

The Vocation of self-supporting or bivocational Priests/Ministers in the global Anglican Church.

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Introduction

The self-supporting ministry is widespread in the Anglican Communion, mainly in UK and USA, but also in Latin America, India, Canada, Africa, France, Australia and New Zealand. By the end of the 20th century the literature on the topic was immense (Francis and Francis 1998, 389-424). The advantages and disadvantages of this form of ministry are discussed. In some dioceses a small group of bivocational priests work. In other dioceses it is a mission strategy. The nomenclature for this vocation varies. In the 20th Century a common term was self-supporting minister. In the 21st Century the word bivocational ministry is used. This form of ministry in the workplace is a value added ministry for a parish mission action strategy; having a minister in secular employment available as part of a parish team ministry. It is about vocation and mission; a calling from God, which is tested by the church, to enhance *missio dei*, God's universal and missionary purposes in Jesus Christ. Inclusion of potential vocations to the self-supporting ministry within the life of the church community and society is another way of mobilising all of God's People in mission.

Terminology and definition

This form of ministry is described variously as: supplementary, auxiliary, non-stipendiary, bivocational or self-supporting. The 1968 Lambeth Conference Report used the term 'non-stipendiary' priest. The 1976 Anglican Consultative Council Report preferred the term 'self-supporting'. The 1984 Anglican Consultative Council Report used the term 'non-stipendiary ministry'.

Three articles, one in 2019 and two in 2020 describe 'Bi-vocational Ministry' (BM) where ministry practitioners opt to serve in ministry at the same time as having another vocation in secular work and outside of church community; priest teacher; priest lawyer; priest professor; priest railway driver; priest doctor; priest baker; priest worker in a factory; priest in the media; priest nurse; priest engineer; priest accountant. The bi-vocational minister/priest is an example of the wider ordained ministry which aims to extend God's mission through the Church into local communities, but in no way reduces the role of the stipendiary ministry or the role of the discipleship ministry of church members in their workplaces. The self-supporting priest is not a chaplain. He or she is an honorary priest in a team relationship with the parish priest and local congregation.

Hartness Samushonga provides a broad definition of the concept of Bivocational Ministry (BM). He offers "a definition of a bivocational minister as one who has a ministry vocation and another vocation that is not ministry orientated" (Samushonga 2019, 5). Such a definition assumes that God is at work in all of life and recognises the reality that there are two different approaches to ministry, "one where a minister only has a ministry vocation and the other

where a minister has another vocation, which is outside of ministry” (Samushonga 2020 (a), 1).

Biblical basis and the early church

1 Cor 9:1-18; Acts 18: 3, 20: 33-34, provide scriptural evidence for a tent making ministry of St Paul at a certain time in his ministry. Paul’s tent-making craft helped him relate to others in that trade, like Aquila and Priscilla. It also “gave him a means of financial support, rather than relying on the generosity of other followers of Jesus. This craft was also mobile and allowed him to move from city to city while giving him freedom to preach the gospel” (Trainor 2021, 123-125). Local ministers of congregations in the first century of the church also maintained their ministry “by labouring with their hands” (Francis and Francis 1998, 54; 2-50).

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey wrote:

“Most of my hearers were concerned with the parochial ministry and its tasks, but if there is an inward essence of priesthood it belongs no less to chaplaincies in industry and the universities and to those “auxiliary” ministries whose role is increasing. I regard the contemporary development of the priesthood which combines a ministry of word and sacrament with employment in a secular profession not as a modern fad but as a recovery of something indubitably apostolic and primitive. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that the apostles visited Churches which they had founded and appointed and ordained “presbyters” within them. These “presbyters” were the local clergy, the teachers and the pastoral and liturgical leaders, the beginning of what later centuries were to know as the second order in the three-fold ministry – the order into which I ordain men today. But it is inconceivable that they were “paid professionals” in their office, as resources for this would have most unlikely to be there. This is not to say that the change to a professional priesthood was wrong, and a number of aspects of the Church’s nature and mission called for it. But it is to say that what we call our “auxiliaries” today belong most truly to the apostolic foundation, and we may learn from them of that inward meaning of priesthood which we share with them” (Ramsey 1972, 4).

