TIME FOR PLAY

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ABSTRACT

TIME FOR PLAY? - A theoretical framework to identify the role of play in coping with stress in the practice of ministry.

I aim to study the concept of play in ministry and particularly its value in the life of clergy.

Much has been written about play in a number of spheres but little from a primarily theological perspective. Berne takes a sociological approach and Huizinga a more anthropological viewpoint whilst Sutton-Smith approaches the subject from a mainly educationalist perspective. Many writers like Brighton and Moon, Willett, Richards, Marsh, Burn and Bishop begin with the child and study school and playground to draw out lessons for life. Suurmond takes a more theological approach in his link between play and worship. I plan to take a more radically ontological approach, examining my subject at a deeper level to seek to discover the answer to the question: *can play enable more balanced and flourishing ministries?*

I aim to show that the long-undervalued activity of *play* has something profound to teach us in the long-overemphasised arena of work that will contribute to our understanding of church ministry.

My objectives are:

1. To research the importance of play as a building block to assist effective and balanced church ministries.

2. To investigate the idea of 24/7 "ministry on demand" for the modern clergyperson and to explore whether play can effectively mediate this.

3. To present play, imagination and "fun" as a possible antidote to stress, pressure and burnout in parish ministry.

"Time for Play" aims to make an original contribution to the understanding of parish ministry and leadership by offering the long-undervalued phenomenon of play and recreation as a possible antidote to stress and valuable contribution to flourishing in ministry.

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"If it was easy, everybody would do it!"

TIME FOR PLAY?



TIME FOR PLAY? - A theoretical framework to identify the role of play in coping with stress in the practice of ministry.

Dedicated to my Father

... we still play together ...

Introduction

Fun is described in the dictionary as a noun than means *enjoyment, amusement or light-hearted pleasure* and although it is also described as an adjective and even a verb plus several examples of apposite phrases, the definition does scant justice to the full meaning of this fascinating little word. The final utterance of that icon of the late twentieth century, Captain James T. Kirk, is "fun" as his death is depicted in the movie *Star Trek: Generations*[1], just after once again making a vital difference and saving the galaxy from disaster. On the other hand …

Christian ministry is a *serious* business.

Reaching out to the lost and needy in a cold cynical world can be hard work. Trying to make a difference in your community and demonstrate in some way the love of God requires determination, patience and stamina. Studies in the last few years would have us believe that stress levels are high and burnout is frequent. There may still be a little romance attaching to the clerical collar but my colleagues and I know that the cold hard reality of ministry in the actual world is very different from the flamboyant fiction of a starship captain! When the issue of clergy stress was discussed at the July 2017 meeting of the General Synod it was noted that "the Church of England Experiences of Ministry Survey (EMS), conducted in collaboration with King's College, London, found that clergy appeared to report higher levels of emotional exhaustion than many other professional groups."[2] That particular synod vigorously debated the causes of clergy stress and its effects upon the profession, with many contributions highlighting the problems, particularly for those involved with the modern issue of terror attacks in some of the major cities. Contributors to the debate warned about the lack of adequate or co-ordinated support from the Church hierarchy and the synod approved a motion to set up a working party to explore it further and report back.

Clearly, stress in the practice of ministry and its uniquely deleterious effects upon the clergy is a significant issue that needs addressing. This work is not another attempt to persuade or cajole the administrators of the Church to provide better care resources, counselling services and support structures for its clergy, although this is self-evidently required. This is an encouragement to self-medication; to remind clergy of the importance of being active participants in managing their own well-being as part of their personal Christian discipleship. Canon Simon Butler says "clergy have to take responsibility for their own well-being."[3]

What will be explored?

This thesis is about play and how it might affect the stress levels and increasing pressures of church ministry. The reference from popular contemporary fiction in the opening paragraph provides a useful metanarrative to explore whether or not "having fun" can help ministers flourish.

Nearly four decades of parish ministry have shown that church work and ministry is pressured and demanding but can it ever, or should it ever, be considered fun? Is there any sense in which an understanding of play can provide a means of coping and even flourishing?

