

Jamie Harrison is a GP specialist adviser to the Care Quality Commission and a former adviser to the Department of Health. He is Research Fellow in Healthcare and Religion at St John's College, Durham University. A long-standing Reader and Member of the Church of England General Synod, he was appointed to the Clergy Discipline Commission in 2014 and elected as Chair of the House of Laity of the General Synod in 2015. He has published widely on issues of vocation, medical careers and the future of the NHS. He received the Baxter Award from the European Health Management Association in 2000 for his book *Clinical Governance in Primary Care*.

Robert Innes is the Church of England's Diocesan Bishop for Europe. Based in Brussels, he oversees clergy and congregations in over 40 different countries and legal jurisdictions. He also represents the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Institutions of the European Union. For many years he taught and ministered in Durham, before moving to Belgium to become Chancellor of the multicultural Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity Brussels. His published work ranges from Augustinian theology, through psychological models of selfhood, work and vocation, to the relationship of the Anglican tradition to the Belgian State. He is co-author with Jamie Harrison of *Rebuilding Trust in Healthcare* (2003).

CLERGY IN A COMPLEX AGE

*Responses to the Guidelines for
the professional conduct of the clergy*



Edited by Jamie Harrison
and Robert Innes

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This book is dedicated to

Ruth Etchells (1931–2012)

*College principal, scholar, spiritual director,
teacher, faithful friend*

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Contributors



Kate Bruce is Deputy Warden, Cranmer Hall, Durham.

Paul Butler is Bishop of Durham.

Stephen Cherry is Dean of King's College, Cambridge.

Paula Gooder is Theologian in Residence, The Bible Society.

Jamie Harrison is Fellow in Healthcare and Religion, St John's College, Durham.

Robert Innes is Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe.

Russ Parker is a retired Anglican priest.

John Pritchard is a retired Bishop of Oxford.

Magdalen Smith is Diocesan Director of Ordinands, Chester Diocese.

David Walker is Bishop of Manchester.

Justin Welby is Archbishop of Canterbury.

Foreword

In a complex age with shifting boundaries – sexual, relational, legal and ecclesial – clarity around expectations is immensely helpful. The Guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy provide a timely and helpful prism through which clergy can discern what it means to be faithful ministers in Christ’s Church today. Deacons, priests and bishops are called not only to be custodians of the faith, but also to live exemplary lives of faithfulness and service to others. This is indeed a high calling.

The Guidelines were promulgated by the Convocations of Canterbury and York in July 2015. They were produced by the clergy for the clergy. They carry great moral authority for each member of the clergy, whether paid or self-supporting, in parish or chaplaincy or sector ministry. It is my hope that all our clergy will develop familiarity with the Guidelines and find in them a source of counsel, advice and comfort.

The original Guidelines appeared in 2003. Why? For those coming into ministry in mid-life and from other careers, the absence of professional guidance for the task in hand seemed odd – not what they were used to in medicine, teaching or the law. For others, the Ordinal and Canons proved silent on how to make sense of the internet, safeguarding and the changing nature of society – and its expectations of the clergy. In the Preface to the 2003 Guidelines, the Chairman of the Working Group, Hugh Wilcox, reminded his readers that the ‘Guidelines are not a legal code, but a beginning of an ongoing conversation in which ministers and those to whom they minister need to engage.’¹ That ongoing

¹ The Convocations of Canterbury and York, *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*. Church House Publishing, London, 2003, p. ix. The 2015 edition is a major revision of this publication.

Foreword

conversation has resulted in a revised and updated version of the Guidelines.

This book picks up the conversation. It is not an exegesis of the Guidelines, more of a meditation upon them. After a provocative reflection on what Jesus did and how he related to others (Chapter 1), the book sets the Guidelines firmly in a spiritual context (Chapter 2). It frames them within the charge for each minister to be faithful to his or her calling, a professional man or woman who is trustworthy and deserving of trust (Chapters 3, 11 and 12). It takes particular account of contemporary challenges in regard to safeguarding (Chapter 4). And in intervening chapters (5–10) it sets out a vision for ministry in today's world in dialogue with the Guidelines which I hope will inspire and excite.

