

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

- Paper by the Revd Nicky Judd, Non-Stipendiary Ministry Adviser, Diocese of Winchester.

What is a non-stipendiary minister? If you have worked with one, you might think you know the answer. If you have worked with two, you might not be quite so sure.

In theory, a NSM is someone with at least two vocations — one to ordained ministry and one to another form of work. The NSM will not receive payment for any church-based clerical ministry, but might be paid for his or her other employment. I say 'might', because that other employment could be something like bringing up children or caring for a disabled family member.

In some way, the NSM will, with the backing of his or her employer, exercise priesthood in the place of employment as well as in the parish to which he or she is licensed. By ordaining 'worker priests' (or MSEs) the church is making a statement about the sanctity of the workplace and about the value of vocations other than that of parish ministry. NSMs could legitimately say, when the subject of 'Fresh Expressions' comes up — "We've been doing it for years."

That is the theory. Now let us look at what has actually developed in this Diocese.

There are currently 57 NSMs, all but 6 of whom are licensed to individual parishes or to multi-parish benefices. One of these is working for *Intercon* in France. 9 live on the Channel Islands: 18 are attached to rural benefices, the remaining 30 are in urban/suburban settings. Four NSMs are in house-for-duty posts. (I don't count retired stipendiaries as NSMs — nor do they! — particularly as they are entitled to receive fees, which NSMs are not, even after retirement.)

There are 25 men and 31 women. 21 of the men are in paid employment; 9 of the women are in paid employment. Here we have a major discrepancy, for very few of these women have young children, and in fact it is two of the men who are carers.

Among our NSMs there is a great diversity of experience. As well as the parents and carers already mentioned, there are lawyers, an estate agent, nurses, teachers, a surgeon, a GP, a pharmacist, a policeman, the director of a charity, people who work for social services in various disciplines, IT experts, a Human resources consultant, a consultant bio-engineer, and someone who works with asylum seekers. At least one runs his own business. You will see straight away that many of these jobs are to do with caring for people. It follows, therefore, that priests in these jobs might well see the workplace as their parish — but not always.

And in some cases the workplaces are many and not only in this country. As time passes, NSMs find they are being pulled in one direction or the other. Some see their priestly identity most fully expressed in their place of work (and may find traditional church limiting and frustrating), others are more drawn to traditional parochial ministry and would happily leave their other employment in order to spend more time in the parishes.

Some people come in to ordained ministry for very functional reasons. They may already have been Readers. They see that they could be 'more useful' if ordained. This group might well experience vocation as local and find it difficult to imagine themselves in another place.

Some people thought they were called to full-time stipendiary ordained ministry, but at some stage in the selection process were told they had to be non-stipendiary for some reason — the main ones being:

- You're too old.
- Your family is too young.
- Your husband (it's always the husband) either won't move, or isn't likely to give a high enough level of support.
- You don't have the leadership qualities we are looking for. (NSM - not suitable for ministry - hurtful).

Of those who deliberately opted for NSM, the majority had a vision of how priesthood could be an essential part of their life at work. A minority were in a position to give themselves freely to parish ministry, not wishing to be a financial burden on the church.

Out of this rich variety, then, there are some (about 4) who would gladly move house in order to take up a more demanding parochial responsibility, ideally stipendiary: two at least have already done this.

Another group would be willing to be licensed to different parishes within reasonable travelling distance from home and workplace/husband's workplace.

Of the remainder, some are close to retirement and so a move at this stage would not be appropriate. Others have just taken on a new responsibility. Yet others are still in their CME-1-4 period, but are open to the possibility of moving on from their training parish in due course. And others are already in the right place.

A lot has been said in the past about the potential for using NSMs more efficiently as numbers of stipendiary priests continue to be reduced. I don't, however, see that happening. In the last couple of years, a small number of NSMs have been seeking redeployment and have not been 'snapped up'. Instead, they have sorted out something for themselves or are still waiting, getting increasingly frustrated as years of unused potential go by. What I hear now is more about a need for paid administrators or youth workers, and a desire to give Readers more responsibility and to train more lay leaders of worship. But there doesn't seem to be anything being put in place to enable any of these things to happen, other than the piecemeal initiatives of individual parishes. Though maybe Simon Baker, with his latest task as 'Director of Ministry and Pastoral Planning' will

address this! Perhaps the muddy waters will clear a bit on 1st April [Diocesan Consultation on Future Patterns of Ministry], but in the meantime NSMs continue to get on with the job, contributing considerable skill, energy and experience to the business of priestly and diaconal ministry wherever they happen to be. And, most importantly, we enjoy what we do, and those on the receiving end welcome and appreciate our ministry.

Some comments made in discussion afterwards

- recent debate in General Synod, readers being 'done down' by lay people.
- experience of one member: 2 NSMs in Leicester redeployed very happily and blossomed. They had been 'hobbled by the system'.
- most significant issue is that the deployment of significant skills depends upon 'the top dog'.
- clergy today are overworked but underused.
- Ordained Local Ministry (in Salisbury): different selection procedure to minister to their place, further selection to go on to NSM
- prime need for NSM to move is because of new incumbent
- there is a congruence of different ordained ministry: situation is more fluid, more recognition of complementarity.
- what about readers? "Ordained bring the ministry of the word mainly from being with other Christians: Readers spend most of their life with 'real' people." (The first half of this statement was disputed with regard to rural clergy.)

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