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resource sheet 8

non-stipendiary ministry

While 'non-stipendiary' is hardly a new concept in Christian ministry, (was Paul the tent-maker one of the first?), in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of men and women offering themselves for this form of service. The popularity grew out of the early formalised training schemes which began in the mid and late 60s. The subsequent growth in vocations has led to the present position with over half of those in training for ordination being prepared for non-stipendiary ministry.

Over the years a variety of titles have been adopted to describe the various strands and emphases of 'part-time' ministry – though even this is misleading since some non-stipendiary ministers are anything but part-time, having offered to serve following retirement. As you scan the development of non-stipendiary ministry (NSM) you may read about auxiliary pastoral ministry (*Bishops' Regulations*, ACCM, 1970), auxiliary parochial ministry (*A Supporting Ministry*, ACCM, 1968), part-time

ministry (Lambeth 1968) and Honorary Ministry (*ACCM Occasional Paper 8*, 1977) – these being just a selection of the titles which have appeared in documents contributing to the debate about the nature and role of non-stipendiary ministry. For a while the term 'self-supporting ministry' was in vogue, not least because it stated what this ministry was rather than what it was not! One differentiation between two expressions of this 'complementary' ministry that has emerged is that of the focus (and even locus) of the ministry.

The workplace-focused ordained minister (often called a minister in secular employment or MSE) may be rather like an industrial chaplain and exercise an official ministry in association with his/her employer, whilst carrying on his/her own paid employment. This may involve pastoral work (with or without reference to the company's personnel officers), establishing means of drawing together Christians in the workplace for worship, witness and fellowship, and responding sensitively to the

needs of individuals and the wider working community. In some settings, senior management will welcome the contribution and insights of an MSE when moral, ethical or pastoral issues affecting policy are being considered.

Some MSEs, however, have no official status in the workplace. Nevertheless, because their fellow-employees know that they are ordained, those in difficulties approach them for pastoral help and guidance. They may also be recognised by other Christians as a focal point and source of encouragement in Christian witness at work.

The parish-focused ministry is that to which most NSMs are drawn. This heading covers a wide variety of unpaid ministers:

- Those who have taken early retirement and may work anything from a day a week to full-time in the parish.
- Those (often married women) who are of an age to take paid employment, but are called to

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ordained ministry and are not able to draw a stipend. They too may offer anything from a few hours a week to full-time ministry.

- Those who have part-time jobs and give the remainder of their working week to the parish.

The need for non-stipendiary ministry is often in rural or urban priority areas, so after an initial post-ordination training period a move may be desirable.

- Those who are in full-time secular employment, but act as curate or assistant minister, perhaps on Sundays and a couple of evenings a week.

Given this diversity, it will be obvious that it is difficult to generalise about parish-focused ministry. It is very important that everyone involved knows exactly what is offered and expected; otherwise misunderstandings can quickly arise. Dioceses are encouraged to draw up a personalised 'job specification' for each NSM to ensure that all parties appreciate both the expectations and time-constrained limitations of the post-holder. There are benefits in NSMs being free to spend more time in the community, e.g. as school governors or in voluntary organisations. In this way they can develop a distinctive role in 'bridge-building' and can release the stipendiary clergy from always being the expected official church representative.

Summarising, the MSE is well-placed to act as a catalyst in reflecting on faith and work issues with a congregation, whereas the parish-focused NSM may have more opportunities to keep local

community concerns in the forefront of church life and activity.

Calling and selection

As with all forms of ordained ministry, the call to NSM will be tested. A candidate must be sponsored by a diocese and the training must be that of a scheme approved by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council on behalf of the House of Bishops. Diocesan Schemes for preparing candidates for OLM undergo similar national validation and the candidates themselves must attend an advisory panel once support has been gained from the sponsoring bishop*.

The call often begins by others suggesting the possibility; but in responding, candidates for NSM will certainly be seeking confirmation from family, close friends and members of the local church fellowship. In particular the PCC and incumbent must share the conviction that there is a call to be explored. In some dioceses – but certainly not all – the first curacy ('title parish') will be the home parish, thus candidates for NSM will need to work closely with the local leadership in preparing both themselves and the congregation for new roles.

An NSM may sometimes be invited to act as a Priest-in-Charge of a parish. Some, where circumstances are appropriate, are asked to consider a 'house-for-duty' arrangement. The picture is by no means monochrome and there are a variety of contexts and models for NSM work. Flexibility is an important attribute NSMs can bring to their ministry, their secular employment and to their family circumstances.

It was once the case that during the time of considering the call and

through the period of selection others might pose a nagging question, 'Why part-time?' This is less common now although there are still those who view non-stipendiary ministry as 'the best of both worlds' where ministers can retain a well paid job and select the most attractive aspects of ministry to exercise. Stipendiary clergy colleagues may share some doubts about the validity of such a ministry, holding to the view that ordained ministry can only be full-time. It is essential before proceeding very far along such a demanding road that candidates are very clear why God is calling them to this particular expression of ministry. For many, however the 'call' is interpreted or justified there is simply a conviction that they can do no other.

