

# ELY CLERGY WELLBEING SURVEY 2019

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(March 2020)



*The 'word cloud' above brings together all the words offered by survey respondents in response to Q17 – “How are you?” The bigger and bolder the word appears, the more often it was mentioned, and the more salient it may be.*

# Ely Clergy Wellbeing Survey 2019 : Executive Summary (March 2020)

## Introduction

This report is part of the continuing work on clergy wellbeing in the Diocese of Ely over the past 5 years (2014-2019). The aim is to determine what encourages the flourishing of the clergy, and therefore the health of the church, and to provide guidance and, where possible, take actions to promote such flourishing. It is encouraging to see that clergy wellbeing within the Diocese has an increasingly high profile and receives the attention it deserves through the work of the Bishop's Clergy Wellbeing Forum and its Research Team.

Diocesan investigation into clergy wellbeing has its origins in a survey conducted in June 2014 when Ely Diocese invited clergy to participate in the *Managing Ministry Pressure Better (MMPB) Survey*, conducted by St Luke's Healthcare. The aim of the MMPB survey was to gather and analyse data which would highlight particular areas of pressure affecting clergy in the diocese, and to use the findings to inform on-going work in seeking to improve clergy wellbeing. Both a summary report and a full report of the survey were made available on the Diocesan website.

A number of actions were taken by the diocese in response to the 2014 MMPB survey as part of the Clergy Wellbeing and Support initiative, under the leadership of Bishops Stephen and David (former Bishop of Huntingdon) and Canon Sue Wyatt. The survey findings were presented to members of the Bishop's Senior Staff, and then to a Focus Group, which met several times to discuss the findings and to suggest follow-up work.

In 2016, the Research Team, a group of three people working on behalf of the Forum, devised a second survey which was more tailored to the local context and needs of the Ely Diocese. This had a more targeted focus on exploring clergy *perceptions of what helps/hinders their wellbeing*. The intention was to offer the clergy of Ely Diocese an opportunity to give direct observations concerning their wellbeing with the overall aim of learning more about what could be done at diocesan and local levels to promote and support wellbeing, e.g. through the development of a support programme and the sharing of helpful practices.

The main question of interest was:

*What are clergy perceptions of the specific things that help or hinder their personal and professional wellbeing?*

Subsidiary questions of interest were identified as:

- a. What do clergy perceive has helped or hindered them in the past?*
- b. What do clergy perceive would help them in the future?*

The final 2016 Survey Report was circulated to all clergy in May 2017 and is still freely available on the Diocesan website, in summary and in full. It contained nine recommendations for possible follow-up action under four broad headings: *Workload, clarity of role and administration; Communication and relationships of support; Time wisdom; and Theological reflection*. Most of these recommendations have been actioned over the past 2-3 years (2016-2019), directly informing ministerial training/support and the work of Senior Diocesan staff.

When the 2016 survey was conducted, it was always hoped to engage in ongoing research to monitor the state of clergy wellbeing. The aim of the follow-up survey in 2019 was to see what trends were emerging in the wellbeing of clergy in Ely Diocese, to listen to clergy voices, experience and aspirations once again, and to track the spiritual temperature of the community. Thus, the questions and options for 2019 followed those of the 2016 survey to discern emerging trends over time, while recognising that the population

cohort would have changed somewhat in the intervening period as clergy arrived in, and departed from, the Diocese.

As before, Part 1 of the questionnaire elicited basic information on the demographics and context of clergy. Part 2 presented a set of questions designed to discover perceptions of specific things that help or hinder personal and professional wellbeing, again closely following the 2016 survey. A new Part 3 was included to capture data on an issue of current concern nationally, by determining the extent and nature of any bullying or harassing behaviour experienced by clergy in their ministry.

The follow-up survey was administered online to all licensed parish-based clergy in the Ely Diocese in May 2019 and a total of 96 valid surveys were submitted from 195 potential respondents. Data analyses adopted the same quantitative and qualitative research methods as for 2016, with the addition of comparisons with the 2016 data, and analysis of responses by gender, thus providing added value to this latest stage of the research.

