What is SSM?
Reporting on research commissioned by the Ordained Vocations Working Group

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Origins of the project

- Commissioned by Ordained Vocations Working Group (Ministry Council)
- Builds on OVWG consultations with range of SSM officers and diocesan staff
- Key project for National Officer
- Builds on other valuable research (Morgan, Sutton, Gage)
• Exeter used as pilot diocese
• Recruitment of another 7 dioceses, later extended to 8, ensuring good cover across the variety of dioceses in the C of E
• SSM officer responsible for recruiting 7 participants to reflect the diversity of SSMs in the diocese
Online questionnaire

- Questions gathering demographic information
- Questions about ministry
  - Whose choice was SSM?
  - Accessibility of ordination training, and provision of content for SSMs
  - Financial support
  - Relationship between ministry and secular work (if any)
  - Sources of support
- What would you change in your diocese?
• Good alignment between demographic statistics for SSMs in our sample and national picture.
• Deployment: many in their current position for more than 5 years.
  • Is this about commitment to the local community?
  • Or is it what Teresa Morgan’s 2010 survey called ‘stagnation’?
• Discernment: whose choice was it to be SSM?
  • Generally the individual, but 16% not permitted to offer for stipendiary ministry – “Young enough to work. Too old to pay.”
Online questionnaire – key findings

- Content in initial training aimed at SSM variable, and generally perceived to be lacking.
- Workplace: about 15% would consider themselves to be MSE, about 35% were not in secular work and not all in secular work saw their workplaces as a significant context for ministry.
Focus groups

- Not about statistical interpretation, or proving a particular hypothesis.
- About getting a picture of the joys and challenges of being SSM.
- Plan for sessions:
  - Introductions
  - As an SSM, what gets you up in the morning?
  - How have the challenges you face changed in the past year to 18 months?
Key findings from the focus groups

- Most chose to be SSM, but a significant minority either came to see SSM as their calling following initial discernment, or feel that their calling is to stipendiary ministry, but the diocese is not prepared to accept this.
Key findings from the focus groups

- Many SSMs understand their vocation to be distinct from that of the stipendiary minister:
  - Integration – one vocation, not several.
  - Context important – local community, workplace.
  - Ministry in the gaps/at the edges, bridge between church and secular world.
Key findings from the focus groups

- Blessings of being in a collaborative ministry team, but issues arising from working with others who don’t ‘get’ SSM.
- Pleased surprise at diocesan initiatives which include SSMs, eg. hampers during lockdown.
- Resigned irritation when SSMs are omitted from supportive initiatives, eg. not phoned when stipendiaries were during lockdown, inaccessible chapter meetings.
Key findings from the focus groups

- SSMs experience their ministry as a joy and a privilege, and look forward to each new day as an opportunity to express their sense of being called by God to be this person in this place.