1

Are you a vicar or what?

I am a self-supporting minister within the Church of England. It's a title I am relatively comfortable with and certainly better than many of the labels previously attached to unpaid clergy. Yes, in everyday conversation it would be much easier for me to have a simple title like 'vicar' or 'chaplain'; however, I recognize that many of my stipendiary colleagues have equally opaque job titles. Unpacking what we do, opening the door to the holy mysteries of church bureaucracy, is always an important chance to communicate.

My day job is working as a career coach, working with adults who want to make a career change or make the best of difficult work situations. Sometimes this is resilience coaching, supporting people through stressful episodes. I work with a range of organizations and people, including clergy. I'm the author of several books about work and careers – helping people who only meet me in print. I write and broadcast about careers issues in a range of media. This work is very much part of my calling, so I consider myself to be a 'minister in secular employment' (MSE – more on this later).

I am licensed to my local Anglican Mission Community – four parishes and five churches working together, served by one full-time (very proficient) rector. I'm part of a ministry team covering a wide range of services, events and pastoral needs. Flexibility in my work commitments allows me to assist in a number of ways and, in addition, I have a diocesan role as Bishop's Officer for Self-supporting Ministry, also performed on an unpaid basis. This balance of paid work, parish and wider commitments is fairly typical for a self-supporting minister (I'll use 'SSM' from here onwards).

Why this book, now?

Around four decades ago there was a flurry of writing about non-stipendiary clergy and worker priests. In 1983 the General Synod published Mark Hodge's *Non-stipendiary Ministry in the Church of*

England. Hodge observed that the growth of non-stipendiary ministry had occurred with 'very limited central direction and consensus' and argued for more of each. He argued that unpaid clergy had been ordained to enable mission but, in practice, they were generally allocated to local parishes and not offered further opportunities or development. Hodge was concerned to find 'a widespread view among stipendiaries that NSMs were an inferior class of clergy, not to be trusted in positions of responsibility or leadership' (Morgan, 2011, p. 5).

The seminal book *Tentmaking: Perspectives on self-supporting ministry* by James Francis and Leslie Francis provided a comprehensive overview. Many of the questions asked are still highly relevant to today's Church, but it was published in 1998 and much of its content came from previous decades (the most recent case study is dated 1991). A few shorter documents have dealt with SSM in the intervening years, but no book has taken the place of *Tentmaking*. A number of research studies have appeared, most notably the 2010 survey of SSMs in England, Wales and Scotland by Teresa Morgan. This book builds on this important study; I am grateful to the Revd Dr Morgan for her permission to quote several passages from her 2011 report.

What's happened since *Tentmaking*? Many things, of course, but the main one is a shift of focus. Twenty years ago the main discussion was about worker priests, MSEs and 'bridge' ministry. We now talk mainly about non-stipendiaries (known in Church of England circles as SSMs). The focus has shifted away from interactions outside church to the support SSMs give to parochial ministry. The term 'MSE' is heard far less frequently than it was 30 years ago – Chapter 8 offers an explanation.

Who might be interested?

All books about ministry are bound to fall into the expectation gap. For some, there will be too little focus on the bigger picture, the theology of ministry, the *why* rather than the *what*. This book touches on some theology, because all doing requires thinking. I will also review the history of SSM, because knowing how we got here tells us where we might go next. For some readers this may be less relevant than the nuts and bolts of ministry, especially working agreements and relationships.

This book is intended to be a practical guide to advise and support SSMs. This includes prospective SSMs as, although the role is fairly well understood by clergy, it's often a closed book to those considering a vocation to ministry.

I hope this book will inform those who select and train SSMs, and encourage those who work alongside them. It will perhaps assist diocesan leadership teams currently thinking about clergy selection, development and deployment. It focuses on the Church of England but should be relevant to unpaid clergy in other denominations. Therefore this book is written for serving SSMs, but may also be of interest to:

- individuals exploring SSM ministry as a vocation;
- diocesan directors of ordinands, bishops' advisers, and others involved in clergy selection;
- directors of ministry development and others responsible for ministerial training and development;
- ordinands in training and theological educators;
- stipendiary clergy who find themselves working alongside or responsible for SSMs;
- bishops' officers and advisers for SSM;
- senior clergy responsible for clergy deployment;
- congregations and teams working alongside SSMs.

