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WOMEN AND PRIESTHOOD IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND: OCCUPATIONAL HIERARCHIES, DISCRIMINATION AND EXPERIENCING MOTHERHOOD

Sarah-Jane Page

This paper will consider the ways in which women priests have been incorporated into the occupational life of England's established church. The Church of England first allowed the ordination of women to priesthood in 1992, with ordinations commencing in 1994. However, as this paper will indicate, women are negotiating a discriminatory terrain at many different levels, especially as discrimination against women is embedded in Church law. This study focused exclusively on mothers and they are negotiating additional layers of complexity. The body, particularly the pregnant and lactating body, can become a site for contestation and its incorporation into the professional structures can be deemed problematic. This is especially pertinent as women priests navigate a culture not only of professionalism but also sacrality, making their negotiation more complex than for professional women per se.

The paper will outline three themes. It will start by examining the changing landscape of the acceptance of women's priesthood in the Church, articulating that generalised opposition has transformed into pockets of opposition. Secondly, it will be highlighted how women's experiences and perceptions of the organisation are often determined by where one is positioned in the organisational hierarchy, impacted upon by the possibilities for actualising professional autonomy. Indeed, acquiring a senior post may be deemed a promotion, but could actually interfere with the amount of professional autonomy priests had. Thirdly, the way in which maternity and parenthood is negotiated in the context of the Church will be outlined, detailing issues such as maternity leave, returning to work after having children, and how clergy mothers are generally incorporated into the life of the Church. Firstly, however, some background information will be given on women's position in the Church, as well as details of the study undertaken.

PROFESSIONALISATION AND SACRED PRIVILEGE

The Church of England has been exempted from much of the employment legislation governing other spheres of secular paid work. The UK's Equality Act 2010 still retains a crucial clause, excusing religions from following the law if this would contradict deeply held theological teaching [Government Equalities Office, 2010]. Meanwhile, 2011 saw the Church of England implementing, for the first time, the legally binding Clergy Terms of Service Measure, which was underscored by the requirements of UK employment law. This

explicated the rights and responsibilities of clergy, detailing issues such as the right to time off, maternity and paternity entitlements and the right to appeal to an employment tribunal. Before this was endorsed, provision on these matters was inconsistent, varying between diocesan areas.

This new Measure however, did not address gender in any specific way, meaning that women priests remain at a greater disadvantage in the Church vis-à-vis men. After the 1992 vote, various legal conditions were ratified, meaning that women's activities in the Church were curtailed – no parish was bound to accept a woman priest and women could not become bishops. Such rules would be deemed anathema in secular institutions, and therefore women priests negotiate additional layers of complexity in their occupational lives, especially because religion is invoked as a sacred entity, beyond secular meddling [Butt et al., 2004].

Ministry is not considered an occupation in any usual sense. A tension has always existed between its professional and vocational elements [Aldridge, 1992; Keenan, 2006; Robson, 1988], where service and sacrifice are juxtaposed against career and promotion. Indeed, this is bound up in the semantics of vocabulary, with clergy remunerated in stipends rather than wages - a living allowance rather than remuneration for work actually carried out - and the terminology of preferment is utilised instead of promotion [Peyton, 2009]. Indeed, ministry is seen as a status of being rather than a professional occupation per se, but it has also been deemed a sacredly masculine role [Bock, 1967] and women's historical exclusion from this sphere has exacerbated their links with the profane [Aldridge, 1992; Furlong, 1991; Milford, 1994].