Bivocational ministers in the early church included: (1) Spyridon of Cyprus (ca.270-348), a bishop and a shepherd; working priests who served with Basil of Cappadocia (330-379); rural pastors working with oxen and using the plow, as described by Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) (Samushonga 2019,5). Ministry in the early ages of the church included clergy earning their living in “handicrafts, trades and professions” (Francis and Francis 1998, 54-60).

History: Towards the Twentieth Century which was still in the Christendom era but transitioning to a new era.

Samushonga wrote “Some of the early British missionaries who made a great impact in God’s mission were Bivocational Ministers. These include: (1) William Carey (1761-1834)- English Baptist missionary to India (2) Missionary Fr. Herbert Kelly (1860-1950) and (3) Roland Allen (1868-1947)- English missionary to China” (Samushonga 2020, 3; 2019, 6).

The worker priest movement of the Catholic Church in France (1944-1954) is legendary (Edwards 1961). Around eighty-five “Many of the most lively and dedicated priests of the Catholic Church in France were allowed to live as manual workers” in an experiment “to bridge the gulf fixed since the nineteenth century between organised religion and the working classes” (Edwards 1961, 5). The experiment was ended by the orders of the Vatican.

The Diocese of Southwark, London, UK established a Theological Course in the 1960's for worker-priests or non-stipendiary clergy. Six candidates were ordained in 1963 (Samushonga 2020 (b), 149). Worker-priests were in many occupations - baker, lawyer, doctor, policeman, milkman, postman, teacher, personnel officer, railway official and people in the mass media.

The Anglican Communion in the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's recommended a wider ordained ministry “In order that the Church may be continually renewed in Mission (Lambeth Conference 1968, 102-104). The Report of the Anglican Consultative Council 1976 noted “the rapid development of the self-supporting ministry in the Communion” and gave consideration to that ministry in terms of the name, the support, teams, selection, training and the expectations for such a ministry (ACC 1976, 47-50). *The Bonds of Affection* ACC-6, 1984 Report included a section on Non-Stipendiary Ministry and ‘Local Priests’ outlining the advantages and disadvantages (Bonds of Affection 1984, 65-67).

David Edwards and John Robinson also wrote positively about honorary clergy in secular jobs (Edwards 1969, 284) and the genuine worker-priest (Robinson 1970, 229-230).

Case study: The ministry of John Littleton as a priest teacher in a local State High School 1969-1974.

I was a priest-teacher, employed by the Victorian Education Department and teaching at Maryvale High School, Morwell. Maryvale High was a Government experimental school; an open plan, open approach secondary school. I ministered in the local Anglican Parish of St Mary's, Morwell, licensed by Bishop David Garnsey, the Diocese of Gippsland, as an honorary assistant priest in a team relationship with the Rector and Assistant Priest who were both employed by the Church. These team members enjoyed breakfast together weekly on a week day in time for me to arrive at school on time for work. Other than family my situation in life was defined by three things – ordination, a licence from the Bishop and work in secular employment.

The task was of supreme importance to the life of the Church and the future of the Gospel in the Church and in secular society; seeking ways to help the Church keep a focus on the purposes of God for the world; a ministry to the non-churched who may come to see the relevance of Jesus for their lives through the creative presence of a priest teacher. As I wrote at the time the role of the priest teacher in a government high school “increased awareness of the real value of the laity and the necessity of the parish priest”. When I concluded teaching at Maryvale High School and left the town of Morwell, the rector reported that he was approached for a ministry from members of the school community. Indeed, when at Maryvale High, like all staff members I was involved in pastoral care. However, on one occasion as an ordained person I was invited by a member of the school community to conduct a funeral.

Maryvale High was a community of people concerned with education. People mattered first. Some basic core attitudes of this educational community were: consideration for others, individual pastoral care, acceptance of every person as an individual, each having individual differences; no one is perfect and we need to grow in self-understanding, to know oneself, do one's best each day and form a philosophy of life; education of the whole person; learn how to learn.

At the school I taught English, History, Asian Studies and The Study of World Religions. In 1973 I was Librarian. Often I was asked to be a resource person on Christianity for other members of staff, eg English teachers wanting to understand the background of a novelist or playwright or poet who assumed Christian values and content.

