

## Is the Church of England still wedded to the vision of the omnicompetent vicar?

The Church of England seeks to share the gospel and offer pastoral care to all people across every square mile of this nation's landscape. In order to do this, the land is divided into pockets which are known as parishes. Inevitably, with England encompassing both densely populated cities and also agricultural spaces, there are no two parishes which have the same characteristics. Indeed, parishes also cross different cultures which leads to a requirement to support the needs of different communities. As expressed by Andrew Rumsey when discussing the geography of parishes, 'some are almost as large as dioceses, covering huge tracts of moorland; some have boundaries as arbitrary and baffling as in an imperial land grab; others are self-contained and perfectly circle their communities'<sup>1</sup>. With this in mind and the geographical realities of parishes understood, the question turns to how these spaces are staffed in order for their core purpose to be achieved.

Traditionally, parishes have been staffed on a one-priest model whereby a single ordained person leads the church in that place. In many cases incumbents are supported by a curate who stays in the parish for a period of time as part of their ongoing training before undertaking their own parochial responsibilities. However, it must be recognised that the cultural landscape of the nation has changed, as also have its social realities, which in turn have impacted the workload of the parochial vicar. Furthermore, a fall in the overall number of ordained clergy which are available to be deployed into parishes has meant that many vicars are taking on the responsibility of leading more than one parish which in some cases involves quite a number of physical church buildings. As explained by Alan Bartlett in his publication, *Vicar*, 'the shift from a monochrome theocratic agricultural society to a pluralist, structurally secular and industrially postmodern society is a reality and it is a folly to ignore this new context'<sup>2</sup>. There is no doubt that there is now a new context in which clergy are to minister, but this research will explore whether a staffing model from a very different era remains widespread in the parishes of today's church.

It is interesting to note that at the current time there is widespread discussion within the Church of England about the parish system and also the effective deployment of clergy as part of a wider development relating to the formation of a new vision for the national church. Nobody within the Church of England today has ever experienced anything other than a parochial model, and in recent decades a number of diocesan pastoral strategies have facilitated efforts to make this traditional system function in the twenty-first century. As expected there are opposing groups within the establishment who have very different view points on the positives and negatives of the parish system and this has recently been brought to the fore of ecclesiastical media attention through the formation of the 'Save the Parish' campaign led by Rev Marcus Walker and endorsed by a former Archbishop of Canterbury. Such a campaign has been encouraged through a feeling that some members of the Church of England hierarchy would rather see a dramatic change to the parish system as we currently know it in the hope of achieving dramatic growth in church attendance. Further interest in the parish system and specifically the role of clergy is linked to a statement made at the MultiplyX 2021 conference in which the speaker, Canon John McGinley, suggested that clergy are one of limiting factors within the church, something which many clerics have found to be offensive but importantly highlighting the possibility of a vision which foresees lay leadership as of greater value than clerical. Therefore, this research is being formed at a crucial junction in the life of the Church

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Rumsey, *Parish* (London: SCM Press, 2017) p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Bartlett, *Vicar* (London: SPCK, 2019) p. 8.

of England at which the next step will decide the reality and priorities of the established church for the years to come. While this study supports the need for a parochial system led by clergy, it seeks to question whether the current staffing model is the most effective for the realisation of a growing, thriving and transformative church in the twenty-first century and instead whether alternative structures may offer far greater success. Crucially, if it is determined that the Church of England remains wedded to a staffing model within the parish system that is widely understood to be strained and broadly ineffective, then perhaps consideration might be given as to whether this is the limiting factor to the growth of the church.

As a starting point, it is crucial that an explanation of the phrase ‘omnicompetent vicar’ is offered. Essentially, this seeks to offer a phrase for the form of clerical life in which the vicar is expected to take responsibility for all areas of the operations of the parish and be able to offer knowledge and skill in each and every scenario. This involves tasks which are only able to be completed by an ordained person, but also duties which could be undertaken by any human being as long as they had the appropriate skill. As such, the omnicompetent vicar is expected to lead in ministry tasks such as worship, pastoral care, evangelism, teaching the faith and administering the sacraments but also organise matters relating to administration, finance, fabric, volunteer relationships, venue hire, strategy and personnel management. Not only are they required to lead in all of these areas, but to lead well and with understanding. It seems fair to suggest that there are very few organisations that would expect a single individual to carry responsibility for all of these areas and furthermore do so from the isolation of a vicarage study. From the perspective of an average human being, it is unlikely that many people will possess the necessary talents to lead all of the above areas and produce the desired outcomes or even have the time to complete relevant training in order to develop sufficient knowledge. This long list of duties experienced by parochial clergy throughout the nation leaves very little time for the completion of the tasks for which they were ordained to do and thus possess the skills to complete. Sadly, these demands often result in negative outcomes whether that be in clergy despondence, illness or the departure of the faithful from regular church commitment. For Bartlett, ‘it is clear that managerial incompetence seriously impedes the growth of God’s kingdom’<sup>3</sup> and surely all church structures should ensure every opportunity for growth and not the encouragement of decline.