Defining SSM

'Statistics for mission 2012: Ministry' defines 'self-supporting clergy' as ministers 'who do not receive a stipend'.[1] SSMs are mostly priests, although some are deacons. Readers and other lay ministers, retired clergy, and clergy in 'house for duty' posts are not considered to be SSM. A small number of unpaid clergy not yet retired operate on a permission to officiate (PTO) basis, but SSMs are nearly always licensed by a diocesan bishop. This process attaches the SSM to a specific benefice, where they are formally responsible to the incumbent (usually the working relationship is collegiate rather than supervisory). Most SSMs therefore work in a parish setting, with many also in paid employment elsewhere.

SSMs often dislike the term 'non-stipendiary' because this defines them in terms of financial status. Many people give their

time freely to their church, including PCC members, churchwardens, Readers and other LLMs. Retired clergy offer substantial amounts of work, usually well into retirement. Stipendiary clergy also give some of their time freely for community commitments outside their job descriptions. Lack of pay is not the defining or most important aspect of SSM ministry – fulfilling the role of curate, priest or distinctive deacon, is what matters – taking care of people, being prophets, pastors and teachers, bringing people to faith, sharing their knowledge of God's loving presence, baptizing, blessing, absolving, and presiding at God's table. This is what calls and sustains SSMs, not role titles.

SSMs support themselves because they can, and because their contribution makes a difference. How do they support themselves? Some are retired and living on a pension provided by their employers (although as early retirement on a well-funded pension scheme becomes rarer, this will no doubt impact SSM availability). Others are semi-retired with enough financial independence to work almost full time in parishes. Many SSMs are in paid work – full time, part time or freelance. These SSMs inevitably have less time for parish work, but in fact still contribute many hours. Some consciously exercise a 'bridge' ministry between church and the workplace.

The Church of England pays for SSMs' training, but does not pay them an income while they train as curates. Neither the diocese nor the parish has to pay for SSMs' stipends, housing or pension contributions (this last element is very significant in terms of the number of clergy shortly to retire). All SSMs may claim expenses of ministry. Funds may be available from time to time to pay for, or subsidize, learning events and study. In some dioceses SSMs can claim part of the fee for funerals and weddings or make a claim for loss of earnings, although this is rare. However, as this book will later discuss, boundaries are shifting – some SSMs are being paid nominal fees for occasional offices, and some are working on a part-SSM and part-stipendiary basis.

At the time of publication there were 3,230 SSMs in England. SSMs form an increasingly large proportion of the clergy workforce – about a third of licensed ministers working in parishes. In some dioceses (Oxford and Bristol, for example) the ratio is higher. Teresa Morgan

notes, 'In 60% of dioceses . . . SSMs form what we might regard as a typical 25–40% of clergy' (2011, p. 21). She also says:

> This figure is expected to increase in the next ten years, as around 40% of stipendiary clergy currently in post retire. The role that SSMs can and should play in the Church in the short and medium term is therefore a matter of obvious interest. The way they are deployed is certain to affect significantly the ways in which we can sustain and develop our corporate ministry and mission in the years to come.
>
> (Morgan, 2011, p. 4)

SSMs, along with stipendiary clergy, are subject to Common Tenure – documented terms of service linked to working agreements (see Chapter 9). They are accountable and subject to review processes including ministry development review (MDR).

The category SSM usually includes ordained local ministers (OLMs). Some dioceses continue to ordain OLMs. The idea is a positive one – encouraging communities to identify their own ministers. Other dioceses have never made sense of the theology of a geographically constrained priesthood. In practice, OLMs are often invited to operate outside their original parish limit, suggesting to many that the practicality (if not the theology) of OLMs might need to be reviewed. Most OLMs would consider themselves to be SSMs, although some feel that they are not given the same degree of recognition.

What do SSMs do?

When I explain my ministry to people who don't attend church, the question most frequently asked is, 'Do you do funerals?' The answer is 'Yes', of course, which people seem to find reassuring. Something about being engaged, literally, in life and death matters unlocks pastoral conversations. Many SSMs report similar conversations – which then usually move on to explain SSM, and how you can be ordained by the Church but not work for it. The first step is to explain that not all clergy are vicars. A former DDO colleague used to say, 'Priest is who you are, vicar/chaplain/associate priest/curate is what you do.' He'd often add a work role title when talking about MSEs: 'Priest is who you are, pharmacist is what you do.'

