

# A CLERGY HUSBAND'S SURVIVAL GUIDE



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*To Miriam  
without whose ordination  
this book would not have been written  
and to  
clergy husbands everywhere*

## *About the author*



Matthew Caminer is a management consultant specializing in process improvement. His career has involved him in projects across industry, the public sector and the Church, including membership of a Consultants to Teams pilot group for the churches in Scotland and consultancy projects for the dioceses of Glasgow and Oxford. Matthew has had a number of leadership roles in the Cursillo movement, and is currently a member of the Making Disciples Strategy Development Group for the Diocese of Oxford. He met his wife Miriam, who was ordained in 2011, when they were both soloists in a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. *A Clergy Husband's Survival Guide* is Matthew's first book.

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# *Introduction*

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One Sunday afternoon a few weeks after Miriam's ordination, the doorbell rang. We were lounging in the living room with our feet up, watching an old film on TV amid the weekend papers and the wreckage of lunch. Answering the summons, I found a member of the congregation standing on the doorstep. 'It's your wife I need,' he said, holding a document that required her signature. It was a perfectly pleasant interlude, lasting only a few minutes, but it wryly underlined Miriam's role as curate and mine, in this instance, as mere door opener. In all sorts of ways, life was changing.

Ordination involves a major shift. You can't be 'half ordained'. Before her ordination, Miriam wasn't, and now she is. When we were out and about in those first weeks after Miriam began wearing her collar, whether in parks, restaurants or shops, she would find herself engaged in conversation by total strangers, given a sideways look, or simply treated differently from before. I, in the meantime, hitherto the upfront and outgoing one, would be totally ignored. Miriam's new public persona was not something we had discussed in much depth. In fact it was only now dawning on us – and especially on me – that virtually every aspect of our way of life, the things we had taken for granted throughout our marriage, and our relationships with others, were about to change for ever, however positively.

In some ways, you might have expected us to be prepared for all this. Miriam had been a Reader for 17 years, and her work as a spiritual director meant people regularly came to see her in our home. On those occasions, I had to make myself scarce, and although I developed a friendly, neutral telephone manner, I rarely met any of those she directed. In any case, at that time my business life took me out on the road for days or weeks at a time, so Miriam's work didn't impinge very much. More recently, though, I have taken on a new existence as a self-employed management consultant, and the periods between contracts are becoming longer, with retirement on the horizon. Thus the impact of Miriam's new role on the household,

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and on our life, is becoming greater at a time when I am already going through a lot of changes of my own.

Talking to other clergy husbands, I soon discovered that their perspectives varied widely. Some expressed the belief that they shared a joint ministry with their wives: some were even ordained themselves. Conversely, there were those who felt so separated from their wife's ministry that they refused to answer questions because, as far they were concerned, it simply didn't affect them and, honestly, they wished it wasn't happening at all. I stand somewhere in the middle. I certainly support Miriam's journey with joy and enthusiasm; I am a sounding board and, if invited, I give advice. But I do not believe that this is a joint ministry. It is her vocation.

Miriam's journey towards ordination was a slow burn lasting many years. Throughout this time, and as the pace picked up, I remained a benign spectator with little sense of needing to prepare for the life of a clergy husband. I was formally involved in the process only twice: after all, it was Miriam's vocation and suitability for ordination that were being scrutinized, not mine. The machinery which was carrying her towards the finishing line did nothing to move me forward. The potential impact on our lives was not ignored: it simply didn't occur to us to explore it.

The staff at the theological college did their best to be warm, welcoming and inclusive. There was a chaplain to the spouses, and at the beginning of the process I met Miriam's head of studies. I went to an introductory evening and spouses were invited to sit in on lectures as often as we liked, but I felt that I should give Miriam the space to get fully involved without any distractions. In any case, her Tuesday evenings and occasional weekends at college represented quality undiluted 'me time'!

I gradually became conscious of the need to find out a bit more about life as a clergy husband. I looked for help, but couldn't find any accessible resources or up to date material. Books, reflections, anthologies and web sites seemed to come and go. Of these, some were couched in the language of psychology or densely packed theology, neither of which felt practical or accessible: too many words, not enough pointers. Others felt like rather self-congratulatory reflections on life as a clergy wife (and yes, I do mean clergy wife. I still had not found anything relating to real experience as a clergy husband). I knew that I needed to

## *Introduction*

explore, but not knowing what I didn't know, had no idea where to start.