We are very grateful to all the clergy across the Ely Diocese who gave time and energy to participate in the 2019 survey, and to the support of the Clergy Wellbeing Forum and senior Diocesan staff. We trust and pray that the outcomes of this latest study will contribute positively to the ongoing work of supporting and promoting clergy wellbeing in this diocese.

Canon Sue Wyatt, Rev'd Dr Lynda Taylor and Rev'd Dr Jenny Gage  
Clergy Wellbeing Research Team  
March 2020

## Summary of Results (with some observations shown in italics)

- The survey was sent to 195 clergy. There was a pleasing increase in both the number (96) and percentage (almost 50%) of respondents to the 2019 survey in comparison with the similar 2016 survey (72 responses, i.e. around a third of those contacted).

### Categorising Data

- The data, as with the 2016 survey data, reflected a good level of diversity amongst the respondents, e.g. gender; number of years ordained; context of ministry; years in present post.
- 46% of respondents had completed the previous survey; 21% were new to the survey and 28% couldn't remember if they had completed the previous survey.
- There was little difference between the 2016 and 2019 data in terms of e.g. date of ordination, size of population served, personal status, activities to maintain/improve wellbeing
- The data regarding age showed a reduction in % of those aged 50-59. This was matched by an increase in % of those aged 60-69. Other age categories remained unchanged – *we are getting older.*

### Working Hours

- The percentage of respondents working more than 60 hours a week has increased from 24% in 2016 to 32%. *This may reflect the changes in clergy to whom the survey was sent, i.e. focusing in the 2019 survey on parish clergy only, but it is still a troubling result.*
- Of the 69 respondents who are in full-time stipendiary ministry 45% report average weekly hours of more than 60. This compares with 37% in 2016.
- There is an increase from 37.5% (2016) to 45.8% (2019) in those taking time in lieu if the day off is missed. *This perhaps indicates an increase in self-care.*

## Caring Responsibilities

- The proportion of respondents with significant caring responsibilities has remained similar at 70% (68%, 2016). However 22% now report these as full-time caring responsibilities compared with 10% (2016); in the 22% there were twice as many women as men.
- 46% of female respondents and 30% of male respondents report caring for children frequently or full-time and 13% report either frequent or full-time caring responsibilities including spouses with health issues, friends/colleagues in crisis, children/grandchildren with significant health needs or learning difficulties.
- 8% of respondents report caring frequently or full-time for parents.

## Perception of Wellbeing/Flourishing

- When offered words to describe how the respondents currently felt about their own wellbeing:
  - 56% of respondents used the word 'positive' (46% in 2016)
  - of the negative words offered 'weary' was chosen by the highest proportion – 40% (38% in 2016)
  - men selected positive words more often than women
  - only men selected the word 'angry'
  - 34% chose only positive words (similar to 2016, 36%) and 19% chose only negative words (28% in 2016).
  - More women than men chose only negative words.
- There are increases in both the proportions of those who feel their wellbeing has improved and those who feel their wellbeing has deteriorated in the past two years. *It is a concern that one in five respondents feel their wellbeing has deteriorated, whatever the baseline of two years ago.*
  - *It is encouraging that 70% of respondents rated their flourishing at 7 or better, a slight improvement on 2016 (66.6%). It remains a concern that one in six (16.6%) rated their flourishing at 5 or worse (similar to 2016)*
  - female respondents used the entire scoring range (1 – 10) with regard to their perception of their flourishing.
  - *It is encouraging that 10% of the women chose the highest value.*
  - *It is of concern that amongst the female cohort there were those who chose the lowest points (1 and 2) and on balance women used the lower points of the scale more when evaluating their flourishing.*
  - 79% of the male cohort responded with scores of 7 and above, compared with 60% of the female cohort.