The value to the school of a trained Christian person must be on educational grounds. A trained Christian is theologically aware, contributes to the educational task of mind-stretching and relates Christian values to human relationships and organisational structures as one member of staff in an educational community where people represented various attitudes to life, humanist, agnostic and so on. The Christian attitude to life was but one attitude to life represented on the school staff. The weekly Staff Conference was essential for the formation of the school community.

In 1972 I wrote about the fourfold value of a worker-priest type ministry to the Church.

1. A suitable person ordained into secular employment is a symbol and catalyst to cause Christians and people of other worldviews to rethink their attitudes towards and ideas about the Church and the Christian faith. The experience also forces the ordained person to grow.
2. In the Christian congregation the presence of a worker priest makes the idea of the *laos* become real and functional. The ministry of the church is the ministry of all members, not one person. The ordained person has a representative function within the *laos*, the whole People of God. The self-supporting minister makes his/her contribution and by example encourages other church members to make their contribution. Worker priests or the self-supporting ministers have a role alongside church members in the workplace, encouraging by example and enabling through collaboration, theological reflection and conversation (Littleton 2021, 14-15). Bivocational priests highlight and enhance the essential role of the parish priest and the discipleship ministry of church members at work and in society.
3. The Christian at work is a real topic for discussion. Insights from work and the relevance of the Christian faith to work contexts can be fed back into the life of the local and national church and into theology.
4. There is a real ministry to change the attitudes of men and women and young people to the church so that they are free of prejudice and ignorance to respond to God-in-Christ. This is the task of all Christians, but the worker priest faces this issue often probably because she/he is an official of the Church right in the middle of the work context.

Once a year I participated in a gathering of a few self-supporting priests called together by Archbishop Frank Woods in Melbourne. Archbishop Woods was Archbishop of the Melbourne Anglican Diocese 1957-1977.

In a paper prepared for the 1972 Gippsland Anglican Diocesan Clergy Conference I wrote “The worker-priest ministry as I experience it is a meaningful life style. This ministry has shown that the worker-priest type ministry is not only theologically and biblically sound but in practice is of great value to the work situation and the Church”.

Twenty First Century Bi-vocational ministry practice in a post-Christendom era.

“ Britain has a wealth of history and contemporary BM Ministry practice” (Samushonga 2020 (a), 1). In 2019, the Church of England reported 7700 stipendiary clergy (320 newly ordained) and 2920 self-supporting parochial clergy (180 newly ordained) (Samushonga 2020 (a), 3).

The advantages and disadvantages of BM are discussed.

Advantages or perceived benefits of bivocational ministry (BM):

Bivocational pastors are known in the community and have unusual access to unchurched people. BM is a ministry of outreach into workplaces.

The element of financial independence from the church enables a consistent focus on ministry without concerns about fluctuating income.

Financial independence enables the church to reduce any financial burden and direct finances to other areas of ministry.

The blending of professional work experience and secular work practices and philosophies with ministry offers other approaches to enhance church related ministry. Having a secular job enhances the minister’s ministry.

Helps the congregation members to be more active in the church and exercise their ministry in the community

(Samushonga 2019, 13-14; Samushonga 2020 (a), 3; Lambeth Conference 1968, 103).

Samushonga wrote “BM is an effective option for participating in the Great Commission (Mt 28: 18-20)” (Samushonga 2020 (a), 3).

Disadvantages:

Having time divided between two vocations emphasises the need for time management skills and the need to intentionally balance the demands of family, ministry and work related contexts; aware of possibilities of burnout (Samushonga 2019, 14-15).

Fear that non-stipendiary ministry might devalue the ministry of the laity, be a back door into full-time stipendiary service, create a ‘second class priesthood’ and be misunderstood by members of the congregation (*Bonds of Affection* ACC-6 1984, 65-66)

The church might not understand or misunderstand the expectations of self-supporting ministers and their functions; the need to educate congregations about this ministry (ACC 1976, 47-49).

Formation, Education and Training

The Report of the Anglican Consultative Council 1976 outlined some approaches to selection and training of self-supporting priests (ACC 1976, 47-50). The UK based “Bivo Support International : Bivocational Ministry & Leadership Training, Consultancy & Research” offers Bivocational ministry training and development (Bivo 2021). The Southern Baptist (USA) denomination offers a Certificate in Bivocational Ministry Studies , 2019 (Samushonga 2020 (a), 5).

