

John's 'SSM Story'...

Parish:	St Mary Whitegate and St Peter Little Budworth	Non-Parochial Commitment(s):	Healthcare Chaplain
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What do you understand by Self-Supporting Ordained Ministry and were you 'called' to be an SSM?

Self-supporting ordained ministry to me is the opportunity to express my faith in a formal and active way through leading and participating in all forms of worship as well as pastoral care but not having the administrative and parish political issues that go with being an incumbent.

I felt called to Ministry in my late forties. I was working on international projects in healthcare and education as a consultant and felt that my work was important and also part of my Ministry. After a lot of thought, prayer and advice I was accepted for Reader training and was licensed in 1994. I few years later the original call was still there and although rewarding, the Reader Ministry did not seem to be the complete answer to the call. I offered for ordained Ministry and after the extensive process was turned down. I offered again a few years later and was again unsuccessful. Many years later I was made aware that the main reason for not being accepted was that what I was offering for appeared too close to what was seen as Locally Ordained Ministry which was not acceptable in The Diocese of Chester. I perhaps should add that I too do not see how Locally Ordained Ministry is appropriate. Later with different attitudes within the Diocese and a greater acceptance of the concept of SSM, I was persuaded to try again, and this time was successful.

What does ministry 'look like' for you?

My Ministry has two quite different aspects, Parish Ministry, as SSM Curate in a two Parish Benefice where I participate as a member of a Ministry Team of Incumbent, one other SSM Curate, Pastoral Worker and Youth Worker.

I take turns on the worship rota to lead and preach at services in both parishes, including presiding at communion. I attend PCC in both parishes and am a member of the Pastoral Committee in one.

I used to take home communion to several people, but we are now actively encouraging lay participation and my numbers have dropped accordingly.

I regularly take funerals, weddings and occasionally baptisms, which I admit is not my favourite service.

I help with preparation for confirmation, Lent and Advent groups, and baptism preparation as well as attending social events and Mother's Union groups in both parishes.

The other part of my Ministry is Healthcare Chaplaincy, as Spiritual Care & Chaplaincy Coordinator at St Luke's Hospice in Winsford which I am licensed to by the Diocese. I also provide out of hours chaplaincy cover at Leighton Hospital, having been a volunteer chaplain there for several years when a Reader.

The out of hours chaplaincy mainly consists of being available three months of the year, in my case March, July and November, to respond for any call for an Anglican Chaplain outside normal working hours. The reality is it is usually in the early hours of the morning to give a blessing for someone at end of life or just having died and to pray with the relatives. It can be varied from elderly patients to still births, those with chronic illness to major trauma of accidents.

The work at the hospice is even more varied, primarily I am available 24/7 to patients, relatives, staff and volunteers of the hospice. Much of my time is spent just being there and talking with people whether Christian, another faith, or no faith and trying to answer their questions and listen to the things they do not feel they can discuss with their relatives or friends.

During my time at the hospice we have had two weddings and a pre-wedding, a modified marriage service, so that the couple were not married at the end of it, but so that the father of the bride could feel he had taken part as he died a few weeks before the date of the wedding.

In some instances home visits may be necessary after patients have perhaps come to faith while attending day hospice and have no contact with their home church and the local church is not prepared to visit them, and I am also asked to take funerals from time to time by families I have come to know during the time their relative was with us.

During normal times we have a communion service every Tuesday and Thursday when day hospice is open, plus remembrance evenings which end with a short service each quarter for relatives who have lost family members in the hospice.

In addition, we help with introducing our service to new staff and volunteers at induction, offer training in aspects of palliative spiritual care and also support all aspects of life at the hospice.

Would you say the real focus of your ministry is non-parochial?

In one sense yes, but it is a bit more complicated than that. Initially as a Reader my ministry was predominantly parochial, supporting the incumbent in those things which I was licensed to do, but over time I gained the confidence to talk more about my faith in different situations and, working internationally, had the privilege of learning from conversations with people of several other faiths, and none, from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This extended my confidence further.

My healthcare Chaplaincy started in a small way taking Sunday services at our local hospital with occasional requests to visit the wards after the service. After I retired, I was able to offer more time and became part of the chaplaincy team in the hospital and later moved the major amount of my time to the hospice while keeping some involvement with the hospital.

Throughout I have always been active as a member of the Ministry Team in the parish or benefice.

How do you maintain a balance between your chaplaincy work, parochial commitments and other commitments, such as family etc?

To be honest I have not always been particularly good at getting the balance right. When I was first active in healthcare Chaplaincy, I had the benefit of being part of a large team: three paid chaplains and twelve volunteers so the load was spread. In the hospice for much of the time I worked with just one or two volunteers and almost without fail put in more hours than contracted to.

I am fortunate that I have a very understanding and supportive Incumbent who works on the basis of me telling him what I would like to do and be involved in for the benefice, and as we speak regularly it seems to work well to mutual benefit. He does have to remind me to take time for family, and indeed for myself, from time to time though.

Are you confident that you are living out your vocational calling?

As far as I can be. I believe that God has called me to work in His service but only He knows if He did call me and I am fulfilling His call.

What is most rewarding about being a Chaplain?

In some ways it seems rather arrogant and selfish, but the feeling that you have actually helped to bring someone closer to God and played a part of bringing them comfort in their most difficult of times.