## Time Aside

- There has been an increase in the proportion of clergy taking annual retreat, quiet day/study day and pilgrimage in order to improve/maintain their wellbeing, *although these proportions remain lower than might be hoped for.*
- There has also been a decrease in those reporting taking an annual holiday and taking a weekly day off. *It is a concern that taking an annual holiday is reported by 82% only, and a weekly day off by 60% only.*

## Those who provide Support

- The proportion of clergy naming the Bishops, Archdeacons and Rural Deans among those who have supported their wellbeing has increased since the last survey (44% from 33%, 42% from 18%, and 29% from 19% respectively).
- The percentage that named their Team Rector as a source of support has decreased from 54% to 5%.
- 1 in 5 respondents (20%) named counsellor/therapist as a source of support, an increase from 8%.
- More women report receiving support from their friends, spiritual director and rural/area dean, while more men report support from clergy colleagues/peers and the Bishops.

- More respondents (51% compared to 38% in 2016) feel positive about the support they receive from churchwardens and congregations, *though there remains a large variation in both clergy experiences and clergy expectations of such support.*

### **‘What would help you flourish more?’/ ‘What additional support would be helpful?’**

- In response to the first of these two questions, 25% of respondents answered in ways that highlighted a desire for more time aside, i.e. more protected rest days/study leave/retreat/quiet days etc. 19% spoke of the need for more resources (support with administration, people, money, time, theological) and 19% highlighted desired changes in church culture (e.g. reduction in Diocesan paperwork, challenging behaviour being properly addressed, a less anxious church).
- The responses to the second question were very diverse: 15% mentioned support from people, e.g. one-to-one support, 10% mentioned issues relating to time, and 8% issues relating to finance, both personal and church related.

### **Bullying or Harassment**

- 24% of respondents reported experience of bullying. 16 of these (17% of all respondents) described recent or on-going bad behaviour in the Diocese of Ely.
- The reported experiences of such behaviour included both ‘clergy to clergy’ and ‘lay to clergy’.

### **Reflections**

The survey provides evidence of a wide range of states of wellbeing amongst the clergy of Ely Diocese. The role of the Clergy Wellbeing Forum is to make recommendations regarding both the on-going support of those who perceive themselves to be flourishing in their ministry, and those who know they are not flourishing as they would wish to. It is hoped that making the results of this survey known to the senior clergy of the Diocese, and to all who are responsible for the support of clergy, will be helpful, and that specific recommendations will be acted on.

The increase in the proportion of respondents reporting their average weekly working hours as 60 or above is a source of concern. Amongst these are 45% of the full-time stipendiary clergy who responded. It is therefore no surprise that 40% of respondents used the term ‘weary’ to describe how they feel about their wellbeing. Clearly there remains more work to be done in this area of wellbeing to establish in more detail why these hours are being worked, where the pressure to work such hours is perceived to be coming from, and how the hours are spent.

It is recognized that clergy are no different from the rest of society in carrying caring responsibilities for others. The more recent emphasis on encouraging young vocations will undoubtedly lead to a significant proportion of clergy having responsibilities for the care of children. Similarly, as people live longer, a larger proportion of clergy in their fifties and sixties will have responsibilities for elderly parents and other family members. Combining long working hours and an expected six day working week with caring responsibilities cannot be conducive to wellbeing.

The increase in the proportion of those taking annual retreat, quiet day/study day and pilgrimage is encouraging. However, the proportion of clergy who take such time aside remains comparatively low, so it is not surprising that there are many clergy wanting to take such time as a way to improve their wellbeing. It has long been recognised in the work of the Forum that adequate time for the continued spiritual growth of clergy is essential for their wellbeing. Further work could be done to ensure that this is prioritised by clergy, and better understood by the laity.

Although there remain issues for many clergy about hours worked, 70% of the clergy rate their flourishing at 7 out of 10 or better and 56% of respondents used the word ‘positive’ to describe their wellbeing, so amongst those working long hours there are those who also see themselves as flourishing in ministry.

Further investigation could be done into this, but the nature of the work, dealing with the meaning and purpose of life as it does, may well give a level of satisfaction that encourages a good sense of wellbeing.