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[1] David Carson (dir.), *Star Trek: Generations* [Film] (California: Paramount Pictures, 1994).

[2] Madeleine Davies, Hattie Williams, Tim Wyatt and Gavin Drake, "Causes Of Clergy Stress Aired In The General Synod", *Church Times,* (9 July 2017), <http:/www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles> [accessed 30 November 2017].

[3] Davies and others, "Causes Of Clergy Stress", 2017.

Play and stress are not often areas we associate with each other, but they have more in common than one might at first think. Those who follow the vocation of faith ministry will find themselves closely involved in the second area but they are seldom as familiar today with the first. Indeed, even to explore such subject matter in a light-hearted or apparently frivolous manner would seem at best incongruous and at worse rather flippant! How can study be fun or research playful? Stress is a serious, even life-threatening matter. How can we treat it lightly? For those involved in the pastoral care of others; the "proclamation of the gospel" and the "cure of souls", the *practice of ministry* is more than just a job. Most believe they are called by God to make a difference. What part does *play* have in this arena? How can it ever be *fun*?

A widely publicised quotation attributed to physicist Albert Einstein reads "play is the highest form of research". It is more likely that this originated with Neville Scarfe who in 1962 in the journal *Childhood Education* published an article titled *Play is Education* that contained the following passage:

> All play is associated with intense thought activity and rapid intellectual growth. The highest form of research is essentially play. Einstein is quoted as saying: *The desire to arrive finally at logically connected concepts is the emotional basis of a vague play with basic ideas. This combinatory or associative play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought.*[4]

Whether it was Scarfe or Einstein that originated the idea, the concept that play is a tool of research and a method of education is interesting and a major factor in this work. In *Time for Play* a framework will be established that will not only seek to provide answers for how we deal with stress but also advance the theory that empirical engagement with play as a practice and academic research on the subject as a principle may go to the very heart of what it is to learn and grow. This is serious fun!

One of Scotland's best-known paintings is *The Skating Minister* which shows the Reverend Robert Walker skating, in frock-coat, hat and gaiters, on Duddingston Loch. The portrait, which only came to prominence in 1949, was painted either by Sir Henry Raeburn or the French artist Henri-Pierre Danloux and dates from the late eighteenth century during the period of the Scottish Enlightenment. The oil painting depicts a bygone age when clergy spent a significant amount of their time collecting butterflies or fishing or engaged in pastimes not necessarily considered commensurate with the frenetic activity of today's professional clergyperson.

Many contemporaries might be inclined to look down on the lifestyle of the ministers of the so-called long eighteenth century whose weekly activities were as likely to include games and hobbies as pastoral visiting and the conducting of divine worship. It could be argued that clergy of that era were as familiar with play as they were with work. This may teach us a great deal.

The application of the subject of play as both an empirical practice and a tool of research is given further complexity when addressed to the issue of *stress in the practice of ministry*. This is perhaps one of the most sensitive areas where stress is not only commonly present but where its deleterious effects are denied or where the failure of its sufferers to deal with it is increasingly hidden or ignored. "But you seem so strong" say some parishioners. "What will

[4] Neville V. Scarfe, "Play is Education" *Childhood Education*, Volume 39, Issue 3, (Washington D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International 1962) p. 120, (Verified with scans; thanks to Jacksonville, Florida public library).

we do if *you* can't cope?" say others. Or, as some have said in other areas, "who cares for the carers?"

A report in the Church Times (2000) suggests that the number of clergy (Church of England) retiring before pensionable age on grounds of stress and ill health has doubled in the last ten years[5]. Since that time the situation has only worsened despite organisations like *The Society of Mary and Martha* and *St Luke's Hospital for the Clergy* promoting improved care for ministers and dioceses and other national bodies including advice on stress and burn-out and setting up structures for support. A deeper and more far-reaching response is needed and the "skating minister" might just provide it. Making time for play and rediscovering its value as both an antidote and prophylactic could help make a significant step towards coping with stress in the practice of ministry. We can seriously explore the need for *Fun*.