Gradually, however, three things became clear: (a) that everyone is different, as are their situations and needs, so a 'one size fits all' response was not going to be of much help; (b) that appropriate resources, whether printed, on line, or in the form of a support group (especially one proactively supported by the diocese or theological college) would be of value; and (c) that my desire for help was clearly shared by others in the same situation in life.

Being a bit of a pragmatist, the answer was obvious: fill the gap myself. This book is the result.

Although Miriam's journey has provided me with a certain amount of experience, it represents only a single perspective. It certainly could not provide the objectivity required to address all the issues that were now bubbling to the surface. You will therefore see references to research that I undertook during 2011. This was based on an electronic survey for which the contributors, nearly all clergy husbands, answered a series of open-ended questions. They were encouraged to respond in as much depth as possible, sharing feelings, both positive and negative, and giving examples. There were 48 responses from 14 Anglican dioceses in the United Kingdom and Europe. The respondents were admittedly self-selecting and the research is unscientific in purely statistical terms. Despite these shortcomings, it has provided a rich source of material based on authentic situations in a wide variety of contexts. Throughout the book, I have quoted directly from contributors' responses; to differentiate these quotations from others, they are printed thus:

I try to prepare for the unexpected and never forget that God is in this with me.

A number of the contributors asked not to be identified in the book. In the interest of consistency, therefore, none of the quotations are attributed by name or location. The willingness of the clergy husbands concerned to contribute is warmly acknowledged.

You may wonder why this book is about clergy husbands and not about clergy spouses in general. The approach arises in part because the concept of a clergy husband is relatively new and very little has been written about it. But even a cursory analysis of Church of England statistics for new ordinations demonstrates that the mix of

## *Introduction*

male v. female and stipendiary v. self-supporting clergy shows interesting contrasts, and the profile has continued to evolve since the first ordination of women to the priesthood in 1994. There has been a steady rise in the proportion of female ordinations, to the point that by 2010 there was almost a 50:50 mix. Furthermore, whereas only one in three new male clergy are self-supporting (previously known as non-stipendiary), nearly two-thirds of women are. These are only two of a number of factors that point to significant difference. It is of course dangerous to generalize, but as a working hypothesis, there is a good case for this focus on clergy husbands. This discussion is developed in Chapter 8.

This book is in four parts, which you are invited to read through from start to finish, or which you may prefer to dip into.

Part One looks at the journey from the emergence of an idea that there may be a vocation, to training, ordination and the early days of the first curacy. It touches also on the occasions when, as the husband, you may expect to be involved formally. Part Two considers what it is to be a clergy husband and the need to know yourself, as we look at areas of opinion and perspective. It shows that there are widely differing points of view on the matter, and that as a clergy husband, you have to develop your own understanding and approach. Part Three explores some of the practical themes of day-to-day life, organization of the home and time management, and the issues that may affect your quality of life as the husband and family of female clergy.

Sadly, things may go wrong and Part Four highlights some potentially problematic areas. They may not apply to you now and, all being well, they will never do so. Ideally, an understanding of the factors discussed in the first three parts will help to prevent at least some of these hazards from developing into cataclysms that threaten your marriage, career or health.

Throughout these four parts, there are questions, suggestions and things to think through by yourself or in discussion with your wife, with others in the same boat or with a trusted friend. This book is not just for clergy husbands, but is also addressed to your ordained wives, to those in your immediate circle and to those looking in on your situation from the outside, especially those providing support or oversight. They may use the same questions to underline the wide range of needs that exist among clergy husbands and to review approaches to communication, training and support.

## Introduction

A recurring theme is the need to develop a circle of trusted friends because it is so easy to feel isolated when difficulties arise. While this book may be helpful in developing an understanding of the life of a clergy husband, therefore, it should emphatically not be seen as a self-help manual to be used at a time of crisis: that is when those trusted friends may represent critical sources of support and rescue.

You may already have formed the view that my emphasis is a little jaundiced, when the life of faith is one to be celebrated with joy and optimism. My intention, though, is that by taking what may at times seem a slightly pessimistic approach, you may come out at the other end with greater clarity and optimism.

I hope that as fellow clergy husbands, and especially those just starting out, you will find that *A Clergy Husband's Survival Guide* helps to clear the path and provides practical signposts for the journey.



*Part 1*

THE JOURNEY



## *The journey*

‘Darling . . . I think I’m meant to be a priest.’

Whether or not that message is a surprise, and whether or not it is welcome, from the moment you hear it your marriage will never be the same again. Even if the idea is tested and doesn’t lead anywhere, your wife will have gone through a time of change and so will you. For the purposes of this book, however, let’s assume that she goes ahead and travels the full journey: what does that journey look like, how might you get involved, and what impact will it have on you?

