

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> King's College London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 17 Business and Management Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Enhancing Clergy Wellbeing and Effectiveness in the Church of England		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Michael Clinton	Reader in Work Psychology & Human Resource Management	From 01/09/2009
Dr Jane Sturges	Reader in Organisational Behaviour	From 15/09/2003
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013 – 2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>The Church of England is responsible for the welfare of 1.14 million worshippers, with over 20,000 clergy members supporting its 12,400 parishes nationwide. However, over recent decades, congregation sizes and church incomes have shrunk: as a result, fewer clergy members have fewer resources to cover the work. This has led to increased administrative demands on clergy, undermining their wellbeing and effectiveness. To address this problem, in 2011, the Church of England commissioned Dr Clinton at King's Business School to analyse clergy calling, wellbeing and effectiveness. The research evidenced ways in which clergy can be more effective in their roles and, through a seven-year programme of extensive research and engagement, devised a new approach to enhancing clergy wellbeing – a topic that has long been a challenge for the Church of England. In contributing to a shift to more evidence-based policymaking, the findings influenced key Church of England decisions around how to support clergy wellbeing and effectiveness, including the recruitment of nine clergy support roles in the Diocese of Sheffield, benefitting the local community of parishioners in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of Sheffield.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Although religion has been the focal point of many UK local communities for centuries, congregation sizes and church incomes have reduced in recent years. As a result, the remaining clergy often have to work across several sites with reduced help from volunteers. At the General Synod (the national assembly of the Church of England), Archbishop Rowan Williams noted that clergy effectiveness and worshipper numbers were intrinsically linked, stating that <i>“effective ministerial presence is essential if people are to be in touch with the faithfulness of God through the Church”</i>.</p>		
<b>A seven-year longitudinal survey to study clergy effectiveness</b>		
<p>In 2011, the Church of England approached Dr Michael Clinton of King's Business School with concerns that clergy calling and wellbeing were being undermined by the pressure caused by shrinking congregations and increasing administrative demands. The research challenge dovetailed with King's expertise in organisational psychology, specifically in thinking about how different types of motivation might shape the relationship between a person's calling for a job or vocation and their wellbeing. The research commenced in 2011 with the lead project, Experience of Ministry Survey (EMS), which was complemented by a series of linked projects that ran simultaneously. EMS collected data on a nationally representative sample of clergy at four time-points (2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017). Over 6,000 clergy members responded to questions about tasks and activities they were regularly engaged in, how they approached their role and the positive and negative aspects of their experiences as priests. Innovative measures of role</p>		

effectiveness included assessment of positive clergy wellbeing (feelings of engagement and avoidance of burnout), discernment of vocation (a fulfilled sense of purpose or mission) and congregational growth (in terms of both perceived spiritual wellbeing amongst those served and numerical growth in worshipping community).

The projects linked with EMS commenced in 2013 and 2015, and were respectively entitled the Patterns of Priestly Practice (3P) and the Calling Far and Wide project. Both projects complemented the EMS data by providing a forensic understanding of what clergy do on a day-to-day basis and the influence of their daily tasks on their effectiveness. Over 300 priests and chaplains completed additional daily diaries for the two projects. By the end of the EMS survey in 2017, the research findings concluded that a 'Big 4' set of predictors of clergy effectiveness were supported by the cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of each; these were as follows: (i) experiencing a strong and consistent calling; (ii) receiving useful feedback; (iii) having colleague support; and (iv) engaging in proactive role crafting.

**Research contribution: revealing the effects of clergy calling on clergy wellbeing, vigour and effectiveness**

The data collected through survey and diary data allowed Clinton and Sturges (together with other colleagues at King's College London and at Royal Holloway, University of London) to study the development process of clergy calling through a sensemaking lens. Sensemaking is a dynamic process of developing subjective meaning that involves individuals striving to understand and make sense of events. The research explored retrospective accounts of clergy members' sensemaking regarding their vocational calling. It examined how individuals narrated the emergence of their calling, how they interpreted and acted upon cues and prompts that directed them towards it and how the socio-material context of the calling domain influenced the unfolding of their calling. The analysis indicated that the emergence of a calling was not a discrete event but an ongoing process of sensemaking. It was characterized by interplay between extracted cues, sensemaking through action and interpretation, the church context in which the participants' calling occurred and developed, and individuals' evolving identity [1].

While the project contributed to a broader understanding of the development of calling, it also highlighted the possible downsides of work that is strongly motivated by a vocation. Although the intensity of a calling has a positive direct effect on work-related vigour, it can also motivate people to work longer hours by limiting their psychological detachment from work in the evenings, for example. In turn, this affects sleep quality and morning vigour, leading to decreased effectiveness at work. Overall, the study showed how the benefits of intense calling could sometimes be nullified by the costs [2].

