

women clergy and deployment

Since 2006 the number of women being ordained has been about the same as that of men. And statistics from the end of 2009 show that women now make up 25% of full time stipendiary clergy (1,649 out of 6,579). Behind these headline figures, however, a different picture is emerging. The majority of women are ordained to non-stipendiary ministry: women now make up around 50% of part-time stipendiary, non-stipendiary and OLM clergy. The majority of those responding to the recent call for younger ordinands have been men rather than women. And women remain under-represented in senior posts (fewer than 10% of 'dignitaries'), as leaders of larger churches (4 out of 160), and as area/rural deans.

Patterns of deployment

In addition, the ratio of full time stipendiary men to women still varies considerably between dioceses. In 2009, Chichester had 274 men and 19 women, Blackburn had 156 men and 17 women, and Truro 90 men and 17 women. In Southwell and Nottingham on the other hand, there were 43 women clergy out of a total of 151, in St Albans, 73 women out of 252, and in Hereford, 24 out of 92.

This pattern of ministry for women is both helpful and unhelpful. Many women welcome the opportunity to work more flexibly, combining ministry with other responsibilities in a way which is more difficult in a full-time stipendiary post.

But women who are not stipendiary may find they are missing out in other ways. Fewer will be incumbents; and then may not be considered as 'training incumbents'. They may miss out on some of the information which is communicated to incumbents and priests in charge. Their ministry may be perceived as less valuable than that of full-time stipendiary colleagues; and they may miss out on opportunities for training and advancement.

In a recent book on Free Church women's ministry, Janet Wootton similarly notes how more and more women are entering ordained or authorised ministry, and are changing that ministry, but that this may have an unwelcome outcome. As ministry is restructured, women's leadership may be eroded: there are more part-time positions, more non-stipendiary ones, and more retired priests and ministers used an alternative labour supply, meaning fewer women in full-time paid leadership posts.

Women and larger churches

There were just nine women out of 100+ delegates at a conference held in November 09 for leaders of 'larger' (USA 350+ adults and children) Anglican churches. The fact that so few women are leading larger churches is of concern; it is as true in the Free Churches as in the Anglican Church. Recent research in the Episcopal Church (USA) has found that while women are being called as rectors or priests in charge of larger congregations, they 'have yet to be regarded as serious candidates in many of the largest parishes in most dioceses'.

I don't believe it is possible to say, as some have said: 'give it more time'. That cannot, in any case, be said of women in the USA, where women have been priests for several decades. In addition, many Anglican women had considerable experience as deaconesses and deacons before becoming priests in 1994. Some women have now had 17 years' experience as incumbents of smaller or medium sized churches, more than many men have had before leading a larger church. So why are there so few women leading larger churches?

This question was addressed in November 2007 by Andrew Watson, then vicar of St Stephen's East Twickenham (and now Bishop of Aston), with contributions by Susie Sanders, then vicar of Christ Church Guildford and Libby Etherington, then a curate in East Twickenham. A presentation entitled 'The Recruitment and Deployment of Women Clergy in the Larger Church' looked at some statistics: church growth in churches led by women (from Bob Jackson's *The Road to Growth*); the increasing proportion of women ministers; the churchmanship of male and female ministers (more women than men describing themselves as liberal or broad church, and fewer women than men describing themselves as evangelical); and the fact that women (especially young women) are leaving evangelical churches at a greater rate than men.

Watson then suggested some possible explanations for the comparative lack of evangelical women among the clergy workforce: a diminishing pool of women from which to recruit leaders, an unsupportive church culture, a lack of female role models; and a lack of acceptance of women's ministry in evangelical circles. One of the ordained women spoke of both the joys of ministry and of obstacles and hostility in a variety of forms: for example, the reference which said, 'I don't know that I agree with women vicars, but if I did, this would be a really good one'!

The presentation ended with a call to keep praying, and keep raising up leaders, male and female.

Women leading larger churches: a consultation

Following on from this, and continuing concerns, CPAS and Awesome sponsored a consultation on this subject in November 2010. 42 people, from across the church and representing patronage trusts, others involved in making appointments, theological colleges, larger churches, and other interested parties came together to hear from each other and to explore the issues. We heard from Bishop Andrew, who revisited his 2007 paper, from Andy Piggott, former CPAS patronage secretary and now an archdeacon, from women leading larger churches themselves, and (on a powerpoint presentation) from women who have felt discriminated against. Papers exploring statistics, previous research, and notes from discussion groups (see resources list), are available from the [CPAS](#) and [Awesome](#) websites.

