

COVENANT FOR CLERGY CARE AND WELL BEING

Background paper

October 2020

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 men and women 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 as the Church of England commit together to promote the welfare of our clergy and their households in terms expressed in the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing.

We undertake to work together to seek to coordinate and improve our approach to clergy care and wellbeing that ordained ministers flourish in their service of the mission of God within and beyond the Church.

In 2015, the House of Clergy in the General Synod agreed a document entitled *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*¹. These provided advice to the clergy about how to conduct themselves in ministry (and, to a lesser extent, in personal life); they offered a vision of the duties of the clergy to the wider Church and those whom the clergy encounter in the conduct of their ministries

However there was also a recognition that this wasn't the whole story and that the wider Church needed to explore what duties it owes to its ordained ministers, in terms of ensuring that the clergy have proper support, guidance, practical help and assistance in the conduct of their ministries. In short, 'clergy wellbeing'.

This is not to assert that the wellbeing of other members of the People of God are somehow less important than that of the clergy. Every member needs pastoral care and, at times, urgent intervention and support. However, there are issues arising out of the particular challenges of ordained ministry in its various forms, from selection to ministry in retirement.

Neither is the duty of care all one way from the wider Church to the clergy. Each member of clergy is responsible for their own wellbeing and self- management as part of their own discipleship. Clergy themselves are active participants in ensuring their own wellbeing.

In July 2017, General Synod considered how best to promote the wellbeing of all clergy and endorsed proposals that some form of aspirational national 'benchmark' would be the most

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/about-general-synod/convocations/guidelines-for-the-professional-conduct-of-the-clergy/guidelines-contents.aspx>

effective way of encouraging a change of culture and the mutual affirmation and accountability that is the foundation of a Christian approach to wellbeing.

The concept of covenant has been employed. In the Bible, covenants were binding agreements made in love and grace, where both parties have a commitment to the other and where both, out of the same love and grace, call the other to faithfulness and remembrance of the promised commitment.

A Working Party was duly established to firm up proposals and report back by July 2019 on its work. After an extensive process of consultation with individuals, organisations and General Synod members, the Covenant was duly adopted by the General Synod in February 2020 and has now been sent to every Diocesan Synod for discussion and debate. The hope and expectation is that Diocesan Synods, Deanery Synods and PCCs will now engage in a Big Conversation about these issues and then adopt the Covenant formally.

In order to facilitate this conversation, a number of supporting documents have been produced in a way that enables their practical use by clergy, parishes, deaneries and dioceses.² The clergy, the local church and the wider church through the office of Bishop are asked to make a series of mutual commitments which together serve to emphasise that this shared ministry is mutually-dependent for the benefit of all and promotes the health of the whole body of Christ.

Ven Pete Spiers
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²<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/clergy-resources/national-clergy-hr/supporting-clergy-health-and-wellbeing/covenant-clergy#na>