

# Vocational Pathways: clergy leading large churches

Liz Graveling, April 2016



## Summary of research findings

### Purpose and method

**Purpose:** to investigate patterns in how clergy move through ministry, with a focus on identifying factors inhibiting women from taking up positions as incumbents of large churches (usual Sunday attendance of at least 350), given that, at the end of 2015, only three of 112 such churches in the Church of England were led by women.

**Method:** Statistical analysis of the current dataset of leaders of large churches, and 22 individual semi-structured interviews with a range of ordained ministers, comprising 11 men and 11 women, including five male and two female leaders of large churches, plus two female leaders of churches with a usual Sunday attendance of 300-349. As most large churches are Evangelical, participants were mainly from the Evangelical sector.

### Factors contributing to the gender imbalance

**Time-lag:** it has taken an average of 14 years for existing leaders of large churches to reach their current post after ordination. Barriers faced by women in the 1990s in particular have also contributed to an overall time-lag effect.

**Discrimination,** based on principles of stable gender differences, including transparent discrimination within the Five Guiding Principles and both formal and informal discrimination in the context of selection, job applications, parish life, collegial relationships, job availability and HR policies.

**Social processes,** shaping gendered social and family roles as well as differences in confidence, self-identification with leadership roles and vocational development.

**Incompatible social roles and working conditions,** mostly relating to childcare responsibilities and precedence of the husband's career or ministry, combined with incumbencies of large churches being exclusively full-time.

**Organisational structures and dynamics:** leaders of large churches are most likely to be clergy who are full-time, stipendiary, geographically deployable, Evangelical and ordained young, with postgraduate education (possibly from Oxbridge), a strong churchmanship identity, experience of serving within a large church (probably as a curate), support from their spouse or elsewhere and no major childcare responsibilities. Many of these are areas in which women encounter structural or processual obstacles, whether related to the Church or to wider society.

### Implications

Monitor **equal opportunities and recruitment processes** in dioceses.

Develop and share good practice among dioceses regarding **maternity and childcare policies**, and **part-time and job-share** posts in large churches, including for clergy couples.

Explore and encourage ways of **developing women's ordained ministries**, including young female vocations, vocational counselling, support structures, and title posts in large churches.

Work with **para-church networks** where they appear to be supporting and developing female ministers.

**Further research** into: recruitment processes for senior posts in large churches; the relationship between families and ordained ministry; the vocational pathways of female senior clergy; the vocational pathways of Evangelical female ministers; women's experiences in para-church Evangelical networks.

# Vocational Pathways: clergy leading large churches

## Introduction

At the end of 2015, of the 112 Church of England churches with a usual Sunday attendance of at least 350<sup>1</sup>, a total of three were led by women. This paper explores why, more than two decades after women were admitted to the priesthood, so few are reaching these positions. In order to address that specific issue, a wider question has been considered: how do Church of England clergy move through ministry and are there any observable patterns in the vocational pathways of different kinds of people?

## Method

The main method used in this research was a series of one-to-one interviews with church leaders, asking them to tell their personal story from the time that they first felt called to ordination up to the present. The sample was defined by the original focus of the research as set by the Transformations Research & Implementation Group and agreed by the college of Bishops in September 2014<sup>2</sup>: to 'explore why there are so few female incumbents of larger [parish] churches'. Because senior clergy and diocesan roles were deemed a separate question, this research is limited to incumbents in parish ministry and excludes men and women in senior posts such as Bishops, Archdeacons and Deans. As the great majority (at least 75%) of large churches are Evangelical, the respondents were drawn partly from Evangelical networks. The sample was composed of three strands:

- a) eight church leaders who had been ordained at least eight years and who responded to appeals at a New Wine summer conference and through the AWESOME<sup>3</sup> network;
- b) five further male leaders of large churches and two female leaders of large churches (the men were drawn from a random sample and three women in this category were approached), plus two female leaders of churches of between 300 and 350 USA (all three were approached)<sup>4</sup>;
- c) five church leaders who responded affirmatively to a question in the 2015 Experiences of Ministry Survey asking whether they had applied for incumbency posts in large churches (ten were approached).

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the 2014 Statistics for Mission (Archbishops' Council), with leaders identified from the 2015 Crockford's Clerical Directory.

<sup>2</sup> Paper CB(14)10, 'TRIG (Transformations Research and Implementation Group) Statistics for College of Bishops September 2014'.

<sup>3</sup> Anglican Women Evangelicals: Supporting our Ordained Ministry

<sup>4</sup> Churches in these categories were identified from the 2013 Statistics for Mission (Archbishops' Council), and their leaders were identified from the 2015 Crockford's Clerical Directory.

This gave a total of 22 respondents, the key characteristics of whom are shown below:

*Role*

	Women	Men
Incumbent	8	11
Associate Vicar	1	0
Retired	1	0
Other	1	0
Total	11	11

*Year of birth*

	Women	Men
1940-1949	1	0
1950-1959	5	2
1960-1969	4	7
1970-1979	1	2

*Year of ordination*

	Women	Men
1984-1993	0	1
1994-2003	6	9
2004-2008	5	1

*Training pathway*

	Women	Men
Residential	6	10
Non-residential	5	1

In addition, a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out using biographical data of current leader of large churches. While the sample for the qualitative element of the research was drawn from the 2013 Statistics for Mission, the dataset for the quantitative analysis was updated on release of the 2014 statistics. According to these figures, in 2014 there were 112 churches with a usual Sunday attendance of 350 or more, of which three were women. However, because some of the churches had fallen marginally below the 350 mark (while others had grown above this level), including three whose leaders participated in the qualitative study, the statistics in this paper are based on the total 117 incumbents<sup>5</sup> who were, at the end of 2015, leading churches that were of this size in 2013 and 2014. It does not include seven interim leaders of churches in this category that were in vacancy at the end of 2015. Of these 117 incumbents, four were female.

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper, 'incumbent' is used to include clergy of incumbent status, e.g. priests-in-charge.

## Findings

### Framework of analysis: gender and management

The data have been analysed within the framework of six different explanations of the gender imbalance in senior leadership roles, identified from gender and management literature:<sup>6</sup>

- **Time-lag:** The gender problem has been solved and it will just take time for women to catch up numerically.
- **Discrimination:** Women are prevented from progressing simply because they are women, regardless of knowledge, skills or aptitude (often spoken about as the 'glass ceiling').
- **Stable gender differences:** There are and will always be inherent differences between men and women, which affect the kinds of roles they are suited to.
- **Social processes:** Social forces shape people's own and others' expectations of who they are and what they should do as women and men.
- **Incompatible social roles and working conditions:** Women bear the majority of the burden of roles such as childcare, which do not fit well with current typical working conditions.
- **Organisational structures and dynamics:** Organisations and relationships in them work in such a way that certain groups are disadvantaged, and women are often in those groups.

