



Self-Supporting Ministry

'Beyond Boundaries'
Exploring the world of Self-Supporting Ministry

**Summary of the Self-Supporting Ministry
Diocesan Advisers' Conference**

Wednesday 27 February 2019

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' (Four Quartets)



Self-Supporting Ministry

“It can be misleading that we define those who undertake Self-Supporting Ministry in financial terms. In truth, their gifts and identity represent a far greater contribution than the title suggests, one for which we are hugely grateful. As priests and deacons, those who don’t spend all their time in the Church bring with them experience of the world and have invaluable insights into making practical theology work. Standing in the place between the Church and culture they are in a place of spiritual encounter – a gift to the world and to the Church.”

“We need to ensure that those who are called to Self-Supporting Ministry are enabled to fulfil their calling, whether as associate priests, incumbents, within archidiaconal ministry - even episcopal calling! The Church doesn’t always understand their experience and gifts they bring. SSMs need to be translators and we need to ensure they are given the tools to understand their boundaries, their rhythm of life, and to develop working agreements.”

The Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Dame Sarah Mullally DBE

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Introduction and Purpose

Background:

The world of Self-Supporting Ministry (SSM) is changing. This has been partly driven by increasingly limited resources (both human and financial) and partly by the emergence of different ways of structuring and operating. Ideas that existed in the early church were refreshed in the nineteenth century, and more recently we have had more than four decades of discussion and debate surrounding the subject of non-stipendiary ministers. Currently SSMs have responsibilities, opportunities and roles that would not have been imagined some twenty years ago. Today there are good examples of SSMs operating as incumbents (in rural, residential and city parishes), as Diocesan 'Officers' and 'Advisers', and as Deans, Area Deans and Archdeacons, though not yet as Bishops in the Church of England (though SSM bishops operate within the Anglican Communion).

Despite these changes there continues to be division between stipendiary and SSMs which is institutional, cultural, historic and emotional. A foundation block for those concerned with this subject is to reinforce the notion of 'one priesthood'; amongst ordained ministers there is a huge and wonderful diversity of calling, capability and strength that directly adds to the response of the church to meet the needs of today.

We are one church, one priesthood, one faith and bear witness to the Gospel.

SSM Consultations

In the last seven years two SSM consultations have taken place. The first was in 2013 and entitled '*A New Pattern of Priesthood*'. This marked the 50th Anniversary of the Southwark Ordination Course and the event was managed and orchestrated by Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council. The second took place in 2015 and this was entitled '*New Patterns of Priesthood*' and again took place under the auspices of Ministry Division. In general terms the first was a 'celebration' of SSM and the second a 'consultation' to affirm SSM and help shape a five-year strategy.

First SSM National Conference at Shallowford House

In 2017 the SSM conference was not managed or structured by Ministry Division. It was an event planned by and for Diocesan SSM Advisers with the clear purpose of moving towards the establishment of a sound platform upon which the crucial contribution of SSMs could be enhanced to further the mission of the Church.

The 2017 Conference was entitled '**Helping to Set God's People Free**'.

The Conference's purpose and title were strongly influenced by the report of the Archbishops' Council '*Setting God's People Free*' (GS2056) which posed the question:

'How does what we do as a church, ordained and lay together, enable God's people to grow in their capacity to live out the Good News of Jesus in all of life -- in service in the church and in the world?'

The 2019 SSM National Conference

The 2019 Conference was entitled '**Beyond Boundaries; Exploring the World of Self-Supporting Ministry**'.

This conference was intended to provide opportunity and enable SSMs to think and step 'Beyond Boundaries'. The title recognises that boundaries pervade our lives and tend to shape and structure the working life of a priest. They are given by history, culture and experience; and are reinforced by the institutions and authority. SSMs frequently work at the edge, often across boundaries and frequently blurring the edges.

Each diocese was invited to offer the opportunity for attendance to interested parties. The encouragement given was that these should be the SSM Adviser, a member of the Ministry Development Team and/or an interested and an active SSM. Of the forty two dioceses thirty were represented.

