

John H's 'SSM Story'...

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Parish: | St Hildeburgh's, Hoylake | Non-Parochial Commitment(s): | University Lecturer and RAF Chaplain |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

What does it mean to you, being ordained, but not having the Parish as the focus of your ministry?

I am a firm believer that I am not someone who works in a secular environment during the week and is a priest at the weekend. I am a priest who happens to work in a university. Parish ministry is the bread and butter for most clerics, though there are a myriad number of ways we are called to a priestly vocation. My role in the parish is that of being a support for the incumbent as and when needed. It also means being a regular presence both at the altar and the pulpit. The people of the parish know who I am, as I have been involved now for over ten years. Besides, my crib service costume would be too big for anyone else!

What does ministry 'look like' for you?

My main focus is on being where I am called to be. There is a real shortage of chaplains, especially for reserve forces locally (if anyone reading this is thinking of looking at service ministry, please do give it prayerful consideration). As a consequence, I am busy most weekends and link this with my time in the parish. Ministry is also about being a priest in my university role. Staff and students are aware of my vocation and I am lucky, in that I have only had positive responses.

How do you sustain yourself as an SSM (Self-Supporting Minister)?

I am very lucky to have a supportive family. We have a five-year-old little girl and I sustain myself with family time such as country walks and bird watching. I attend an annual RAF chaplains conference / retreat, and this gives me time to reflect on the role I have. Otherwise, it is just going for a run a few times a week (though as I get older the route gets shorter).

So, what would you say an SSM is?

In essence an SSM is someone who has the privilege to take their priestly ministry into places that full-time members of the clergy are not. We have the chance to be a support to the incumbents of our parishes and to be another cleric for God's people to turn to. In a nutshell, we are a resource.

Do you believe that you are fulfilling your vocational call – in work, church and through your chaplaincy role?

I do feel very fulfilled in my role. I have the bedrock of the parish that keeps me grounded in the love of God's church and people. I have the chance to take my

ministry to those in the military who are often unchurched but are very welcoming and supportive and I get to see my family most evenings. I am busy but in the very best of ways.

Finally, what are the joys and privileges of being SSM?

The joys are the same as those experienced by all called to a priestly vocation. I don't think the fact that the role is not paid lessens the wonderful privilege of being alongside people and bringing them God's message of hope and love. If there is a benefit, it could be not living above the shop as those on a stipend so often do. However, my phone seems to ring a lot!