#### 1. Time-lag

While the number of women entering ordained ministry has risen since the first small cohort was ordained in 1994 to equal roughly the number of men (240 and 254 respectively entered training in 2015/16), the number of women appointed as incumbents of larger churches has not followed suit. Given that, at the time of writing, women have been admitted to the priesthood for 22 years and that it has taken an average of 14 years for existing leaders of large churches to reach their current appointment (see Chart 1),<sup>7</sup> time-lag is certainly a contributing factor to the dearth of women in such roles. Of clergy currently leading large churches, only 54 (46%) were ordained (deacon) in 1994 or later (Chart 2). It is therefore realistic to expect several years to pass before the number of women in such posts 'catches up' with the number of men. Chart 3<sup>8</sup> allows comparison with the wider population of incumbents, reinforcing this argument by showing that the large proportion of

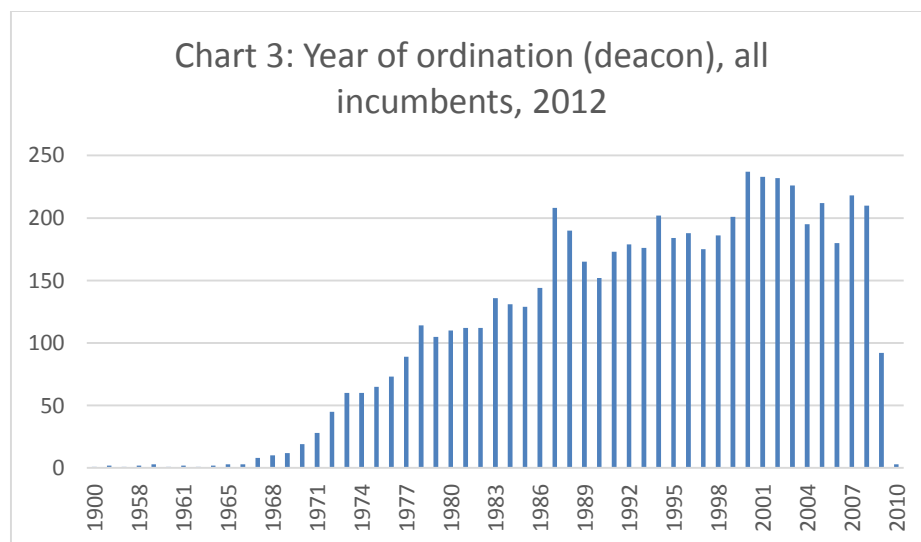
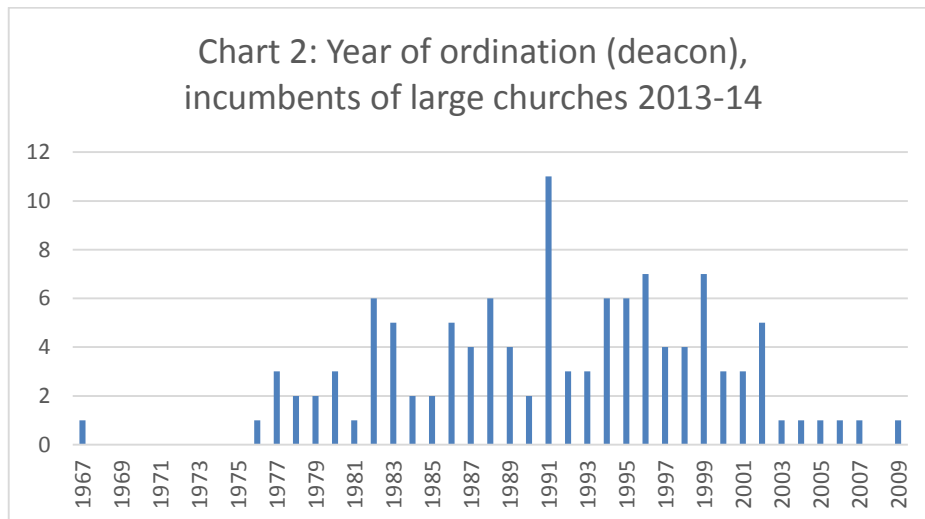
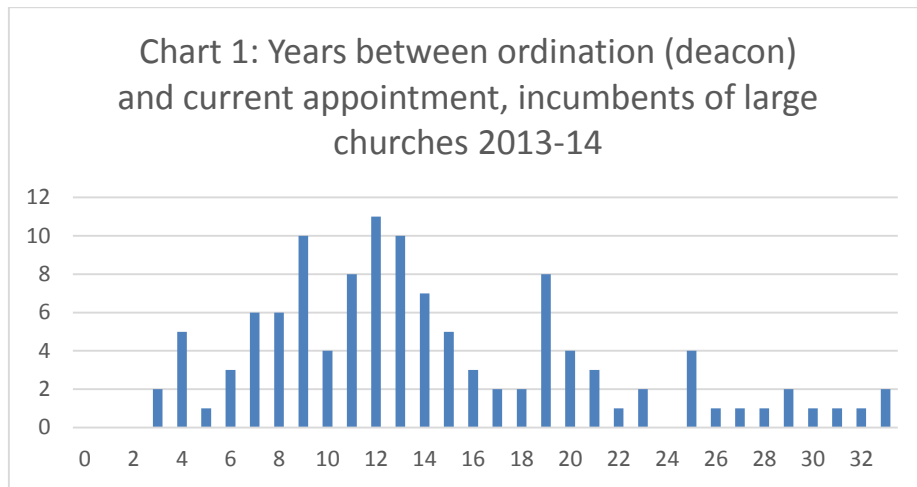
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<sup>6</sup> See Graveling, L. (2015), 'Women and Leadership in the Church: Review of Gender and Management Literature', Ministry Development paper, Archbishops' Council.

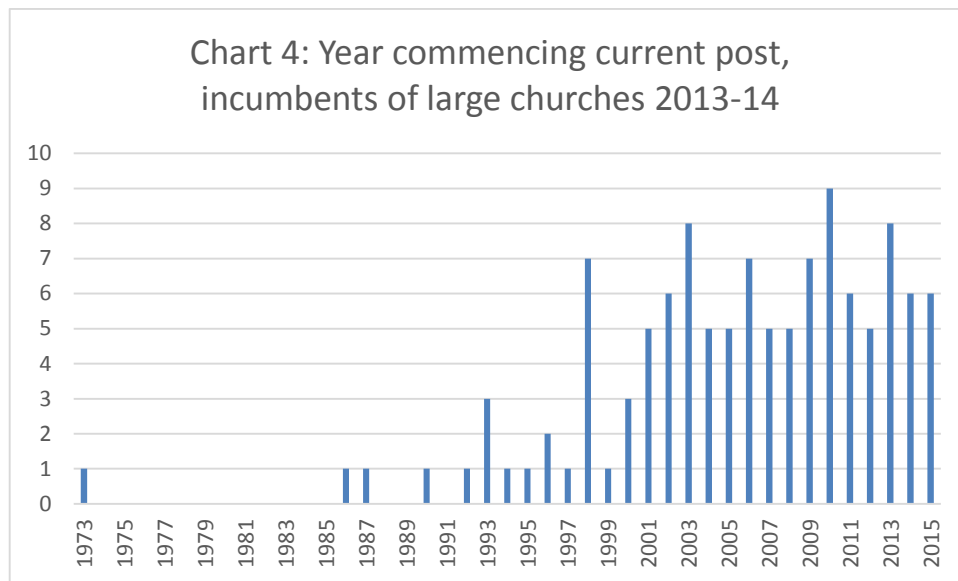
<sup>7</sup> Analysis of the 102 available historical records reveals that 74% of these churches had a usual Sunday attendance of at least 350 at the time of appointment, and 83% had a usual Sunday attendance of at least 300. Further analysis remains in order to take into account whether this is the minister's first appointment to a large church.

<sup>8</sup> This is drawn from the 2012 Ministry Statistics, the latest available.

incumbents ordained between 2003 and 2010 is barely represented among those leading large churches displayed on Chart 2.