Faithful relationships are fundamental to maintaining and improving the life of the Church. It is my fervent desire that increasing trust, particularly that which flows from trustworthy clergy, will transform God's world – a world too often marked by suspicion, scepticism and painful failure.

Justin Welby
Archbishop of Canterbury
Lambeth Palace, London

How this book works



This book is about imagination, explanation and encouragement. It is about hope and faithfulness. It is about trust and being trusted. It is about confident clergy and being confident in clergy. It is about how clergy bring the love of God into all parts of God's world.

In seeking to understand and reflect upon the context and meaning of guidelines for clergy conduct, the book lays out in a series of chapters a vision of how to respond to the complexity and suspicion of the current age. It aims to give clergy renewed joy in the core values and meanings of their calling as ministers of the gospel, while reminding them of the boundaries to that ministry.

So what are we talking about here? Are guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy (the Guidelines) a rule book for life (a parallel bible?) or a checklist for keeping out of trouble, or both? They are, at least, identifying minimum standards of professional behaviour. But keeping out of trouble might be shorthand for avoiding risk and playing it too safe, when what is needed is a prophetic challenge to the status quo. So at the outset we offer a poem from Stewart Henderson that has a subversive take on priestly ministry, followed by a piece from Paula Gooder (Chapter 1) reminding us that Jesus constantly challenges our expectations and does what we would least expect.

It might seem a bit cheeky that the editors of this book are in one case a member of the laity and in the other a bishop – nevertheless, we hope that the make-up of the team responsible for writing the chapters makes for a nicely balanced group of authors, reflecting the breadth of the Church and a desire to inform and inspire fellow travellers on the Way.

To put one's trust in clergy requires clergy who can be trusted; clergy whose lives are orientated by their faith in Jesus Christ and whose practice is shaped by a perspective on their calling such as that offered by the Guidelines. Yes, such guidelines risk being unrealistic, threatening, undermining. And the shadow cast by 'discipline' can feel long and burdensome. But the Guidelines can also offer a framework and a set of 'rules' to provide comfort, support, guidance and confidence.

The publication *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy 2015*¹ is a collection of documents, which include a foreword from the Archbishops, a preface by the Synodical Secretary of the Convocation of Canterbury, the Guidelines in 14 sections, a theological reflection from Francis Bridger, a note on the ministry of absolution, and one appendix of references plus another relating to safeguarding and relevant documents.

In this book, we print the essential Guidelines as an appendix,² and we use relevant, context-setting Ordinal quotes at the head of each chapter. We link the book chapters to Guideline sections, seeking to be creative and without being exact. Where we think two or more guidelines work better together, they go into one chapter. And each chapter author was asked to be imaginative in their writing while remaining faithful to the intention and integrity of the Guidelines themselves.

Given that we did not opt for a one-to-one correspondence between sections in the *Guidelines* publication and chapters in

¹ Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy published by Church House Publishing. © The Archbishops Council, 2015. Used by permission. <copyright@churchofengland.org.uk>

² In this book we use the word 'guideline' for the generic term in relation to guidance, as in 'medical guidelines'. We use 'Guideline' (capital G) to refer to the essential guidance promulgated by the Convocations, as set out in the Appendix to this book. And we use *Guidelines* (italicized) to refer to the volume, *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy 2015, Revised edition*, published by Church House publishing in September 2015 – which contains more than just the Guidelines themselves.