It was clear from the day that there are a complex variety of reasons why (aside from theological convictions, in churches which have passed Resolutions) there are not more women leading larger churches. Women often find it difficult to get curacies in larger churches, or to gain associate posts where they could gain relevant experience. In many churches there is a general openness to women, but alongside some residual conservatism and an unwillingness to upset the status quo when it comes to appointing an incumbent. Sometimes the recruitment process does not always follow best practice; but already there is progress here, since in March 2011 a new Church of England 'common application form' was issued, on a trial basis. This has been produced in the light of requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and goes some way to addressing perceived unhelpful aspects of the previous form. New general guidance on appointments will also be produced, later in 2011.

Changing mindsets takes more than changes of policy, but these will help to inform debate and perhaps prompt people involved in appointments to see the issues for women more clearly. Jane Hedges' research has suggested that women are often unlikely to apply for a more senior post unless they receive a personal approach, and encouragement from peers and others will also help.

Where are the evangelical women?

From my own encounters with women and my research in this area, I know how common are the feelings and concerns raised in these discussions. And that as a result, as Andrew Watson put it in 2007: 'the kingdom of God is missing out on the fruitfulness from the ministry of people he's calling, because as church leaders we are failing to develop their leadership.'

I believe the key question is not only: Why is there a comparative lack of evangelical women among clergy? but also: Among those churches which are open to women as leaders, why there are so few women leading larger churches? As I follow up the consultation, and begin further research on this issue I'd be interested to know what others think (do email me: rward@cpas.org.uk), and in ideas for how the situation can be improved. In the meantime, here are some possible reasons and remedies:

Barriers to women

- Women who want to serve in a larger church sometimes can't find a curacy in one, so may appear to have less relevant experience on their CV. And the same applies to associate posts.
- Some congregations still have little experience of women's leadership – so are not sure what having a woman leader would be like.
- Churches are reluctant to rock the boat, so even if welcoming to women, when the time comes to make an appointment some want to keep the handful uneasy about a woman happy, and opt for a man.
- Some women don't apply for posts in larger churches, for a variety of reasons, even if they have plenty of experience.

According to recent research (see *Coaching Women to Lead*) women aspiring (or in spiritual terms, feeling called to) senior leadership still face a number of barriers, which the authors suggest might be addressed in the following ways:

- Increasing confidence
- Building active support networks
- Looking for role models
- Learning to balance home and work life [or ministry and family life] effectively
- Becoming resilient, with the capacity to bounce back from difficulties
- Navigating the labyrinth
- Playing with the big boys
- Developing presence
- Turning in to a leader rather than a doer [more leadership and less 'ministry'].

(Averil Leimon, Francois Moscovici and Helen Goodier, *Coaching Women to Lead*, Routledge 2011, p 110.)

If these are still needs for women in business, the professions and non-profit organisations, it is probably not surprising that they are needs for women in the church, with its additional barriers of theological issues (which often undermine women's confidence), history of patriarchy, and residual conservatism.

To change the future?

What will make a difference?

- More risk-taking on both sides? Churches keen to have women as curates and associates – and women being prepared to take on the leadership of a larger church.
- The fostering of vocations of women, younger women in particular.
- Female role models, and modelling women in leadership, in churches where these are absent.
- Women providing role models and mentoring for each other, helping to boost confidence, encouraging each other to apply for posts – and supporting women when they are in them.
- Good training (provided by dioceses or others) on the skills needed for senior roles.
- Patronage trusts and others involved in appointments ensuring that best practice is used in making appointments, and that inadvertent bias is avoided; including improved application forms.
- Continued monitoring of appointments, and continued highlighting and discussion of the issues in the church.

I long for a time when churches genuinely appoint the best person, and where gender is irrelevant. Until that time, let's pray and work towards it!

Resources

John Lee, 'Towards good practice in the appointment of clergy to parochial posts in the Church of England' (2005) downloadable from www.churchofengland.org/media/35938/goodpractice.doc

Averil Leimon, Francois Moscovici and Helen Goodier, *Coaching Women to Lead* (Routledge 2011)

Martyn Percy and Christina Rees (ed), *Apostolic Women, Apostolic Authority: Transfiguring Leadership in Today's Church* (Canterbury Press, 2010). This includes an article by Jane Hedges on her 2008 research into women in leadership, 'Size Matters; Why don't women lead large churches?' by Kirsten Rosslyn-Smith, and 'Evangelical Women, Spirituality and Leadership' by Elizabeth Hoare.

Papers from the November 2009 Consultation

Women and the leadership of larger churches: a summary of research

Women leading larger churches: statistics

Group discussion outcomes: What does it take to lead a larger church? Why are women clergy not getting posts in larger churches? The appointments process: are there things that need to change?

Appointment process: summary of a process developed by the Revd Simon Heathfield

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