This does not tell the whole story, especially as many women, particularly those among the first ordained, entered the priesthood with a great deal of experience accumulated as deacons, deaconesses, lay ministers and in other employment. Moreover, 93% of existing incumbents of large churches were appointed to their current role in or after 1994, and 49% were appointed in or after 2007 (i.e. the latest year of deaconing for the first female priests, plus the 14 years it has taken on average for leaders to reach their current post) (Chart 4).<sup>9</sup> We would therefore expect women to have been potential candidates for at least 57 of these 117 posts.<sup>10</sup>



Time-lag is not simply about numbers of clergy. Individual experiences make a difference to how quickly a minister progresses and along which route, and cumulatively this can affect an entire cohort of ministers. For instance, 45% of current leaders of large churches (53 out of 117) were ordained deacon in the 1990s. If, as we will see, many women entering ministry during those years faced significant barriers in their ministerial journeys, it is not surprising that few have been able to pursue appointments to large churches on a similar time-scale to men, if at all. We will see below how some of the other explanations of gender imbalance contribute to this effect.

## 2. Discrimination

The Church of England is one of very few contexts in which some posts may legally be restricted to male applicants. Although the number of large-church vacancies that this has applied to is unknown, churchmanship can provide an indicator of churches which may not

<sup>9</sup> Even excluding the proportion of posts which may not have been available to women on the grounds of theology (see Section 2), and assuming these are different posts, these figures are only reduced to 78% and 44% respectively.

<sup>10</sup> About a quarter of current large churches had a usual Sunday attendance of less than 350 at the time of appointment of the current incumbent. This may reduce the overall number of large-church appointments; however, it may be balanced out by churches that have since fallen below the 350 threshold.

be receptive to ordained women. Approximately 18% of large churches have Conservative Evangelical associations<sup>11</sup> and none is connected with traditionalist groups.

Any discrimination in these cases is of course entirely transparent and grounded in theological conviction. Whether discrimination occurs in current appointment processes within the remaining 82% of larger churches is a question beyond the scope of this piece of research. Two potential cases (one relating to a large church) were mentioned by the participants, one where the churchwardens wrote to a woman after an unsuccessful application, explaining that they had wished to interview her but were overruled by the bishop, and another where traditionalist patrons apparently attempted unsuccessfully to block the appointment of a woman after interview.

It is clear from the stories gathered in this research that women have faced enormous institutional barriers to ministry specifically because of their gender, manifest in a number of ways. This is particularly the case for women ordained or exploring ordination in the 1990s. In this sample, six women went to national selection for ordination training during this period. Four of them cited some explicitly gender-related obstacle during selection or training, including: being turned down twice at ABM because of alleged sexism; a new bishop stating categorically to a woman already part-way through her training that there would be no position (stipendiary or non-stipendiary) available for her in the diocese; being released from a diocese because only one curacy was available for a woman; and being asked to resign from curacy when pregnant and then given Permission to Officiate status at the age of 38.

Such practices may be far less common now; however, they have had a lasting impact on the ministries of individual women and on the cohort as a whole. This is particularly pertinent given that, as we have seen above, this is a cohort from which a large proportion of current leaders of larger churches has emerged.

In addition to barriers such as these, women also continue to face less formal obstacles directly related to gender. These mostly relate to attitudes and actions of individuals, such as: a supposedly supportive incumbent whose views against women's ordination did not become clear until the first form was sent to the DDO; a churchwarden who initiated disciplinary procedures against a female incumbent through an unsubstantiated complaint; church members and clergy colleagues who have not accepted the ministry of women; and a husband who refused to be part of a church where he would be under the authority of his ordained wife.

Potential gender-related tensions are an additional factor for women to take into consideration when looking for posts. One woman declined a curacy with a (male) training incumbent who informed her that it would not be necessary for her to attend staff meetings (early 1990s); another explained that she avoided taking a curacy in a church that had only recently agreed to have women as leaders: 'it's too soon and it's really not my battle. I don't want to go to a place that's only just thought it's okay to have women' (late 1990s).

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<sup>11</sup> This figure is based on churches that either subscribe to Reform or Gospel Partnerships, or contain clergy who do so.

Moreover, several women described finding their options for jobs, including curacies, severely limited because of their gender. As one commented, describing looking for jobs in the mid-2000s, 'and then there's the female bit as well, which was going to, you know, block some things.'

Not all these situations had negative implications for the women involved; however, all contributed to restricting the options available for women as compared with men.

### **3. Social processes and stable gender differences**

The view that there are inherent differences between women and men that make them suitable or unsuitable for particular roles, whether on theological, biological or psychological grounds, was not evident in any of the accounts of female church leaders in this research (largely unsurprising, given that this is a study of women who are already ordained and leading churches), and gender was discussed very little by the men. However, this perspective is implicit in the barriers described above: when, for example, Parochial Church Councils decide not to open vacant posts to female applicants, they do so on theological grounds that men and women are inherently different.

There is some evidence that may point towards women and men having different expectations of ministry and of themselves, leading to different choices. For example, one of the men described sensing while learning about leadership at college that 'at some point in the future God might want us to be leading a larger church', and therefore looking for a first post as either an incumbent or an associate minister in a large church. This contrasts with a woman who at the same point saw herself as an associate minister in a large church or a school chaplain, on the basis of a background in education and a desire to work collaboratively in a team. Reflecting on why she excluded incumbency from potential ministerial routes, she identified a number of additional possible contributing factors, including a lack of confidence; childhood experiences at school; life before ordination as homemaker and family maker while moving around to follow her husband's career, which limited her capacity to develop in leadership roles; and a desire not 'to sacrifice those relationships and vocations for getting burnt out as the vicar of a church or a group of churches'. The man eventually went on to become the incumbent of a large church, while the woman, after a period as a chaplain, was appointed as associate minister of a medium-large church.

Lack of confidence was also mentioned by a woman who described excessive shyness, which disappeared after she started her training for ordination. Having previously belonged to a church of a different denomination which did not accept female leaders, once she felt the stirrings of a calling to ministry, 'I tried to get my husband ordained because I thought, "Surely it can't be me, it must be my husband who has got to be ordained."' This echoes previous research among people selected for ordination training under the age of 30, where women described uncertainty over their suitability, as women, for ministry as a barrier to pursuing a vocation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Graveling, L. (2015), 'Young vocations, Journeys Towards Ordination', Ministry Development paper, Archbishops' Council.



Another woman, currently leading a large church, questioned her bishop's suggestion that she look at large church rector jobs, with the reaction, 'do you think I'd be good enough for that?'. By contrast, a male participant went ahead with applying for his current position leading a large church, having been encouraged by clergy and members of the congregation but not by his bishop, who permitted his application but advised him that he was unlikely to succeed.

Given the findings of other inquiries into women's careers,<sup>13</sup> these accounts may represent wider trends. However, there is also evidence from the current research of women demonstrating confidence and ambition, and of men feeling inexperienced and not confident enough on finishing their curacy to enter immediately into incumbency. One man requested a second curacy, having had a difficult time in his first, another took a chaplaincy post as a 'stepping-stone' between curacy and incumbency, and a third sought an associate post rather than go straight into an incumbency (the latter two are both now leading large churches). The particular age and gender profile of Church of England clergy must be taken into account here, with many women entering ordained ministry following extensive professional careers, while men are more likely to be ordained at an earlier age, often with less experience. In our sample the age of the men ranged between 27 and 41 at ordination, while the women were aged between 27 and 54.<sup>14</sup>

There is strong evidence in the stories of both the women and the men of widespread gendered family roles. This relates largely to raising children, where women have by far borne the greater responsibility, and to a lesser extent to marital roles, with women's careers or ministries more likely to be superseded by their husband's. This will be discussed in Section 4.