The proportion of those respondents (1 in 6) who rate their flourishing at 5 or worse is the same as it was in the 2016 survey. It is not good that 1 in 3 chose only negative words to describe their wellbeing and 1 in 5 feel their wellbeing has deteriorated in the past two years (whatever the baseline for that deterioration). These figures do not reflect a flourishing body of people.

Female respondents appear more polarised in their evaluation of their flourishing, some using the lowest points on the scale but 1 in 10 choosing 10, the highest value, although we should bear in mind that 1 in 10 of the female respondents is only a small actual number.

It would seem that Diocesan support, offered through the Bishops, Archdeacons and Rural Deans, is being taken up by more clergy. The increase in the proportion of those seeing a counsellor/therapist (20%, up from 8% in 2016) is noted. The report of greater support from churchwardens and congregations is encouraging and may reflect the clear direction given to churchwardens by the Archdeacons at the annual visitation.

The diversity of responses given to the questions asking about 'what would help flourishing?' and 'what additional support would be helpful?' suggest that there is no single, overwhelming need that the clergy of the Diocese identify. Many of the responses related to specific contexts and individual circumstances.

This survey was the first in Ely Diocese to ask clergy about experiences of bullying and harassment related to their ministry. That almost a quarter (23 out of 96) of respondents reported experience of such behaviour suggests that such behaviour is not rare (as is suggested in the Foreword to the 'Dignity at Work' policy of 2008, available on the Diocese of Ely website).

## **Moving forward and Recommendations**

The work of supporting those clergy who are positive about their own wellbeing and their flourishing in ministry needs to continue, while at the same time, finding ways to improve the wellbeing of those who are negative about their wellbeing and know they are not flourishing as they would wish to.

There are sources of encouragement, such as the increase in the proportion of respondents feeling better supported by congregations and churchwardens, perhaps reflecting the clear direction regarding the care of clergy being given by Archdeacons to Churchwardens at their Visitations. This needs annual reinforcement.

The 2016 survey highlighted many issues around the provision of good administration, and although there is still work to be done in this area, it appears to be a less pressing concern for clergy than 3 years ago.

Concerns remain around excessive hours worked, days per week worked, and holiday not being taken. There is clearly still work to be done in encouraging greater care in taking the time for whatever it is that helps clergy to maintain their spiritual growth and to relax, develop good, life-sustaining relationships. We need to explore further why clergy do not build these into the working day, week and year.

The incidence of bullying/harassment reported is not acceptable. We need to do more to discover what is happening, why it is happening, and how it might be prevented. Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is now built into all that we do; prevention of bullying, whoever is the perpetrator or victim, similarly needs to be taken very seriously.

The Clergy Wellbeing Forum will take the data provided by this survey and use it to direct the work of the Forum in the coming months. The Forum remains committed to:

- making available to clergy a range of ways to encourage them both professionally and personally;

- supporting clergy in the responsibility they carry for their own wellbeing;
- enabling the wider church to support their clergy, not least by having a greater understanding of the ordained role, and being more aware of their own contribution to clergy wellbeing.

As a result of this survey the following immediate recommendations are offered:

- Issues regarding 'time aside'/working hours to be addressed with clergy, in particular investigating where the pressure to work long hours comes from.
- The on-going work of communicating all that is already available for clergy in terms of both professional and personal support to be encouraged and improved where possible.
- Concerns regarding the culture of the church should be brought to the attention of senior clergy, particularly concerns regarding uncertainty and the perceived anxious nature of the church.
- Ensuring that clergy are able to report experiences of bullying and harassment easily and in a manner that feels safe. Training should be put in place to help clergy recognise and challenge such behaviour. A culture in which it is clear that such behaviour is not acceptable must be established and developed. Clear policy on matters of bullying and harassment needs to be accompanied by transparent and workable practical procedures for managing cases when they do emerge.
- Work should be continued to find ways to communicate helpful information and good practice regarding clergy wellbeing to congregations and churchwardens.