

10 MINISTRY SUPPORT FOR CLERGY

Connection between Unhealthy Ministry Practices and Abuse

Pastoral ministry by clergy requires high levels of discernment, knowledge and energy. In their pastoral ministry clergy are often under considerable stress. They deal with deeply personal aspects of people's lives and are called upon to provide spiritual advice and comfort to vulnerable people.

Clergy effectiveness depends upon many factors including intellectual stimulation, spiritual vitality, physical health, emotional well-being, supportive collegial relationships and healthy ministry practices. All dioceses are giving commendable attention to the welfare of their clergy in many ways including:

- programmes of continuing education;
- clergy conferences;
- various forms of recreational leave including long service leave;
- facilitation of spiritual direction; and
- retirement planning seminars.

Some clergy do not take advantage of these opportunities provided by their diocese. Some clergy do not care for their personal well being through their failure to take personal retreats, regular days off, annual holidays and long service leave or to develop outside interests.

We are concerned that the direct relationship between unhealthy ministry practices and the abuse of others by clergy¹ is not widely understood. We would encourage dioceses to continue to promote healthy ministry practices by their clergy. We examined programmes in Australian and overseas churches introduced to promote the well-being and maintain healthy ministry practices of clergy.²

System of Ministry Support

A diocesan system of ministry support is a practical method of pastoral care for its clergy. We consider that each diocese should include within the system of ministry support for its clergy:

- *Peer support* – this is a process of ministry support provided by a colleague or a small group of colleagues. Where provided on a one-to-one basis peer support will often be informal through telephone and email contact as well as face to face meetings. Where provided in a group the group will meet regularly and covenant to be accountable before each other. Group members will intentionally seek to encourage each other. Apart from time spent together group members will pray for, and make informal contact with, one another.
- *Mentoring* – this is an informal, unpaid, publicly known, ministry-focused relationship in which a more experienced colleague supports, trains, guides and/or sponsors colleagues in the practice of their ministry. Confidentiality limits need to be negotiated.
- *Professional supervision / consultation* – this is a formal, collaborative process which a more experienced person uses to develop and support a

CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

person in their ministry. This relationship is confidential, evaluative and extends over time. It is preferable if:

- the supervisor has been trained in supervision; and
 - the supervisor has no other pastoral or personal relationship with the person being supervised.
- *Ministry review* – this is a regular assessment of the ministry of clergy undertaken by a person outside of the parish or church organisation and independent of the diocesan leadership. The review will commonly include the following features:
 - collection of information from selected recipients of the person's ministry and from the person in review through questionnaires / interviews;
 - consideration by the reviewer and the person in review of such ministry areas as skills, deficiencies, goals and spiritual, personal and training needs; and
 - confidentiality, with the possible exception of a brief report of goals for the next period and training needs to the bishop or his delegate.

Confidentiality is foundational to each of these relationships or processes. Confidentiality will encourage openness and genuine accountability. All persons involved in the process need to negotiate the bounds of confidentiality. Because of the requirement of confidentiality and mutual accountability it is important that the supervisor, peer colleague or reviewer not be in an oversight relationship with the member of the clergy (such as a bishop or an archdeacon). A mentor may be in an oversight relationship. Those in leadership positions in a diocese will need to develop their own mechanisms of ministry support.

To enable clergy to take advantage of a diocesan system of ministry support, the parish or church organisation should include ministry support as part of its expectations for its clergy. The financial package for clergy should include a component that will enable clergy to participate in a process of ministry support.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The General Synod recommends that each diocese includes within the system of ministry support for its clergy:

- (j) peer support;**
 - (k) mentoring;**
 - (l) professional supervision / consultation; and**
 - (m) ministry review**
- and that clergy regularly seek out and utilise opportunities to maintain and enhance their ministry skills.**

A Future Approach to the Appointment and Professional Development of Clergy?

We are aware that a number of dioceses are examining the adequacy of current systems for the appointment and professional development of clergy. While the responsibilities of clergy are specified in the Ordinal, difficulties sometimes arise in a parish or church organisation when there are differing views between clergy and those they serve as to how these responsibilities will be

fulfilled. These difficulties could be avoided or reduced by the provision of a statement for clergy of the expectations and responsibilities of their roles and their legitimate entitlements at the time of their appointment. These entitlements may include the support to be provided by the parish or church organisation. The introduction of such a statement would inevitably raise questions as to its status.

Difficulties also sometimes arise in a parish or church organisation when there is dissatisfaction with the performance of clergy. The expectations within a parish or church organisation as to the performance of clergy have increased. Many of those served by clergy undergo regular performance reviews as a normal part of their employment. These difficulties could be avoided or reduced by the introduction of compulsory reviews of the parish or church organisation at regular intervals. For clergy they would need to be structured in a way that affirms them in areas of ministry that are undertaken competently and challenges them in areas where their ministry skills could be improved. For the parish or church organisation they would need to be structured in a way that identifies areas requiring improvement in their ministry support of clergy and the means to achieve those improvements.

Our concern with both of these issues arises because of the importance of the Church providing practical care for its clergy and reducing their stress through unreasonable and unstated expectations. The General Synod should refer to the Ministry Commission consideration of the introduction, and if appropriate, the preparation of:

- a model statement for clergy of the expectations and responsibilities of their roles and their legitimate entitlements at the time of their appointment;
- a model review of the performance of clergy and their ministry support within a parish or church organisation.

This reference by the General Synod is contained in Recommendation 19 (refer to section 11).

NOTES

¹ For example, Marie M Fortune (1989) *Is Nothing Sacred?*, Cleveland: United Church Press, p152 n4(1):

At the time of the sexual activity with the parishioner, this minister is not functioning well personally or professionally.... This clergyperson takes little care of himself or herself and is easily overcome by stress. Thus the opportunity to "fall" into a relationship with someone who is emotionally vulnerable and who holds the pastor in total positive regard to the point of adoration is a temptation to which the wanderer responds....

² In the early 1990s the Diocese of California of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America created The Clergy Wellness Commission whose charter is to promote healthy clergy work practices. The Commission recommends "clergy health agreements" which set out strategies which will enhance healthy work practices for clergy. The Commission has also introduced a formal mentor programme for newly ordained clergy to enhance their physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health. Information about, and resources of, The Clergy Wellness Commission can be found on the Diocese of California website online at: <http://www.diocal.org>

Established in England in 1987, The Society of Mary and Martha has, as its primary task, the individual support of clergy and/or their spouses. *Affirmation and Accountability*, published in 2002, is the Society's manual of practical suggestions for preventing clergy stress, sickness and ill-health retirement. The contents pages and sample pages can be found on The Society of Mary and Martha website online at: <http://www.sheldon.uk.com/frameset.htm>

Notes continued next page ...

NOTES cont...

In The Church of Scotland the Manse Family Counselling Service provides a confidential telephone counselling service that operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for clergy and their families. Considerable effort has gone onto making this service known to all members of clergy families, so that any member may access it, confidentially, at any time.

John Mark Ministries, which has a cross denominational ministry across Australia, is committed to the renewal of churches and the encouragement of its ministers through:

- leadership enhancement;
- supporting and encouraging ex-pastors;
- consulting with churches and denominations;
- counselling;
- seminars and motivational talks;
- pastors' renewal retreats;
- mentoring and equipping; and
- small group training.