### *Expectations and calling*

Only two of the participants, one male and one female, commented that they entered ministry with a sense that they might be called to lead a large church. One had discerned her vocation within the context of a large church and the other had felt a particular call to leadership and enabling others to lead during his theological training. The other ministers currently leading large churches each began with different passions, including, for the men: to convert and disciple, regardless of context; to teach and teach others to teach; to bring gifts of strategic thinking and organisational change management. These expectations have all been fulfilled throughout their ministries and into their current roles.

Most of the women have experienced less straightforward journeys. Two described callings to minister in deprived areas and to reach out to people in need, respectively, and have found this unfulfilled in their large church context, either because of the socio-economic setting or because of unwillingness or inability on the part of the congregation. Several of the women, including three of those leading large churches, began their discernment

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<sup>13</sup> See Graveling, L. (2015), 'Women and Leadership in the Church: Review of Gender and Management Literature', Ministry Development paper, Archbishops' Council.

<sup>14</sup> The sample is also limited in that it was partly self-selecting and partly recruited from ministers (men and women) who were either leading or had applied for posts in large churches, and therefore likely to possess relatively high levels of confidence.

process under the impression that women could only be deacons, which meant that some of them had no sense that they may be called to lead a church: 'because when I started training it was only possible to be a Deacon, I hadn't really thought beyond there.' Others expressed uncertainty or tension between their sense of calling and theological perspectives on women's ordination:

I used to feel as if there were something wrong with me really, because I always used to talk about being called to full-time ministry. I didn't think of it so much as necessarily sacramental ministry, I wouldn't name it as priesthood, I would name it as full-time ministry which I saw as being an incumbent which embraced the sacramental, but I didn't really unpick it that much.

For some of these women, then, their specific vocation emerged as they journeyed through ministry, often moving through a range of roles that, as we have seen, may have been shaped by the needs of family and restricted by limited options available to women. One female participant explored moving from Reader ministry to ordination over a period of nearly ten years while she changed jobs, raised children, negotiated a difficult divorce and served under an incumbent unsupportive of women's ordination (unknown to her). This is not, however, the case for all women, and not all men entered ministry with a clear sense of their gifts and calling.

Calling itself, of course, may be a determinant of the kind of church a minister ends up in. While few of the participants sensed a call to lead a large church, several women and men articulated callings leading them away from large churches. One woman, for example, declined an opportunity offered by her bishop of a first post in a potentially developing large church 'because it wasn't urban. It was kind of city, but studenty. It just wasn't quite right. So I felt a bit guilty, I'd said no to two things. But I knew they weren't right.' Another declined several posts and then took an incumbency in 'two little churches which were nearly dead. ... I just have this feeling that I'm called to dead churches, churches that are declining.' One of the men commented,

In the back of my mind, I always think I could possibly run a large [church], but I'm not sure if I would want to. I know there are opportunities coming up in the diocese and I've seen adverts for larger ones, but I never felt that urge.

All three of these ministers are currently in growing churches. It is possible that they could be leading larger churches, had they discerned a different calling, or that they may lead larger churches in the future. However, none expressed a desire to do so for its own sake and each felt specifically called by God to their current role. One of the women described the challenge of discerning and negotiating an authentic calling in the face of pressure to take on higher profile roles:

[T]here's a real kind of balancing act and battle thing with the urban, because I've got such a heart for the urban and the urban is small. People all the time are saying to me, 'You need to be leading a bigger church.' I don't even know what that means, really. Bigger church isn't better than my small, urban church. I'm really trying to work out what that means at the moment.

#### 4. Incompatible social roles and working conditions

Considering the ministerial pathways of the participants in this research, overall the women described more complicated journeys than the men, in terms both of number of posts and of complexity in decision-making and appointments. Of 11 men and 11 women, the women have accumulated a total of 154 years of ordained ministry and 38 ministerial posts (averaging four years per post), while the men have a combined 32 posts over 194 years (averaging six years per post). This indicates that women's ordained ministries are characterised by shorter posts with more frequent changes than men's, which is largely reflected in the qualitative data, although a great deal of variation is also revealed.

##### *Posts occupied by participants*

	Curacy	1 <sup>st</sup> post	2 <sup>nd</sup> post	3 <sup>rd</sup> post	4 <sup>th</sup> post	5 <sup>th</sup> post	6 <sup>th</sup> post
Men	Curacy	Team Vicar <b>Incumbent</b> Assoc Vicar Chaplain 2 <sup>nd</sup> Curacy	<b>Incumbent (4)</b>	<b>Incumbent (1)</b>			
Women	Curacy Curacy (NSM)	Team Vicar <b>Incumbent</b> Asst Chaplain Asst Vicar (HfD) PTO	Precentor <b>Assoc Vicar (HfD)</b> Team Vicar (PT) <b>Mission Priest</b> <b>Incumbent</b> Dioc Officer Asst Minister (NSM)	<b>Incumbent (1)</b> <b>Chaplain (PT)</b> Dioc Officer	<b>Dioc Officer</b> <b>(PT)</b> TEI Staff	Dioc Officer	<b>Incumbent</b> <b>(1)</b>
Current post - men		2	8	1			
Current post - women		3	4	3	1		1

*Notes: The posts in bold represent those currently (or most recently, in the case of one retired minister) held by at least one participant. The numbers in brackets indicate leaders of large churches. 'Incumbent' also includes Priest-in-Charge roles.*

It is clear from the table above that, overall, the ministerial journeys of the female participants have been more complex than those of their male counterparts. While the majority of the men stepped from curacy into their current incumbency via a junior parochial post or a chaplaincy, four of the women have held three or more posts after curacy and only five became incumbents by their second post. The range of posts occupied by women in this sample is also wider than those occupied by men and includes some self-supporting roles.

The largest influencing factor on women's movements through ministry is family. Of the 22 participants, all eleven men were married with children, while seven of the women were married (one remarried after a divorce), two were unmarried, one divorced and one widowed. The women with the least complex routes through ministry were those with no dependants. The unmarried women were deployable over a wider geographic area and had a broader range of options open to them at each stage than most of their married (or

previously married) counterparts. Both turned down the curacy offered to them by their sending diocese and found their own post elsewhere (as did one of the married participants who was single when she entered curacy), and both are now incumbents, one in her first post and the other having previously been a team vicar and mission priest elsewhere.

By contrast, the women with the most complex ministerial journeys were those with dependent children. Particularly in the early days of women's ordination, there was little support available for ordained women who became pregnant or had childcare responsibilities:

When I first got pregnant, the Diocese were like, 'oh, not sure what we do about maternity'. They had to work that one out because I think I was the first young woman getting pregnant that they had had.

For all three of the female participants who were ordained in the 1990s and wanted to work part-time while they raised children, this meant having to take non-stipendiary (NSM) status, as stipendiary posts were all full-time. One, who subsequently switched to stipendiary ministry after a change in family financial circumstances, chose to be non-stipendiary

largely because of the children. I had three small children and thought I couldn't possibly be stipendiary. I couldn't see how I could make it work because that would mean full-time, and I was teaching full-time whilst training. I had been feeling called to stipendiary ministry, but couldn't see how to make it work.