As soon as your wife raises the idea of offering herself for ordination, you will be a fellow traveller, regardless of whether you are fully involved or simply a spectator. More than that, it will affect your life, your marriage, your family and your relationships. In this part of the book, we take a husband’s-eye view of the journey, looking at the areas in which you may be involved directly or indirectly. Along the way we will explore the following themes:

- It’s a very long process.
- You are part of the journey.
- Some of what happens will baffle you!
- You will probably be interviewed for your wife’s job.
- Been divorced? Or your wife? Prepare yourself: it won’t be pretty!
- Know where to find help.
- Communication is essential.

This book is mainly for and about the husbands of female clergy who have already started their life of ministry. If, however, your wife is at a much earlier stage, or indeed is still exploring, then this brief walk through the complete journey is also for you. It doesn’t pretend to be an authoritative guide to ‘How do I get ordained?’ That is the job of the church authorities, especially as there may be local variations. What it does offer, however, is an exploration of the potential impact on you and your wife, especially at those times when you are likely to be directly involved.

# 1

## *The process*

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... is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly . . . (Book of Common Prayer)

I don't see it as any different to being the husband of a business woman apart from the hours being different.

The process that culminates in ordination is a long one, and deliberately so. Your wife will have to meet a lot of different people before she faces the ordeal of the Bishops' Advisory Panel, or BAP. It takes a long time because the vocation must be tested for its authenticity, something you may well understand intellectually without necessarily appreciating the full implications. However positive both you and your wife may feel, the process will certainly involve adopting a different way of life based on fresh assumptions. The lengthy and often disruptive period of training and formation that follows a successful outcome from the BAP is equally likely to affect your family life, involving your home, your lifestyle and your finances, and possibly requiring you to move house or change jobs.

Let's now look at the stages that are involved and their potential impact on you. Not everyone will go through the same steps in the same sequence. The stages will differ from diocese to diocese and to an extent will depend on the amount of experience your wife has had before entering the journey. It is similarly difficult to generalize about how long it will all take and how many meetings there will be: these are subject to many factors, some with local variations that need to be understood.

### *Personal reflection*

You may be part of this process. It may even be you who suggests to your wife that she should explore her vocation. This is a time of evolution, in which the spark of that vocation will be explored and

tested, perhaps for months or years, before it becomes appropriate to develop the search into a more formal dialogue. It is an exciting time, but it may also be unsettling.

### *Discussion/s with incumbent*

It's unlikely that your wife will be able to make any practical steps towards ordination without the support of her incumbent. This may even mean moving churches to find someone to provide that support, something which may affect you in all sorts of ways. If doors appear to slam shut, you are likely to be the person who has to provide comfort in the face of distress, denial or anger. It will be even harder to offer that comfort if you share your wife's reactions.

### *Discussion/s with vocations advisor*

The diocese will appoint a local vocations advisor whose job is to focus on your wife and her vocation. The impact on you and your family life will be secondary, if it is considered at all. Even at this early stage, however, you will need to explore the many ways in which your wife's eventual ordination will intrude on your marriage and family life. You may have to be proactive in starting this dialogue with your wife and the vocations advisor.

### *Discussion/s with Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO)*

By now your wife's potential vocation will be gathering recognition, but there's a long way to go. The DDO will need to form his or her own view based on your wife's vocation and the needs of the diocese – not on you! Your wife may have a very clear calling to serve the Church in some capacity; indeed she may already be doing so. It is valid, though, for the Church to explore whether that vocation is for ordained ministry. The Church may not have a need for the particular shade of vocation, however godly, that your wife offers; even if it does, the diocese may not be able to afford it. You may both end up feeling baffled, distressed and angered at challenges that are raised, and you may be as bruised by the process as your wife, even if the eventual outcome is positive.

## *Discussion/s with bishop*

The DDO has pushed your wife's case forward to the bishop: support for her vocation is clearly growing. The bishop must nevertheless form his own view, governed by a variety of factors. The needs of the diocese will again be on his mind, and he will be influenced by the body of paperwork that has by now accumulated in support of your wife's candidature. In the space of a single interview, to which you will probably not be invited, he has a decision to make. You, your family and your home circumstances are unlikely to be high on his agenda, however much you feel that this ought to be the case.