RESEARCH FOCUS

This study is based on in-depth interviews undertaken between 2006 and 2007 in England with seventeen Anglican women priests and deacons (clergy are first ordained as deacons; ordination to priesthood occurs after a probationary period of one year). Women at a number of levels of church life were interviewed, from those who had recently entered the organisation, to those in senior posts. More specifically, this included those who were curates (a training period after priesthood, where the priest would work under the supervision of a more senior priest in parish ministry), associate ministers (who assist another priest but not as part of ongoing training), parish priests (who are in charge of a parish, also known as incumbents), chaplains (who work as a priest outside of the Church of England in another organisational setting, e.g. a hospital, prison or university), area deans (responsible for the pastoral wellbeing of other priests in a geographical area called a deanery) and those enacting senior posts, denoting someone working either at the level of the diocese, with close proximity to the diocesan bishop or those priests who work at a senior level in a cathedral setting. For anonymity purposes it is not specified which roles such women in senior posts undertake as this would compromise their identity, with women being a minority in such positions (pseudonyms have been used). As Peyton [2009] highlights, the Church of England has an organisationally flat hierarchy, with few opportunities for occupational advancement. Area deans can be considered a type of middle-management position, whereas senior posts such as cathedral deans, diocesan posts and archdeacons, can be considered more senior appointments. Bishops and archbishops are the most senior positions, but from which women are barred.

Ages of those interviewed ranged between 31 and 54. Women were interviewed if they currently had a child or children still at secondary school or younger, or if they had experience of being ordained and a mother in the recent past, even if their children had since become adults (this applied to one person). Indeed, women had a variety of experiences in relation to motherhood. Some had embarked on training for priesthood after their children

had been born. Others had children while they were priests. Most of the priests were stipendiary (thus paid), but research has indicated that it is more likely that priests who are mothers will be in unpaid (non-stipendiary) positions [Page, 2005; Robbins and Fowler, 2008]. This research, however, wanted to prioritise those in paid posts, in order to capture more concretely the tensions, problems and benefits of working for the Church of England.

The sample was geographically diverse, with participants being included from nine different dioceses. England is divided into 44 geographical dioceses. Respondents were contacted through diocesan officials. A range of issues were covered in the interviews, but coalesced around two key themes: experiences of working within the Church (including how they came to be a priest and their subsequent occupational experiences) and experiences of motherhood and family life, linking this back to their role within the Church and how each impacted upon the other.

POCKETS OF OPPOSITION

When the legislation allowing women's ordination to priesthood was passed in 1992, very overt conflicts emerged between those opposed and the supporters of the motion [Furlong, 1998; Webster, 1994]. The media used the ensuing furore to emphasise a church in schism, with threats of a parishioner and priest exodus [Webster, 1994]. The women interviewed who were part of the first cohort of priests were more likely to specify that they had encountered opposition to their priesthood at some point, either from fellow clergy or parishioners. However, those who had recently been ordained into the Church were less likely to have encountered opposition.

Research suggests that women priests have been largely accepted in the parishes [Blohm, 2005; Jones, 2004; Thorne, 2000] and clergy who were initially opposed have changed their minds. At the same time, not only does underlying legal discrimination still exist but vehement opposition is still in evidence, from campaign groups such as *Forward in Faith* and *Reform* (the former is a predominately catholic grouping opposed to women's ordination, established as an umbrella organisation after the 1992 vote, and the latter is an evangelical group created in 1993 who also campaign against women's ordination). As previously outlined, because parishes can instigate legislation to stop women priests working in their church, pockets of opposition can emerge, or what Dyer [1999] has called 'no-go' areas. Because of their dispersed nature, these pockets will not necessarily be experienced by women entering ministry. For example, Emily, a curate, knew of a local *Forward in Faith* priest, but as he attended his own meetings for spiritual and ministerial support, she did not know him personally. Therefore, this reduces the likelihood of women actually encountering direct opposition, if those opposed are sealed off from wider Church fellowship.

Opposition to women's priesthood is thus less likely to be overt and face-to-face and is markedly different in character to the direct opposition women faced in the campaign leading up to the ordination to priesthood. This can lead to a false sense of security, with priests who have never encountered opposition believing that women are now fully accepted.

ORGANISATIONAL NEGOTIATION

The cohort of entry into the Church can impact significantly on one's views and perceptions of it. Those who were part of the first cohort of women priests have had very different formative experiences to those who have entered the Church subsequently. Interrelated to this, one's position in the organisational schema of the Church will also impact on one's understanding of occupational inclusion.

