

Self-Supporting Ministry in East Anglia

Meeting in Ely, 3 December 2016

Our contexts

Represented at the meeting:

Ely
London
Norwich
St Albans
St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

We were joined by Rob Taylor, the Bishop's Officer for Growing Vocations in Ely Diocese for just over an hour in the morning.

Apologies from:

Chelmsford
Peterborough

- Wide variety in our contexts – urban/rural, deprived/wealth areas
- Some of us are MSE/retired MSE, some do not see themselves as MSE although working in a secular context
- Keith (Norwich) is FTS CMD officer
- Some dioceses don't have SSM officers – of the dioceses represented, Norwich and London don't
- What is the job description of the SSM officer – who writes it, does one even exist?
- Shop steward of SSMs – title upsets the archdeacons!
- Point is that people feel pastorally supported, and have a point of contact with the diocese.
- SSM officer role – offering support where required, helping the diocese to become more aware of what SSMs are, what they aren't
- Need to brief Bishop's Council on what SSM is

What is an SSM?

- No clear answer to this question, but for us, being SSM is a distinct vocation, not just a second best FTS (full-time stipendiary)
- We have strong feelings about the need for recognition of our distinctive vocation
- But the age cut-off for stipendiary ministry in some diocese => some are SSM reluctantly
- Who are the SSMs in a diocese? Inaccurate lists are an issue for several of us.
- Difficulty in defining SSM
- Where do House for Duty priests sit, for instance?
- What they are is everything and anything
- Tend to be older
- Amount of time offered varies from quite a small amount to full-time and more
- MSEs are one way of being SSM
- Some regard themselves as MSE, some have a secular job but don't regard themselves as MSE
- Can't ever generalise what an SSM is or what they give – enormously diverse.
- But stipendiaries are also diverse.

Issues for SSMs

- SSMs perceived as lower forms of life!

- Specific support needed for SSMs in parishes in vacancy, and for stepping forward in a vacancy, then stepping back when someone new arrives. Parish expectations – you’ll do everything that the FTS did, SSMs as ecclesiastical polyfills for vacancies
- SSMs in Chelmsford – ‘turn around’ ministry, help parishes come to terms with doing more for themselves, often leads to parish growth
- A new bishop => change of emphasis
- Challenge of emphasis on young vocations, many SSMs are older, lack of appreciation of our life experience
- Some dioceses – SSMs move to stipendiary or retire, and few new people are coming forward to replace them
- Very small representation on General Synod – either SSM or MSE
- Focus in looking for younger clergy is in looking for leaders, whereas older clergy were chosen to be pastors. Collaborative team ministry – working in a team and with volunteers hasn’t been part of the stipendiary training, so we can be seen as a threat.
- Many SSMs are leaders in their secular jobs, but we may be quite happy not to be the leader in our parishes.
- Using our secular skills in the church.
- Working Agreements – necessary for all SSMs with min/max hours, responsibility of SSM as well as incumbent, specifies the situation when there’s a change of incumbent
- Preach on SSM vocations – we should be doing that – parishes have to talk about vocations, and SSMs are the best advert
- SSMs often prepared to be deployable, some can be a deanery resource, some could be seconded to a parish for a period for a particular service
- Requires receptiveness of the parish and bishop, but also the SSM being pro-active
- Continuing training and education for SSMs post-title post – what do you feel you’re lacking, what do you need to work on – need for more rigour in CMD
- For SSMs in a supportive role, what skills and aptitudes do you need for this?
- Additional work on what it means to speak theologically in a secular context
- Being personally fed – how do you do it if you’re in full-time secular employment? eg. if you can’t get to chapter
- Challenge hierarchical structure of number 1 and number 2 – cure of souls is with the incumbent, but can work collaboratively bringing all skills into the mix, requires training of the no. 1s as well as the no. 2s
- Chrism: model Working Agreement, Working Time Regulations, Common Tenure – see <http://www.chrism.org.uk/resources.htm>
- Anecdotally Oxford, Bristol, Manchester pretty good for SSMs

SSM vocations

- Need to encourage vocations, to work with the vocations team
- Churches which are good at identifying vocations down to the skills of the incumbent.
- Is there differentiation at BAPs for stipendiary candidates and SSM candidates?
- St Albans have an excellent brochure for SSM vocations, available from <http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/SSM-leaflet-10-16r-8pages-A4.pdf>
- Problem in resourcing – the church thinks it needs SSMs to fill holes
- Lots of cultural changes needed
- What does priesthood bring upon us – discipleship and priesthood of all believers ...
- What’s the difference in essence between an LLM and an SSM, other than a very few sacramental things
- Can’t distil what this difference might be, despite struggling with it
- You bring who you are, the gifts you’ve got, the strengths you have
- Can define an individual by the job they do, by whether they’ve been licensed and in what way, by whether they are employed by the church or not – how do these three come together in the

individual? Certain things are reserved for certain combinations of what you do, whether you're licensed and what kind of licence.