Modern anthropologists such as Johann Huizinga suggest that Play may be the most universally practised activity in the world and yet comparatively little understood for its contribution to the development of life. All human beings engage in play at all stages of their lives, not just as juveniles. Huizinga in his seminal book *Homo Ludens* writes:

> Play is essentially different from work in that it is "autotelic"*; it tends to be an end in itself, generally (but not exclusively) giving pleasure to the participant. It is vital to understand this quality of play differentiates it wholly from work, which has always been intended as a means to an end. Both are built into the fabric and rhythm of life as seen in the phrase: Work, Rest and Play, these being the three basic building blocks of daily life.[6]

The broadcaster, Gyles Brandreth[7], quotes Friedrich Schiller who wrote: "man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays". Huizinga seeks to demonstrate that Play is clearly a *life function* that is at the very heart of our culture and an essential part of what it means to be alive. But why should play and "having fun" be of any interest to the practitioner of ministry?

Although there has been much written on play, particularly in recent years, it has been frequently focused on children within the environment of school, the playground and the park and little from a primarily theological perspective. Relatively little has been explored in the public arena about the phenomenology of play and even less in the realm of church leadership and ministry. Berne takes a sociological approach and Huizinga a more anthropological viewpoint whilst Sutton-Smith approaches the subject from a primarily educationalist perspective. Many writers begin with the child and study school and playground to draw out lessons for life. Suurmond takes a more metaphysical approach in his fascinating link between play and worship. This thesis plans to explore a more radically ontological viewpoint, taking the idea that play is a part of who we are as humans and examining the subject at a deeper level to seek to discover the answer to the fundamental questions *Why do we play?* and *Can regular engagement in play enable more flourishing ministries?*

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[5] "The Retired Clergy - Pensioned Off" *Church Times,* (5 May 2000), <http:/www.ukpressonline.co.uk>, [Accessed November 2019].

[6] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens –A Study Of The Play Element In Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).
* a twentieth century construct, combining "auto" (self) with "telos" (end).

[7] Gyles and Saethryd Brandreth, *The Lost Art Of Having Fun* (London: John Murray, 2013), p. 4.

Why is it interesting?

'Having fun' may be one of the most positive steps to take to avoid burnout. Not taking oneself too seriously and appreciating the amazing gift of perspective can go a long way to protecting a church leader from doubt and despair. David Clutterbuck observes:

> Recent studies of learning and childhood have revealed the critical importance of play in the generation of mental energy. The proverb *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy* is quite accurate. As adults, the pressure to focus on work and to see play as a frivolous diversion has become widely institutionalised and is perhaps one of the primary reasons why so many companies complain of lack of creativity and an inability to maintain high levels of customer friendliness.[8]

Perhaps the long-undervalued activity of *play* has something profound to teach us in the long-overemphasised arena of work that can contribute a great deal to our understanding of life as well as church ministry. Play should interest us as an activity not only because it has a strong metaphysical connection but also because it can have direct value in the alleviation of stress and work pressure.

Stress is commonly regarded as a twenty-first century phenomenon but in truth it is only such when it is understood as a negative pressure impacting upon and affecting lives that are overwhelmed with busyness and frenetic activity. The word has its roots in language meaning exertion of force, narrowness and being drawn tight as in the Latin *strictus*. Stress results when we face too much physical, psychological, mental or emotional pressure and it will seriously affect the way we feel, think and behave.

Stress is a great deal more than simply feeling "under pressure"; it produces a very definite physiological reaction. When our bodies become aware of stress, the hypothalamus stimulates the production of several hormones including adrenaline and cortisol, the so-called stress-hormone. This is the body's way of dealing with any pressure we are facing so that the "fight or flight" syndrome ensues: the hormones raise our blood pressure and produce extra energy to face up to the threatening issue or we take steps to avoid it.

We all need a certain amount of stress to regulate our lives; the problems arise when there is too little or too much and both these extremes can lead to serious health problems including head and stomach issues and even stroke or heart attack. Psychological problems are also a major factor including distrust, anger, anxiety, fear and depression. It can often lead to relationship breakdown and can even contribute to problems with the immune system that may increase the chance of viral infection. Chronic stress may increase our chances of contracting long-term medical conditions such as diabetes.