Candidates for NSM are normally aged 30 or over, attend Bishops' Advisory Panels with candidates for stipendiary ministry, and are considered in precisely the same way and according to the same criteria – though advisers will want to explore specific issues which lead a candidate to think that God is calling them to NSM rather than stipendiary ministry. Dioceses handle OLM candidates in differing ways and enquiries are best made locally.

Training

Consideration and advice may be given regarding the most appropriate training which will have to be carried out while a full-time job or domestic commitments are maintained. There is some flexibility in arrangements, but training will usually follow an approved scheme on one of the (part-time) theological courses. This normally lasts three years and involves either central teaching evenings (one or two a week) or a local tutor system (used extensively in rural areas such as East Anglia, Cumbria and the Southern Dioceses). In addition, there will be several residential weekends and a summer school each year. The course will demand ten to fifteen hours of private study per week. Candidates are prepared for a

variety of approved certificates and diplomas, validated by higher education establishments. Continuous assessment is more usual than examinations and study is almost always based on a modular approach. Previous study and experience are now taken into account.

NSM ordinands who train on part-time courses may feel deprived of a sense of community in their learning since they do not experience the same benefits of college campus life that full-time students enjoy. Yet since fellowship and worship are key elements of training, the theological courses recognise this need and try to meet it. Occasionally NSMs – where professional and family commitments allow – follow a full-time programme of study and now it is increasingly common for stipendiary ordinands to study on courses, so there may be a more mixed course community than in the past.

For each NSM candidate, the time eventually comes when, on receiving advice from those responsible for training, the bishop agrees to ordain. The years of preparation are demanding for the ordinand, the ordinand's family and possibly work colleagues, who may not fully understand what is going on, but will sense that it is an important step. Because of the time demands of such training, those undertaking it are advised to give up some of their local church responsibilities for the duration of the course, in order to allow them to give adequate time to family, personal spiritual growth and work (or domestic responsibilities). There will be many calls upon one's time following ordination, so it is advisable to learn and apply the important lesson of being a good steward of time at the earliest opportunity.

Ordination and early days

Many people will have a wide variety of expectations of the NSM as the great day approaches. Colleagues at work may wonder how the person will change, whether they will come

to work in a dog-collar, and even how the (now ordained) NSM should be addressed. Family may have mixed feelings of pride and self-consciousness and maybe some fears that the new minister will be seen even less at home! Church members will probably welcome the idea of another minister in the parish but will also be aware of his/her weaknesses, if they have known the NSM prior to training.

NSMs may well be flattered to receive many invitations to address meetings of organisations now that they have a new 'status'. They can get 'punch-drunk' with the excitement and 'busy-ness' of parish duties and being regarded as people with a certain authority. Where opportunities arise it is good to experience as many different aspects of the job as is realistic, bearing in mind the other calls upon one's time. Leading or preaching at Sunday or other services may be a regular commitment, but demands ample time to prepare. Visiting the sick, housebound and bereaved can be rewarding and uplifting, but equally it can be energy-sapping and, again, takes time – often more than is presumed. NSMs must constantly exercise a special discipline, given that tomorrow there is a (paid) job of work to be done or the family needs to enjoy their company.

It is really important for NSMs to be clear about the focus of their ministry – is it a 'work-focused' ministry (e.g. an ordained GP whose 'calling' may be worked out in their day to day work in the community) or a 'parish-focused' ministry (e.g. an ordained early retired engineer whose calling is worked out in the local church especially in ministry with the bereaved). It is also crucial for boundaries of time and energy to be clarified at an early stage!

In most cases it is advisable, perhaps after a period of gaining general experience, for the NSM and the incumbent to agree on an area of specialised work for the NSM such

that time and talents may best be employed. There may, however, be occasions when the NSM has to exercise a fuller ministry, such as during an extended illness of other staff, during a vacancy or as a result of a move and being offered more responsibility. Indeed there is a small but increasing number of NSMs who have charge of a parish, particularly in rural areas. Such additional responsibilities must not be taken on lightly. NSMs need to know their own limitations and may need the wise counsel of those close to them. Equally a move of job and house may result in having a diminished or even no ministry for a period. A parish already well staffed may cause some frustration. Here an NSM may feel it right to approach the archdeacon or other senior clergy to seek advice on how his or her ministry might again be exercised.

Deployment and parish life

Dioceses vary considerably in their approach to deploying NSMs, especially those with a parish-focused ministry, so it is wise to make enquiries in advance and not to make assumptions which may lead to disappointment. One particular factor to bear in mind at all stages is that many NSM candidates emerge from flourishing suburban churches which have thriving lay leadership and may rapidly become over-staffed. The *need* for non-stipendiary ministry is often in rural or urban priority areas, so after an initial post-ordination training period a move may be desirable.

