

## **JUGGLING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE – AN INTERESTING CASE STUDY**

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### **Stand first**

**Entering a previously male dominated role – the priesthood – may present challenges for women with families. As *David Mason-Jones* finds out, however, these are little different from the problems faced by all parents as they juggle the work-life balance.**

### **Pulls quote**

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**Being a mother is a challenge at the best of times and being a working mother may be yet more difficult. But what about being a working mother who’s occupation is priest in the Anglican Church? Is this an even more demanding role?**

The experience of Julie Turnbull, a priest in the Diocese of Newcastle, Australia, gives some insights into the challenges faced by women clergy.

Julie says there are some requirements in being a priest which differ from the employment conditions found in many other job descriptions.

“One of these,” she says, “is the undertaking I made at my ordination to ‘pray often’. In practical terms, and on a personal level, I often pray in any case. But, in organisational structure terms, it means that I am obliged to pray at morning and evening prayer each day. This is a formal requirement of my position.”

The 20 minute morning service usually starts about 7.30am – the very time in most families when the school lunches are being packed, everyone is having breakfast and the adults are rushing out to work. The evening prayer usually starts around 4.30pm – the very time the children are due home from school and workers in the family are heading home from the office.

“But I made the commitment at my ordination and, once that has been decided, we find ways to manage our routine so that all the lunches are still made, all the breakfasts are still eaten and all the other workers still get to work. For me it is a spiritual discipline at the start of the day and I welcome it,” says Julie.

Other unique church situations include the Bishop’s authority. The Bishop can choose to place the priest in any position in any parish at any time and Julie accepted this at her ordination.

Julie says: “I know that clergy do get posted to positions which they may have preferred to decline but the way things happen in reality is that there is a long period of thought and prayer before a posting decision is made.

“Before becoming a priest I worked for many years in private industry and I have seen people accept employment positions and moves they really hated. My husband was originally in the air force and there was a high degree of authority in the posting system we faced in those days. So the role of the Bishop is not too far removed to what often happens in other jobs.

“At the time of the Bishop’s decision about my first parish appointment, I had two young daughters still at school in Newcastle and my husband’s employment was in Newcastle. These family needs were taken into consideration in my placement. These needs have also been taken into account with my current position as assistant priest in the parish of Cessnock Wollombi,” Julie states.

Then there is the vast range of roles as a priest which may be time consuming but which are not specific challenges imposed by being a priest. In a parish there are parish council meetings at night, social functions and events, bible study groups, hospital visits and other community commitments. From time to time these can clash with family commitments like children’s sporting events, parent teacher nights, attending a spouse’s work related functions, visits with friends and relatives, sharing a meal together and relaxing in front of the TV.

“But you don’t have to be a priest to face these clashes. Balancing your work priorities and your parenting and family role is a juggling act we all have to play,” says Julie.

“What I’ve found is that people in the parish are aware we are a family and they take that into account when making demands on my time.”

Apart from the challenges the role presents there are enormous benefits to family life.

“I guess I have the opportunity to work from home and yet be involved in a community. And within certain constraints I have a high degree of workplace flexibility – much more so that many other mainstream employment positions I see. My daily routine is certainly varied and stimulating.

“If we were talking about a ‘normal’ job, I’d say it is a job I like. But it’s more than that. The priesthood is my vocation and not simply something I’ve selected because it suits my needs. Because I have responded fully to my vocation I feel fulfilled in my work and a person who is fulfilled in their work is more likely to be a positive parent and a role model for their children,” Julie concludes.

“Being a parent has also had a rebound effect on my ability to perform the role in a parish. Parenting develops self organisation, people management, financial planning and budgeting skills – all of which are sorely needed in every parish,” she adds.

In the final analysis, although the position of female priest in the Anglican church may still be a new concept to some, the challenges for the person who is both a priest and mother are not that much different from those facing any working parent.

**End note**

The Reverend Julie Turnbull was trained at St John's College, Morpeth, in the Hunter Valley near Newcastle. Julie was made a Deacon at Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle, on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2003 and ordained a Priest in the same cathedral on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2003.