Stress is most commonly triggered by emotional issues arising from biological factors, social concerns and significant life events. In addition to the way our brain functions, physical and neurological matters; issues such as bereavement, divorce and redundancy may seriously heighten stress but more "positive" factors such as a new relationship or job or even taking a holiday can also be stressful.

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[8] D. Clutterbuck, *Managing Work-Life Balance*, (London: CIPD, 2003), p. 1.

Stress in the practice of ministry, as in any of the so-called caring professions, can be particularly problematic not only because they have been traditionally stressful environments but also because stress levels may have a profoundly negative effect upon relationships with clients who are already in deeply vulnerable and demanding situations. Care and service within a faith context have further complications that may deepen the experience of stress such as a powerful work ethic and compulsion to serve others as well as a sense that someone working in a faith context shouldn't be experiencing high levels of stress. Whilst this sense is patently untrue, in many cases it also increases stress levels! It may be argued that stress in parish ministry may be an area where it is experienced in its most chronic and acute form. Archbishop Justin Welby said:

> The hardest work I have ever done, was as a parish priest. It was isolated, insatiably demanding, and I was, on the whole, working without colleagues. That wears people down.[9]

The work of the parish priest has been quietly progressing in cities, towns and villages up and down the country for centuries and although the "occasional offices" of baptisms, weddings and funerals may have declined in importance in both reality and common perception, the pressures of pastoral work on the twenty-first century clergyperson are greater now than in any previous generation. 'Ministry on demand' is an accurate description of the pressures generated by the current dependence on electronic media and being available 24/7 can quickly lead to stress and burnout in church leadership.

The work-stress guru Sir Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University, argues that an avalanche of unnecessary emails contributes to work overload and Britain's culture of long hours. Professor Cooper, who advises the government on health and wellbeing in the workplace, said "Britain's current methods are not effective – although we have the longest hours Monday to Friday in the developed world, we are bottom of the G7 nations league for productivity."[10]

Stress in the work place is an increasing problem and it is clearly counter-productive. Unhealthy stress in *the practice of ministry* is also increasing and will not contribute to clergy wellbeing or ministries that are flourishing. This work will explore these issues and identify how fun and play can provide a positive solution.

How will the subject be explored?

The aim is to:

1. Research the importance of play as an autotelic activity within a context that is often about being driven to succeed and ministry that is frequently discharged to please other people.

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[9] Rudgard, "Causes Of Clergy Stress", 2017.

[10] Jenny Hope, "How To Improve Productivity … Cut Down On The Office Emails As Workers Accused Of 'Embracing Technology Too Much'", *The Daily Mail,* (7 May 2015), <http:/dailymail.co.uk> [accessed 14 January 2016].

2. Investigate the idea of 24/7 "ministry on demand" and examine play as a response to flawed management in the parish pastoral arena and over-availability experienced by the parish priest leading to stress.

3. Present play, imagination and "fun" as a possible antidote to stress, pressure and burnout in parish ministry.

The aim of this study is to make an original contribution to the understanding of parish ministry and leadership by offering the long-undervalued phenomenon of play and recreation as a potential antidote to stress and a positive contribution to flourishing in ministry.

This thesis is concerned primarily with an activity that involves action so it will seek to involve Action Research that is both practical and participatory. The research will look at the broad scope of available literature on the subject under discussion and explore the various arguments and approaches that relate to it. It will investigate the origins and definitions of play and also the developing theories and ideas about it as well as the arguments and discussions about its value in various spheres of life, focussing particularly upon church ministry. The research will then study the empirical realm and further explore how ministers play and have fun in order to see whether this can deepen and enhance wellbeing.