How this book works

this book, we set out in the table below how the material in the book relates to the relevant Guideline section:

The book in 12 chapters	The 14 related Guidelines
1 Jesus the care-taker	
2 Sustaining the spiritual centre	1: Calling
3 Calling and believing	1: Calling and 8: Faith
4 Staying safe	2: Care and 3: Reconciliation
5 Embodying witness	4: Mission
6 Offering blessing	5: Ministry at times of deepest need
7 Giving leadership	6: Servant leadership
8 Being imaginative	7: Learning and teaching
9 Living faithfully	9: Public ministry and 10: Life and conduct
10 Keeping well	13: Well-being
11 Trusting clergy	12: Trust, 11: Discipline and 14: Care for the carers
12 Faithful servants in a complex age	

So how to use this book? It is a book that can be read front to back or back to front, or just dip in. The central chapters of the book stand on their own, although readers who read from beginning to end will, we hope, see something of a connected flow and argument.

Together the chapters of this book set out a vision for ministry that is concerned with being centred upon Jesus, staying safe, embodying witness, offering blessing, giving leadership, being imaginative, keeping well and living faithfully. Such a ministry builds and rebuilds trust and confidence. It is a simple and clear vision for a complex age. While it is what experienced and competent clergy do routinely, the book contains fresh ideas and perspectives. And so, we hope this book may help our clergy

How this book works

to reflect creatively on their ministries and to calibrate and tune what they do and how they do it in the light of the Guidelines to the greater glory of God and the growth of his kingdom.

Jamie Harrison

Robert Innes

‘Priestly duties’¹

What should a priest be?

All things to all –
male, female and genderless.

What should a priest be?

Reverent and relaxed,
vibrant in youth,
assured through the middle years,
divine sage when aging.

What should a priest be?

Accessible and incorruptible,
abstemious, yet full of celebration,
informed, but not threateningly so,
and far above
the passing soufflé of fashion.

What should a priest be?

An authority on singleness,
Solomon-like on the labyrinth
of human sexuality,
excellent with young marrieds,
old marrieds, were marrieds, never
marrieds, shouldn’t have marrieds,
those who live together, those who live
apart, and those who don’t live anywhere,
respectfully mindful of senior
citizens and war veterans,
familiar with the ravages of arthritis,
osteoporosis, post-natal depression,
anorexia, whooping-cough and nits.

¹ Henderson, S., ‘Priestly duties’ (written for Eric Delve, 23.5.96), published in *Limited Edition*. Plover Books, London, 1997, p. 21; reproduced with permission.

'Priestly duties'

What should a priest be?
All-round family person,
counsellor, but not officially because
of the recent changes in legislation,
teacher, expositor, confessor,
entertainer, juggler,
good with children, and
possibly sea-lions,
empathetic towards pressure-groups.

What should a priest be?
On nodding terms with
Freud, Jung, St John of the Cross,
The Scott Report, The Rave Culture,
The Internet, The Lottery, BSE and
Anthea Turner,
pre-modern, fairly modern,
post-modern, and, ideally,
secondary-modern –
if called to the inner city.

What should a priest be?
Charismatic, if needs must,
but quietly so,
evangelical, and thoroughly,
meditative, mystical, but not
New Age.
Liberal, and so open to other voices,
traditionalist, reformer and
revolutionary
and hopefully, not on medication
unless for an old sporting injury.

Note to congregations

If your priest actually fulfils all of the above, and
then enters the pulpit one Sunday morning wearing

'Priestly duties'

nothing but a shower-cap, a fez, and declares 'I'm the
King and Queen of Venus, and we shall now sing the
next hymn, in Latvian, take your partners please' –

Let it pass.

Like you and I,

they too sew the thin thread of humanity.

Remember Jesus in the Garden –

beside himself?

So, what does a priest do?

Mostly stays awake

at Deanery synods.

Tries not to annoy the Bishop

too much,

visits hospices, administers comfort,

conducts weddings, christenings –

not necessarily in that order,

takes funerals,

consecrates the elderly to the grave,

buries children and babies,

feels completely helpless beside

the swaying family of a suicide.

What does a priest do?

Tries to colour in God,

uses words to explain miracles,

which is like teaching

a millipede to sing, but

even more difficult.

What does a priest do?

Answers the phone

when sometimes they'd rather not,

occasionally errs and strays

into tabloid titillation,

prays for Her Majesty's Government.

