

Ad Clerum 1.3

THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE CHURCH'S MINISTERS

The diocesan bishop has ultimate responsibility for the ministry of all clergy and ministers in his diocese. They share in the exercise of the ministry which is both his and theirs. While being the focus of unity, authority and oversight, he has a special concern for the pastoral care of the Church's ministers. The bishop recognises that this is a major responsibility, keeping in touch with the life of 23 deaneries, over 330 parishes, 350 stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy, towards 300 Readers, 25 lay ministers, and some 150 retired clergy and clergy widows.

Clergy and ministers naturally look to the diocesan bishop as their Father-in-God. He is the person to whom they have made an oath of canonical obedience, to whom they look for pastoral care and support and to whom they can turn in times of particular stress or difficulty.

As in the parishes we seek shared and collaborative ministry, so the bishop of the diocese shares his responsibility for the pastoral care of the clergy and ministers and their families with other members of his staff - the suffragan bishops, the archdeacons, the DDO and the ADDO, and liaises with other Bishop's Officers carrying pastoral responsibility (e.g. archdeaconry NSM Officers). The members of the Bishop's Staff work closely together, keeping in regular contact with one another.

Every two or three weeks they meet together to share concerns, in particular those relating to pastoral care. In this way the bishop of the diocese is helped to keep in touch with those matters of pastoral care which others are looking after on his behalf. A considerable time is given at each staff meeting to these matters and the staff invariably include a time of prayer (usually the Eucharist) during the course of the meeting. They also join in praying for the clergy and ministers, and the parishes in turn using the diocesan calendar of prayer; and are greatly helped in this by the letters from those who write about themselves, their families, and their parishes. We should add that any personal confidences shared with a particular member of the Bishop's Staff are, of course, fully respected.

We also ask that you will pray for us and that all of us should remember that the increasing pressure upon us as clergy and ministers makes it all the more urgent that we should regularly and faithfully day by day set aside time to wait upon God in quiet and prayer.

We are all aware that many people both inside and outside the Church are currently giving considerable attention to understanding what is involved in the proper pastoral care of one person by another. One outcome of this heightened awareness of the subject is the raising of the expectations of everyone as to what may be desirable. However, unrealistic expectations do not help the achievement of the best results; it is helpful for everyone if our expectations of one another are founded on what is possible. One way forward for us as a diocese is to seek to develop a structure of pastoral care that takes account of the wealth of resources that are available, some very immediate, others more distant.

The first and most important level of pastoral care is what we consciously and responsibly choose and arrange for ourselves. This may include a particular friend and confidant with whom we can share our concerns, a personal spiritual counsellor, director or friend whom we will see at regular intervals and/or membership of a small cell or fellowship group. We should have at least one of these provisions of pastoral care. Apart from this very personal pastoral support, for those in the parochial ministry the most immediate relationships are with churchwardens and parishioners. We wish to encourage churchwardens to meet regularly with their clergy and ministers and to pray and think together about the work of God in the parish. A churchwarden can be an invaluable friend and support, and the parish which values its clergy and ministers, and makes clear to them that their ministry is appreciated (not waiting until they leave!), is the parish that best enables them to a full and happy ministry.

At the next level is the deanery chapter. A deanery, or formal or informal group of neighbouring parishes, can provide valuable mutual fellowship if all will take a personal interest in one another, offer human friendship and work for each other's greater good. Isolation is thankfully being replaced by a new sense of partnership in each deanery and this can be a most valuable resource of pastoral care for all concerned. Rural Deans have a particular share in the bishop's oversight and pastoral care. A rural dean is appointed as someone who has the confidence of the deanery and who can be looked to for immediate pastoral care, support and encouragement. We hope that you will feel able to work with your rural dean in this way. In addition to the Anglican chapter, many are able to enjoy valuable fellowship and support in an informal ecumenical clergy grouping.

At diocesan level the bishop is assisted in his oversight and leadership by a wide variety of specialist officers and advisers who are available for help in these aspects of ministry. Anxieties often stem from some particular problem in a parish and it is at this point that one of the bishop's officers can often best help and encourage. Rural deans and diocesan officers have the bishop's full confidence and share the bishop's oversight in this way. For more personal advice or spiritual direction you may wish to seek help from those outside the Bishop's Staff. We have appended a list at the end of some of those in the diocese who are willing to be approached and who will gladly give help if asked.

The diocesan bishop, however, particularly shares his responsibilities of pastoral care with his suffragan bishops and archdeacons. The bishop and archdeacons arrange for the clergy to have an extended conversation every three years. This Ministerial Review involves preparatory reflection and the completion of some paperwork as background to the discussion, after which a short summary is agreed. The members of the Bishop's Staff themselves participate in the same Review process. These conversations are an opportunity for you to talk about your work and the life of your parish or specialist ministry; to discuss opportunities for Continuing Ministerial Education; and generally to share your interests, strengths and weaknesses, fears and hopes, as we look to the future.

Between such interviews there will be occasions when you may wish to talk with the suffragan bishop or archdeacon, and you should always feel free to telephone for an appointment. Bishops and archdeacons spend much time in visiting parishes for a variety of occasions and, although these may not be an opportunity for any extended personal conversations, they are a point of contact and an opportunity to raise issues which can be followed up later. Inevitably some parishes seem to have fewer of these contacts and may need to take the initiative of inviting a member of the Bishop's Staff to visit. Always remember that in an emergency or crisis one of the bishops will always make time to see you immediately. At all these different levels we hope to see a network of pastoral care provided in such a way that none will feel uncared for or unable to seek the help and encouragement needed.

Ultimately, as bishop of the diocese, I am your chief pastor and, while this is only one aspect of my total responsibility, it is nevertheless for me a matter of high priority. It is therefore essential that you should know that in addition to the network of pastoral care which I have described, you have free and direct access to me, as your Father-in-God, for we share ministry.

I would also wish to make it clear that my concern for you includes your families. I hope that you will pass this on to your wife or husband so that they too may be aware of the pastoral care which we are attempting to offer and that we are equally available to them. There are a number of clergy wives groups in the diocese and we can commend these, while for more specific personal needs the list included at the end may be helpful.

This letter may not meet all needs but we hope you will find it helpful. We will always welcome suggestions which assist us in our particular responsibility of being 'pastor parvorum'.

Names and addresses of those who may be approached for personal help:

Spiritual Direction

Mrs Sally Sanderson, The Jays, Ball Lane, Bedmond, Abbots Langley, Herts, WD5 0QT,
tel: 01923 265963, e-mail: sallysanderson@ukonline.co.uk maintains a list of those willing to offer spiritual direction. She acts confidentially on behalf of Diocesan Initiatives in Spirituality.

Counselling and Marriage Guidance

Diocesan Clergy Counselling Service:

Suzanne Clackson, Bedford
tel: 01234 356996; e-mail: suzanne.clackson@ntlworld.com

Dianne Harris, Rickmansworth
tel: 01923 282490; e-mail: dianne.harris@dsl.pipex.com

Mary Perren, Welwyn Garden City
tel: 01727 327289; e-mail: mary.perren@ntlworld.com

Finance

Clergy with debt concerns or problems are invited to contact one of the archdeacons confidentially. The archdeacons cannot themselves provide specific financial advice but they can draw upon groups, contacts and resources known to them to assist.

[Reissued January 2008]