

The Ordinal and Clergy Responsibility
Fr. Owen Williams (Lecture #1)
-A Synopsis-
Clericus, Alfred, Maine, June 16, 2011

Fr. Williams opened his presentation by asking participants to write down in a few words to write down why and/or how they were called into ordained ministry. Several shared, after which Fr. Williams recounted his own story: “God stepped into my life”.

He emphasized that the Church is not a business. His appointment as rector of his church was not based upon a contract, but on a “letter of agreement”, a “charitable understanding”. The relationship between all the orders of the Church is that of family love. It is a covenantal bond. At one point someone wanted to “review his contract”, but he replied that he is neither a hireling nor an employee.

In the “Barchester Chronicles” (a British TV series based on novels by Anthony Trollope) there are vicars portrayed who never did anything, but boasted a good “living” at the expense of the church. The real work of the parish was done by poor curates. But what *is* a “living”? God has “called us out of worldly service to serve the world”. The Church needs to provide a living, but not for “services rendered”. It is in fact required, by Canon 60, to obtain episcopal permission for outside employment added to the ministry. Such a job should be complementary to ministry. Unfortunately, this is a rare exception in the Continuum. Baptists and Jehovah’s Witnesses tithe their income, so that ten families can afford to maintain a leader for the congregation. 20 such families can afford a building; 30 can go on to support missionaries. The ACA is only 19 years old. But as we mature as a Church, we must reinforce clergy/parish responsibilities to each other.

The idea of an “annual evaluation” of the clergyman’s effectiveness is not a good thing. Our vocation is to be guided by Scripture and the Ordinal. P. 533 of the BCP clearly states diaconal responsibilities. I and II Timothy are books regarding pastoral life and responsibility. The ministry changes us inwardly. It is no hobby. One can never go back, but must make it a life’s work unto death.

The Priesthood:

In the 1960's, consultations among several major denominations were held called Consultations on Christian Unity (COCU), the "Protestant version of ARCIC". Attempts were made to define the function of the clergy, and to determine what "sameness of ministry" could be discerned among the various groups represented. 1. Absolution. 2. Benediction. 3. Consecrating Sacraments. 4. Offering sacrifices.

These are also the principal ministries of ordained priests. We are deeply involved in the lives of our parishioners. We function as shepherds, messengers of God's Word, watchmen, stewards of the Lord; we teach, admonish, feed, and seek for the lost sheep; we correct misconceptions about the faith, bring back the lapsed, and fight false teaching. There is nothing in this "job description" about "making pastoral calls". That is not to be the measure of satisfactory ministry, although it is often represented that way. The "Mitford Books" present an utterly impossible ideal, a minister who fills his day with unaccountably "perfect" ministry in the form of continual house calls, plus everything else. (Fr. Koller noted that "in America, the perception is that if you are not seen doing something, you must not be doing anything!"). The Perfect Pastor "preaches 10 minutes, works from 8 a.m. 'til midnight, makes \$40/week, is 29 years old with 40 years experience, is handsome, and does 15 home visits/day", etc.

The public behavior of rectors, and how they handle the sheep under pressure are vitally important. Examples were offered:

A family in a certain church took issue with a policy of the priest, and had decided that to "make a statement" they would stand every time the *Sursum corda* was said during the service. The priest became uncontrollably angry over the matter, and acted in retaliation in ways that were hurtful to the church.

In another instance, a rector publicly excommunicated a parishioner with whom he was angry. Fr. Williams noted here that we must be careful by our actions "never to put a block between people and God".

A good clerical response to a difficult decision was also described. Two congregational leaders persisted in what appeared to be an inappropriate relationship, causing questions and consternation in the church. Pastoral inquiries were turned aside by the couple, until close investigation proved their culpability. Because the pair had assented to specific rules of conduct

before they assumed their ministries, they could be held to standards they supposedly upheld. When the rector confronted them, they resigned and left the church.

We should return to the Ordinal to review our responsibilities as clergy, and must always call to mind the dignity of these orders.