

by Paul Needle

resource sheet 9

ministers in secular employment

Every MSE is an NSM but not every NSM is an MSE! Non-stipendiary ministry is well described in CPAS Resource Sheet 8 as a parish-focused ministry. Many who serve in ministry without pay as NSMs also have full- or part-time work which means they have a different ministry (either official or unofficial) at their workplace as well as in a local church.

Ministers in Secular Employment are involved in work and ministry which is workplace-focused. MSE is therefore a particular branch of non-stipendiary ministry. This paper concentrates particularly on those who, as ministers in secular employment, experience the conflict between working as MSEs and the demands of a Church and society which is accustomed to the traditional role of a minister – always on call and totally committed to a local parish. One of the difficulties for ministers at work is a confusion about their identity experienced by their fellow workers, church leaders and members of church congregations.

But first of all in our considerations, the question must be asked from a personal point of view, 'What is the purpose of being ordained as an NSM – unless I will be doing something which I could not otherwise do as an unordained but committed lay Christian?'

Nowadays ministry is seen to be much more than the traditional work of rector, vicar or curate. Clergy and lay people are involved together in various forms of collaborative ministry. There are, of course, a number of challenges and difficulties in the contemporary Church of England but God still prompts congregations and individuals to consider afresh both the possibilities for the shape of ministry in any particular area and the choice of who should exercise relevant skills in the service of the Church and the gospel of Jesus. A realistic appraisal of financial resources and the task of finding suitable candidates for ordained ministry to work alongside those engaged in local lay ministry

has given the Church of England a golden opportunity to develop alternative forms of ministry.

Some potential candidates for ordained ministry have a particular call to non-stipendiary ministry as part of a parish team and naturally such voluntary ordained ministry reduces the overall cost of ministry. (This is not to say parishes should not be reimbursing working expenses!) For some this is specifically within the context of a local ministry team authorised or mandated by the diocese. Their work will be centred on a particular congregational setting. They will be trained and appointed through a diocesan scheme rather than nationally, and will often be known as Ordained Local Ministers (OLM). Others, however, feel that their major area of interest is primarily within the workplace. Ordination of such ministers of the gospel provides them with a licence that is readily recognised both within and outside the Church and is an indication of a

ministers in secular employment

particular call to be a representative focus of the whole Church's ministry.

'Ministers in Secular Employment are missionaries of the Kingdom, authorised by the Church for that service on her behalf, as part of the process by which the whole world is to be brought into the Kingdom of God.' (Michael Ranken in *Ordained Ministry in Secular Employment*, p20.)

Such ministry should be no second-class form of ordination even though, with the rise in the number of non-

themselves in later years capable of undergoing a three-year part-time course.

The Church of England stresses that all who are selected and trained for the ordained ministry in whatever form must undergo a rigorous process of interviews and assessment. Selection criteria are the same, although training courses may vary in their methods. NSM is by no means an easy option for ministry.

A diocesan director of ordinands, vocations adviser or bishop may recommend you for a particular type of ministry and sponsor you accordingly. You may feel that while you are called to ministry you need not give up valuable work elsewhere. If ordination is a possibility then of course this is a different form of ministry to that of a Reader or pastoral assistant.

readily to those whose lives are dictated by clocking on and off.

So another question worth asking is, 'Is ordained ministry as an MSE compatible with my paid occupation?'

For would-be ministers in the workplace, areas to consider include:

Is my work appropriate?

As rather extreme examples one might think of how the landlord of the local, and the manager of the betting shop may be committed Christians, but can they reconcile their jobs with ministry to hardened gamblers or alcoholics? It is a question that must be asked by an MSE who, as managing director of a local company, has to make a large number of his workforce redundant – including members of his own congregation.

Is my work convenient?

Christian witness in the workplace is always to be encouraged but there are some occupations which may make it harder to evaluate whether or not being an ordained minister in secular employment is possible or appropriate. Shift work and occupations which include being 'on call' may raise particular pressures as an MSE works out an appropriate lifestyle. Other examples are with police officers or other emergency services staff being called out at short notice.

One journalist NSM had the agony of hearing a fire engine noisily racing past the church en route. The hapless priest tried to continue his sermon and keep his mind off a potential scoop!

Employed or self-employed?

Working for yourself in a small business can be exhilarating and demanding, but it may also be a lonely existence (not far removed from the isolation of many full-time vicars working in lonely situations). Although you may be your own boss, which means you can fit ministerial

If you are certain of the spirituality of your call to ordained ministry, it is equally important to consider the practicalities (and spirituality) of your daily work...

stipendiary ministries, some clergy working within a traditional stipendiary pattern may feel threatened by these part-time, often better paid, easy-come, easy-go rent-a-parsons!

With all patterns of ministry potential candidates are always advised to consult diocesan authorities about the current regulations.

Which ministry is for me?

At the moment In Britain, many NSMs are in the main people either working in professional roles, or retired from a professional career. This is because ministerial training requires an intellectual ability and level of study commitment equivalent to that of a university degree, which often characterises the type of person who qualifies. However many who for various reasons have missed out on further education and who have the appropriate spiritual gifts may find

The day job

If you are certain of the spirituality of your call to ordained ministry, it is equally important to consider the practicalities (and spirituality) of your daily work, and its compatibility with being an MSE as a form of workplace focused NSM.

Despite the observation of current trends, it does not mean that ministry rests only with those in clerical or managerial posts. In Britain during recent decades manufacturing industry has declined and service and leisure industries have multiplied. A survey of church members, or people who live in your parish will underline the modern range of work commitments and from this can come a variety of candidates for ordained ministry. It is open to all, and those engaged in manual work can bring a refreshing approach to public ministry. They are able to relate

commitments around your work, you also have the constant challenge of maintaining an income and keeping the business going in bad times as well as good.