These findings shed light on the specific causes of clergy burnout. The data collected through 3P and the 2011 and 2013 bi-annual EMS surveys revealed that the role of members of the clergy involved administrative duties that were hugely time-consuming and found to be antithetical to most clergy's sense of calling [2]. A major finding of the 3P research was that on a daily basis, clergy spent more time on administrative tasks than on practising core aspects of their calling and that this had major implications for their wellbeing and motivation [2,3]. The findings showed that clergy ranked administration first out of the 14 tasks they were surveyed on, averaging three hours per day. In contrast, they ranked it 12th in terms of relevance to their calling and 11th in terms of tasks they felt competent doing. Further analysis of the data revealed that clergy members expended much of their resources on self-control on days that required extensive administrative duties, causing conflict between their working and non-working hours in the day: over time, this pattern of working is likely to lead to clergy burnout [4].

**3. References to the research**

The research was commissioned and funded by the Church of England through the following projects:

- 'The Patterns of Priestly Practice project', GBP25,000, the Church of England Diocese of Sheffield, split equally between Mike Clinton and Jane Sturges at King's College London. Ran between 6/2014–6/2015.

- ‘Evaluation of the Mission Partnership Development Worker Project’, GBP46,000 from the Church of England Diocese of Sheffield, split equally between Mike Clinton at King’s College London and Neil Conway at Royal Holloway. Ran between 6/2015–5/2020.

Publications [1], [2], and [3] went through strict peer-review processes and are all published in CABS 4-rated journals. The papers have become a reference for further research on calling and vocation.

- [1] Sturges, J., Clinton, M., Conway, N., & Budjanovcanin, A. (2019). I Know Where I’m Going: Sensemaking and the Emergence of Calling. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 114, 57–58. DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2019.02.006
- [2] Conway, N., Clinton, M., Sturges, J., & Budjanovcanin, A. (2015). Using Self-Determination Theory to Understand the Relationship Between Enactment of a Calling and Daily Well-Being. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(8), 1114–1131. DOI: 10.1002/job.2014
- [3] Clinton, M., Conway, N., & Sturges, J. (2016). “It’s Tough Hanging-Up a Call”: The Relationships Between Intensity of a Calling, Daily Work Hours, Psychological Detachment, Sleep Quality and Morning Vigor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(1), 28–39. DOI: 10.1037/ocp0000025
- [4] Clinton, M., Conway, N., Sturges, J., & Hewett, B. (2020). Self-Control During Daily Work Activities and Work-to-Nonwork Conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 118, 103410. DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103410

#### 4. Details of the impact

The implications of innovative research at King’s Business School gained widespread attention within the Church of England. The findings contributed to a significant organisational shift towards evidence-based policymaking within the Church, improving clergy effectiveness and the wellbeing of their communities.

##### **Encouraging a shift to evidence-based policymaking in the Church of England**

The project produced over 20 internal reports for the Church of England, tackling issues related to clergy wellbeing and effectiveness across the country [A]. The reports were viewed by a range of national policy bodies, including the House of Bishops and Ministry Council, and discussed annually at the National Continuing Ministerial Development Panel. As noted by Dr Tim Ling, former Head of Ministry Development in the Church of England, “*The results [referring to A, (i)] were circulated to all diocesan Bishops in the Church of England and to their lead offices. This resulted in active debates about the nature of good practice, resource allocation and policy development*” [B]. The research was drawn upon within key debates regarding clergy wellbeing at national and local levels [C]. For example, in June 2017, the General Synod dedicated a large proportion of their meeting to discussing clergy wellbeing, keeping the findings from this research at the heart of discussion on the need to better understand wellbeing issues for change to occur [C, (i)]. The research contributed to conversations about clergy work more widely, with the Church Times publishing three articles about the findings [D]. The articles highlighted the need for greater support for clergy under pressure, explicitly stating that “*the study will inform ongoing work in the House of Clergy on well-being*” [D, (ii)].

These sustained conversations led to a shift in thinking within the Church of England. A major legacy of the project is its role as a catalyst for a change in the organisational mindset relating to evidence-based policy development within the organisation. As noted by Dr Ling “*... the decision-making culture within the National Church of England in this area has fundamentally changed in terms of the extent to which it draws on evidence and has resulted in increased investment in new research to support future policy decision, including the appointment of a full-time researcher in its Ministry Division nationally to lead on the Living Ministry Project*” [B].

##### **Enhancing clergy wellbeing and effectiveness**

The shift to evidence-based policy-making across the Church of England has had a concrete, positive impact on the working lives of clergy. The evidence provided by King’s research led to higher investment in clergy wellbeing and professional development. One of the most significant and high-level impacts was on the future of nationwide theological education. The research

provided evidence to support a major review by the Archbishops' Council, seeking to understand the impact of investment on theological education nationally (GBP12,000,000 per annum). *"The findings influenced how individual dioceses invested in continuing professional education shifting their practice and investment to areas of work identified by the research as being effective. The work also informed the formation of a new national Nurture Course (Pilgrim) for new Christians"* [B].

