

The ministerial working week

Resolution 11

General Assembly approves the following as the principles governing the Ministerial working week,

- a) There should be more clarity in defining working hours.
- b) The working week, translated into hours in a four week period, is recommended to be not less than 160 hours and not more than 192,
- c) A note on the working week shall be included in the plan for partnership and the rationale for the working week, set out as supporting text for this resolution, shall be available on request from the Ministries office.

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- 1 Paragraph 7.1 of the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration sets out holiday provision for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers, but the Plan contains no definition of the working week. This can lead to two extreme assumptions, that those in ministry work only one day a week or that they are available 24/7.
 - 2 Custom and practice means that those in ministry have for some years been encouraged to have a day a week 'off' and congregations are instructed to check that this is happening. However this suggests that ministers have a six day working week and begs the question 'Is there any common agreement about the length of the ministerial working day?'
 - 3 Part of the remit of the Ministries Committee is a concern for the central care and conditions of service of Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, and in the exercise of that concern the Committee believes that some guidance should be given about the ministerial working week.
 - 4 Underlying the concern about this matter is a recognition of the need for ministers to be encouraged and allowed to establish and work within a proper relationship between living and working, doing and being. The Biblical witness on this is rooted in the story of creation. The way God's period of work is followed by the Sabbath is presented as example and injunction to build into a faith-based lifestyle a creative balance of activity and rest. This guidance is intended to give ministers the challenge and permission to reflect on such balance as they build their own working style, and as they consider the example that their pattern of working offers to all members of the church community.
 - 5 Any guidance on the working week, arising from a wholly admirable desire to care for the minister/ Church Related Community Worker and his/her family, is set within the context of ministerial status being that of office holder with all the flexibility and autonomy that implies. Such guidance must also take account of the unpredictability of ministerial life in which some weeks are filled with crises and others are as eventful as the minister cares to make them.
 - 6 Furthermore, such guidance must take note of the vocational life, which leads individuals to respond instinctively to the needs of others, whenever that need arises. However, such an instinct needs to be treated with immense care in order to safeguard the health and well being of individual Ministers/ Church Related Community

Workers and their families. Ministry is not only a series of tasks (e.g. writing the sermon; arranging community events) which can be finished; but is focused on the life of the congregation and/or community and therefore, in a very real sense, can never be finished or quantified.

- 7 Nevertheless the Ministries Committee feels it right to offer guidelines on the ministerial working week, in order to take seriously the concept of work /life balance, and leave the minister/ Church Related Community Worker with time for family and friends as well as free to give voluntary time to any cause about which he /she feels passionate, but which is not part of the local church's planned vision and mission. In this respect the Church may be seen to be ' counter-cultural' challenging the working ethos of much of our society.
- 8 Rather than talk of 'days off', it might be more appropriate to talk in terms of hours over and above which Ministers/ Church Related Community Workers should view themselves as within their own time; time to be used as they want without any sense of guilt. Because ministry does not fit easily into a routine working week, the hours should be treated with flexibility, possibly dealt with in four-weekly blocks and managed by the Minister/ Church Related Community Worker who alone will know the complexity of his/her ministry.
- 9 Although the Church may wish to be counter-cultural in some of the things it does, it is wise to take note of societal guidance which is intended to nurture health and well being. For this reason we should be aware of what others would regard as an excessive working week, and here we could be guided by the working time regulations.
"For the purposes of the Working Time Regulations (WTR) 1998, organisations are required to monitor the hours of their employees to ensure that individuals do not work in excess of an average of 48 hours per week over a 17 week period unless by mutual agreement. "
Although WTR does make it possible for employees to work an average of more than 48 hours per week by mutual agreement, the principle behind the regulations is that there is something unhealthy in working excessive hours, both in terms of the individual's well-being and the quality of work undertaken.
By the same token when considering Ministers/ Church Related Community Workers there should be concern both for the individual's well being and a recognition that quantity does not equate to quality, indeed quality can be adversely affected by quantity.
- 10 A standard full -time ministerial working week could therefore be anything up to 48 hours per week, though secular standard working weeks are probably between 35 and 42 hours with the standard full time working week at Church House being 35 hours. The Ministries Committee would suggest a minimum of 40 hours per week. This includes Sunday and does not preclude the practice of a designated day off. The Ministries Committee also recommends that the highest average number of working hours should be 48 hours per week in any four week period (192 hours per month). This would allow for the weeks of extreme business and for those ministers who are currently working much longer hours to cut down gradually.
- 11 If guidance on the working week is accepted by the Church, there is no suggestion that the Minister/ Church Related Community Worker fills out a 'time sheet' to submit to the Elders. Equally there is no reason why a Minister/ Church Related Community Worker should not inform the Elders, or a support group, of the hourly element of the working week. Indeed it ought to be part of the Elders' responsibility to Minister/

Church Related Community Worker and local pastorate or post to ensure that the Minister/ Church Related Community Worker does not regularly overwork to the detriment of individual health. It may be illuminating for the congregations to know the breadth of the ministerial task. The most important factor is the relationship between Minister/ Church Related Community Worker and pastorate or post. Where the Minister/ Church Related Community Worker is felt to be fulfilling their role within the total life of the congregation most church members will not think in terms of the time a Minister/ Church Related Community Worker gives.

It is hoped that this framework will offer a useful benchmark for the reflection involved in the processes of Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal and Local Mission and Ministry Review. Similarly the guidance should be reflected in the management and support structures put in place for ministers engaged in General Assembly and Synod appointments, including Church House staff and Synod Moderators. The principles involved should also inform how ministers in non-stipendiary service are deployed and supported.

- 12 In setting clear guidelines for 'working time' several factors need to be borne in mind;
- 12.1 For some ministers their local ministry is their only passion. That has to be accepted, although open to being questioned by the Elders or by the appraisal partner in the accompanied self appraisal element of the ministerial review.
- 12.2 An essential part of the minister's work is reflection, prayer and study. This is not additional to, but an integral part of, the working time. Frenetic activity is counterproductive
- 12.3 Ministry also has a creative quality about it and the creative process is notoriously difficult to quantify. It is the end result of time spent in apparent inactivity that is important.
- 12.4 A clear working time will not prevent the majority of those in ministry being 'on call'. But it may enable them to decide how to respond to any request and to feel able to take time off after a particularly busy or stressful period.
- 12.5 Setting clear guidelines about the hours which form a reasonable working week should help reduce stress in those ministers who are diligent. It might also help those dealing with ministers who do not seem to pull their weight. But we may also need to address, perhaps more stringently in the assessment process, those who 'need to be needed'. This need can produce levels of over-commitment to others which eventually places considerable strain upon the individual minister as well as others. Such stress can lead to a sense of being put on, which may manifest itself in grievance. Furthermore, over-commitment on the part of some ministers also creates quite unrealistic expectations in congregations of the responsibilities of the average minister.