Junior Positions

Deacons, curates and associate ministers were more concerned with the immediate occupational setting. When asked about the impact the bishop and the diocese had on her experience, Amanda replied 'I think the experiences women have in the church are more determined by the individual parish church rather than by the bishop'. It was seen as necessary for the church tradition of the priest and the congregants to be in harmony, and of crucial importance that the training incumbent was supportive of the ministry of women in that parish. Difficulties emerged when one experienced conflict with one's immediate superior. Eleanor outlined that her training incumbent 'in theory was very supportive of women's ministry; in practice was less so', especially regarding the negotiation of the practicalities of being a parent and a priest. Having a wife at home to facilitate childcare meant that her boss took a very monastic approach to his role, insisting that evening prayer be conducted at 5 o'clock in the evening, despite this being very disruptive for Eleanor's family life.

More positive experiences were also in evidence. Emily saw her boss as 'absolutely amazing and brilliant and I'm incredibly fortunate and I think my good experience has been all down to him'. But Emily's experience also highlights the pivotal nature immediate superiors play in whether one has a positive or negative experience.

Parish Priesthood and "Middle Management"

When priests become in charge of their own parish, they are able to enact a certain level of authority over their working practices, augmented through the spatial distancing of one's superior and the autonomy to run a parish as one sees fit [Aldridge, 1989; Mellow, 2007; Peyton, 2009]. For instance, Eleanor, mentioned above, changed the times of the daily offices to suit her family life once she became in charge of the parish. When priests took up such positions of authority more emphasis was placed on the deanery and its role in shaping experience. A deanery is a cluster of parishes, and is overseen by an area dean. The clergy members of that deanery will meet together sequentially for chapter meetings as a source of occupational support. Stephanie, as an area dean in a very conservative location with very few women, voiced her concerns about the cohesion of her deanery, and the way it was not a supportive environment for women in ministry:

« There aren't any liberals in this deanery. So when we get together, we actually get on quite well when talking about what we're doing in our ministry and mission, but there's a whole area we don't talk about and so when we worship together we don't celebrate communion together, the Eucharist, because we can't. »

Even in deaneries where women were not in such a minority, some were concerned about the underlying dynamics of meetings. Lois felt that 'actually working on the ground I do find that deaneries, synods and chapters are very much male clubs' and that there were difficulties in voicing one's opinion. Historically, such meetings have enabled fraternal collegiality, supporting male bonds of friendship [Aldridge 1989]. Therefore, women have to negotiate their place in this historically masculinised space.

Parish priests often felt they were being appraised and judged by male priests in nearby parishes at meetings and events. Isobel felt that male colleagues devalued her approach to ministry in that 'men can often see women leading in a way that they bluntly just look down on. Because they don't see that as, you know, not authoritarian in the same way'. Natalie said that 'The number-crunching stuff I think, very easily becomes a very male success-orientated strategy which when I'm feeling strong I can reject'. Natalie was operating in a deprived parish and struggled to positively appraise her own work when surrounded by

male colleagues who tended to emphasise church growth rather than parish problems. Therefore although contact with fellow clergy was less intensive when women became parish priests, with the role allowing much autonomy, when contact did occur, it could be a negative experience for women.

Senior Posts

A number of priests in the sample had experienced senior posts. It has been highlighted how autonomy can be generated through becoming a parish priest; this can actually lessen on embarking on a senior post. Often interaction with superiors was strengthened and some priests felt a loss of autonomy, despite the promotion. For instance, Kate had been given a more senior role, moving into a space where there were more colleagues and closer proximity to superiors: ‘my parish church was mine and I had a vision for how it should be... but here the vision is [someone else’s]’.

Indeed, women are underrepresented in senior posts – in the most senior posts open to women, there are only three women deans of cathedrals (out of 44) and 15 archdeacons (out of 114) [CPAS 2010].