One assumption sometimes made is that SSMs perform a narrower range of duties than paid clergy. For example, it may be assumed that they don't preside at communion or they don't do weddings or funerals. So, to be clear, SSMs perform all the same rites as other clergy. SSMs might be called out at 2 a.m. because someone is dying, and they may take midweek communions. They will not have the same availability as full-time paid clergy, and probably won't routinely chair PCC meetings, but they are called (and trained) to do everything their stipendiary colleagues do. To date there has been one important exception – leading a parish. The Church of England has until now looked for a special set of abilities for clergy seen as potential incumbents. This book will explore why this thinking may be under review as SSMs are being used more flexibly and given more responsibility.

Most SSMs operate largely within the parish where they are licensed. This is not always where they live: 'Although the stereotype of SSMs is that they minister in their home parish, many, in practice, live some distance from where they are licensed' (Morgan, 2011, p. 17).

SSMs make an important contribution, especially to those many parts of the Church where shortages of clergy exist, or multi-parish benefices that require extensive travel and careful rota juggling. Their levels of responsibility vary; they may provide cover where an incumbent is on holiday or on sabbatical, and usually have increased responsibilities during a vacancy (but not always – see Chapter 11). The time commitment of SSMs varies, as does their focus of ministry. They tend to offer more hours than retired clergy. SSMs, like other clergy, take on community roles such as being school governors. Some SSMs serve as diocesan officers and advisers – for example, in vocations work or advising on spirituality. Most bishop's officers and advisers for SSM are unpaid.

Some SSMs (perhaps describing themselves as MSEs) have a special relationship to their 'nine to five' working lives. They are licensed to parishes, but see their paid work as their primary calling (see Chapter 8). Other SSMs have a ministry focused on community. Training clergy whose focus of ministry is outside the Church is still Church of England policy, but some argue that in its efforts towards maintenance it is leaning too heavily on a middle-aged workforce

of 'free' clergy, neglecting callings to other contexts. Teresa Morgan points to a key finding of the 2010 survey:

> One of the most surprising and, to the designers, saddening results of the survey was how few respondents saw themselves as having much, if any ministry outside the formal structures of the Church. This has some claim to be one of the survey's most significant findings, and one which, if it prompts a response, has the potential to make a substantial difference to the future of the Church . . . It is a great pity that more SSMs do not think of their ministry as extending beyond the formal bounds of the Church. It is also a sad omission that the Church does not encourage them.
>
> (Morgan, 2011, pp. 19–20)

A changing picture

Today many English dioceses are planning increased dependency on SSMs. This is largely for two reasons. The first is a projected decline in church attendance and income. The second is the fact that even if funds are forthcoming there will be fewer stipendiary clergy available. Since a considerable proportion of clergy are over 50, many will be retired by 2025. Dioceses are thinking hard about how they can continue to support worshipping communities with dwindling resources; some are taking a strategic view about SSM deployment. One or two are wondering if more SSMs might be found, and thinking about how to get more out of their existing SSMs. Some SSMs report that they are being asked to take on an increasingly large workload to support a shrinking workforce of stipendiary clergy.

Other SSMs are being used more imaginatively than they have been previously, being given levels of responsibility that would have been unusual 20 years ago. In the recent past it was considered unthinkable for SSMs to have charge of a benefice. This was already changing in 2010: 'Some, but not all, dioceses currently allow SSMs to look after a parish within a group' (Morgan, 2011, p. 14). In fact, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, SSMs are now working as unpaid incumbents. There is reason to assume that SSMs will be invited to undertake interim ministry. They continue to work in diocesan officer roles. Their role in vacancies may also change – consideration

is being given to providing short-term licences to SSMs during extended vacancies.

This reinvention of SSM is energizing and positive. To date it has been largely ad hoc, local and without a great deal of national attention or policy-making. SSMs come with valuable skills and experience. This is sometimes fully recognized, but not always. They are sometimes overworked, sometimes sidelined, sometimes frustrated. The good news is that evidence is emerging, if slowly, that they are being deployed with more creativity and being considered more strategically as a resource for ministry.