The key note speech was provided by the Rt. Revd. & Rt. Hon. Dame Sarah Mullally, DBE, Bishop of London. Additionally there were five well known and respected 'stream leaders' who led parallel break-out sessions:

Revd Dr David Heywood - Deputy Director of Mission (Ministerial Formation), Oxford, and author of *Reimagining Ministry*

Revd Hugh Valentine - Worker Priest, St James Piccadilly and founder of the website '*With In Tent*'

Revd John Lees - Career Strategist, SSM and author of *SSM – A Practical Guide*

Revd Dr Jenny Gage - SSM Adviser Ely, and author of *Twenty-first Century Minister: The Priest in Secular Work* (forthcoming)

Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy - Chaplain, Trinity College Oxford, and author of *What Clergy Do: Especially when it looks like nothing*.

The conference took place in the TS Eliot Theatre, Merton College, Oxford.

Executive Summary

- 1. The second National Conference of Diocesan Self-Supporting Ministry Advisors** took place on 27 February 2019 at Merton College Oxford. This conference was designed by SSM Advisors for SSM Advisors and recognised the wide variety of ministry lived out within the description self-supporting ministry.
- 2. The Conference was attended by SSM Advisors and other representatives of thirty Dioceses** (approximately three quarters of the 42 that constitute the Church of England). Additionally representation was invited from the Church in Wales and the Episcopal Church of Scotland.
- 3. The Conference purpose and title were shaped around the idea of how ministers (both stipendiary and SSM) have the opportunity to operate across and beyond boundaries** but are so often limited by existing structures; geographic, historic, cultural and institutional.
- 4. The key note speech was given by The Rt. Revd. & Rt. Hon. Dame Sarah Mullally, DBE, Bishop of London, which focused** on challenging the existing boundaries.
- 5. Five Work Streams discussed key SSM topics:** all were associated with boundaries that serve to limit, boundaries which define the edge at which SSMs work and boundaries that need to be crossed. 'Being Valued for What We Are', 'Engagement in the Public Space', 'How we Work and Ways of Working', 'Boundaries of Ground and Mind that Hold Us' and 'Here, Rather than There' – all related to SSM lived experience.
- 6. Each Work Stream identified a number of characteristics and opportunities** that will serve to benefit the church to work in partnership to achieve God's purpose. The first step will be to establish a **National Network of SSM Advisors** to establish links and share knowledge, good practice and resources.
- 7. Additionally, there is an intention to:** increase SSM visibility especially in the appointment of a bishop with SSM experience supported by a national advisor; continue making the SSM Research Instrument (SSM Questionnaire) available across dioceses; and to offer support for diocesan strategic planning in respect of SSM resource and capability.
- 8. The next National SSM Advisors Conference** will be in 2020 and will include an international perspective.

Setting the Context:

‘Beyond Boundaries’

Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Dame Sarah Mullally, DBE, Bishop of London

Notes of Bishop Sarah Mullally’s keynote speech

- Paul wrote ‘You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions’; he stayed in Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila (who like Paul was a tentmaker) and praised the ministry of Phoebe (Acts 28.2; 20.34; Romans 16.1-2). None of them saw themselves as SSMs, and it is unfortunate that our Church defines its ministers by whether they are paid or not
- The Church of England is very grateful for the ministry of its SSMs, and many dioceses increasingly depend on them; it is ~~furthe~~ unfortunate that women are over-represented as SSMs and under-represented as incumbents or in senior positions in the Church
- we need to understand what God is calling us to in terms of mission and ministry, work out the best way of taking that forward, and change some of our sloppy boundaries

The Place of SSMs & MSEs

- they bring specific skills and expertise that can help the Church, but the potential to contribute in transformational and pastoral terms is untapped
- the secular world has recognised that people who come to their work with other interests offer something extra that enables other people with similar interests to relate – SSMs are bridge-builders, and can be translators or communicators that allow the Church to better reflect the world and become more rooted in it
- Christopher Moody (in *Chaplaincy: The Church’s Sector Ministries*) envisages health-care chaplaincy as being in-between, or on-the-edge, and uses the island of Patmos as an image – at the top of the mountain is the monastery, at the bottom are the tourists, and in the middle is a cave where John wrote his revelations, an in-between place of transformation and encounter. SSMs should be encouraged to occupy places in the middle, or on the edge, as visionaries, for that is where Jesus is to be encountered; we struggle to see God in our world, but SSMs help us to do so
- we now live among two generations who have not been brought up going to church – it is important for SSMs to speak to the world in the language of the world and to engage with the contemporary culture, for they best understand what it means to be a Christian, a leader and a manager. There are challenges because the Church does not understand what gifts SSMs bring
- the Church sees an SSM as someone who has slightly not got what it takes to be a stipendiary – they are not quite so well educated, and a bit older – and it needs to

recognise and encourage the myriad of the very different vocations to follow Christ, and to change the vocabulary of vocation