This necessarily leads the discussion to step back and consider above all what it is a vicar should do and what a vicar is for. In order to grasp an understanding of the core role and work of a vicar, it seems most appropriate to focus carefully on the words which form the service of the ordination of priests; a service which is the starting point for any priestly ministry. The words used in this service are exactly the same for every single ordination service regardless of the tradition, theological position or title parish of the individual being ordained. During the service, the bishop explains in great detail the role of the priest and for the purposes of this report I wish to highlight just a small number of the phrases used. Firstly, it is stated that priests are to ‘set the example of the Good Shepherd always before them as the pattern of their calling’<sup>4</sup>. In short, this makes clear that vicars are to be focused on imitating Christ in all that they do, following His example and keeping their eyes fixed on the call they have to continue Christ’s mission in the world today. A brief observation of Christ’s ministry will highlight that He gathered around Him a group of individuals whom He led and whom He could work with to further His mission. Furthermore, Christ did not engage in bureaucratic matters but instead

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<sup>3</sup> Bartlett, *Vicar*, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> The Church of England, *Common Worship: Ordination Services* (London, Church House Publishing, 2007) p. 32.

worked tirelessly for the spreading of the knowledge of God. Although we live in a very different cultural landscape, it is worth noting the call of clergy to be Christ-like and from this discern what such a reality may involve and require in the life of a vicar in today's world. Another phrase which is stated by the bishop during an ordination service is that 'guided by the spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole church may be built up in unity and faith'<sup>5</sup>. As such, vicars are to find and utilise the gifts of all people present within their midst and not simply to burden all responsibilities themselves. Such a statement has a sense of understanding for the growth of the church; there is a need for all of the faithful to contribute and not simply leave the work to a small number of people. Later in the service, it is interesting that a question is posed to the individual being ordained which has a clear link to the statement just discussed. The question asked by the bishop is 'will you work with your fellow servants in the gospel for the sake of the kingdom of God?'<sup>6</sup>. Crucially, therefore, rooted in this most holy service is an understanding that clergy are to work together with both fellow ordained individuals and lay persons in order to carry out the mission and ministry of the church.

Nevertheless, alongside the role of a vicar as explained in an ordination service, it is crucial that acknowledgement is given to the reality of the duties carried out by clergy in the modern-day church. Many across the nation will be completely unaware of the administrative tasks and matters relating to the fabric of church buildings completed by clergy and instead think that vicars simply work on a Sunday and just pray for the rest of the week. Although this is not the reality for any cleric, understanding the core role of the vicar is crucial before a practical and sustainable parish structure can be developed. Chiefly, clergy are to be representatives of Christ and examples of the Christian life in all communities. Vicars are to stand as beacons of God's love and joy in every area of society, standing with the marginalised, challenging injustice and sharing God's word appropriately and effectively. The world in which we live is a broken world and clergy have a crucial role to play in making it a better place through bringing people together, promoting peace and being someone who will listen and facilitate opportunities. Perhaps the age-old saying *be something to everyone* encapsulates the daily encounters of clergy. Of course, this sits alongside a call to regular and committed prayer, the offering of worship and sharing the sacraments with those who gather. While not an extensive list, it outlines the core calling of clergy to live out their lives as Christ would have done. Due to the many needs of society, Bartlett rightly states that, 'being a vicar is, as it has often been, an impossible role to fulfil adequately'<sup>7</sup>, and goes on to say that 'it is currently becoming more complex and challenging'<sup>8</sup>. The complexities and difficulties come from the ever-increasing responsibilities in relation to the tasks detailed earlier in this report. Although the Book of Common Prayer may explain the role of the priest in relation to the parish being a task of the leadership of the church alongside the bishop, it is unrealistic to consider the kind of leadership required at the time of writing this particular text to be anything similar to what is experienced in the modern day. Surely it is crucial that any development of a parochial structure should enable clergy to first and foremost be vicars with their community and secondarily from this lies responsibilities for a particular area of parish life appropriate to their skills and experience.