The first stage of research will explore three key phrases from the title of the thesis. Chapter One will involve a review of literature relevant to the *role of play* in life and examine play as a phenomenon of culture capable of being utilised as a tool for flourishing. The literature reviewed will cover a wide scope of arguments and ideas relating to play from a number of relevant standpoints, anthropological, sociological and metaphysical. Literature and studies relevant to understanding stress and *coping with stress* will also be reviewed and the various arguments relating to care for the clergy and current understanding of stress levels in ministers. The first stage will also examine how the very *practice of ministry* should include space for the non-specific areas that are less goal-orientated and more life enhancing. The first stage will seek to establish play as a relevant and vital contribution to the experience of life and ministry and improved clergy performance and wellbeing.
A short explanation of the philosophy of this research and reasons for the methods used will follow in Chapter Two. It mainly follows Participative Action Research principles as a way forward and there will be some exploration of why this type of methodology is considered most effective for the purposes of the research.

The second stage of research will involve the study of clergy activity in pastoral ministry, both theoretical and practical. This will mean not only the examination of existing material on the pressures and stresses experienced by those involved in running parishes but also interviews at "grass-roots" level. Interviews will take the form of Participative Action Research with clergy willing to be involved in the process. Clergy will be interviewed at many different levels of engagement This second stage will add a further empirical dimension to the thorough literature review in the previous section.

Chapter Three will explore responses to a programme of questions within a framework that will lead to shared evaluation to link theories about play with understandings of the performance of ministry. These responses will be analysed and set out systematically. Chapter Four will reflect on the findings of the empirical research and ask what it all means for the purpose of the thesis. *Will these ideas result in greater clergy wellbeing and more flourishing*

ministries? This final stage of this research will be to collate the findings of the Action Research responses with current perceived understanding of pressures within the clergy work environment to discover if play and playing can provide an effective and measurable response.

The research will conclude by exploring whether the findings of the thesis can be operationalised and whether this would improve ministry and make it more *fun*. *Time for Play* is a serious attempt to explore an issue that is ontologically unserious; fun by its very nature constantly shifts and changes to avoid definition, challenges convention and playfully divests itself of the garments of function and purpose.

The trivial and playful impacts on the serious and profound and we are called to activities that do not seem to matter. Can this provide wellbeing in ministry? In that 1994 movie *Generations*[11], the iconic Captain Kirk's last words to his successor, Captain Picard, are: "Did we do it? Did we make a difference?" All his life and service as a starship captain has been to persuade his observers that it is all about saving the galaxy from evil and wrong. Every minister of the gospel works with a similar ethic: to right wrongs, to serve others, to strive with all they have and are to make a difference. But Kirk's final sentence is both trite and epic: "It was … fun!"

Isn't that really how it should be?

[11] Carson, *Star Trek: Generations,* 1994.

1. Literature Review

Introduction

According to diverse encyclopaedic references, play is an activity, existing entirely for its own sake apart from the aim of giving pleasure and personal gratification to the participant(s), generally without serious motive or intent and often involving personal indulgence, fantasy and "make-believe" and a measure of dissociation for those taking part. The word "play" has early Anglo-Saxon roots (in *Beowulf*) and itself connects to Middle Dutch but the concept goes back to the beginnings of life.[12] Caillois alludes to the history and development of games in his chapter on sociological derivation.[13]

Play is essentially different from work in that it is "auotelic"; it tends to be an end in itself, generally (but not exclusively) giving pleasure to the participant. The concept of "play" is built into the rhythm of life as seen in the phrase: "Work, Rest and Play", these being the three basic building blocks of daily life. In *Laws* Plato wrote:

> That which has neither utility nor truth nor likeness, nor yet, in its effects is harmful, can best be judged by the criterion of the charm which is in it, and by the pleasure it affords. Such pleasure, entailing as it does no appreciable good or ill, is play.[14]

Play can be perceived in both a formal and informal sense, though play in its purest form may defy mere encyclopaedic definition and it is possible that "formal play" is itself a contradiction in terms. Everyone knows what play is and everyone does it both as children and adults but most of us are unable to describe it adequately or account for it definitively. Plato seems to think, like Huizinga writing so many centuries later, that play has value simply because it brings pleasure to the participants; it is *fun*. Huizinga invents the word "autotelic" to encapsulate this vast yet elusive concept. Nevertheless, whilst it is possible to indulge in play for no good reason, it is also common to participate in play that operates within a fixed set of rules placed in order to accommodate fuller enjoyment of the play itself. Many games including sport and athletic pursuits, board games, card games, computer games and even gambling, fall into this category.

