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PANEL SURVEY WAVE I REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mapping the Wellbeing of Church of England Clergy and Ordinands

June 2017

Background

The aim of Living Ministry is to explore how different modes of training influence ordained ministers' future ministries in order to provide ongoing, consistent information relating to the work of the Church of England's Ministry Council. The overarching research question is: 'What enables ordained ministers to flourish in ministry?'. This is addressed through a longitudinal, mixed-methods approach, of which this is the report of the first wave of the panel survey.

Objectives and method

The objectives of the immediate study were to collect information relating to socio-demographics, ministry and wellbeing from four cohorts of clergy and ordinands through an online survey, in order to identify patterns and create a basis for the longitudinal research. The response rate was approximately 50%, with 761 responses received. The respondents are representative of the four cohorts but not of the whole population of clergy including those ordained in earlier decades.

Findings

Sociodemographic and ministerial characteristics

- Respondents have a fairly **narrow range of occupational backgrounds**, with 58% of respondents previously (or currently) working in education, health and social care, or church work.
- Young clergy are more likely to be married than the general population, with **extremely high rates of married male clergy** (73% under the age of 32, compared with 35% of women and 24% of UK 25-29 year olds overall). However, no gender differences were evident regarding the **likelihood of unmarried candidates marrying or remaining single** after ordination.
- **Current age and age at selection** are crucial characteristics, linked with sponsorship category, current ministerial role, mode of training, remuneration status, working time (full-time/part-time), type of church and theology. **Age and gender also interact**, with overall ages of female clergy higher than their male counterparts.
- **Clergy switch between different roles, remuneration statuses and working times**: they do not always end up doing what they expect to when they begin training.
- Higher numbers of current ordinands expect to **work in a church plant or Fresh Expression** immediately after curacy than those ordained in 2011 are currently doing (although numbers are too low to establish statistical significance). A disproportionately high number of context-based students expect to work in a church plant.

Wellbeing indicators

Overall in each domain, amongst the majority of respondents **levels of reported wellbeing are positive**. Analyses by sociodemographic and ministerial characteristics reveal the following relative differences:

- Ordinands report lower levels of financial wellbeing than ordained ministers, while higher levels of **financial wellbeing** are associated with ministers who are older, part-time, self-supporting and assistant/associate ministers.
- Those **without any income beyond that which they receive for their ministry** are far more likely to struggle financially. Retirement provision is a major concern.
- **Living accommodation tied to one's post or training** is reported as less adequate and more stressful than non-tied accommodation, and nearly two thirds of ordained ministers and over one third of ordinands live in tied accommodation.
- **Older respondents** reported relatively lower levels of physical health but higher levels of mental wellbeing.
- Relatively lower levels of **mental wellbeing** were associated with residential training, stipendiary ministry, incumbency and full-time ministerial roles, although these categories closely overlap and causality was not established.
- Older respondents and women reported relatively higher quality **relationships** and lower levels of **isolation**, while single people reported higher levels of isolation than married people.
- **Family and friends** were seen as the sources of support most beneficial to flourishing in ministry. However, there were also indications of obstacles to developing and maintaining these relationships, including a **lack of temporal, spatial and relational work boundaries**.
- **Relationships with diocesan senior staff** were generally reported as relatively low in quality (along with levels of diocesan pastoral support) but higher than relationships with employers.
- Higher levels of **autonomy** and (mainly diocesan) **support and development** were most strongly associated with incumbents and those in full-time ministerial roles.
- Older ministers tended to report greater **vocational clarity and fulfilment**. Barriers to vocational fulfilment included expectations or demands of others (particularly where gifts and skills were not recognised or utilised), an overload of day-to-day ministry tasks and churchmanship differences between the ordained minister and their context of ministry.
- The sources of **continuing ministerial development** most highly rated as beneficial were not those with the highest rates of participation.

Concluding comments

Overall, as well as highlighting specific areas of interest as outlined above, this first survey has drawn attention to the highly interrelated nature of the analytical categories. Characteristics such as age, gender, mode of training, role and remuneration should not be examined in isolation, but in recognition of the complex relationships between them. Age in particular has emerged as a thread running through all analyses, and is associated with other categories such as gender and role.

Wellbeing differences between respondents trained residentially and those trained non-residentially were evident, although the close relationship between mode of training and other variables such as role and remuneration means that any effects may be explained by other factors. In addition, and yet to be explored, are the interconnections between the wellbeing domains. The findings from this initial survey will be explored in more depth through further waves of the quantitative and qualitative Living Ministry research.