- in terms of training, there needs to be a mixture of non-residential and residential courses and for the teaching to be looked at carefully, so that it not only theologically equips students for the sacramental and pastoral aspects of ministry, but it also trains them to handle the secular – curacies and training should be creatively and sensitively tailored to the call of individual
- currently there is not a language for what it means to be called to be, and to do as, an MSE, and the individual is left to work it out. The Working Agreement should not just focus on church work but on work life, that is, a life that incorporates a balance with Sabbath rest and addresses the question of who God is asking the individual to be, because time will prevent the individual from being as effective as he or she would want in all areas
- some in the Church have to accept that many SSMs do not feel valued, not least when the training offered could with some imagination be provided when individuals can more easily attend. A broader understanding is required of ministry, and the value to God of the strength and rootedness of SSMs who give their time to the Church
- the Church will always depend on its tentmakers – it must learn how to use them.

The Work Streams

- **Boundaries of Mind and Culture** Revd Dr David Heywood
- **Valued for What We Are** Revd Dr Jenny Gage
- **Engagement in the Public Space** Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy
- **How We Work** Revd John Lees
- **Here, Rather than There** Revd Hugh Valentine

These became the foundation subject for small-group (involving fifteen to twenty participants) conversations. The purpose of the conversations was not to rehearse old arguments or grievances, but to look toward more positive responses.

How might we, the church, work to more successfully claim and proclaim this distinctive ministry that we describe as SSM? The following summarises some of the major points that arose.

Boundaries of Mind and Culture

Revd Dr David Heywood

Introduction

Recognising that ministry is increasingly diverse and collaborative we might ask ‘Where do SSMs fit in?’ And, perhaps, what is the distinctive ‘priestly’ element that distinguishes SSMs from their local ministry colleagues/teams? A foundation block within this is the recognition that both stipendiary ministers and SSMs are priests – one priesthood, yet containing a richness of diversity and expression.

Structural Legacy

Practice across dioceses differs considerably. It is often the case that SSMs are required to be licensed to a stipendiary incumbent, though this is not always the case, for a few dioceses provide SSMs in incumbent roles with a stipendiary mentor to facilitate the adoption of ‘church practices’. It is often the case that SSMs are better qualified and experienced than their stipendiary colleagues – often in roles where the skills and experience are directly transferable.

Training and Development

Neither residential training nor part-time theological courses provide opportunity for experiencing or understanding forms of ministry other than parochial. This limit is both cultural and related to content.

Most of those responsible for selection and training (from BAPs, through theological training, to Ministry Development Teams) are either stipendiary or have a stipendiary career path.

Some SSM Advisors had prepared papers for consideration at Bishops' Staff (and other) Meetings to address these issues or provide alternative methods. The collective experience was that these had resulted in minimal change if any because the current way-of-working is so strongly part of the system. A response to this might be the strength of networked SSMs rather than diocese by diocese.

There might be an opportunity to take a fresh look at the IME Pathway for SSMs. An opportunity is available to explore the process used in the Church in Wales and that being discussed in St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich diocese.

Distance of Senior Clergy

Senior clergy tend to be stipendiary and usually have followed a career path which is stipendiary and based upon a parochial model of ministry. This serves to distance them both experientially and culturally from the reality of day-to-day ministry in life, work and parish. Examples of this are assumptions that documentation designed for stipendiary clergy can be 'generally applied' (eg Ministry Development Reviews or Statement of Particulars, etc), or that the primary use of SSMs is as current 'gap fillers' rather than a strategic resource to be thoughtfully engaged for the future.