A report to the General Synod in 2004 titled *Mission Shaped Church* was produced by a working group commissioned to inspect developments in relation to mission within the Church

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<sup>5</sup> The Church of England, *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> The Church of England, *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Bartlett, *Vicar*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Bartlett, *Vicar*, p. 3.

of England. This evaluated both the growth of church plants and also the ‘Fresh Expressions’ of church life which had been popular in offering a new form of church activity which were notably different from traditional forms of missional activities within the life of a parish. The support of this group for initiatives such as Fresh Expressions was certainly underpinned by a belief that ‘the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church’s strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose.’<sup>9</sup> As such there is clearly some recognition by this group that the current parochial model, which in many cases hinged on the omniscient vicar, would not be a sustainable option for long-term growth. Fresh Expressions seek to embrace individuals who are not currently integrated in the life of the church and often they take the form of an event targeted at a specific group. As this initiative operates beyond the bounds of traditional liturgical activity, there is tremendous scope for developing events which are both attractive and accessible, offering opportunity for evangelism and encouraging new people to join the life of the church.

On the contrary, however, a common and obvious negative is that Fresh Expressions attract individuals with a common interest, or who satisfy a targeted demographic. Therefore, the result is not a group who represent a cross-section of God’s kingdom, rather a group of like-minded individuals. Additionally, in their publication, *For the Parish*, Andrew Davidson and Alison Milbank have been particularly critical of the initiative, in particular the way in which it attempts to separate the form and content of church life, when in reality these two things are intrinsically linked. In the years following the 2004 report to General Synod, Fresh Expressions became a regular feature of diocesan agendas and parishes were encouraged to implement them into their missional activity. This focus across the wider church in itself perhaps suggests that the limitations of the omniscient vicar model were being recognised and that alternative provision was necessary.

The City Parish of Preston has recently been in receipt of extensive investment from the Church Commissioners in order to develop a Resourcing Church in the city-centre. A unique element to the investment in Preston is that the two churches in the parish are of very different liturgical traditions, one being a distinctive Anglo-Catholic church and the other a church plant from Holy Trinity Brompton. As part of this ambitious plan, the Anglo-Catholic church within the parish was given its own parish priest to lead all areas of the life of the church. However, the church plant from Holy Trinity Brompton arrived in the city with a team of people with a determination to transform the city and bring people to know Jesus Christ. This team included not only the Vicar and two curates, but an Operations Manager, Administrator, Finance Assistant, Music Leader, Youth Worker to name a few. Crucially, the huge task which lay at the centre of the vision was to be realised through the work of people who applied their specific skillset to the given situation: crucially, every task did not fall to a single vicar. The vision of this church plant is no different than that of every other parish across this nation, but it is striking that the Holy Trinity Brompton network have recognised that parachuting a single individual to complete all of the work is not a model which will lead to success. Perhaps there is something about parochial staffing for the wider church to learn from this example.

Over recent decades, in an attempt to provide staffing for as many parishes as possible, the Church of England has completed a number of pastoral reorganisations meaning that a number of parishes have been amalgamated into one. In many cases this has been necessary due to a

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<sup>9</sup> The Church of England, *Mission Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004) p. xi.

lack of clergy available to fill vacant posts and in some situations there are also financial factors leading to this outcome. It is obvious that a result of this is an increase in the workload for the incumbent who has assumed responsibility for the additional parishes. This increased workload is not only in relation to pastoral responsibilities for a larger group of people and associated services in the parishes, but also the additional administrative duties including further church buildings, ex-officio committee membership, school governance and financial burdens. Although the large number of churches will be provided with a named incumbent whom they can approach as their parochial vicar, it is highly unlikely that with the workload the individual is able to implement notable missional activities and grow the kingdom in that place alongside their day-to-day responsibilities. The arrangement of such parishes is a clear example of the omniscient vicar model in action within the modern church and there is no doubt that this leads to questions regarding the sustainability of such models. In an effort to tackle the increased workload encouraged by such amalgamations, the staffing of some parishes has been developed into a team ministry whereby a number of clergy work together to complete all of the necessary tasks. Where a team ministry has been implemented, a Team Rector usually takes overall responsibility but is supported by one or more Team Vicars and often a number of further lay officials. In some cases, the Team Vicar(s) have responsibility for a specific church within the parish but also participate in the wider life of the other places of worship within the team. Such a model points clearly in the direction of a collaborative ministry where clergy have the opportunity to work together in leading the parish, sharing the workload and supporting one another. A clear benefit to this is the removal of the isolation experienced by so many clergy and furthermore there is the reality that tasks can be assigned in relation to skillset rather than one individual being required to complete every matter which comes to their desk.

