

## **DIOCESE OF CARLISLE**

### **Guidelines on Lone Working and Personal Safety for Clergy**

#### **Introduction**

Clergy may find themselves working alone for several hours of their working day - this may be less if there is a parish office out of which they work, or more if they operate entirely from home.

Clergy working alone will of course face the same risks in their work as others doing similar tasks. However the work of clergy does carry additional risks and it is important that these are fully understood and that sensible precautions and adequate arrangements are made to ensure they are as safe as possible.

#### **Potential hazards of lone working**

There are a number of areas where risks may be greater when working alone:

- Accidents or sudden illness when there is no-one to summon help or first aid.
- Violence or the threat of violence.
- Allegations of inappropriate and/or abusive behaviour.
- Fire or other threat.
- Attempting tasks which cannot safely be done by one person alone, e.g. heavy lifting, or use of certain equipment.
- Lack of safe way in or out of a building (e.g. danger of being accidentally locked in).
- Loss or damage to property e.g. theft of laptop from parked vehicle.

#### **Assessing the risks of lone working**

The perception of what is a risk and the actual risk itself may be seen differently by individuals. For example an inexperienced curate may underestimate the risks of an activity; some clergy especially those in urban parishes may feel particularly vulnerable to violence after dark; or a medical condition may make it unsafe for an individual to work alone.

Clergy should consider these factors and assess the particular risks in their parish environment. Appropriate steps should be taken to reduce the risk, particularly where the environment around the vicarage or church plant is lonely, poorly lit and / or in an area where criminal activity is more likely.

#### **Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy**

The guidelines on Lone Working and Personal Safety should be read in conjunction with the good practice advice given in the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy (revised 2015), which are on the Church of England website, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/about-general-synod/convocations/guidelines-for-the-professional-conduct-of-the-clergy.aspx>

Section 2.7 states:-

“There is risk in all pastoral work. The appropriateness of visiting and being visited alone, especially at night, needs to be assessed with care. The same assessment should also apply to other “out of hours” contact (especially through telephone calls and social media).

Consideration should be given to:

- the place of the meeting;
- the proximity of other people;
- the arrangement of furniture and lighting; and
- the dress of the minister, appropriate to the context

- which are important considerations in pastoral care. The perceptions of others need to be considered at all times, taking particular care to assess the extent to which others may experience or perceive behaviour to be inappropriate.

At times it may be appropriate to advise a third party in advance of any appointments which have been made. Keeping accurate records of appointments is helpful and good practice.”

The clergy will often find themselves in the powerful position of meeting people at the limits of their vulnerability. The Guidelines for the Professional Conduct (revised 2015) set out how to maintain appropriate boundaries which in themselves are helpful in preventing misunderstandings and reducing risks. If clergy are in any doubt, they should consult the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

### **Measures to minimise the risks of lone working**

There are a number of things which can be done to minimise risks when clergy work alone. The **attached risk assessment guidance** highlights actions clergy can take to improve the working environment, and practices and procedures which can be implemented to enable them to go about their daily work in relative safety.

The most important precautions you can take are:

- Know as much about as possible about any potentially risky situation
- Ensure you have a mobile phone with you
- Do not put yourself into a situation where you are very vulnerable
- Let someone else know where you are if you feel you must go into that situation alone.

### **Reporting incidents**

Please report any incidents that happen to you to your Archdeacon, so that you can be supported and so that we can learn any lessons and improve practice in this difficult area. The Archdeacons will also advise HR. If you have any concerns, please talk to your Archdeacon. Safety risk assessments for clergy and / or their vicarage are available by contacting the property team at Church House.

### **In Conclusion**

Establishing safe working practices for lone working is similar to organising other safe systems, but the risk assessment should take account of any extra risk factors, and then implement the safest ways of working.