## *Bishops' Advisory Panel*

Into the crucible! Three days of intensive grilling against nine fixed criteria. Your wife will have papers to submit in advance, and she will go through a series of gruelling interviews and other activities. She is being assessed against her vocation and her qualities. Your marriage and the impact on you and your home life are ruled out of scope: you are again not invited. The outcome may be a recommendation that your wife should be encouraged to go forward for training. Sometimes this comes with conditions, such as the suggestion that she should return after a suitable period during which she is to gain extra experience. In other cases, the verdict may be completely negative. There is no perfect way of passing on this sort of message. It is very often seen by the candidate as failure or rejection, and the Church is not always able to provide full support in the months that follow. This can lead to bitterness, anger, deep sadness and many other emotions for you both.

## *Training and formation*

The training is likely to take three years and may be residential. It could mean moving house, finding a budget for books, perhaps a new computer. You may end up adding housework, cooking and child care to your day job. Indeed you may need to change your job altogether or alternatively live a parallel life, staying at home while she is away at theological college. How this will work out varies hugely between different dioceses and colleges. Similarly, the extent

## *The journey*

to which previous experience and formal academic qualifications are allowed to influence the content and duration of the training will vary widely. In some cases, the college will proactively seek to involve you, in others it may be a more half-hearted invitation, while in yet others you will not be considered at all. In summary, it may affect you almost as much as it affects your wife; do seek the opportunity for a thorough review of the options and potential consequences.

## *Ordination*

This is a time to celebrate. Take the opportunity to rejoice and enjoy the moment, because your life as a clergy husband has just begun! For some, however, there may be uncertainty even at this stage, as ordination may take place before your wife's first parish has been finalized. For many people, ordination will coincide with moving house, in itself a highly stressful process. Even if your wife is going to exercise her ministry in the parish where you already live and worship, ordination is still a rite of passage, a doorway into a new way of life. To a certain extent, you too are going through that doorway. If you have had to change jobs in order to move with your wife to her new parish, then add yet another stress factor to the list!

## *Further training during curacy*

Initial Ministerial Education (IME) entails a minimum of three years on-the-job study and building of experience. Whatever its form, and however long the training takes, it will affect you too. Few people realize in advance quite how onerous this training will be. Perhaps the biggest challenge is not for those in full-time ministry, but for those already in full- or part-time employment, perhaps with the extra burdens of child care, or care of other dependents. It is hard to imagine your wife settling into the new routine and the requirements of IME without you having to take on some additional responsibilities.

This lengthy gestation period is complicated further if either you or your wife, or both, have previously been divorced, since a faculty must be obtained. This adds a further dimension, and is an area that we explore in Chapter 3.

Some people argue that the lengthy training clergy undergo before they are let loose on congregations, and the continuing education they undertake following ordination, is no different from those required in some other professions. Medicine and the law, for instance, are known for their extensive training over many years. But there the similarity ceases. In Chapter 7 we contrast with other professions many of the characteristics of the life of ordained ministry.

Despite the appearance I may have given that the process of ordination entails a smooth sequence of events, the reality is that there are several opportunities for go/no-go decisions, whether made by your wife and yourself, or by those accompanying her on the journey of discernment. This may mean walking away from a life of ordained ministry altogether, or the suggestion that the vocation should be channelled in a different direction. It can be a time of huge strain and distress, not only for your wife but for you too. It is very much up to your dynamics as a couple how this works out.

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### *From vocation to ordination: things you can do*

- Listen to your wife. She will probably want to share on a number of levels, spiritual, emotional and practical.
- If you find it difficult to take seriously the prospect of your wife's ordination, or if you simply don't 'get it', find someone else to discuss it with. She may have been brewing the idea for years, and you need time to catch up.
- Encourage your wife to build up her own network of trusted friends. You may be too close to be objective and disinterested.
- Make sure you discuss and understand all the options for training (residential or non-residential, full time or part time) and type of ministry (stipendiary or self-supporting, full time or part time) and their implications. These choices will have a huge impact on your life and your career, not just your wife's.
- As your wife becomes more and more involved in the process, be proactive in protecting 'us' time and book leisure time in both your diaries. Go out on dates together and make sure you don't neglect the basic things in life.

## *Introduction*

male v. female and stipendiary v. self-supporting clergy shows interesting contrasts, and the profile has continued to evolve since the first ordination of women to the priesthood in 1994. There has been a steady rise in the proportion of female ordinations, to the point that by 2010 there was almost a 50:50 mix. Furthermore, whereas only one in three new male clergy are self-supporting (previously known as non-stipendiary), nearly two-thirds of women are. These are only two of a number of factors that point to significant difference. It is of course dangerous to generalize, but as a working hypothesis, there is a good case for this focus on clergy husbands. This discussion is developed in Chapter 8.

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