A second notable investment, again in direct response to the research findings, is the Mission Partnership Development Worker (MPDW) project launched by the Diocese of Sheffield. The Church of England granted the Diocese GBP1,000,000 to run the MPDW project from 2015 to 2021 [E]. The project provides administrative support to clusters of 33 neighbouring parishes in the most deprived areas of Sheffield to allow clergy to devote more time to their calling and connecting with parishioners. A video prepared by the research team to promote the scheme to prospective clergy members of the Diocese of Sheffield features clergy who found the new scheme helpful. Rev Philip Ireson explains that he has noticed a difference in his workload since the beginning of the scheme: *"I can now be thinking of developing youth work, for instance, which I couldn't have done"* [F].

Thirty clergy members gave further description of the impact that the project had had on their lives, demonstrating a reduction in their administrative workload, freeing time for other activities. For example, two years into the MPDW project, compared with those from a control group (n=18), clergy with a support worker (n=13) reported spending more time on mission-related activities and performing activities that they feel competent at [A, (iii)]. Other reported advantages of reduced administrative workload included feelings of connectedness, closer working relationships with clergy in other parishes and more opportunities to share resources and ideas. The Project Manager to the Diocese of Sheffield, Graham Millar, noted the value of the scheme beyond clergy wellbeing: *"the Mission Partnership Development Workers have benefitted clergy in receipt of such workers, parishioner attendance and the financial position of their churches"* [E].

#### **Improving community life in the Dioceses of Sheffield**

The MPDW project created jobs for nine support workers and potentially benefitted the 3,000 parishioners within the parishes that received additional support. For example, findings in internal reports produced for the Church of England [A] demonstrated that clergy with support were able to spend more time working with children and young people within their parish. A year later, the support workers remained in their roles and virtually all clergy involved in the project cited community events and new parishioner-led activities that were made possible by the project. One priest with a support worker reported that *"having an MPDW lift the burden of admin has enabled me to spend more time with people, in particular running groups and courses in evangelism and discipleship. These groups and courses have been hugely beneficial in the spiritual health of our church family"*. [A, (iv), p2] Another clergy member stated that *"Within six months [of getting a support worker] we have got a messy church off the ground, new Sunday morning activities, more school engagement"* [A, (iii), p6].

Two prominent parishioners in the diocese noted the impact of the scheme on the activities and initiatives that were run in their parishes:

*"The parish nursing programme would not have happened without our Development Worker and it has greatly impacted the community by encouraging healthy children and families in one of the ten most deprived parishes in the country. The nursing scheme reaches out to people who are on the fringes of society who otherwise could not or would not contact GP services, because they may not have the means or confidence"* [G].

*"Having a Development Worker means we are more capable running larger events that extend much further into the community... activities included soft archery and Dr Bike and the event was attended by the police, fire, and ambulance services (who brought their vehicles). The children saw the emergency services in a different light which is hoped will build trust between children and these groups. Building such trust is crucial, especially with the police"* [H].

Overall, the seven-year King's research programme has significantly influenced decision-making within the Church of England, leading to enhanced clergy wellbeing and effectiveness, and improved activities and services for the parishioners of the Diocese of Sheffield.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [A] Internal Church of England reports on the research findings: (i) September 2017, Clinton, M., & Ling, T., *Effective ministerial presence and what it looks like in practice: Insights for the experiences of Ministry Project 2011-2017*; (ii) February 2018, Clinton, M., Frasca, K. & Conway, N., *Second Report: Overview from the November 2017 Diary*; (iii) May 2018, *2018 Qualitative Study into Clergy Experiences of the Mission Partnership Development Worker (MPDW) Scheme*; (iv) June 2019, *Report of the June 2019 MPDW Sheffield Survey*
- [B] Testimonial from: Dr Tim Ling, former Head of Ministry Development, Ministry Division, Archbishops Council, acknowledging the importance of the research for organisational understanding of issues, 30th January 2020
- [C] Internal Church of England committee documents: (i) General Synod (June 2017), *Clergy wellbeing A Background Paper from the Archbishops' Council*; (ii) Diocese of London (October 2014) *Update on Clergy Wellbeing, Engagement and Resilience*
- [D] Church Times pieces: (i) 'Causes of clergy stress aired in the General Synod' 9 July 2017; (ii) 'Purpose-filled' clergy score highly on well-being' 22 Sept 2017; (iii) 'Look more for vocations, church leaders told' 19 April 2018
- [E] Testimonial from: Graham Millar, MPDW Project Manager, the Diocese of Sheffield, 29th October 2018 and 17th December 2019
- [F] Video outlining the Mission Partnership Development Worker project. Retrieved on 15 Feb 2021 from: <http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/development-worker-project>
- [G] Testimonial from: Michaela Suckling, Parish Nurse at St Matthew's Church, Sheffield, 9th March 2020
- [H] Testimonial from: Kath Steele, Churchwarden at St Peter's Church Hoyland, 9th March 2020