The other two women had both originally been sponsored for stipendiary ministry and both had children during curacy. For one, the only option available was to take a house-for-duty Associate Vicar post. Five years later she went back into stipendiary ministry, negotiating a two-thirds Team Vicar post:

I was inventing it as I went along because there was no precedent really. ... I think part of it was that I just assumed. I went along with these expectations, not in a tough way, but just that this is what you have to do. ... I look back and think that I was lucky they were prepared to be flexible and listen to me saying, 'I don't think I can do full-time.

The other was initially permitted to return to her curacy part-time, until a new diocesan bishop arrived who 'was in favour of women's ordination, but as long as they behaved as men would behave'. When she had her second child she was denied maternity pay and then,

when I'm eight months' pregnant I get a letter from the bishop asking me to resign. And I hadn't done anything wrong, he just wanted me to stop, because he said you can only be paid if you're prepared to work full time. And if you aren't then you have to remain a curate and be unpaid.

She was eventually given Permission to Officiate status and five years later, after a spell as a non-stipendiary Assistant Minister, took a diocesan role.

Beyond these institutional barriers, women with dependent children also describe having a limited range of options when making decisions about new posts. Children's health, schooling and general wellbeing were commonly cited as factors restricting where women could look for jobs, for example,

The trouble was that there weren't that many local jobs coming up and my youngest was in the middle of secondary school at the time and I really needed to try to get a job where he could stay at the same school.

Women recognise negative effects of this on both their ministry and their children. One observed of her Assistant Minister role,

[The new vicar] was clearly threatened, and I was in the wrong place. I shouldn't have been there, because I should have been having some sort of responsibility. But I wanted to be a mother as well. And we couldn't afford to just send our kids off to full-time nursery, and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to see how I could work, not as if it's an experiment, but I have three vocations. Marriage, motherhood and ministry.

Another described the ongoing tension between her ministry and her family while training, looking for a first post and then reflecting on a later post:

It was a good place to be and a very good training place. I enjoyed it. Apart from the challenges on family, which were tough, very tough. Trying to fit in taking children to school, picking them up from school – I think they suffered actually, looking back, particularly the youngest.

I really had the feeling I wanted to be in an inner city parish, but also that tension with family. So we went and looked at one parish which was mostly high rise flats, quite deprived. I took my son, who at that time, must have been about ten or eleven, just to have a drive around and look at it. I said to him, 'how would you feel about moving here?' He said, 'On a scale of one to a million, I'd give it naught.' And I just thought, 'I can't do this', I just can't do it'. I'd put them through enough, I just can't do it.

[I]t didn't work for my son ... he never settled and he dropped out of education. So, I always feel that I did badly by him. It just didn't work.

Most of the men also mentioned taking the needs of their children into consideration while making decisions about their ministry. This was largely in relation to timing moves with key school years, for example,

[W]hen we moved the fourth one was just about to start primary school. So it was a window to try and actually get to move. And in ministry I think you can't ignore those things. So the job looked really interesting but we said, not the right time.

Despite having children and being concerned for their needs, this did not appear to affect men's ministries as much as women's. Only one of the men felt tied to the local area in order to keep his children settled. His reflections regarding the implications of this for his ministry echoed the experiences of some of the women:

My experience is that I was fairly disabled in my ministry because of my family circumstances. And my time and energy was, you know, spent on them.

None of the men described switching to part-time or non-stipendiary work in order to raise children, although two specifically mentioned helping with childcare along with their full-time parish ministry while their wives were studying. While several of the male participants' wives had their own careers, it generally seems to be the women who took time out of employment, either completely or part-time, to take responsibility for childcare, for example,

She worked through my first year of college, until we had children and then stopped for ten years to look after four children. Then has gone back into teaching. ... The toughest years of our lives was when she was doing her PGCE, but the beauty of my job, I manage my time so I could look after children. I nearly killed myself. She only works three days a week at the moment. Our youngest now is leaving primary at the end of the year.

In general, the ministries of the male participants appear to be central to household decision-making. Several of the men described their wives taking an active role in their parish ministry, ranging from stepping in when particular skills are required to 'very much a joint ministry'. This may relate to findings elsewhere that female clergy partners (compared with male partners) perceive greater levels of social expectation regarding how the partner of an ordained minister should act.<sup>15</sup> None of the men described his wife as unsupportive of his ministry, and only one talked of his ministry taking a backseat to his wife's career:

I suppose we do have quite sort of radically egalitarian views about different roles and there have been different points where my career has taken precedence and ... at the moment [my wife's] career really takes precedence. ... [Q]uite a lot depends on what [my wife] does next, I think. And that's fine. ... I've got a strong sense of a number of possibilities but probably the initiative lies elsewhere.

Another, whose wife has a completely separate, well-paid career, explained that, although she is not involved in his ministry,

We agreed from the moment that we got married ... that wherever God called me, and the right fit for me and my calling, we would go together. And so we've never

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<sup>15</sup> Clinton, M. (2016), 'Clergy Partner Respondent Findings Report', King's College London, p. 4.

tried to use her career as the defining aspect of where we should go next, as God calls us. ... So her career, sometimes it's part-time, with children. Sometimes, as it is now, it's full-time as the children are older. But she's just followed where we've gone and then tried to seek where God would use her skills in business.

Perhaps ironically, the man expressing the most frustration regarding tensions relating to marriage and ministry was married to a female ordained minister. Despite training together and attempting to maintain both their ministries equally, they had been unable to do so within a parish setting:

There are lots of different ways of deploying clergy couples, but you can't share a role, so one of you, no matter how it's presented to the parish and no matter how much you share it, one of you has to be Vicar, one of you has to be Curate.

In this case it was partly a period of ill-health on his wife's part that led to his ministry moving forward at a faster and more straightforward pace than hers.

Most of the married female participants also described support from their spouse, two specifically mentioning their husband taking an active part in parish ministry. Although some had followed their husbands' careers before being ordained, it was more typical for decisions to be negotiated between the work requirements of each partner. Only one referred to being tied to a geographical location because of her husband. In that case his reluctance to move was not related to work commitments, but rather that he did not agree with women's ordination and therefore refused to leave his church to join one where his wife would have authority over him. By contrast, another woman who, similarly, entered ministry during her fifties and no longer with dependent children, explained how her husband gave up his job in order for her to find a post when there was none available in her sponsoring diocese. A third described spending time exploring her calling, having for many years supported her husband's career while raising children:

Those three years, I suppose I saw it as a gift to me of rediscovering who I was as my own identity. In that I wasn't primarily [the children's] mother, and I wasn't [X's] wife, primarily. I was me.

Whether or not they experienced support from their husband, all the female participants with children either entered ministry later in life or experienced challenges or delays associated with motherhood, as described above (difficulty in finding part-time posts, requirements to be non-stipendiary, limited geographical options, tensions between family and ministry). Women who are also mothers therefore face a double challenge. Not only are they often disadvantaged in developing their ministries while negotiating these obstacles, but senior roles and incumbencies of larger churches tend to be full-time, stipendiary positions and therefore not available to women who want to work part-time while raising children.

## 5. Organisational structures and dynamics

So far we have focused on the differences between how women and men have experienced their ministerial journeys. We are now going to shift perspective to examine the factors that are conducive to individuals becoming leaders of large churches, and how these may have implications for women.

