

Clergy Wellbeing Report: Who Cares for the Carers?

Initial response of clergy small group.

Culture and Calling.

What follows is the initial response of a small group of clergy to the *Clergy Wellbeing Report: Who Cares for the Carers?* (hereafter 'the Tanner Report'). It is intended that this initial response be forwarded to the Archbishop. A similar process is underway with the lay people on the group, under the guidance of Dr. Anne Lodge.

At the outset it is worth recording that the Tanner Report was well received, and the sensitivity and positivity of the authors lauded.

This response is thematic and falls under ten main headings. Some elicited much discussion, others less. Some were met with broad agreement; some provoked a range of views. It is perhaps more useful if we record the range of views rather than trying to form a potentially artificial synthesis.

It was not our aim to reach conclusions on the issues under consideration, but certain themes kept recurring. Our discussions often returned to the complimentary questions of Culture and Calling. Our concern was that much effort could be devoted to addressing issues which are not at the core of clergy care, but are merely symptomatic of an underlying problem. That is not to say that the symptoms ought not to be treated, but rather that we should expect them to recur if we do not address that which gives rise to them. This brought us to what we saw as being the essence of clergy care: Culture and Calling.

Clergy need to be encouraged and kept afresh in their sense of vocation and in their discipleship. The clerical culture in the diocese needs to be one that helps foster this sense of calling, prayer and service. It also needs to value the contribution of both clergy and lay people in a context that nurtures mutual respect and the dignity of all. This applies equally to the culture within parishes. All of us; bishop, clergy and lay people have a responsibility and a role in fostering a positive and healthy environment in which clergy can minister in a way that allows them to grow as disciples, whilst also serving the people of God in their care.

1. Administration.

It was noted that not all clergy have a gift for administration. However, most find it a manageable issue. Issues raised for consideration included:

- Level of Administration
 - The amount of administration work ought not to be overstated.
 - Some aspects of administration are seasonal – EGV, SGT
- Delegation

- Are clergy good delegators? How can they be encouraged to delegate without worrying that it will be seen as weakness?
- Clergy may wish to appear to function properly without help
- It takes a certain level of organization to delegate effectively.
- Clergy need to accept the importance of collaboration.
- Assistance with Administration
 - Some clergy benefit from paid help, in the form of a PA or a parish secretary.
 - The idea of sharing resources (inc. human resources) between parishes was commended, but it was noted that many parishes are struggling to meet their assessment and any form of administrative help will not be possible.
 - The idea of utilizing lay willingness to help was considered – perhaps a member of the SV. The dangers of becoming too reliant on one person, or of a lay person building their own ‘fiefdom’ over time, were noted.
 - It was noted that clergy may need some guidance in how to manage and get the most out of any administrative help they have.

2. Schools

This discussion centred around the role many incumbents hold as chair of a school Board of Management.

- Importance
 - It was noted that in the current political climate many clergy value having a strong organizational link with the parochial school, and that this is also appreciated by the school and the parish community.
- Workload
 - School Boards of Management are relatively well resourced and often have a recording secretary in addition to the Principal’s role as Secretary to the Board.
 - The workload is generally manageable and tasks are of a routine nature. This can change quickly in situations of emergency or difficulty.
 - Clergy can feel vulnerable when it comes to new appointments, though the invaluable assistance offered by Mrs. Jennifer Byrne to diocesan clergy was noted.
 - Clergy may feel pastorally compromised when a dispute involving a school/church family reaches the Board of Management, and all parties may struggle to differentiate between the various roles carried out by the cleric in relation to the school and church.
 - Roles: It is important for clergy to maintain some distance and not to inadvertently take day to day responsibility for the running of schools.

3. Lack of Work/Life Balance

This engendered much debate, not only on how to safeguard an appropriate work/life balance, but also on the nature of the ordained life. In acknowledging that this is a real area of concern, the discussion centred around:

- Vocation
 - There was a strong feeling that clergy are living out a vocation, and that of this we ought not to lose sight. The limitations of imposing upon clergy a narrowly 'worldly' work model were considered.
 - It was suggested that often problems exist because a parish does not feel cared for by their cleric/clergy.
 - A starting point: is the cleric a person of faith, worship and prayer?
- Expectations and Culture
 - In society there is arguably an unhealthy culture of boasting of activity and busyness – to this clergy are not immune, and may feel the need to enter into it in order to relate to, or be taken seriously by, parishioners.
 - Parishioners do not always have the expectations of clergy that the clergy think they have.
- Regulation and Organisation.
 - Working 'from home' offers great flexibility, the corollary being that one is free to always be at work.
 - Much of what clergy do may be difficult to regulate, particularly responding to pastoral emergencies or chaplaincy commitments.
 - A possible analogy with GP's was considered – a pastorally minded group that has gone down the route of greater regulation of hours, professionalization and regulation of out of hours services. Can we borrow anything from this model?
 - Organising cover for holidays with neighbouring clergy was discussed. Would a more formalised system within rural deaneries work, and might it be extended to non-holiday cover for out of hours calls? Would this be desirable?
 - The regulation of holidays was considered. Some clergy take many, some take very few. Too much regulation could be counter productive, as the flexibility of ministerial life is a strength.

4. Changing Roles and Attitudes

- Clergy are in many areas amateurs who are called to be professional.
- Not all changes are negative. There is a freedom in a less deferential attitude to clergy.
- Volunteers
 - People are becoming less willing to commit themselves as volunteers
 - Clergy often seen as service providers
 - The rise of what might be called consumer worship, where people 'dip in' to a worship setting, but do not take responsibility as a member of the community.
 - Clergy need more training in how to make disciples out of seekers
 - Mission has to take the place of maintenance in clerical priorities
 - How do clergy and lay people collaborate on this?

