***Church of Ireland***

***United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough***

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**Who Cares for the Carers?**

**If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2: 1-2)**

God created us as God’s children. Within the love of God, the call to care for others was not intended to be a call away from self-understanding, self-belief and self-care. To substitute the care of others for the care of self as a primary life-goal is counter-productive. We are God’s children living in the world of God’s creation; and self-love, properly understood, is a primary task of the human person, lay and ordained. It is also the mirror in which others see us. It is what is seen by others of our understanding of our worth and dignity before God.

The issues raised in The Tanner Report on aspects of ordained life in these United Dioceses gives scope for the encouragement of a fulfilled life on the part of clergy working alongside and in partnership with others. They bear considerable similarity to experience of clergy in other dioceses with whom I have consulted and compared notes. The core issues are replicated across the best international research in this field. Isolation emerges as a key factor in individual distress. Bureaucratic expectations, particularly when set alongside a very individual sense of calling, emerge as another key factor in loss of confidence, loss of direction and loss of professional self-worth. This can lead to heightened anxiety that radically diminishes happiness, both personal and domestic. It is always important to realize that others may well not see us as negatively as we see ourselves. In the ordained life friendship, prayer and resting in Scripture are the key ingredients of care for oneself and care for others.

Along with the valuable insights of those who contributed to The Tanner Report, I have received reports from a group of clergy and a group of lay people. All of these reports are published in appendices to this document, as is The Tanner Report. From my own perspective, in meeting clergy one-to-one biennially and in working with clergy regarding distress and difficulty on an individual and confidential basis, I am fully aware that there are also unpredictable factors and unforeseen circumstances that have to do with physical and mental illness along with disability and need, as well as family pressures and tragedies. I realize also that clergy have to deal with all that they do in what is and will remain a de facto situation of self-employment.

**So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 27)**

The following Pilot Project which is already in train seeks to equip clergy, particularly clergy in their first incumbency, to draw together a number of approaches as will be clear from the rest of the document. If tithing is a Biblically-based principle of giving in church life, we should equally make tithing for self-care a principle in personal and in professional life. A further tithing should also be extended to the joys and responsibilities of family and domestic life and for the special friendships with people whom we cherish. My hope would be that united with a structured life of prayer and Scripture and sufficient relaxation and refreshment, the combination of these can enable each and every one of us to fulfil the shared duty of The Ordinal in an enriched and enriching service of God and community.

WAYS FORWARD

**‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14: 1)**

The Tanner Report and the Reports of Clergy and Laypersons’ Reflections are published as Appendices 1, 2 and 3. A comprehensive booklet is actively being prepared that lays out the role of clergy and committees. It will be available on the Diocesan Website to all members of the dioceses and will be particularly useful to clergy in the area of creating and maintaining appropriate boundaries. An arrangement with a psychology practice/team that specializes in counselling in cognate areas has been put in place. Accessing such support will be through the archbishop and provision will be made for up to four sessions for a calendar year for an individual who needs to engage with such services. Because of cost constraints an individual will be responsible for any further sessions and the diocese will make available a maximum of twenty sessions per calendar year for the whole body of the clergy. The relationship between the cleric and the counsellor will be both professional and confidential. While the archbishop will make arrangements for the sessions, confidentiality will be maintained between the cleric and the counsellor. This is already the case where the archbishop has been doing this on an ad hoc basis for a number of clergy heretorfore. The archbishop will continue to remain available to all clergy who wish to meet with him at their own initiative and through the biennial meetings as heretofore. Appendix 4 contains pastoral material from a neighbouring diocese (Meath and Kildare) and a diocese of similar size (Connor).

PILOT MENTORING PROGRAMME

**But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. (Ephesians 4: 7)**

A Mentoring Programme has been established whereby clergy in their first or second year of incumbency are members of a mentoring pair with established rectors. This relationship will be one of meeting formally together for three to four times for the first year, twice in the second year and once in the third year. The frequency of meetings in years 2 and 3 may be different depending on the wishes of the mentoring pair. The overall purpose of this is constructive support. In the subsequent phases, meeting may be face to face, by phone or by e-mail. Its purpose is not to resolve or solve problems but to build a relationship of confidence and empowerment in the context of collaborative ministry and service. Ultimately it is intended to empower the new incumbent to make wise and informed decisions and to learn additional skills in this regard from a more experienced colleague.

The hope is that the mentees will consolidate their relationship with one another as a peer support group of critical friends. While some of this activity may be happening informally already, it is the ad hoc nature of it that I am trying to address in a structured way. Such structuring of relationship is designed to facilitate discussion and conversation about areas of ministry and professional concern. Critical Friend pairings will help the participants to support one another’s spirituality.

Alongside this there will be the provision of a professional mediator who may be made available to clergy, both established and new to incumbency and other ministry in the diocese with independent responsibility, through the archbishop. Costs associated with mediation will be a matter for individuals or for parishes as appropriate.

**‘I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’** (Revelation 22: 9)

WIDER ISSUES

Planning Continuing Professional Development of clergy in the Church of Ireland is a matter of ongoing concern to a central church. The House of Bishops has undertaken to develop and advance this through its outworking of the Review of the Theological Institute and the development of its services.

**‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’ (Mark 10: 45)**

+Michael

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