The minority of women in the sample who were directly involved in diocesan-level decision-making were negative about the gender dynamics. Jill and Harriet discussed the politics of meetings, with Jill articulating that as a minority of one, she has to regularly ‘keep popping up above the parapet every now and again and having a little comment’ in order to remind her colleagues of discriminatory practice. For instance, at one point a committee was appointed to direct Jill in how to enact her role – something she argued would not have happened to a man. Another problem was ensuring women were not routinely overlooked for involvement on church committees. Committees are created for various task-oriented reasons – perhaps to do with recruiting for a post, or looking at whether certain processes can be undertaken more effectively. What is clear is that experience on such committees is needed in order to apply for senior posts. Harriet articulated, ‘Names would come up to go on groups. And I’d be “Excuse me, we haven’t any women on that group”. “Whoops, so we haven’t”. But if I hadn’t said anything, nothing would have happened’.

Jill often subverted the agenda with humour in order to get her point across:

« They were drawing up a post that had become vacant and drawing up an interview panel for that. And they were saying ‘Now who should we get to put this interview panel together and sort out the day?’... And they said ‘Oh we’ll have so and so, because he’s this’... ‘We’ll have so and so because he’s an archdeacon... and this bishop said, ‘Now, where are we going to have the meeting?’ and I said ‘The gents?’ [laugh]... They just don’t notice. And then they start getting very defensive and say, ‘This is nothing to do with the fact they’re men, it’s because of the positions that they hold in the diocese’. Well, yes, but those positions are going to be held by men. »

A self-perpetuating cycle thus emerges – men are given tasks because of their positions of authority, but women are not given the opportunity to obtain the experience necessary in order to be eligible for senior posts. Men, however, get defensive when they are challenged.

Jill argued that ‘I fight a lot of the flak, really, so it doesn’t filter down’. She was adamant that those in the parishes did not need to know the conflicts she was negotiating, for she did not want to elevate her status. Jill was not only fighting the ‘flak’, she was also presenting a congruous femininity which would allow her to challenge the masculinist diocese she encountered. It was an “appropriate” femininity, which emphasised her as non-threatening – for example, using dissenting humour, not elevating her status through making unnecessary demands and playing down her own achievements. In this way she succeeded in

negotiating a presence which was not intimidating or menacing and seemed to be successful, for Jill was respected in her role. This fits in with wider comment about the expected gender displays of women and although older cohorts of women priests are stereotyped as strident and aggressive [Webster, 1994], they are often utilising more subtle means of engagement in a successful management strategy [Collinson and Hearn, 1996].

Occupationally, women's understanding and perception of the organisation is impacted upon by their position in the organisation. It can be argued that being a parish priest is the best structural position for women to occupy in the Church, for it is here that there is little interference from the Church hierarchy. Although parish priests have to mediate the culture of the congregation and the personalities of parishioners, there is more scope for priests in this position to enact the role on their terms.

Although in careerist language, holding a senior post appears to be a "promotion", it is here that there is more containment with women more likely to directly confront the gender order of the Church [Connell, 1994]. The experiences of women in such posts indicates that they have to continuously negotiate women's inclusion, with much discrimination occurring behind closed doors. There is also a sense in which superiors are more immediately present in such contexts, meaning that priests have less opportunity to undertake the role on their own terms.

EXPERIENCING MATERNITY

The women were also negotiating another issue in the occupational setting: all were mothers. Mothers with dependent children have been a minority within the Church. However, as increasing numbers of women undertake theological training, their numbers are set to rise in the future [Moore, 2008; Thorne, 2000].

Attitudes toward maternity in the Church were conveyed early, with anxieties emerging in relation to the *potentially* pregnant body. Prior to actually getting pregnant, Dawn was considered young and assumed fertile - in the eyes of Church officials, she potentially *could* have a baby. As Gatrell articulates 'all women are defined through their reproductive status' [2008, p. 40]. And as Poggio asserts, 'The collective imagination tends to associate the female image with maternity. A woman who enters an organisation is not "only" a woman, she is also a potential mother' [2003, p. 15].

This may entail 'scrutiny' [Gatrell, 2008, p. 43] of young women's bodies. On applying for curacy posts, despite not even being pregnant, Dawn still embodied the potential disruption her body may cause. She reported that at one interview, the male incumbent 'kept goggling my belly and implied I was pregnant'. This was not an isolated incident. Another interviewer was also preoccupied with Dawn becoming pregnant and much of the interview was spent discussing her hypothetically having a baby. On complaining about this to a diocesan official, 'instead of backing us up, he said, "Yes, what if you did have a baby?"'. Dawn went on to receive a letter from this official telling her that he had 'consulted many people on the issue of your fertility', turning Dawn's body into a wider topic of discussion.