In recent times, attention has been given to the Minster Model which finds its origins in the Anglo-Saxon period. This particular structure can be seen in operation within the Diss Team Ministry, a parish in the diocese of Norwich. A team operating within this model have a central church - a hub - from which all operations stem and in which the clergy and other members of the team are based. It is here that the team meet for daily worship and gather to complete daily administrative tasks. The other churches within the parish are cared for collectively by the central team, but the focus for unity is the central church within the structure. Such a system means that there will always be a member of clergy available for the needs of a particular church community and furthermore, that individuals will already be known by the group. This in turn reduces the stress for one individual to attend to all matters within the particular church, which is often felt by incumbents in parochial life, and allows for a sharing of the workload. It is likely that this improves the well-being of the clergy concerned and by the skills available for deployment results in a positive outcome for church mission and growth. As such it would appear that a move in the direction of collaborative ministry would be a positive development, but knowledge of such models remains widely unknown within Church of England parishes at the present time.

In 2019, the Church of England published a paper titled *Calling All God's People* which aimed to reflect upon and understand the possibility for all people to be involved in the missional activities of the church and not just those who were ordained. This could be seen either as an encouragement by the church for further lay leadership or could also be considered to be a step in recognising that clergy require support in order to grow large and thriving churches. Principally, this paper wished to promote that evangelism could be completed by any member of a church community and did not necessarily need to be completed in a formal and organised manner. Instead, it encouraged individual Christian people to spread the good news of the

gospel through the encounters of their everyday lives. Essentially this signals a move away from relying only on clergy for the evangelism of the nation and in turn brings into questions the suitability of the omniscient vicar model.

It is therefore evident that a variety of ministry models have been developed within the Church of England. Some of these have been developed in response to the pitfalls of a previous model and others reflect changes in emphasis across the church, for example a shift to more active lay leadership. Nevertheless, all models seek to achieve the same result: the growth of the church across this nation and an ability to engage efficiently with people from all walks of life. On the basis of the reading I have undertaken and observations I have made through my own involvement within the Church of England, it seems that there has been a desire to move towards a more collaborative mode of working in order to achieve these aims. In other words, there has been active engagement with the suggestion that a model of ministry which is built upon a sole omniscient vicar is not suitable for ministry in the twenty-first century. It is with this understanding that I approach a number of recent parish profiles published online to consider whether such a model remains widespread or whether parishes are seeking to implement an alternative ministry model which enables collaborative working and moves away from the issues highlighted regarding the sole omniscient model. To steer my analysis of the parish profiles, I have determined four questions which I hope will enable me to determine the ministry model intended by each parish. The questions are as follows:

1. Does the parish profile suggest the person will be part of a team of paid individuals?
2. Is the individual expected to possess a wide range of skills or is there capacity to take on only duties which align with their talents?
3. Are there established forms of collaborative ministry evident in the parish profiles?
4. Does the parish profile suggest that the appointed individual is to lead in all areas of church life?

In total, I have read and considered sixty-nine parishes profiles, all of which were published during 2021 and cover different geographical areas and church traditions. Although not directly related to the questions stated above, it is interesting to note that upon first opening a parish profile, the simple presentation of the document suggests the type of ministry required in that particular place. For example, some profiles are simply a large amount of text separated by only a few images and others are attractive, glossy brochures with relevant pictures for each section. Instantly, one of these examples suggests that there is a level of skill and collaborative working evident in the parish in which the new incumbent will become a part and not simply be expected to carry the entire load.

