

## **Rt Revd Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough writes**

### **Caring for the Clergy**

One of the privileges of my job is that I have the main responsibility for the care of the clergy. In practice I share this with my senior staff and with the rural deans, but it is something I take very seriously. The well-being of the Church depends on the well-being of its leaders.



That doesn't mean that every problem in a church is the vicar's fault (or the bishop's). But common sense tells us that if the leader of an organisation is functioning well, it is likely that the organisation will be too. And if the leader is struggling that is likely to be evident in the organisation.

Ordained ministry is unlike any other job. Those who come into it as a second career often take time to readjust. Even though they bring relevant experience and transferrable skills, it takes a while to get used to a role where there is no manager or immediate boss, where you are responsible for your own working hours, time off and holidays, and where the borderline between work and leisure activities can be very blurred.

The bishop can and should give guidelines and make suggestions, but with large numbers of parish clergy and very few "senior" clergy there is no possibility of the sort of oversight that a teacher or social worker could expect. And with the Church of England's healthy tradition of parishes having a degree of independence (much more so than in the Roman Catholic or Methodist Churches where the local church is completely under the control of the diocese or the circuit) it would be a foolish bishop who tried to exercise that degree of control.

One of the suggestions I make to clergy is to have a "sixth day ministry". That is, to spend up to a day a week on issues where priestly ministry can be exercised outside the context of normal day-to-day parish work. Full-time clergy are expected to work six days a week (and to have holidays which reflect that), but if all six days are spent on their parish responsibilities they are unlikely to be functioning at their best. If up to a day a week is spent serving as rural dean, or offering training in the diocese, or sitting on the council of a missionary society, or running Street Pastors or a foodbank, that will be good for the priest and good for the parish.

Best wishes

+ Donald