### *Ministry status*

While four female leaders out of 117 is clearly very low, it is important to view this in the context of the wider picture of women in ordained ministry, recognising that leaders of larger churches mostly come from a particular subset of clergy. Most obviously, all these leaders except one are stipendiary, whereas women only represent 24% of stipendiary clergy.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, incumbencies of large churches are not only usually stipendiary, but also full-time. While only 3.5% of male stipendiary clergy are part-time, part-time women represent 10.5% of female stipendiary clergy. Putting these two factors together, if the proportion of leaders of larger churches that are female were to reflect the proportion of full-time stipendiary clergy that are female, it would be 23%. While incumbencies of large churches remain almost exclusively full-time and stipendiary, and while female clergy remain disproportionately part-time and self-supporting, a goal of equal numbers of male and female leaders of large churches is unrealistic and would be unrepresentative.

In terms of actual numbers, we have already seen that, based on year of appointment and average time between ordination and current post, we would expect women to have been potential candidates for at least 57 of the current 117 incumbencies of large churches. If 23% of these potential posts were occupied by women, there would currently be 13 female leaders of large churches. In rough terms, then, even allowing for major disadvantages relating to time and a smaller pool of potential candidates, the number of women leading large churches is only about one third of an equitable figure.

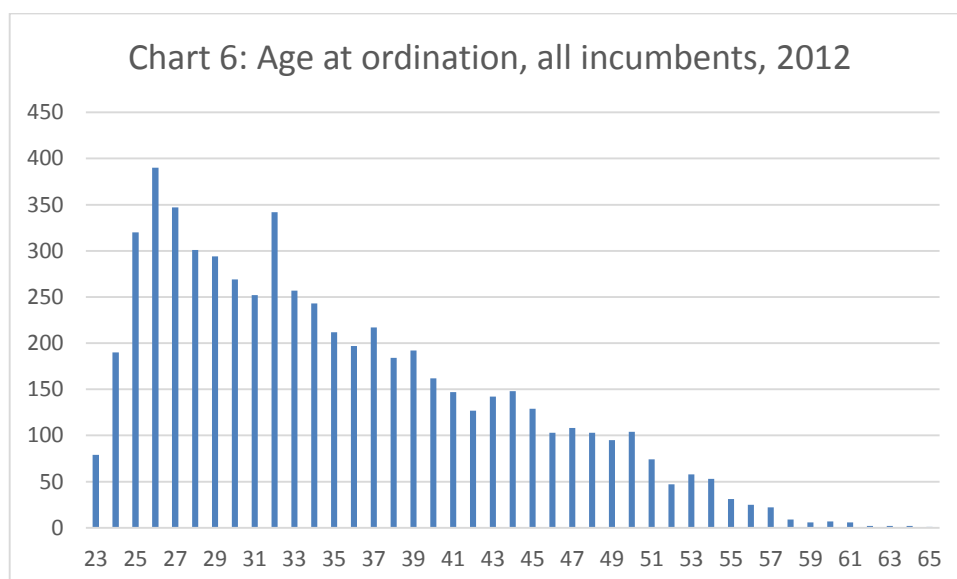
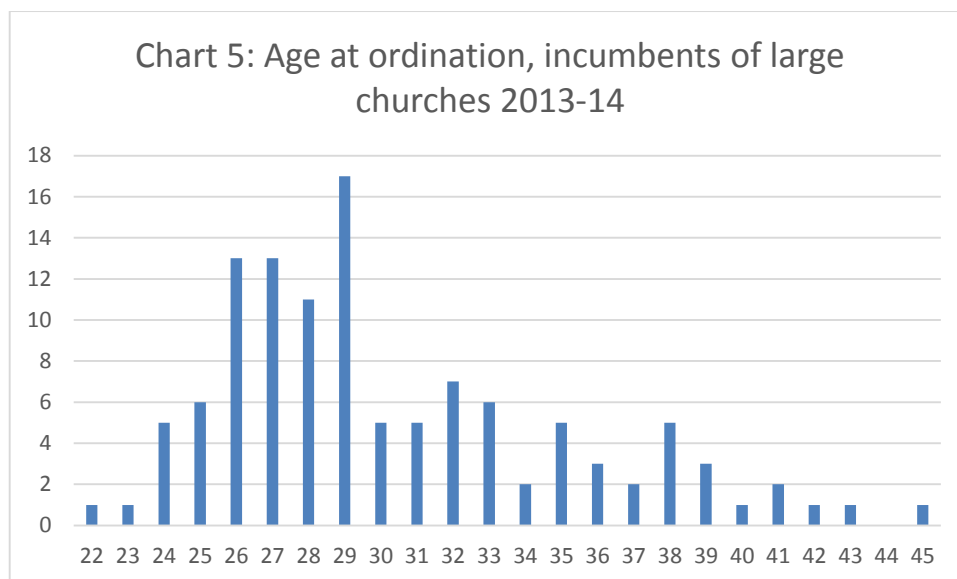
### *Age*

Analysis of the profile of current leaders of large churches tells us that 72% were ordained deacon under the age of 33 and therefore probably recommended for training under the age of 30 (Chart 5), with more than half ordained even earlier (58% aged 29 or under). This represents a disproportionately large group when set in the context of the wider incumbent population (Chart 6), of which 46% were ordained under the age of 33 and 32% under the age of 30.

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<sup>16</sup> These and the following figures are based on the 2012 Ministry Statistics, the latest available, and may have changed slightly since then.





Within the qualitative study, four of the five male leaders of large churches fall in this ‘young vocations’ category, with the other just outside, recommended at the age of 31. One of the women leading churches of 350 or more was also under 30 when selected; the other was 38. Age at selection is therefore an important factor in the profile of leaders of larger churches. As women tend to enter ordained ministry at a later age than men, and only about a quarter of young vocations are female, this is an obvious contributing factor to the low numbers of women leading large churches.

### *Education*

About 48% of current leaders of large churches have studied for an undergraduate and/or postgraduate degree at Oxford or Cambridge University (not including initial ministerial education), and about 60% have a postgraduate qualification. So far it has not been possible

to compare this with the wider population of stipendiary clergy, in terms of either size of church or gender. In the qualitative sample, two of the five men leading large churches had a postgraduate qualification and one had studied at Oxbridge; of the four women leading churches of 300 or more, all had either studied at Oxford, Cambridge or St Andrew's, or had a PhD. It may therefore be possible that women have to prove themselves academically more than men in order to be appointed to a large church, but this evidence is not enough to support this.

### *Family status*

As we have seen, all the men in our sample, including the leaders of large churches, are married and have children. Both the female leaders of large churches are also married to supportive husbands and have children, although this has caused challenges in their ministry and both reached their current appointment at a later age than the men and once their children were grown. Neither of the two women leading churches of between 300 and 350 people has dependent children (one has never been married and the other is widowed with grown-up children). Given that female clergy are disproportionately single compared with men, it is possible that women are caught in a double bind here, where married applicants are preferred for incumbencies of large churches, but married female clergy find it more difficult than their male counterparts to take up such posts because of family responsibilities. However, the key factor here seems not to be whether a minister is male or female or married or single, but rather how far they are restricted in ministry-related decisions and scope by the requirements of a spouse and/or children. Therefore, despite the majority of female clergy being single, it is possible for a married woman with children to have a full-time, stipendiary, senior ministry as long as she is not restricted in her options by the needs of her family. Likewise, it is possible for a single woman (and, presumably, man) without children to lead a large church. However, in this case it is likely that she will need to have in place strategies to provide the kind of support that male leaders of large churches often receive from their wives. However, full-time incumbencies of larger churches are likely to remain inaccessible to women with major childcare responsibilities.

