

**Seconding the Report on the Commission on Ministry. Ruth Handy,  
Glendalough Diocese.**

**Embargoed until delivery.**

In seconding this report I would like to dwell in particular on one aspect of ministry which has occupied the time of one of the working-groups. You may remember that last year we described the emerging vision of the Church of Ireland of the future. It was one of a vibrant worshipping church, enthusiastic and positive where parishes boundaries had melded together and there was active participation from everyone - no passengers, all crew - a totally shared ministry.

The achievement of such a vision is dependent on everyone playing his or her part and feeling adequately equipped to so do. So of course our minds turned to training and in particular, in the working-group I am attached to, to the in-service training of those in the ordained ministry. We recognise that conditions are very different to-day from those prevailing even ten years ago. New trends, new areas of concern arise all the time and if our clergy are to be able to respond appropriately, they need training. We identified particular stages in clerical life when training seemed highly important and I would like to touch on these. At this stage we are exploring the issues and would welcome comment and reactions.

We looked first at the newly ordained deacons, just leaving the Theological College after three busy years. At the moment those three years in the College are crammed. People are trying to complete in 3 years what is normally covered in 4 years. Inevitably some topics can not be covered adequately, and indeed, possibly cannot be taught without the appropriate practical experience. The newly hatched curate comes out into his or her first parish expected to be able to deal straightaway with all sorts of problems and issues. The outside view and that of the average lay person is that he or she is fully formed and trained and now just needs a little experience. This is far from being the case. It is impossible for the Theological College to cover everything so we are proposing that **Curate Assistants should continue with a course in ministerial education** for the three years following their ordination as deacons. Such a course might consist of a mixture of formal lectures administered by dioceses, either individually or with their neighbours, and fairly intensive experiential training within parishes. We hope to draw up a list of competencies which all curate assistants would be expected to have acquired with in those first three years, through a combination of formal study and experiential training.

Herein lies a problem. Some curates are fortunate in being placed in a parish with a multiplicity of opportunities for learning and with a rector who is an excellent trainer. Others are less fortunate and end up being used as an extra body helping someone who has no interest in or experience of training, and

indeed, may have completed his or her curacy very recently. We suggest that the allocation of curates to rectors be looked at very carefully. For example, if a large, busy parish requires a curate but its rector is someone uninterested in training, a neighbouring rector might be asked to act as mentor to that curate and to provide appropriate coaching, of course with the actual rector's blessing.

In all cases we envisage a **formal contract** being drawn up between rector and curate and sent to the bishop, detailing the expectations that each has of the other, the way in which they will work together, and how the curate will be expected to apportion out time spent on study, on personal reflection and on parochial work. This contract should be shared with the parish.

Some dioceses already provide a portion of the curates' stipends and we would suggest that this should become a common practice. At an institution the Bishop, in delivering the act of institution to the new rector, says *'I confer on you the care of God's people in this parish which is entrusted both to you and to me.....'* The curate shares in the rector's work. The Bishop therefore should have a say in both the welfare of and the training given to the Curate Assistant.

We feel that **rectors taking on the onerous task of training a curate should themselves receive training**, preferably on a residential basis. They should

be given the opportunity to develop mentoring skills and encouraged to find out about alternative methods of learning such as the use of action learning sets.

Other stages when we felt training would be beneficial are firstly when **someone moves into his or her first incumbency**. This might take the form of the appointment of a mentor who would be asked to act as guide, consultant and friend for the first year and would be recognised as such by the Bishop.

The next stage might be **during mid-career** when people may be feeling stale, have reached a 'stalling point', wondering about their purpose in life, their achievements and their vocations. Clergy at this stage need time out for reflection, possibly through a directed sabbatical.

We dared to think that **Bishops might find training beneficial, especially at the beginning of their episcopate**. Such topics as exercising authority while not having executive powers, leadership skills, legal knowledge and management skills might be particularly relevant.

And the final stage where training can be very beneficial is **pre-retirement**. Advice on financial issues, psychological adjustment and health can make all the difference during that transitional phase.

These are our musings at the moment. We are aware that implementation may be very difficult. Ideally all 12 dioceses should follow the same practices in relation to in-service training, but of course there are practical difficulties to be surmounted. Nevertheless we believe this is the way forward.