It is widely understood that every parish is different in that the communities they serve have different demographics, the physical buildings are of different ages and the former incumbent brought with them different ideas and priorities leading to an array of outcomes. As such, the duties for the new incumbent listed in the parish profiles varies within each one. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis, I assigned each profile into one of three categories which were as follows: the cleric is to do everything; the cleric is part of a small team of lay individuals (possibly with the addition of a curate); the cleric is part of a large staff team of both ordained and lay members. Of the parish profiles analysed, a total of forty-nine (71%) wished to appoint an individual who would be considered to be leading all areas of church life. In relation to the second category where the cleric is to be a part of a small team, there were eleven (16%) profiles that illustrated a parish with this organisational structure. Finally, there were nine (13%) parish profiles which explained the appointed individual to be a member of a larger staff

team. Although this study may only have considered a relatively small number of parish profiles in relation to the number of parishes across the whole Church of England, the number of parishes which seek to appoint an omnicompetent individual is striking. However, it is also pleasing that a total of around a quarter of parish profiles explained that some level of support, whether that be administrative or in the form of an additional cleric, would be offered. Nevertheless, it is critical to note the very few parishes which operate a large staff team where individuals are assigned duties and responsibilities relative to their skills. Although the parish profiles do not offer an opportunity to physically spend time within a particular parish community, they do offer a glimpse into the atmosphere of the environment. It is interesting to note that the parish profiles of parishes which operate a structured staff team offer a perception that the life of the church community is busy, exciting and large numbers are involved with all that is taking place. The counter-argument to this also applies in that the parish profiles which seek an omnicompetent vicar often provide an impression that the parish requires a large amount of intervention in a great number of areas in order to become the thriving church that is desired.

In the first category highlighted above where the profile suggests an omnicompetent vicar is desired, it is interesting that as a general rule these documents appear to be lacking in creative presentation, an observation which in itself suggests the likely expectations of the new incumbent. To offer an example of such a profile, a parish in Diocese of Manchester were hoping to appoint a new incumbent for their single church in which the current structure offered no formal lay or clerical support. Furthermore, the profile for this particular parish set out a list of skills and abilities the congregation would like to see in their new vicar. These skills ranged from being someone who was inspirational and flexible in their approach to worship to a need for them to have an ability to connect through social media. The list continued by requesting that the individual is to have a mature and enthusiastic outlook and possess excellent organisational, time-management and communications skills. All of the above examples are taken from a much longer list and spanned across many areas of the human skill set. In a similar way, a parish in the Canterbury Diocese required their new incumbent to look after two churches each of which had its own PCC and associated lay officers. As part of the profile for this parish, the congregation had identified a list of requirements they wished to see in their new vicar and this covered no fewer than eight separate attributes required for different areas of church life. Examples are technical skills and approachability to name only two. Also falling into this category of staffing structure were profiles such as one from the Truro Diocese which although did not set out a set of skills the congregation would like of their new vicar, did make clear that there are three churches, each with their own PCC and a volunteer currently looking after the administration but who intends on giving this up upon the appointment of a new incumbent. Furthermore, in this parish, the new vicar is expected to ensure either one or two Eucharistic services every Sunday within the parish, a weekly Evensong and a midweek service. This final example may not set out required skills, but the willingness to hand everything over to the new incumbent upon their arrival does suggest the attitude of the congregation towards their vicar and the likely working style the individual will have to operate. In relation to the questions with which I approached the profiles, the documents I have tagged within this first category do not suggest that the individual will be a part of a team of paid individuals, the person is often expected to possess a wide range of skills, evidence of collaborative ministry is largely absent and the impression offered is that the appointed individual will be required to lead in all areas of church life.

Within the second category I placed parish profiles which suggested that the incumbent would become a part of a small team of both ordained and lay individuals. A first example of a parish

profile which I deemed to be part of this category is a document formulated for a parish in the Diocese of Truro which was made up of five churches. The new incumbent was to have the support of a small team of retired clergy, ten pastoral ministers, two worship leaders and a licenced lay minister to help them in many areas of their ministry. Additionally, a part-time administrator and voluntary editor for the parish magazine were active within the staff team to alleviate the administrative burden which normally would have been carried by the incumbent. As such, although the staff team was largely voluntary, the vicar was not expected to look after every area alone and also, as indicated by the appointment of an administrator, the PCC had clearly identified the need for administrative support in order for them to operate efficiently.