### *Churchmanship*

Churchmanship is difficult to analyse quantitatively because churches are not formally classified in this way and ministers do not always easily fit particular categories. For the purposes of this study, association with organisations such as Reform and New Wine, along with self-definitions on church websites, was used to give an idea of church identities in this respect. Of the 124 large churches in 2013-14 (including those without an incumbent at the end of 2015), 23 (18.5%) are associated or contain clergy associated with Conservative Evangelical organisations (either Reform or Gospel Partnerships). None belongs to Forward in Faith societies. Given that not all these churches may have passed Resolutions A, B or C, but also that some of the other churches may have done so, it is therefore possible that a sizeable proportion of large church incumbencies are not open to female applicants.

This, however, leaves 81.5% of large churches (101) which are not obviously Conservative Evangelical or traditionalist. Of these, 61 are members of the New Wine, HTB or Evangelical

Alliance networks and therefore probably Evangelical, and 10 either have Evangelical patrons or self-identify as Evangelical on their website. Seven self-identify as Anglo-Catholic.

This study has focused on Evangelical ministers because the vast majority of large churches are Evangelical, including all those led by the male participants. However, of the four churches of over 300 people led by women, only one is Evangelical. The other women describe their churches as Liberal or Anglo-Catholic. It therefore appears to be the large Evangelical churches that are especially lacking in female incumbents. It has not been possible to compare these figures with overall numbers of male and female clergy identifying with different traditions, so it is unclear whether there is a dearth of female Evangelical priests more generally, or if female Evangelical incumbents are particularly underrepresented in larger churches (and, likewise, whether female non-Evangelical incumbents are overrepresented in larger churches).

Attempts to classify churches and clergy in terms of churchmanship are further complicated because clergy may move between a range of traditions throughout their ministry, often without major shifts in their own theology and sometimes within the same church or benefice. Several of the participants, men and women, mentioned this, either as a deliberate strategy to broaden their knowledge and experience, a result of limited options, or a specific calling, for example, 'to be a charismatic evangelical in a non-charismatic-evangelical church' (male). Some of the participants leading larger churches described an openness to ministering in traditions other than their own: 'I'd deliberately trained at [X college] ... so I could go and do things in both' (female); 'we would consider central churchmanship, so I'm leading a New Wine kind of church but we would be prepared to consider different kinds of churches' (male). However, all of them (including the two female incumbents of churches of 300-350 people) are currently leading churches of the tradition with which they personally identify most closely. Moreover, none of them served their curacy in a church of a radically different churchmanship from their own.<sup>17</sup> This contrasts with several of the other participants, who found themselves in very unfamiliar contexts as curates, for example:

I was based at the parish church, which was a bit of a shock because it's very high Anglo-Catholic. ... and I was from a fairly middling to low church and wasn't at all sure about this. (Female, NSM curacy)

### *Support and development*

Clergy describe a range of sources of support and ministerial development, including family, friends, peers, colleagues, local clergy, bishops and other diocesan officers, TEI staff, training incumbents, work consultants, mentors, spiritual directors, church members and lay leaders, local and national networks, conferences, and well-known church leaders and writers. Beyond the family support mentioned above, there are no clear differences in

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<sup>17</sup> Although one of the men (of an Evangelical background) described his title parish as 'an incredible mix of Anglo-Catholic heritage, charismatic renewal and evangelical commitment to scripture', and another entered the Church of England from a Free church background.

support and development strategies between either men and women or clergy leading different sized churches.

We have noted above that the scarcity of women leading larger churches is particularly marked among Evangelical churches. Ten of the eleven male participants in this study were Evangelical, including all the leaders of large churches. Of these ten, four mentioned New Wine<sup>18</sup> when describing sources of support and development:<sup>19</sup> three (one leading a large church) referring to local leadership networks, and one (also leading a large church) involved at a national level. Of the women, eight were Evangelical and three mentioned New Wine as a source of support or development, while a third referred to the network as 'friends'. Although only one of these women is leading a church over 300 people, at least three have a record of growing churches and three have been involved in speaking and/or leading within New Wine at a national level as well as participating in local groups:

New Wine is real family to me, and New Wine has been the support that's got me through everything else. Certainly in the years of incumbency, because the Diocese is brilliant, and there is support, but actually, as a vicar on your own in a small church, without any staff, without any team, without any whatever... who supports you? Yeah, the Diocese is great, but are they really the people that support you and keep you going? It's been New Wine, really, in terms of local people and people praying together and all that. They've been a great support, and the mentors, and all of that. ... They've been really encouraging from the first time I did a seminar to now, speaking at [national events] and stuff.

Another commented:

New Wine is very significant to my life. I was amazed. First of all, I'm a woman. Second of all, I was a curate, and they allowed me to run something, and I think that was brilliant. ... They really have ploughed into me.

I just had these wonderful relationships around me where I was just encouraged to be who God had called me to. That was significant to my formation. In some ways, particularly as an evangelical, charismatic woman, I think the Anglican church gives me less opportunity than New Wine.

Thus, despite its preponderance of male leaders and dominant model of married couples in joint ministry led by an ordained husband, New Wine may act as a space where ordained Evangelical women can develop and gain leadership skills and opportunities. Because of the sampling bias in this research this is an area requiring further investigation, particularly given the small number of female clergy appointed to posts in the big New Wine churches. It is interesting, for example, that all the women who mentioned support from New Wine are either single (two unmarried and one divorced) or married with no children. This may not be representative; however, a comment from one of the married female participants about

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<sup>18</sup> New Wine was by far the most commonly mentioned Evangelical network.

<sup>19</sup> Two of the men and four of the women participating in this study were recruited at a New Wine summer conference, therefore the responses are likely to be biased.

clergy networks in general indicates that it may be easier for women without children to fit into church leadership networks than those with families:

I've not particularly found clergy networks supportive, just because I've always been a bit of the odd one out. It is becoming less so but there still aren't many people who have done what I've done and brought up a family all the way through.

While both male and female participants mentioned a wide range of sources of support and development over the course of their ministries, the ways in which they moved between posts revealed a greater emphasis on dioceses, and particularly bishops, by women. While only three of the men referred to conversations with bishops about transitioning between roles, nine of the women did so, and for several the bishop was the key player in finding new posts. While some experiences of bishops' interventions were negative, such as those mentioned above, the majority were supportive with some making particular efforts to encourage women's ministries.

The higher levels of reported contact with bishops by women reflect wider dynamics in employment, particularly where women enter a male-dominated profession. While men tend to have greater access to informal networks, women tend to be more dependent on formal structures and processes to move through roles. In this study, several men described personal contacts as important in finding new jobs. While this was also the case for some of the women, women overall were more likely to request advice from a bishop or be approached by a bishop regarding a possible move:

I then thought, 'what on earth am I going to do?' I went to see my Bishop. ... What my Bishop ended up agreeing to do, was to write to the Bishops in [that] area, just saying, 'have you got any House for Duty posts?'

As in this case of a woman with a young child, this may also to some extent reflect the less straightforward arrangements sometimes required by female clergy, particularly where new policies such as maternity leave needed to be devised, necessitating episcopal intervention.