Alternative Models

What is the central model of ministry? Has it been the association of '*a place people come to*' rather than the idea of '*gifting*', in context and mission, with SSMs being called to build bridges. The significance of context is important, there is considerable evidence that in flourishing churches the forms of ministry are not necessarily transferable to other situations and locations. What works in a city does not necessarily work in rural communities.

It is important for SSMs to recognise the pressure on stipendiary colleagues who also have expectations placed upon them which are related to models of parochial ministry that are no longer relevant, but are deemed at diocesan level to be of significance in the systems, structures and leadership.

SSM Network

- How can the two ways of working be drawn together? A forum for conversation amongst SSMs/advisers would be good. At national level there is as yet no representation - how can the newly-appointed SSM-responsible bishop, who has no SSM experience or knowledge, best represent the potential of SSMs?
- Would a national council for SSMs increase the division?
- Could there be a national group which would visit and talk about and help with training, etc? There is always a problem with training during the week for MSE/SSM.

'Valued for what we are.....'

Revd Dr Jenny Gage

Four differing narratives were explored:

- What does it mean to be a priest in the secular?
- Does our being priests make any difference to how we do our secular jobs?
- How does who we are/what we do proclaim Christ to the world?
- What is the role of the SSM in the church?

Reflecting that priesthood is less about something that 'we do' and more something that 'we are' leads to consideration of how SSMs live out 'what we are' in different ways.

- How do SSMs participate in the priesthood of Christ?
- How do SSMs grow and establish the relationship between Christ and humanity and to the world.
- How does the Church recognise and value the ministry provided by SSMs?



The discussion led to a wide variety of responses:

Within the SSM community there is no 'ministry model' that provides a catch-all category for SSMs. It seems that SSMs have individual ministries, who live a marginal and in-between ministry which is not corporate (even with each other!). This makes for the existence of a quite challenging group which is difficult for the Church to understand and an uncomfortable place for them to be in.

Care needs to be taken that 'the church' doesn't attempt to put SSMs in a box labelled 'priestly ministry'. There is no longer the possibility of just a professional ministry carried out by paid priests – indeed stipendiary clergy are increasingly becoming more diverse.

If the current pressure on the church is part of God's plan to re-shape mission and ministry then thought needs to be given about how to enable and inform. For example, lay

understanding of SSM; shifting from the dichotomy of church and world (where work is not holy) to an understanding that God is always present; recognition of the place of priestly ministry within work; awareness of the place of spiritual growth and exploration in the workplace; influence on business and work ethics; and so many more opportunities.

Greater SSM voice and active visibility within the church could be achieved by:

- a bishop with SSM oversight who has knowledge, experience, time and enthusiasm
- a national level post for 'SSM Adviser'
- an active network of national Diocesan SSM Advisors (not just loose regional groupings)
- a dedicated SSM website for information and sharing ideas (to avoid reinventing the wheel), share survey data, provide history, news, and experiences.

Engagement in the Public Space

Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy

Religion touches people's hearts, minds and actions, consequently it has enormous power and influence. All God's people across the world give accounts of how their faith has a potential to guide, liberate, empower, transform and heal – from individuals and for communities.

This is part of what Christians do as disciples, but within this many priests who are SSMs, and in particular MSEs, have a particular calling. God's engagement with the world, a created world loved by him, is the basis for the church's role in the public space.

To what extent do SSMs reflect this engagement – and should they do this?

How does the Church listen to the values of our (secular) organizations?

What are the key issues of public discourse that faith can comment upon?

The public square demands honesty – yet the church has 'failed' on some key issues:

- Equality Act
- Safeguarding
- Anti-Semitism
- Hypocrisy

How do we respond appropriately to people's desire for spiritual insight?

Perhaps one of the places to search is in the authenticity of a priest's role as an SSM (especially MSE) in terms of word, action and lifestyle. Some prompts come from reflecting on role from the perspectives of:

- Farrer's 'Walking Sacrament'
- Rahner's 'Means of Grace'
- Arendt's 'Realm of Action'

And, lastly we come to the question of what SSMs believe and how well they are able to articulate what they are within the public space. Are SSMs working for the Kingdom, or as partners of God in the *missio Dei*, or because they appreciate that people matter within God's creation?

How We Work

Revd John Lees

What is the current proportion of SSMs in the Church of England?



