

Hampshire Rural Group

Assistant Clergy – Report of Meeting with Revd Norman Boakes, Winchester Diocesan CME Adviser 191110

*Who is there that can tell me who I am?* (King Lear 1.4.230)

Assistant Clergy 'Issues' listed on flip chart from buzz groups

- ! [benefice as] Container for dynamic of God
- ! Working with young people
- ! Vocation
- ! Trusting
- ! Loyalty
- ! Communication
- ! SSMs & vacancies
- ! Authority & collegiality: new assistant clergy/new incumbents
- ! Who does what?
- ! Organisation
- ! Working together: different models
- ! Geography & "Parson": place/area & motorways and railways
- ! Access points to church
- ! Systems to refer
- ! SSM: loved by parish, ignored by "hierarchy" / when from parish can be challenges (baggage)
- ! Theological variety

*Typically, not all these are as cogent when reviewed as they seemed when spoken at the meeting. The following picks out some of the themes of the flow of subsequent discussion.*

**Organisation** – Who does what? Access points to church: Systems to refer: Authority & collegiality: Geography & "Parson": place/area & motorways and railways; [benefice as] Container for dynamic of God

Why not give **individual parishes** to ministers? Is there really a need for multi-parish constructs?

**Common Tenure changes:** many will be surprised to find themselves styled 'assistant curate' (legally applies to everyone not of incumbent status): Bishop may approve a suitable other title, such as 'associate rector'.

**authority** – (incumbency) + collegiality: boundaries – who does what? Which group has authority ministry team or PCC or Benefice Council or ... ?

Need for **clarity in documents:** CT statement of particulars, licence.

**Holding the benefice in the mind** – just a container for the dynamic of God, an idea in prayers – all provisional. **Benefice** is simply a mental construct, but people take it seriously in the wrong way.

SSM in **Interregna: Clerical Registry:** not many retired [previously incumbent] clergy prepared to undertake interregna.

**Leadership:** "They tell me they want me to lead, but they tell me also what I may lead."

**Collaborative working** – or not

**Relationships** – Working together: different models; Trusting; Loyalty; Communication; Authority & collegiality: especially with new assistant clergy or new incumbents: Theological variety [especially when mutually exclusive]; SSM: loved by parish, ignored by "hierarchy"

**Representation:** doing 'on behalf of' is never 'instead of' – sharing the responsibility; secular ...

**Finding your place:** Coping with own insecurities because of not having a place. Change of style – over-asserting role because of insecurity: need for incumbents to prove themselves. All ministry is shared with others.

**Negotiation:** personal maturity and self-understanding needed to come to a conscious agreement acceptable to all parties.

**Communication:** handing on information, access points "You've phoned the wrong person ..." – systems of referral.

**Trust** in colleagues

**Loyalty**

**Hypothesis:** "As you were with your parents, so you will be as a minister."

**THE question for ministry:** "What is happening to me and why?" (Wesley Carr) – listening to oneself

**Schizophrenia** – facing in two directions; possible to be much-loved in parish but ignored by incumbent

**Introduction of a new person:** management of issues for an incoming incumbent

People from local community being ordained

**Projections:** awareness of personal dynamics is essential

**Assisting:** give a bit of licence? Framework.

### Vocation

**Vocation:** has to be grounded. How are you called to multi-parish ministry? Is it managerial? being a vessel?

**Selection:** the criteria – primary leader priest / associate leader priest: formation in priestly ministry is included in criteria

**Hypothesis:** Present benefice system favours extroversion over introversion: introverts need to develop a balancing mechanism against the exhaustion.

**Vocation:** how to be a Christian parent is one of the most demanding callings. What does it mean to be a Christian today?

Need for **theological coherence**

### Status

**Hierarchy** ‘only an NSM’ ‘Could we not have the baby-sitter, please?’ **Status** [the meeting suddenly threw off the post-lunch torpor and came alive] mental model of hierarchy. “I cannot see why one person cannot represent another.” We can sense the hidden hierarchy but do not wish to face up to it.

What **cannot be delegated** by incumbent? The buck; important funerals??

**Place** – the parson; whether geography makes it possible

**Critical Events** which need special attention and care: **SSMs & vacancies**; **SSM: loved by parish, ignored by “hierarchy”**

**Vacancies** and expectations of SSMs: how authority is handled

### Leftovers

North Downs Benefice grown on previous independent benefices – affects present dynamics

When SSM finishes curacy there should be a welcome / licensing service

Colbury - SSM came from being Oxford OLM to priest-in-charge House for Duty

Relatedness of role to task

(mentor / work consultant usually provided now)

**Continuity** – via interregnum: nice for incoming incumbent if all running smoothly, then can be released for ministry.

Value of Service of **commissioning and authorising** for parish visitors: but the best visitors are often those neither in the church and not authorised.

**Cure of souls**

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### Some Observations

*Martin Coppen*

**Relationships between Clergy within a Benefice:** Collegiality is too weak a concept (“gathering together”) to be a way for incumbents and assistants to relate to each other. It is also without the theological basis of *koinonia* or even *partnership*. We need to base the hoped-for relationship in the latter, vocationally in Christ. The need is for those who are reconciled to their weaknesses and aware of their effect on themselves and others. Humble self-awareness is a prime virtue in parochial ministry. Parochial clergy formation must be in love and acceptance, of self and other.

For some, the continuing intractability of relationship between incumbent and assistant can be very painful. Is this a clash of personality, a training, or counselling, or spiritual, or theological issue? If there cannot be love, might there not be respect?

**Church of England and Diocese:** need to work out a coherent structure of relationships and expectation of bearing between clergy, based on the traditional sharing of the cure of souls. The licence, which will be the norm under Common Tenure, is a bishop’s discretion, so all relate to him at the centre – the wheel is all spokes and no tread: the basis on which clergy relate to each other needs attention and support. There is a case for Bishops to conduct Ministerial Development Review not just of individual clergy, but also benefice teams, to counter the ‘my ministry’ culture.

**The hidden status system** of Anglican and English culture needs to be exposed for what it is: baseless in Christ, where there are neither stipendiary nor self-supporting, neither male nor female, neither trained full-time nor part-time, but all are one, valued, accepted, loved. For instance, cathedral honorary canonries need to be spread between stipendiary and self-supporting – the labourers in the vineyard.