Researchers such as Brewis and Sinclair [2000] have highlighted the problems faced by pregnant women when they are part of the rational organisation. They argue that the pregnancy identity takes over; the woman is 'subsumed by her pregnancy, so that her biological role in reproduction supersedes other aspects of her persona, such as her professional role' [2000, p. 203]. The body becomes very visible – a visibility that it at odds with the rational, disembodied organisation [Tyler, 2000]. As Dawn's experience highlights, this projection could occur even when women were not pregnant.

Maternity Leave

Ten priests had experienced maternity while being in Church posts. Very recently, the Church enshrined paternity and maternity leave in policy; prior to this, it was left to individual dioceses to determine how to manage maternity leave provision. Most women had positive experiences, with provision for time off and preparation for paid leave being very good and with some being pleasantly surprised by the provision offered. However, some priests experienced the discourse of disruption anticipated by their new pregnancy status. Jill articulated,

« The first time round it was reported to me that somebody had said... ‘Oohhh one of them has got pregnant, who’s going to tell [diocesan bishop], who’s going to tell [diocesan bishop]?’ and [he] had children of his own, you know... sex and babies were not complete alien things to him. » (Mother of two, senior post holder).

Jill’s pregnancy identity was problematised and fantasies emerged in the minds of others as to the level of chaos that might be invoked. The excitable comments of the unnamed commentator highlight the problematic positioning of the pregnant body and potential motherhood in wider culture, disrupting not only assumed philosophical boundaries (Walker, 2003; Young, 2005) but also acting as the threshold of the sacred and profane (King, 1989).

Those who had been the first priests to need maternity leave recalled how the Church had not pre-empted what to do in such a situation with officials often asking the women themselves what the provision should be. Rachel was one of the first to go on maternity leave in her diocese, with the diocese having to think quickly to put organisational systems in place and Rachel articulated how she was the person making the suggestions for arranging cover.

Some priests experienced a “business as usual” attitude from those around them. Stephanie experienced direct discrimination, for seemingly not fitting the organisational norm by being pregnant. She was heavily pregnant prior to her ordination to priesthood when she was informed that a decision had been made not to ordain her – the reason being that she may have the baby during the service and this would ‘upset everyone’. At one level, this could be linked to a purity-danger discourse, where birthing and priesting occurring in the same space indicates unspoken fears about women and the sacred but another strand to this denial was because as a heavily pregnant body, she was considered out of place in the well-oiled ordination routines. She would become a burden on the rational, bureaucratic organisation. As Stephanie explained of the attitude of the diocesan bishop,

« [H]e wanted everything to be correct and right and everybody had to jump through the same hoop... I was just a nuisance, I was just in the way and I was going to have a baby and I wasn’t... to ruin it for anybody. » (Mother of two, area dean).

By Stephanie asking for some concessions to be made, her ability to perform adequately in the organisation was scrutinised and questioned and a decision was made to delay her ordination until a later date.

Lois also felt the intense expectation to fit in with institutional norms when she was in training to be a priest (in a college setting) at the time of her pregnancy,

« There is no plan in place as to what to do. There’s certainly no way you can take maternity leave with any real sense... when you’re in training, your housing rests on the fact that you’re in training... it was very clear that I had to stay in training full time... I felt under quite a lot of pressure to prove that I could actually do what was required of me at college whilst being pregnant and having this baby. » (Mother of two, curate).

After she had had her baby, the pressures did not diminish, with placements to be completed, essays to be written and college duties to be performed:

« We had the college equivalent of an OFSTED [an inspection]... other women went to point out that there's a nursing mother trying to do all these things, trying to fit feeding the baby into all of this and they were quite horrified. » (Mother of two, curate).