Case studies

This book is intended to be about ministry in practice, so it will come as no surprise that it includes a range of case studies – examples of the different ways in which SSMs work. The variety of their ministry is enormous, and I could quite easily have put in four times as many case studies without repeating stories. I have, however, tried to cover a range of ministries, experience levels and locations. Many dioceses also publish very useful case studies of their own SSMs.

SSM in practice

Tony Redman, SSM, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocese, chartered building surveyor

How and why I became an SSM

I was licensed as a Reader in 1976. I didn't feel called to serve as a local non-stipendiary minister (LNSM), probably because of the geographical limitations imposed. Some years later I was offered a range of roles, including the job of diocesan surveyor. I felt called to ordained ministry at the same time, but chose to join an architectural partnership. I've served as an SSM in Suffolk for about 14 years.

My experience of SSM

I think we put ministers in silos too early, and this includes Readers. Strict demarcation lines really don't reflect the reality on the ground of holding things together, particularly in a rural context. We look after four parish churches and we have two OLMs, two Readers, three elders,

one stipendiary priest and myself. Our experience is that we need to get people to contribute according to their skill, not their status. Elsewhere I've seen examples of high-value SSMs not being used adequately and sad evidence of transferable skills in SSMs being ignored or wasted.

What's the main focus of my ministry?

Having worked full time for many years in an architectural practice, I now work one day a week as a consultant building surveyor, and otherwise most of my time is taken up in ministry, including the work I do as Bishop's Adviser for SSMs. Apart from my parish responsibilities, which take at least 15 hours a week, I volunteer as a chaplain at my local hospice.

Support and training

I was ordained in 2003 having been trained on the East Anglia Ministerial Training Scheme, where I undertook a Master's in pastoral theology. I found this invigorating and challenging – I'm still building on the work I did in my Master's degree, especially in relation to change management.

I'm not sure how much the course prepared me for life as an SSM, but I was at least encouraged to think about the contribution I could make as a priest in secular employment. However, I have reservations about the way courses don't really fit us for the practicalities of ministry, relying too much on curacy training. My training was delivered largely by stipendiary priests and theologians, who had sympathy with but little understanding of SSM. In general, ministerial training doesn't address workplace ministry – you have to work it out for yourself.

Challenges and difficulties

I think that the Church does not adequately prepare ministers, stipendiary or otherwise, for the challenges of working with a multidisciplinary team of colleagues, including volunteers. We need to seriously rethink the idea that some people are exercising ministry in their 'spare time', and learn from organizations that have been using volunteers at a professional level for many decades – the National Trust, for example.

I think the primary challenges for SSMs are inevitably about status. I firmly believe that we should work to people's gifts and not their status, but the Church doesn't always agree. Also there are very evident work pressures on many SSMs: most of the time, working agreements seem to be fictional! At one stage I couldn't work out how you could be a priest *and* have a family *and* an outside job, but we work it out in the end. Largely this is about having really clear boundaries focused on a minister's well-being.

I'm also concerned about the lack of national representation of SSMs, especially on the General Synod. SSMs make a very significant contribution to church life, and this really isn't represented in terms of national discussions.

The best thing about SSM

The strongest aspect of SSM, for me, is *diversity of presence*. In a rural context you still need to be a kind of Herbertian embedded presence and, even as an SSM, demonstrate visible leadership. I very much enjoy flexibility in my ministry, but I also enjoy working in a professional context, particularly where I can raise an awareness in fellow clergy of the theology of the buildings we use, and their potential for ministry.

Looking forward

Since becoming Bishop's Adviser for SSMs, I like to encourage fellow SSMs to talk positively about their experiences, using Luke 10 as a focus. When I was thinking about SSM, I could not see how the various pressures on life could be balanced with serving as a member of the clergy, and so I try and encourage SSMs to be open with others about their personal experiences of how they manage the work/life balance.

SSMs often, like me, value flexibility, but we also need to retain a sense of *discipleship*. We have to take the rough with the smooth, doing what's required and not reinforcing the stereotype that SSMs pick and choose. In fact, I think it's like being a chameleon, fitting into the context and not just in what you are comfortable with. I've considered full-time ministry but I'm not tempted by it – for me, SSM ticks all the boxes.