Summary

Keith Rayner, an Anglican Archbishop in Australia, The Diocese of Adelaide, reflected in 1989 on “the theology of ordained ministry in secular employment” and made eight essential points (Francis and Francis 1998, 287-295). These eight points are included as a way to summarise key issues.

1. Rayner understood that “ministry in secular employment has been going on long enough now” for it to be well known and established in the Anglican Church, but it did not “get off to a good start in Australia”.
2. He made a strong case that ministry in secular employment is “theologically and scripturally proper”. “Certainly if we look at the New Testament itself, we see not only Paul with his tent-making ministry but also elders (presbyters) who are appointed, to be in the first instance people who fulfilled their ministry while carrying on their normal life and work”.
3. Priesthood is “expressed in the ministry of word and sacrament.” “Any minister in secular employment, however much he sees his work focused in that secular employment, must engage in a specific ministry of word and sacrament”.
4. Ministers in secular employment have been described as “ministers of the kingdom’ in a different way from those who work through the parochial structures. The task is to recognise, affirm and name the signs of the kingdom of God in the world and to introduce and bring people to the fellowship of the church. “Wherever anything exists which reflects the character of Christ, wherever there is something that reflects the will of God, there is an expression of the kingdom of God because the kingdom of God is wherever the will of God is being fulfilled”. “Any form of justice and generosity, any real love and forgiveness, any beauty and truth and a whole lot of other things that you could mention that we know to be good and Christlike”, are signs of the presence of the kingdom of God.
5. The recognition of lay ministry and the distinctive ministry of the diaconate raises the question as to why ordination makes a difference to ministry in secular employment. It makes a difference through the training (do not have to be ordained to have training) and it means

the affirmation and authorisation of the church. Those in workplaces know that the church recognises the minister and the minister has confidence in being recognised by the church and those in the work place.

6. Within the whole *laos*, the People of God, the priest in secular employment has a particular role of leading from the front in the process of “enabling the laity to discover and exercise their ministry” by “leading the way and showing how it is to be done, able to speak from their own experience in a way that the parish priest cannot do”; as a “sign to the church of what the whole church is to be about”.

7. Three potentially negative aspects exist. Some may seek ordination through secular employment to have status, others may want to gain entry to parish ministry by the back door. Some church leaders or parishes may want to obtain clergy on the cheap to save money or to overcome a shortage of money for ministry. Providentially, “it may be that God is wanting to say something to the church as to why there is not enough money or why there is a lack of the human agent”.

8. Rayner described the ministry of the minister in secular employment positively. “One of your great tasks is to discover what is an appropriate spirituality for people in the workplace, with all its pressures and its hours of work. You must not evade that responsibility. Perhaps that is the most important single thing you have to do: to come to this spirituality first for yourselves and then to help others to find it through you. Such a spirituality will make the words of the gospel come to life”.

Conclusion

The author of this document advocates an integrated, inclusive and holistic approach; a both/and perspective rather than an excluding either/or distinction; a bivocational ministry in work places and a mono-vocational ministry in parishes, working collaboratively together for the cause of Jesus Christ.

This document on bi-vocational ministry is about vocation and mission; a calling from God, which is tested by the church, to enhance *missio dei*, God’s universal and missionary purposes in Jesus Christ. Inclusion of potential vocations to the self-supporting ministry within the life of the church community and society is another means to mobilise all of God’s People in mission.

Recommendations

1. That the Church, through the bishop, ordains suitable and well-equipped people to be a self-supporting or bivocational ministers/priests.
2. That bishops license self-supporting or bivocational priests/ministers as honorary associates or assistants in appropriate parishes to be in a team ministry relationship with the parish clergy and the members of the congregation.

3. That this ACC-3, 1976 Resolution 12 be noted and commended to the Churches today. Resolution 12 on Self-Supporting Ministry from ACC-3, Trinidad 1976.

“That in view of the rapid development of the self-supporting ministry throughout the Communion, and the way God has manifestly used it, the Council commends it to all the churches, to be encouraged and used with synodical support and caring pastoral oversight” (ACC 1976, 50).

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