### *Experience of larger churches*

It is striking that all the male participants currently leading large churches served their title post in what they described as a large church. It has not been possible to ascertain the size of each church during the relevant time period; however, three of them currently have a USA of over 350 and one of the others of over 200. The two female participants leading churches of between 300 and 350 people were also curates in large churches, whereas only two of the participants not currently leading large churches described their curacy church as large. Historical records do not allow a full analysis of the title posts of all current leaders of large churches; however, to give some indication, 35% of leaders served their curacy in a church that had a usual Sunday attendance of 350 or more in 2013-14. This is likely to be an important factor contributing to later appointments to similarly sized churches, recognised by some of the participants:

I'd done a large church. [My curacy church] was quite a large church. I think that was quite significant actually. Even though I wasn't in charge, it gave me an understanding of how larger churches function. (Male)

However, it is not an inevitable consequence: one of the women who also served her curacy in a large church was then obliged to take a part-time house-for-duty post after starting a family, and has not yet returned to full-time parish ministry. Moreover, the size of a church itself may not be the most significant factor in developing leaders. The same man quoted above went on to comment that his training incumbent's approach was at least as significant:

In the curacy, they could have said, "You don't plant a church in your curacy. You sit and tick the boxes for MinDiv and say that you've got all your curacy stats up to date and you've been a good boy and done your curacy well." And he said, "Go and plant a church. See what you can do. See what God will do." And so I came out of curacy with an experience, even though there were the limitations of what he allowed me to do in the structures, but an experience of seeing God use me to build a team, establish a church, set a vision and values for that church community, see lots of people come to faith. ... I'd begun to learn some lessons about leadership during that time.

Leaders of large churches, both men and women, described key development factors within their curacy as: being part of a growing church, being given responsibility and learning about things such as leadership, strategy and boundaries in term of managing one's work. Such things were also mentioned by other participants but, for most of them, not in the context of a large church.

## Conclusions

The way clergy move through ministry must be understood both in the context of gendered social roles outside the Church of England, and in the context of current and historical structures and dynamics within the Church that affect both women and men. It is often the interaction between these two sets of processes that results in significant differences between the positions of male and female ministers. Considering the stories of the participants in this research through the lens of six different explanations for the gender imbalance in large church incumbencies, it is clear that multiple processes are in play.

*Time-lag* is a significant factor, given that more than half the current leaders of large churches were ordained before women were able to become priests, and that it may take around 14 years between ordination and appointment as incumbent of a large church. Although numbers of men and women entering ministry are now roughly equal, this is not the case for stipendiary ministry. Barriers faced by women have also to a large extent delayed and shaped their ministries, particularly in the years immediately following women's admittance to the priesthood, which is a period when a sizeable proportion of current leaders of large churches were ordained. All the explanations below contribute to this effect of time-lag.

*Discrimination* beyond that legitimised on theological grounds has been experienced by women both formally and informally, in the context of selection, job applications, parish life, collegial relationships, job availability and HR policies. This may or may not affect women applying for posts in large churches; perhaps more significant is its impact on shaping the routes through ministry followed by women, meaning that fewer women than men may find themselves in a position to apply for such posts. Around 18% of large church incumbencies may not be available to women on theological grounds.

*Stable gender differences* were not explicitly identified as an explanation within the data, probably partly because of the nature of the study and sample, although they are implicit in discriminatory barriers.

*Social processes* may be a contributing factor in terms of differing levels of confidence and self-identification with leadership roles, along with clear gendered social and family roles, largely relating to parenthood. Women's vocational pathways tend to be less straightforward than men's, and there is some evidence that their sense of calling is more likely to emerge as they journey through ministry, while men (particularly those leading large churches) tend to have a clearer idea of their calling earlier on.

*Incompatible social roles and working conditions* are clearly a major reason for the dearth of women leading large churches. Women continue to bear most of the responsibility for childcare and are much more likely than men to take time out of employment to do so. Part-time posts have not been easily available and for some women the consequences of having children has been to switch to NSM or PTO status. Women are also more likely to experience tension between their ministry and their family, sometimes limiting deployment possibilities. Regarding conjugal roles, whichever partner is ordained (and with some exceptions), the husband's career or ministry is more likely to take precedence in household decision-making than the wife's.

*Organisational structures and dynamics* are key to understanding the differing numbers of men and women leading large churches. Elements relating to the appointment and profile of such leaders are:

- Large church incumbencies are almost entirely **full-time and stipendiary**. Female clergy are disproportionately part-time and self-supporting: if an equitable female proportion of leaders of large churches is seen as relating to the overall proportion of full-time stipendiary clergy, the target would be 23%.
- More than two thirds of large church incumbents were **young vocations**. Women currently make up only about a quarter of young vocations, and historically the proportion has been even lower.
- Nearly half of existing leaders of large churches have studied at some point at either **Oxford or Cambridge** Universities, and 60% have a **postgraduate degree**.
- Male clergy (including leaders of large churches) tend to be **married**, whereas women are much more likely to be single (unmarried, divorced or widowed). This may represent a double bind for women, or it may in itself not be a barrier: indeed, it

can be easier for single women to take on more senior roles than married women. The gendered nature of conjugal roles is certainly significant, specifically relating to how far one is limited by one's spouse or children (for example in time or deployment options), and how much support to one's ministry they provide.

- The vast majority of large churches are **Evangelical**, and leaders of large churches tend to be serving within the **churchmanship with which they most closely identify**. Ordained women are particularly underrepresented in Evangelicalism, although it is unclear whether this relates to overall numbers or particularly to leaders of large churches. Women are also more likely to have complex ministerial paths, which may include posts in unfamiliar traditions.
- In the qualitative study, all the male and two of the female clergy leading churches of over 300 usual Sunday attendance **served their curacy in a church they described as large**. Experience of a large church, particularly during curacy, is likely to be an important factor contributing to a later appointment to such a church.
- There are no clear patterns of **support and development** relating to leaders of large churches, beyond support from spouses (usually wives). New Wine features heavily and has been particularly helpful to some of the women (which arises to some extent from sample bias). Women also report higher levels of contact with bishops relating to movement between posts.

Leaders of large churches are therefore most likely to be clergy who are full-time, stipendiary, geographically deployable, Evangelical and ordained young, with a postgraduate education (possibly from Oxbridge), a strong churchmanship identity, experience of serving within a large church (probably as a curate), support from their spouse or elsewhere and no major childcare responsibilities.<sup>20</sup> Many of these are areas in which women encounter structural or processual obstacles, whether related to the Church or to wider society. Increasing the number of women in large church incumbencies is therefore not a simple task. As with all deployment, for women and men, it must be approached with care, recognising that large churches are not necessarily more important than small ones and that God may call ministers elsewhere.

## Implications

The findings of this research have implications for dioceses and the national church. The following suggestions are made to address the gender imbalance in the leadership of large churches.

1. Monitor **equal opportunities and recruitment processes** in dioceses, in order to keep track of whether women are applying for, being shortlisted for and being appointed to large church incumbencies.

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<sup>20</sup> Other characteristics may also be important but did not emerge in this study, for example ethnicity, class, sexuality and disability.



2. Develop and share good practice among dioceses regarding **maternity and childcare policies** and **part-time and job-share** posts in large churches, including for clergy couples.
3. Explore and encourage ways of **developing women's ordained ministries**, including:
  - young female vocations;
  - vocational counselling;
  - support structures;
  - title posts in large churches.
4. Work with **para-church networks** where they appear to be supporting and developing female ministers.
5. Conduct **research** into:
  - recruitment processes for senior posts in large churches;
  - the relationship between families and ordained ministry;
  - the vocational pathways of female senior clergy such as Bishop and Dean;
  - the vocational pathways of Evangelical female ministers;
  - women's experiences in para-church Evangelical networks.