Subsequently policy was changed, but Lois's experience reflects a sense in which women are put under pressure to prove they can do everything, with no allowances made for pregnancy and lactation. This concurs with Gatrell's articulations of women's experiences being pregnant in the workplace, where it is assumed one's work role will carry on regardless so that women are compelled to 'present... themselves primarily in the image of healthy, reliable and "professional" workers' [2008, p. 64]. There is an underlying thread that if women cannot give birth, hand in assignments, fulfil college duties and attend worship then they are not as reliable and dedicated as male candidates, putting a black mark against their gender [Moore, 2008; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005]. Indeed, Gatrell argues that there may be a stress on portraying a 'supra-performance' [2008, p. 72] at work, above and beyond the normal expectations, to prove women can cope in the disembodied organisation. This is perhaps tied in with how pregnancy [Gatrell, 2008] and motherhood [Crittenden, 2001] are not constructed as "real" work because of their non-remunerative status.

Negotiating Children and Ministry

Experience was wide-ranging in the post-maternal period. The most extreme infringement occurred to Stephanie who was informed in no uncertain terms that her post would disappear after she had her baby but she 'didn't feel empowered at the time to do much about that'. Stephanie felt she was an easy pawn in the Church wanting to make a financial cut, but having just had a baby, Stephanie was also in a vulnerable position and felt unable to challenge the decisions made. Esther said that 'one of the jobs I considered going to, when he realised that I was pregnant, the chap said, "Oh no, I wouldn't have someone with a baby"'

Gatrell notes how such discrimination against mothers is commonplace in secular organisations for 'Despite 30 years of anti-discrimination laws... incidences of unfair treatment of pregnant women remain high' [2008, p. 67]. Indeed, in the Church setting, secular laws do not necessarily apply. But this is also no doubt compounded by the fact that new mothers are less able to be in a position to challenge such decisions, having to negotiate other life changes.

Other women returning to posts after maternity leave found it was often a stressful experience, underpinned by the way in which housing was often tied to the job, so priests were bound to return to their old post, otherwise their housing would be jeopardised. As Dawn articulated,

« It's not like other professions where you can perhaps do locum work or supply work and tread water a bit. And because your job is linked to your house, you were in such a vulnerable position. » (Mother of one, parish priest).

Therefore, often maternity leave was followed by a return to full-time working hours. A number of priests found this incredibly difficult, with Dawn discussing how she did not know how she was going to combine motherhood and priesthood following her maternity leave, because her daughter was still breastfeeding:

« She was breastfeeding all the time... I went to see the rector before the end of my maternity leave and I said look... 'I just can't see myself going back and doing what I was doing before'... And he said, 'Dawn, come back and start on Sunday services and build your way up... And I was just so relieved... as a team we found a way of working with Jemma... and she came everywhere except funerals... It really helped me say, 'Right ok, here I am. I'm a mother and a priest and it can work'. » (Mother of one, parish priest).

Dawn was fortunate in being in a parish setting with such a supportive supervisor. As Gatrell [2007] argues, organisational structures are not created with lactating mothers in mind, creating enormous difficulties for women to continue breastfeeding in paid employment. Women in professional organisations often either have to conceal their breastfeeding or stop altogether.

It was only by the grace of supervisors taking an enabling stance that allowed women to continue in ministry. This is a study of mothers as priests who have stayed as active priests in some capacity – nobody was interviewed who left ministry posts altogether because the conflicts became so unbearable (although changes in roles occurred and some mothers were incorporated into other organisational structures as chaplains). Other research suggests, however, that many mothers do leave ministry because of the heightened demands [Blohm, 2005; Moore, 2008; Zikmund et al., 1998].

It has already been noted that supervisors can have an enormous impact on one's experience post-maternity. The amount of choice, autonomy and power one has often seems dependent on the flexibility and empathy of superiors, especially when one is an assistant priest or curate rather than a parish priest. In the above cases, bosses were willing to offer support to new mothers, but equally, one can potentially be curtailed by superiors, especially when one is not solely in charge of one's own working patterns. Priests with babies also experienced negativity when applying for jobs, suggesting that there seemed to be evidence of a wider culture of constructing clergy mothers as problems rather than assets, with a lack of insight over what such women can potentially offer a parish. Dawn was told that her being a mother was an excluding ministry:

« I was asked a question in interview... 'What in the last 2 years has made the most difference to your spirituality?' and I said, 'Becoming a mother'. Again a really big reaction. 'Well isn't that going to alienate people, if that's what you're preaching?'. » (Mother of one, parish priest).