5. Current Position

Consideration was given to the part of the Tanner Report headed 'Current Position'. This scheme seems undesirable. Even were it susceptible to being revived, the question remains whether any clergy would avail of it. The diocese is small – do clergy trust one another enough to use such a group? Could confidentiality really be guaranteed in the long term?

6. Financial Insecurity

It was noted at the outset that there was little the group could do about the financial position of clergy.

- The issue of financial security is sometimes overstated, and stipends have improved.
- Parishes do not tend to resent clergy receiving their stipend.
- The onus is on clergy to exercise personal responsibility, especially on matters of finance, and post-retirement accommodation.
- It was noted that whilst stipendiary clergy generally have housing provided, this may in turn make it more difficult for them to obtain mortgages to buy their own home, as it will be seen as an investment property/second home, rather than as their Principal Private Residence.
- There is help for clergy in the forms of a variety of funds, information about which ought to be, and generally is, readily available.
- Ordinands and candidates for ordination may not wish to ask about remuneration. The Church ought to be open about stipends with those coming forward for ordination.
- The group felt that we lacked the voice of an NSM, and were ill equipped to consider the financial pressures on those who have trained for ordination and live out their vocation as an NSM.

7. Communication

Under the heading 'A Way Forward', it is noted that 'Communication is an essential component to clergy wellbeing'. In the following section 'Further Recommendations', the idea of a clergy handbook is raised. This was considered to be a positive suggestion. It may be in print, or possibly more usefully, on a clergy area of the diocesan website. It would be a good place to collate 'soft' regulations of which clergy may not be aware, such as recent funeral guidelines. The key would be in keeping same up to date.

There was some discussion around the negative side of communication. Many clergy and parishes use social media, all utilize the Church Review. Both can be useful and encouraging, but can also encourage a culture of competitiveness and feelings of inadequacy.

8. A Mentoring Cleric for new clergy

This idea was raised and the group received it warmly. A similar system is used in other dioceses and could help the newly ordained or the newly arrived to learn about the diocese, the deanery, the parish. This would be a time limited arrangement and could only be given to those with an aptitude for it and a certain lightness of touch.

9. Continuing Professional Development

The Tanner Report states variously that 'it would be difficult to adapt the practices of most of the secular caring professions due to a difference in structures' (pp4), 'clergy have no job description, nor indeed can they; (pp5), and 'in service training courses . . . should be run by experienced people who are intimately familiar with both the context and culture of these dioceses. It should be noted that speakers unfamiliar with this context and culture may be inspirational but more often than not contribute to clergy stress, as they raise more questions than clergy can hope to answer'(pp7).

The group had mixed feelings on this matter. We recognised fully the calling clergy live out to be a vocation first and foremost, yet there was also voiced a feeling that this did not preclude clergy learning lessons from other groups.

- There was a fear of in-house amateurism if CPD was offered by those with the degree of familiarity with the dioceses suggested in the Report.
- CPD could become little more than a time commitment and a source of resentment
- If it were to work it would have to be offered by professionals, offering a balanced programme that would allow clergy to up-skill, keep afresh of current theology and biblical studies and to be given the necessary tools for self-care and spiritual care.
- The writing of a job description for clergy does not seem impossible, especially if one begins by finding out what clergy actually do, considered through the lens of the Ordinal.

10. Rectory Life and Tied Housing

Rectory life is one of the more unusual aspects of ministry, and one that can be an issue for some clergy. Most recognize our system of tied housing as necessary and beneficial, allowing clergy to minister where they are called, without questions of accommodation inhibiting their free movement. Often rectories are a considerable financial burden on parishes, though they are generally regarded as an invaluable resource within parishes and rectories are generally maintained with pride by clergy and parish alike. However, issues can arise:

- How does one get 'distance' from work when one 'lives above the shop'? – what is the psychological impact of not leaving your place of work to go home each day?
- There can be an expectation (real or perceived) that the rectory will be open to the parish – a house with a public and private function. This can cause tension within the family.
- Clergy can be reluctant to trouble glebewardens over repairs.

- Parishes may find it frustrating if clergy resist glebewarden intervention/inspections, leaving a large amount of work when the parish is vacant.

11. Clergy Families

The Tanner Report could have given more consideration to the pressures on clergy families and relationships. Much of what follows is an exploration of some of the issues facing clergy families.

- Not all clergy are married, and not all clergy have family or friends close by. All clergy need to be sensible to the range of domestic arrangements and pressures among their colleagues.
- Being part of a rectory family gives a spouse and children a public role in the parish, even if they take no active role in parish life. This can be positive, offering a structure of welcome and belonging when one is in a new place. However, it may also have a cost. Although parochial expectations towards the rectory family may be changing, the interest in the goings on of that family is often still very real. This has obvious negative potential in times of family difficulty or stress.
- Increasingly clergy spouses have their own careers, are often the main 'breadwinner' in the family and no more define themselves in relation to their spouse's profession, than the cleric would be expected to do in reverse.
- Clergy 'moves' have an impact upon spouses and their careers. Ministry is lived out in a model that can accommodate frequent moves throughout the island and beyond. Few spouses have careers with similar flexibility. Moves also impact upon children and their schooling. Moving from school to school is not ideal.
- There is an impact on family life from clergy working on Sundays. With children at school during the week and spouses at work, weekends are reduced to Saturday. Moves to facilitate lay people by holding meetings or gatherings on Saturdays have a disproportionate impact upon clergy families.
- Clergy children can face higher expectations and scrutiny in the community.
- It was suggested that there could be a regular gathering of clergy and spouses socially.
- We are the household of God – clergy model that in how they live out their vocation.