If you are employed, you will find it hard to operate as an MSE without the sympathetic support of those above you. But be encouraged, for even with increasing business pressures and the secularisation of society, there are many employers (in public service and private sector industries) who are happy to encourage staff in ministry.

What about trade bodies, unions, and professional organisations?

Most work areas have trade associations, unions or other committees or regulatory bodies. It is important that you play your full part at work, rather than seeing your work as a minimum-effort, low-commitment means of financing ministry. This may even extend to membership of a local Rotary Club, where one NSM was surprised to find that members used and valued his role as an ordained minister in counselling, and on occasions when he led worship.

Full-time chaplain, or ordained employee?

Your role at work needs to be understood by everyone from the outset. It may be that you are viewed unofficially as chaplain to the firm, but as you are paid by the company you need to know what your commitments are in work time, and where your responsibilities lie.

The late George Reindorp, a former Bishop of Guildford, compared ministry to the role of a ship's chaplain in the Navy when he said, 'You are to be the friend and adviser of all on board.' It is hard to work on the shop floor or in office politics without taking sides. MSEs, like the ship's padre, have 'no rank of our own, but adopt the rank of the person to whom we are speaking.' It takes the patience of Job, and the

nerve of the prophets to be able to relate to all levels at work.

You may find there are tensions because you are an MSE in a large organisation which already has a full-time chaplain. This can happen in a university, for example, and here common courtesy and respect is important.

The tensions of this type of ministry are obvious. 'No one can serve two masters', yet that is precisely what we are trying to do. But God still calls people, and experience is showing that those who can live with the tensions are finding that MSE works, and is rewarding.

The 25-five hour day, or what could I do in the church?

As an MSE you may well have responsibility in a local church, as well as at work. It is equally important that these duties are agreed and set out as clearly as those in your day job. It may not always be possible to commit yourself to a parish for 'two days a week' but you need to know your own limits and the limits of public and private ministry. Do not over-reach yourself by trying to do too much.

There is no honour in working yourself into a physical breakdown where neither your employer nor the local church benefits. Sunday worship is demanding in terms of preparation and leadership. Learning to say 'no' is crucial when setting out your work pattern. Many MSEs who have regular duties in a parish have also agreed that they take one Sunday in four away from the demands of the parish. This is a good pattern to consider, in addition to regular holidays.

The key to reconciling your two areas of life is in time management. You

need a good diary system, and strong personal discipline to work hard. It helps to have something of a 'butterfly brain' so that you can become the sort of person who can switch from one segment of life to another with ease. There is a strong Christian principle behind this. In the beginning God created order out of chaos, and St Paul advised the Corinthian church that it is important that things are done properly and in order. A clerical friend of mine is fervent about punctuality, and comments, 'It is a discourtesy to the Lord to be late.'

But regular leisure and relaxation time is equally important. You may find either or both of your commitments cause you to 'live over the shop' and that to get real time off, you have to go elsewhere.

Do not over-reach yourself by trying to do too much. There is no honour in working yourself into a physical breakdown where neither your employer nor the local church benefits.

Positively, the MSE can bring to parish life many blessings. Working in a well-run business organisation can bring clear thinking to many a PCC. Seeing the problems of modern industry can put some of the seemingly mammoth issues of church life into their proper perspective. And the experience of regular work commitments gives an invaluable knowledge that assists pastoral care.

It is also sensible, when considering the possibility of working as an MSE, to think through the effects upon you if you move to new work. If your

ministers in secular employment

company relocates you elsewhere or you change jobs, you may have to reconsider your ministry commitment afresh. And if a move comes later on after ordination it is best, perhaps, not to rush into a new area of service until you have settled and had the chance to consider what you have learned in former situations. Anyone in ministry could tell you how they would plan and act differently if they could start again!

What should I do next?

The Church is often accused of being slow to change, but modular training courses and the changing pattern of

urban and rural ministry are making NSM and MSE more possible. If you feel you are called to this form of ministry you should:

1. Ask yourself why ordination is necessary for the sort of ministry you have in mind. Are there other ways of serving God without ordination?
2. Read the Ordinal and ask yourself how the demands and commitments of ministry apply in your own case.
3. Talk to your local incumbent and consult your local diocesan director of ordinands.

Resources

CHRISM (CHRistians In Secular Ministry) publishes a quarterly journal for ministers at work, occasional papers, holds an annual conference, organises occasional retreats and pursues worldwide links. CHRISM Paper 6 is on Training for MSE. See their website: www.chrism.org.uk

Diverse Gifts: Varieties of Lay Ministries in the Church and Community, Malcolm Torry (editor), (Canterbury Press, 2006).

resource sheets

Download sheets free of charge from www.cpas.org.uk/vocationresources or buy a complete set of printed sheets at www.cpas.org.uk/shop. For bulk copies of individual sheets, phone 01926 458461 or email mnorris@cpas.org.uk.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 1 Guidance | 7 On being not recommended for training | 13 Infant baptism |
| 2 What kind of people? | 8 Non-stipendiary ministry/OLM | 14 Theological training |
| 3 Women and ministry | 9 Ministers in secular employment | 15 Pre-training reading |
| 4 Calling for all? | 10 Church Army: pioneering evangelists | 16 Grants for training |
| 5 Able and willing | 11 Readers in the Church of England | 17 Fostering vocation |
| 6 What do Bishops' Advisers look for? | 12 Church of England: obstacle or opportunity? | 18 Situations vacant |
| | | 19 Ordained pioneer ministry |

CPAS resource sheets ©CPAS. Not to be reproduced by any means (including photocopying) without written permission from CPAS. You may not post electronic versions of this document on any website, but instead may post a link to www.cpas.org.uk/vocationresources.