Dawn's experience of motherhood was not given legitimacy by the interview panel. This viewpoint failed to recognise what clergy mothers can offer the Church in terms of opening up new ministries, using their experience to support other families, particularly other mothers. Indeed, being a parent in ministry is different to secular employment, for although it is usual in secular employment for paid work and family to be separated from each other, for priests, it is more complicated than this for their whole family is implicated in their ministry, with the expectation that partners and children will be visible and part of the parish [Moore, 2008].

Eleanor highlighted that mothers in parish ministry can be unfavourably perceived as putting in less time and effort because of their families:

« I know a vicar in our previous parish who had younger children... And for some people, they said 'Oh she'll see it as a job'... When I first started, I was terribly anxious that they shouldn't think I was being lazy in the parish... (or that)my family were taking up more of my time than they would for a male curate in a similar position. » (Mother of two, curate).

There is an underlying theme that mothers will not be as hardworking, therefore having to go further to prove themselves in their working environments. Rachel worked especially hard at maintaining work-intensity – ‘I worked a lot of evenings and weekends, so it all kind of came out in the wash and I’m sure people got their money’s worth, I’m sure they got a full-time priest’. Therefore, a stream of thinking emerges that mothers will not be putting in the effort and time that a father or single clergyperson would, because their private-sphere responsibilities are seen to come into conflict [Nesbitt, 1995; Robson, 1988; Thorne, 2000]. As Crittenden [2001] argues, mothers have to act like men in order to be respected. But equally, they are likely to be castigated if their mothering is seen as lacking [Garey, 1999]. As Höpfl [2003] explicates, mothers are deemed as out of place in the occupational workplace and motherhood has to be denied in order for success in the bureaucratic organisation to be achieved [Aaltio and Hiillos, 2003]. Interestingly, however, the hours the priests do work may go unnoticed, especially if work is undertaken late into the evening, away from the gaze of the parish. This is a problem clergy experience more generally, with a common assumption being that clergy only work on a Sunday [Mellow, 2007; Moore, 2008; Russell, 1980].

CONCLUSION

Discrimination for priests who are mothers is dual focused [Moore, 2008]. Women experience discrimination on the basis of gender per se but this is intensified with pregnancy and childrearing. As Moore asserts,

Men don’t face the same pressures to identify as fathers, and women are often still eyed with suspicion because of social expectations... Expectations of clergy and of mothers and fathers make the reality of male and female clergy lives very different. Clergy mothers challenge both the norms of male clergy and the social messages about mothers [Moore, 2008, p. 6].

Many links can be made between the Church and secular institutions in the UK, where gender discrimination, particularly around motherhood, occur. But unlike secular workspaces, discrimination against women in the Church is enshrined in law. The Church has conceded that there are no theological objections to women being bishops, but debates are ongoing regarding how this should be implemented; it is likely that previous guidelines that have restricted women’s ministry will be abandoned, but it is unclear what will be implemented in its place, in order to appease the opponents of women bishops. Indeed, unlike a secular institution, the Church is deemed sacred territory, where traditional sentiment is honoured. Rationally, it is clear that the Church’s current restrictions on women priests and the outright ban on women bishops is untenable in a society that legally endorses gender equality; emotionally, however, women’s bodies are not seen to traditionally ‘fit’ into the sacred roles of priest and bishop [Lehman, 1985; Riss and Woodhead, 2009]. Crises are most evident when individuals are confronted with the explicitly gendered body – the pregnant or lactating body – all at once challenging the disembodied rational organisation, as well as the sacredly masculine organisation that has historically viewed women’s bodies in dangerous and profane terms [Furlong, 1991; Milford, 1994].

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