

Trish's SSM Story...

Parish:	High Legh, Rostherne with Little Bollington, Over Tabley	Non-Parochial Commitment(s):	Education Consultant (Deaf Education)
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You are an SSM (Self-Supporting Minister) – what does that mean?

It simply means that I do not receive a stipend and that my income comes from my paid employment and pension. Whilst I don't see my priestly ministry as specifically part of my work, my ordained status and priestly nature mean that at times I can offer specific support to those I meet. However, usually, the support I offer is as a faithful and committed follower of Christ.

When I was ordained, I moved from employed status to become self-employed. This was possible because I also took my occupational pension. My self-employed status gave me considerable flexibility but also meant that I had to respond as work opportunities occurred with little regular pattern.

I had a working agreement at church and contracts in employment that, sometimes, created conflict or difficult demands. Managing this sort of balance is made easier if your training incumbent is adaptable and sees your employment as a valuable addition to your ministry. However, it can be difficult to maintain a sense of balance, remembering that the whole of life is vocational – work and play, family and church.

How would you describe your calling?

My calling to ordained ministry was very gradual and came through the strong encouragement of my vicar and after a range of ministry including children's ministry, Reader ministry and a range of positions within the leadership of the church. For most of my life I felt that my career as a teacher of the deaf was my vocational calling.

What is the focus of your ministry?

My focus is on parish ministry across the three parishes within the United Benefice. As there are three priests – the incumbent and two Associate Priests – we each take a lead on one of the parishes. I take the pastoral lead in my home parish where I have lived for over 40 years. This means that I have good contacts with many of the residents in our small village and long-standing links with many organisations. These links have been built up through personal contact over the years as well as through links created through my ministry at St John's.

I feel that the same personal traits, interests and experiences that drove my career have also directed my ordained ministry – a desire to be alongside people at difficult times in life, to work collaboratively, a passion to see young children and families

learning and developing together, communication and a love of nature all figure in my family life, hobbies, career and ministry.

My parish ministry includes encouragement of faith and vocation in others, leading worship with a balanced focus on Word and Sacramental ministry, preparing for and undertaking pastoral and occasional services.

I particularly enjoy preparing informal services held in different places e.g. outside in the garden, using symbols, action and visual reinforcement for the theme of the service.

My heart lies in encouraging ministry with the families with young children and the young children themselves. This comes from or is at least consonant with my professional life as a teacher of the deaf working with young children and also providing their families with guidance and support following the diagnosis of a hearing loss.

I have enjoyed strengthening links with the school including welcoming them into church for seasonal services and for informative visits. Also, visiting the school for whole school assemblies, Open the Book or question and answer sessions with year groups. Within church, along with an enthusiastic group, I developed a story-telling service for families with young children and encouraged the establishment of a Little Acorns group for carers and tots which whilst being held in church doesn't have any religious content.

Living in the village means that I often know those who request pastoral services especially weddings and funerals. This means that they are less anxious about the service, experience a personal touch and it is easier to provide pastoral follow-up.

Previously a Reader, I am now Deanery Sub-warden of Readers encouraging the development of licensed lay ministry.

What would you say are the joys of being an SSM?

Throughout all aspects of my life, variety has been a key part to feeling fulfilled. Although I spent 50 years in Deaf Education, there was huge change within the profession and I added to that by the variety of posts I undertook, the additional training which led to different types of work and the different schools and Local Authorities that I worked for.

My current role as Associate Priest adds further variety to life. When I am asked by school children "What do you like best about your job?", I find it very difficult to answer. I have to tell them that I enjoy almost every part of my role from speaking with young children about faith and church to visiting care homes for the elderly; from the joys of weddings to the deep sadness of funerals; from the seasons of the

church and much more besides. Parish ministry is full of variety and alongside work, family and friends it is that "rich clutter of life" that feeds all aspects of my life as a Christian and as an SSM.

As work makes less demand on my time, I find great joy in serving a village community that I have known and loved for several decades.

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

Faith and life have always been closely integrated in my life. I had a holistic feel to my life - from family to faith and including what I always saw as my vocation as a teacher of the deaf and audiologist. My whole life felt vocational with my work as a teacher of the deaf / audiologist as a particular calling and changing involvement in church ministry also part of my calling, first and foremost, to follow Christ.

However, following ordination, that rather fell apart and the different parts of my life took on a hierarchical feel. As a Children's Minister and then as a Reader as well as involvement in various aspects of church life, everything had felt integrated within my life. However, ordination seemed to change that, and church duties always came top of the pile with work commitments below and then family, friends and "fun" came at the bottom of the pile. This is where I feel it is vital that training incumbents for SSMs understand the nature of "living vocationally".

It took me some considerable time and much support from a very wise Spiritual Guide to help me recover that sense of living out my vocational calling in all aspects of life. The whole of life is vocational and whilst there are still some times when balance is difficult and fun days drop off the edge, on the whole I am living my whole life as a disciple of Christ with a particular calling to priestly ministry.

Being an SSM means that I can continue to fulfil my professional vocation as well as my ministerial vocation whilst not losing sight of the many other aspects of life as a follower of Christ.