It may be argued – not infrequently by those in the stipendiary ministry – that NSMs are in a privileged position. This may be true, for they may be more 'free agents' than full-time curates. Movement between parishes or the selection of tasks actually undertaken (in what is inevitably a limited time available) is within their control to a far greater extent. However, that is not to say that there are no difficulties

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and frustrations. On the contrary, NSMs may feel unable to exercise any significant influence in the decision-making and policy-setting of parish life in the same way that stipendiary clergy enjoy. What one would hope would be a complementary and fully supportive role, can be seen as subordinate to a degree which trivialises what NSMs view as a valid expression of ministry.

Many dioceses encourage NSMs to have a clear working agreement with their parish which is ratified by the PCC. Whilst the need for common sense and flexibility are obvious, this can be very helpful in clarifying expectations.

NSMs – especially those who hold positions of responsibility and accountability in the secular setting – may have to come to terms with the implications of the authority and leadership of the incumbent, whose style and managerial insight may be less than inspiring. In such circumstances, the maintenance of good relationships – both in discussion of issues and devotional fellowship – is of the utmost importance, as is the outward expression of unity of a staff team when seeking to lead a congregation. Put bluntly, if you can't work in a team, NSM ministry may not be for you! The ability to work collaboratively is critical. This calls for a discipline of restraint, humility and

loyalty which will have to be fostered if the total parochial ministry is to be truly effective. If this is not possible NSMs may need to consider seriously whether their ministry is best exercised in a different situation, either in terms of location or expression.

A further potential source of frustration is that, whilst the stipendiary clergy may preach to the world and about the world, it is NSMs who are often closer to that world. Thus an NSM may have a greater credibility in presenting the gospel of reconciliation when it comes to highlighting the pertinent issues that a congregation may be experiencing in daily life. Equally, as a pastor, an NSM may demonstrate an awareness, sympathy and empathy with the problems of church members that touch at a deeper level than could be achieved by full-time colleagues. Can this lead to resentment, conflict or even jealousy among a staff team? Some would say 'yes', as they speak from personal experience, while others know nothing of such difficulties. Much, however, will depend upon the expectations of staff in relation to one another, a recognition of specific gifts which need realising in practical ways. There needs to be a depth of honesty in fellowship – as befits those who are called to be united in fulfilling the will of the one Lord who has called each, first to himself and then to serve him.

NSMs are not alone in having to work – and often work hard – to discover, with others, how and where this is to be achieved.

Further reading

Ordained Ministry in Secular Employment, (ACCM Occasional Paper 31, 1989).

Stranger in the Wings: A Report on Local NSM, (CHP 1999).

OLM: A Ministry in Flux, (2007).

Diverse Gifts, Malcolm Torry (editor), (Canterbury Press, 2006).

All the above are available from Church House Bookshop
Great Smith Street
LONDON SW1P 3NZ
or via www.cofe-ministry.org.uk

On the Boundary: A Vision for Non-stipendiary Ministry, Rod Hacking, (Canterbury Press, 1990).

The Rev Canon Brian Pearson served for some years as an NSM whilst lecturing in management and computer studies, and was at one time Bishop's Officer for NSM in the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

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ordained local ministry

Appendix to non-stipendiary ministry

The 'label' OLM (previously called LNSM) has been introduced in over half the dioceses of the Church of England. This appendix describes the distinctive features of this ministry in more detail, but it is primarily an expression of ministry which is rooted in a single geographical (parochial) location. Thus selection and training, while being centred on the same criteria as for other ordained ministry, is rooted in the local context of existing and anticipated mission and ministry.

Each diocese organises OLM training differently, some using their own local training schemes, while others look to regional courses or regional training partnerships. There are, however, common principles.

OLMs are *locally* chosen

All prospective ordinands must be sponsored by a parish, i.e. their candidature is ratified by the local church. OLM candidates are called out and put forward by their local

church(es) because the parishes are saying: 'This person, who is rooted in the life of this community, is someone we believe God is calling to ordination within the shared ministry of this place.'

OLM candidates attend a selection panel set up in their own diocese, and if selected, then attend a Bishop's Advisory Panel.

OLMs are *locally* trained

The exact training pattern varies substantially from one diocese to another. Some may do part, or even all, of their training on a part-time course alongside other ordinands. There is always, however, an element of training which involves a local group alongside the ordinand. There is often a local ministry / leadership team in which s/he has emerged as an ordinand; or in some dioceses the training group is formed to work with the ordinand. But this is more than a support group; all are involved together in training and in ministry.

The OLM's role is *locally* shaped

Every ordained minister in the Church of England has a local licence. In the past this meant to serve in (a) particular parish(es).

An OLM serves with a particular team of lay and ordained ministers in a particular context. However, the realities of parishes working together means that 'local' may mean within the deanery. In the case of those who move house, out of their deanery or diocese, Ministry Division is working on processes to be followed to allow a 'transfer' to a new situation. S/he may be primarily a pastor or a teacher or work with young families etc. but OLMs are not expected to be (even notionally) omniscient. They work collaboratively alongside others. Their gifts and experience will complement and be complemented by the other members of the team and their sacramental ministry will enhance the ministry of the whole team.