What are the drivers that have, over the last twenty or so years, led to the increasing number of SSMs within the church? Probably a mix of some key themes:

Parochial – response to the needs of a parish, especially where the model is the traditional clergy led structure

Economic – diocesan expenditure on stipendiary clergy balanced against the opportunity of ‘supported’ (non-stipendiary) clergy, especially where conditions are of limited resource (both financial and people)

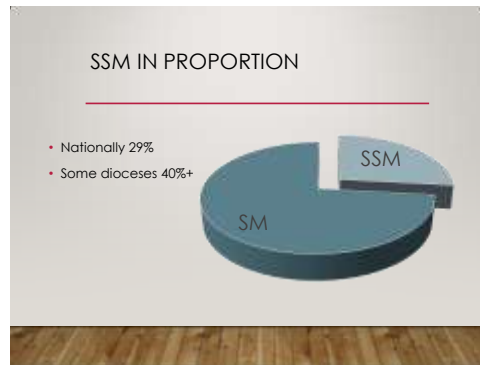
Evangelistic – the hope or expectation that SSMs bring about the opportunity to open new doors, because they often have a different presence in new communities

Industrial – the argument of the workplace ministry. The Church has experimented with industrial chaplains and worker priests but has explored anew with Ministers in Secular Employment (MSEs): priests who work in and can reaching out within their workplace.

These drivers are made even more significant given:

- decline in Stipendiary workforce
- crisis of retirement ‘cliff edge’
- second chair leadership development
- SSMs in first chair leadership roles
- focused deployment
- the growth of a mixed economy.

How is the diocesan proportion reflected across dioceses?



Looking around dioceses there are some positive stories relating to SSMs operating in 'non-traditional SSM' roles, as:

- SSM Incumbents
- SSM Acting Archdeacons
- SSM Acting Deans
- SSM Training Incumbents

However, as yet, there is no authentic SSM Bishop with SSM oversight.

These changes in role and expectations demand the adaptation of current practices in system and process. Amongst the dioceses there are some good examples, though these are heavily counter balanced by many bad examples and unwillingness to change.

Simply adapting existing systems and processes designed for stipendiary clergy is not the answer. The purpose and intention needs to be rethought. Key areas demanding attention so that they are made appropriate for both SSMs (and also the wide variety of other forms of priestly ministry) include:

- Selection and training
- Working agreements
- Licensing
- MDR
- Support and development

Despite changes that are taking place, a broad survey of SSM attitudes reveals significant similarity with stipendiary brothers and sisters – though difference lies in the detail. There is general agreement that clergy are;

- Required to do more with less support
 - SSMs often feel unsupported or second class
 - SSMs identify occasions where they are side-lined and significant skills not recognised
 - SSMs are made to conform with existing inappropriate structures and expected to make 'church' the focus of ministry

'Here Rather than There'

Revd Hugh Valentine

Introduction

Here is a reality. The affirmation, that living life as a priest is an adventure; yet there is a constraint, the church is the main arbiter of this adventure. All clergy are bound to experience stress as a result of this yet support for this by church lacking.

In some ways SSMs are well positioned to positively experience the adventure, but there is also an opportunity hitherto missed by the church.

How do we describe this group of clergy? 'Unpaid Clergy', or 'Self Supporting', some would think that 'Worker Priests' provides a better description for those working in secular settings. However, using the current term, SSMs existed in NT and then did not really re-emerge until late 19thc.

For some, inside and outside the church, aspects of secular work and priestly work are seen as being in conflict. Does this conflict create a boundary between church and population which is getting wider and may affect the sustainability of the structure of the church for future?

An example of this boundary between church life and lived human experience is demonstrated in the media which tends to present 'church goers' as out of touch and not part of life as experienced by the majority. This is reinforced by such things as the poor record of church in speaking out or acting on important issues in the life of ordinary people.

How does the Gospel speak to, from and within these experiences? This is confronting the boundary between spiritual and secular (stipendiary and non-stipendiary?). This is an area where the perspectives and skills of SSMs could actively be employed to revitalise the connection of the church with people's lived experience. In particular those called to MSE provide a ready connection between the lived experience and the life of the church:

- parish ministry has a seductive element (culturally and familiar) and is deep rooted; the call to outside parish ministry needs additional support
- SSMs can become interpreters of the church to the world and the world to the church
- in most diocesan websites the place, role and activities of SSMs are almost invisible – despite providing nearly half of the licensed clergy (in some dioceses).