- 50% more ordinands means (a) 50% more growth in the church, or (b) we ask God to zap 50% more people, or (c) actually we're missing a whole bunch of the people God's calling – we're not looking where he's working
- "I know I'm being called but no one has ever told me that I can acknowledge God's call to me without having to give up my job or move house or ..." Who is God calling, what is he calling them to?
- Question – how do you live out this vocation? What is it?
- Number being ordained = number retiring and dying, stipendiary ministry is declining because people are leaving – are we treating those whom God has called well? If he calls you to ordained ministry you should be working 60 hours a week, and you should feel guilty if you're not doing this – sustainable ministry
- Chrism: examples of horrendous things said to would-be SSM/MSE ordinands – at BAPs who are looking for parish managers, or making unreasonable suggestions
- SSM training – in courses if you're lucky, not in colleges
- Wider recognition of the non-ministry pressures in people's lives might lead to more younger SSM vocations
- Need to tell people it's ok to have one or two or whatever Sundays off – it's not about how many hours you can offer, and for younger people with a family, this might be attractive, with more on offer perhaps later in their lives
- Too old, not enough hours is looking at it from the wrong end – actually, we are saving the church money and they should welcome us with open arms!
- Do younger Christians go to Vineyard etc because they feel we don't offer enough? Or are we losing them because growing churches may be brilliant with people in their 20s and 30s and young families, but when they leave a city like Cambridge and are in a fen village, they won't have that kind of church. What kind of church do we need to keep the people in their 40s and 50s?

More on what being SSM means

- Theological basis for priesthood wherever you find yourself – we are never not priests, wherever we are
- Chaplaincy to people who don't know what a chaplain is, or why they might need one
- SSMs as lead examples for the laity?
- Understanding of where the laity are coming from, with the hassle of work, etc
- Difference between priest in secular employment and lay Christian – we are trained to bring theological thinking into the general everyday context, authorised to do a certain number of things which may be helpful, eg. baptism of a child of a colleague, handling sudden death in the workplace. Many lay Christians can do most of this, but we're well placed. About having the antennae, and the language to talk about things of faith in an ordinary way – beyond the theological language, not off putting. Could argue that any sensitive educated Christian could do most of that, but that's true of most of what parish ministry is.
- Difficulty of being welcomed in some institutions if you're obviously denominational, or even Christian – it's not PC. In a full-time secular job, you may need to work out what you are there as a Christian, but it might be very difficult to be a priest there – it could be compromising, eg. if you have to make people redundant.
- How often do Christians become switched on, because they have good leadership models – SSM role important here because church prepares people for Sundays rather than for Monday to Friday.
- We applaud missions to foreign lands, but that's effectively what many MSEs do.
- We often affirm people in the work they do for the church, but not in their working lives.
- Need support for Christians working out their vocations wherever they are, important because the institutional church is too church-focused. We have been fuzzy Anglicans in a pseudo-Christian

culture, and now we have to work out what it means to be Christians – not just about being Anglican because you're English.

- Distinguishable by the collar, carry authority to do what we're doing.
- Jesus said follow me. Paul said if you don't know how to do that, follow me because I'm following Jesus, and will help you until you do know how to follow Jesus.
- The priestly role is the role of Jesus – sacramental/sacrificial. Prophetic ministry also important – standing up for colleagues, being trusted to do that on their behalf – about the collar, even though we maybe don't wear it at work
- Also bridge-building – called to be *pontifex*

What next?

Oasis Days:

- London have run oasis days for SSMs in the past: speaker, study, support and fellowship – on a Sunday, so avoiding taking time from their working/family lives – incumbents instructed to free up SSMs for it, not a day off, but a working day off rota
- Involved two parallel workshops (from heavy duty theological/ecclesiastical to looking after yourself), a eucharist with preacher, keynote speaker, long lunch to provide time for chatting – could run with 40, more good
- Take soundings on whether bishops would support an E Anglia version
- Tony to write something for us to agree and take forward

Online forum:

- Online forum – needs to be well set up, and have (a) moderator(s) to oversee it, and it may or may not work, needs to be promoted

SSM Handbook:

- Perhaps a booklet which dioceses can adapt to their own needs.

Accessing useful stuff:

- Tim Ling – Friday mailings from Min Div, sign up to it

Meeting again:

- Future date for us to meet: April/May/June, maybe late April