordained minister and or their families/households if disability and/or health problems limit what they are able to do, or at times when extra help might be welcomed?

# Ordained Ministers as Public Figures



Scriptural Insights: Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7;  
1 Timothy 4:11-16; Acts 6:1-7



Ordained ministers are public servants of Christ called to represent the Gospel to all in their cure. By the nature of their calling, they are always in the public eye, as to some extent, are members of the minister's household.

*Recognising this, we ask the local church to:*

- Appreciate that the calling of the minister is to both church and community, and to work with the minister to help maintain a healthy balance between the two
- Be aware of the vulnerability that clergy face as public figures and to support them in times of difficulty
- Respect the boundaries that the minister and their family/household need quite rightly to place around their home life, and to ensure that people respect the necessary space associated with the minister being a public figure and, where necessary, help to protect it.

## Some Questions You Might Like to Ponder:

- Do you think you have the right balance between the amount of time you expect your ordained ministers to spend with church members and with those who do not yet go to church? Don't forget the importance of their responsibilities in the community and beyond the church.
- Have you talked with your ordained ministers about appropriate boundaries around their time and space, including when they are in their homes?
- Are you aware that your ordained minister(s) can be very vulnerable as people mostly in public view? What might these be in your context (e.g. social media, being constantly watched)?
- If you are preparing and reviewing parish profiles and role descriptions to appoint a new minister, what do you think needs to be included to demonstrate that you are committed to the care and wellbeing of the post holder you're looking for?

# The Minister's Household/Family



Scriptural Insights: Titus 1:5-9; 2  
Timothy 1:3-7; Romans 12:9-13



Those who share their private lives with ordained ministers give them support and encouragement which makes a real difference to their care and wellbeing, especially as much of their work is very public. It is therefore part of the responsibility of the whole church to provide for the minister's family/household.

*Recognising this, we ask the local church to:*

- Work with the minister to ensure that people respect the boundaries around the minister's household and family, and, take action to enforce them, where necessary
- Think about the care and wellbeing of a minister's household and family when considering any initiative, project or other aspect of ministerial work

## Some Questions You Might Like to Ponder:

- How can you be most helpful in taking part in a conversation with your ordained ministers about any pressure points there might be in relation to their family/household and their wider ministry, and the ways in which you as the local church can support them?

- Where an ordained minister has children who are members of your local church, what steps can you take to protect them from being 'singled out' or judged by different standards to other children?

## Taking It Further...

### Going Deeper

We are inviting each diocese to reflect on how it might best address some of the issues raised above at a local level. Feel free to ask your Rural/Area Dean or Archdeacon about what is going on. We are also asking the clergy to undertake a similar exercise. Might it be worth finding a way to have a conversation between some local lay leaders (e.g. the PCC or the Church Wardens) about the issues this exercise has raised?

You can read the full report – including a very helpful and rich theological essay [here](#). There is also a short reading list.

The report contained a number of specific recommendations, which you may find interesting to read, especially if you have responsibilities in these areas (e.g. Churchwardens).

Finally, the General Synod has appointed a small group to *encourage and evaluate* progress in the field of clergy care and wellbeing across the Church of England. That group will be keen to receive feedback and ideas in due course.