A second example is that of a parish in the Diocese of Leeds who wished to appoint an individual to serve amongst a team of three clergy and a small number of lay individuals. What was particularly interesting in this profile, however, was that the description of the role set out exactly what area of church life the cleric was to be responsible for; in this case, Pastoral Care and Outreach. This example makes clear that in some cases the appointed individual is not expected to be responsible for every area of ministry and administration, but that some church structures assign particular duties with identified individuals. A final example can be seen in the contents of a profile for a parish in the Diocese of Oxford that currently had one church and an established team of three clergy and a paid administrator. Furthermore, the profile explained that lay leadership was evident in many areas of church life suggesting that the new incumbent would be able to work alongside others and not simply take entire responsibility themselves. It was pleasing to see in this profile a heading which read *how we will support you* which suggested that the parish community were already active in ensuring that the incumbent would not be alone in the leadership of the church community. In relation to the questions I considered whilst reading all the parish profiles, it seems that these documents do often suggest that the vicar will be a part of a team of paid individuals, the skill set outlined is usually not as broad as can be seen in the profiles which fall into the first category, forms of collaborative ministry are evident but perhaps do not appear as developed as they could be and finally, the profile does not suggest that the individual will be required to lead in all areas of church life.

For a parish profile to be assigned to the final category, it was necessary that clear evidence was provided to show that the incumbent would be a part of a large team of paid ordained and lay members of staff. Intriguingly, the profiles I deemed to fall in this category were all of parishes which contained only one church. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, perhaps there is a reason why churches that operate in this way, which, as an aside, often experience huge growth, only develop in parishes that have a single church. An example of a parish profile in this category is a parish in the Birmingham Diocese which had a team of four clergy and six lay individuals all of whom had clear areas of responsibility within the overall structure. However, what was most striking in this profile was that the first phrase you read as you turned over from the front cover was *Dear Future Colleague*, a phrase which instantly states that the appointed individual would be working amongst others and would be welcomed within a team. Having read quite a number of profiles, turning over to see this phrase gave a first impression which was quite different from all of the rest and had I have been seeking a new post, this phrase would have been extremely encouraging. A further example is a profile from a parish in the Peterborough Diocese which in its one church structure has four clergy and four lay staff alongside readers and other church officers. Within such a structure the incumbent was able to work collaboratively with other ordained colleagues as regards liturgical and worship related matters, but also had the support of a lay team to help with the administrative areas which most clergy are to look after themselves. Finally, a parish in the Chester Diocese is led by a staff team of two clergy and nine lay employees, all of whom work

alongside readers and retired clergy. This particular profile explained the roles of the nine lay employees and thereby illustrated that each one has a very specific area of responsibility, which as a collective, alongside the areas looked after by the ordained members of the team, become the mission and ministry of the church. As such, the vicar is not expected to lead in every area of church life, but instead play their part in enabling and encouraging others to make use of the talents they possess. Profiles within this category therefore always illustrate that the vicar will be part of a team of paid individuals, the appointed person is not expected to possess skills in all areas of church life, but can instead fit into the larger picture by making use of the talents they have and release others to play their part whilst taking their place as the overall shepherd of the church in that parish. Seemingly, there is a stark difference between the parish profiles seen in this category than in the first, and as such, there is no doubt that there are various ministry models in operation across the Church of England.

Although the examples offered above illustrate the spectrum of parish profiles which are published and also span a large number of dioceses, the sheer number of profiles which fall into the first category makes clear that the Church of England is to a great extent still wedded to the omniscient vicar model. Although this may be the traditional model adopted by Anglican parishes, the literature review which formed the first part of this research clearly indicated that there are alternative ministry models which can be engaged in order to avoid the issues generally accepted to be related to the omniscient model.

Having worked through the process of this research, it is concerning to note the extent to which the Church of England remains wedded to the omniscient model. With a good variety of literature available which clearly suggests that a collaborative approach to ministry is more suitable for ministry in the modern church, it is intriguing that so few parishes have made the decision to adopt such a ministry model. This therefore raises the question of whether those in lay leadership roles within parishes are aware of such alternative models and whether greater education regarding their existence is required. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the omniscient model remains widespread because the developed alternatives do not provide a sustainable option for a typical Anglican parish. It may therefore be necessary to develop a new ministry model which provides a collaborative approach funded on a long-term basis which can also be staffed based on the current uptake of vocations.

There is no doubt that the present time in the life of the Church of England is a crossroads for the parochial system and the related ministry models. It is indeed possible to find a structure which retains the rich traditions and opportunities of the parochial system whilst offering a collaborative mode of working for clergy that engages their individual strengths and talents. Personally, it seems clear that the development of such a structure would secure an attractive and thriving future for the Church of England in which it can confidently live out its core mission and safeguard its rightful place in the centre of each and every society.

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