

# ***‘With joy and not sighing...’<sup>1</sup> : a theological reflection on clergy wellbeing and its impact on the wider church (Summary Overview)***

The theological reflection entitled *‘With joy and not sighing...’* grew out of the findings from a Diocesan Survey into Clergy Wellbeing conducted in the Diocese of Ely in mid-2016 as part of an ongoing programme of work to understand and promote clergy wellbeing. The Survey highlighted the value of undertaking some intentional theological reflection in this area and the resulting document emerged out of a process of prayer, reflection and discussion.

The theological reflection begins in Section 1 by setting out the background context and rationale. The aim was **to think theologically about who we are as priests and how we flourish as clergy so that we, with our congregations, may work effectively with God in building his kingdom on earth.**

Section 2 explains the intended audience and purpose for the document, i.e. to provide accessible and helpful input for discussion of clergy wellbeing among Diocesan senior staff, clergy and congregations across the Ely Diocese, as well as those who have responsibility for the training and formation of ordinands (e.g. in the local theological colleges). It is also offered to the wider church, both regionally and nationally, as a contribution to the current debate on clergy wellbeing within the life of God’s church.

Section 3 of the paper explores biblical insights and imperatives, drawing upon both Old and New Testament scriptures, in order to try and ensure that our theology and our praxis are biblically grounded. Insights from New Testament passages in Luke, 1 Corinthians and Hebrews are examined to highlight the corporate and interdependent nature of Christian ministry. Old Testament passages from Exodus and 1 Kings are used to illustrate the priority of care for leaders and the role of collaborative leadership for the wellbeing of all, both leader and led, both clergy and congregation.

Section 4 explores and develops issues of clergy identity and wellbeing, drawing upon some of the work that has been undertaken in recent years with regard to professional conduct, clergy health and wellbeing, etc. Key issues addressed include: pragmatic and theological considerations; the importance of vocation and profession; notions of relationship and covenant; a theology of priesthood that underpins clergy wellbeing; and the role of agape and virtue.

Section 5 of the reflection offers some concluding comments, drawing together key threads and suggesting a possible direction for the future. The comments stress an urgent need to underpin any practical action and initiatives concerning clergy wellbeing (e.g. Clergy Covenant) with sound theological insight and understanding in this area. Under a number of subheadings, the reflection offers an emerging frame of reference for further thinking and action in the Ely Diocese, and possibly further afield. The discussion acknowledges the interrelationship and reciprocal dynamism of the church body as a whole, which in turn reflects the ‘perichoresis’ of the Triune God we worship as Christians – a relationship in which what impacts one impacts all.

You may find it helpful to consider the following questions as you read the theological reflection:

- *To what extent does the overall content resonate with your own experience of clergy wellbeing?*
- *How helpful do you find the biblical insights and imperatives that are presented in Section 3?*
- *How far do you identify with the issues that are discussed in Section 4?*
- *How helpful do you find the concluding comments that are offered in Section 5?*
- *How useful do you think this paper is, and how might it be used in support of clergy wellbeing?*

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<sup>1</sup> *‘With joy and not sighing...’* was compiled by the Clergy Wellbeing Research Group for the Diocese of Ely (Rev Dr Lynda Taylor, Rev Canon Sue Wyatt and Rev Dr Jenny Gage). It was completed in final draft in September 2018 for submission to and review by the Diocese of Ely’s Clergy Wellbeing Forum and the Bishop’s Senior Staff.