Self-Supporting Ministry What Next?

Final Words and Next Steps

During the 2019 SSM National Conference participants had the opportunity to identify items of consequence and to make suggestions, from their reflections on and of the day, as to what might be carried forward.

The following were the ‘top nine groupings’ of recommendations:

Senior Representation

- Identify bishop for SSM episcopal oversight who has SSM knowledge, experience and interest and who has benefited from secular employment.
- Appoint a ‘National SSM Advisor’ to mobilise and engage at diocesan levels and represent at national level.
- Ensure that each diocese has an SSM Adviser appointed and active – with a place on the Ministry Development Team or Bishop’s Staff.

Increased Visibility

Fundamental foundation block is that of One Ministry – One Priesthood. All lived-out priestly ministries are of equal importance and part of God’s plan. However, at the moment there is a call for greater visibility and understanding of SSM and MSE ministry. This needs to be managed in a way that benefits all and further enable the Church. It may be uncomfortable but it must not divide.

Common Language

With increased visibility will come the shaping of a common language within the church. A language that does not belong to and support the legacy cultures of stipendiary and parochial ministry, but refreshes understanding and is in keeping with ‘Renewal and Reform’.

Create a National Network or forum

The purpose is to claim and proclaim the ministry broadly defined as SSM. This is not intended to be a pressure group focused on the National Church or upon individual Dioceses. It would be an informed group to enhance the development of coherent strategy; share knowledge, and good practice; engage with regional SSM Adviser groups; and provide a vehicle to support change and encourage energy.

Share Good Practice

Examples of good and bad practice exist across dioceses – more of the latter than the former. Typical examples include the approaches to Work Agreements; Ministry Development Review; fees, expenses and gifts; SSM checklists (what to do

in vacancy or with seriously ill incumbent); Continuing Ministerial Development for SSMs.

SSM Research

Nearly one quarter of dioceses have made use of the 'open access' research instrument (or SSM Questionnaire) that explores SSM attitudes and behaviours. Support is provided to ensure that each diocese has the instrument tailored to need and brand. Support is also provided to understand and analyse the data gathered and how to use this to inform strategy and actions.

Dioceses that engage are also able to use the data gathered from across those who have completed for comparison and to stimulate thinking.

Shaping Diocesan Strategy

Some dioceses are developing strategic responses in response to the pressures of increasingly limited resource (people and finance); to changes in patterns of church attendance; and to alternative approaches to mission. Within this the role of SSMs may be thought of as part of the solution.

However, to enable this to be effective, change is required to the way that the Church thinks about and engages with SSMs. Much of the above activity is the process of enabling this to happen.

Strategic Fund Bid

Strategic Development Funding supports major change projects which tend to be aimed at a diocesan level to make a difference in mission and financial strength. A major opportunity here could be a bid relating to MSE and the impact they will have in both mission and finance. Such a bid could be proposed at diocesan level or through two or more dioceses making a co-ordinated proposal.

'Thank You'

Many thanks to all who attended the 2019 SSM National Conference and those individuals and Dioceses that offered their support and on-going engagement.

Thank you to the Bishop of London, The Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Dame Sarah Mullally DBE who was so willing to invest time and energy in this event and for inspiring the Conference with an excellent key-note presentation that shaped the day and encouraged confident new thinking.

Thank you to Revd Dr David Heywood, Revd Dr Jenny Gage, Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy, Revd Preb John Lees and Revd Hugh Valentine who willingly and expertly led the Work Streams of the day.

Thank you to Merton College, Oxford and the team who manage the T S Eliot Theatre who provided the venue and the support (and arranged for the sun to shine).

Thank you to Ecclesiastical and SPCK whose generous financial support helped to reduce the costs of attendance for delegates

And finally thank you to the Diocesan SSM Advisers from Gloucester and Bristol (The Revds Dr Nick Fisher and Charles Sutton) who planned and executed the 2019 Conference.