Phrases connected with play in common English parlance include *to play around*, *to play along*, *to play back*, *to play down*, *to play off*, *to play on*, *to play out* and *to play up*. It is possible to *play the fool*, to *play for time*, to *play the game*, to *play around*, to *make a play on words* and to *play by ear*. It is possible to *play a game*, *play a sport*, *play an instrument*, *play with someone else's feelings* and *play at being someone or something else*. It can be associated with performance as well as with personal pleasure and has strong connection to art and creativity. Play can be connected with entertainment, enjoyment, fun, relaxation, recreation, diversion, frolicking, romping, frisking, capering, distraction, leisure, pleasure, hobby, pastime, gaming, horseplay, merrymaking and revelry. It may also be a means of practising to prepare a child for the skills needed in adulthood.

Informal play is associated with ritual and symbolism, with pleasure and enjoyment. It is commonly regarded as trivial and transitory, yet it is a common experience that is foundational

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[12] Paul Clark and Andrew Lindzey. (eds) *Dictionary Of Ethics, Theology And Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 641-644.
[13] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play And Games* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp 59-61.
[14] Plato *Laws* (tr Benjamin Jowett A Public Domain Book) ii 667.

to the understanding of life, society, culture and community. Play is not limited to humanity; many animals also participate in play though without the complexity and analogous symbolism of human beings. It can be complex and intricate in the extreme but it can also be whimsy and nonsense and as fantastical as Alice Liddell's Cheshire Cat.

Understood as an aesthetic concept, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller are among the foremost writers on the subject, whilst Johan Huizinga's seminal work,[15] has inspired much late twentieth century thinking on the relationship between play and culture.
Distinction is made in play between its biological and the psychological characteristics, whether the activity is a form of practice of real life in semblance before it is conducted in reality or simply a means of mediating excess energy and whether the activity is a form of psychosis common to all that allows self-amusement with no other significant independent aim or function.

Play encompasses a vast part of human experience whether as formal and intense as motor racing, as cynical and divisive as poker, as complicated and consuming as sexual foreplay or as simple and childlike as hopscotch. "All of life is a game: it is just that some games are more serious than, and some games are more tedious than, others."[16]

Play is common to all and, although it is separate from "ordinary" life, everybody joins in. At its deepest, purest and most fulfilling it is joyous and foolish and utterly incomprehensible.

> While the term "play" may refer to an extremely varied range of activities, certain broad, defining characteristics have been noted. Perhaps the most basic one is that *play is something that is not required*. (my italics) Although the enjoyment derived from it may be needed emotionally, no single play activity itself is necessary for survival. Thus, play is referred to as "autotelic"—it is engaged in for its own sake, with the reward inherent in the activity itself. Nevertheless, in spite of its detachment from survival and financial gain, play is engaged in wholeheartedly. During the time allotted to play, it commands a person's entire attention.[17]

Throughout the history of play a clear pattern of polarisation can be seen between it and work, as if play is what children alone do as their form of work. Some theorists have suggested that the arena of play is where we prepare for the challenges of real life; where we develop skills like conflict-resolution and problem solving. None of this explains the fact that adults engage in play as much as children. "We do not stop playing because we grow old" said George Bernard Shaw. "We grow old because we stop playing."[18] This is a heart-warming aphorism, but it isn't strictly true. None of us ever stop playing.

The History and Development of Play

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[15] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens.*
[16] Paul Clark and Andrew Lindzey. (eds) *Dictionary Of Ethics* p.641.
[17] "Play – Piaget Stages of Development, Children, and Therapy", *JRank Articles*, (p. 496) http://psychology.jrank.org, [Accessed January 2017].
[18] The quote was apparently originally attributed to G. Stanley Hall *Adolescence: Its Psychology And Its Relations To Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion And Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company,1904), quoting Karl Groos in *Die Spiele Der Thiere* (*The Play Of Animals*), (USA: University of California Libraries,1896), "die Thiere spielen nicht, weil sie jung sind, sondern sie haben eine Jugend, weil sie spielen müssen." ("The animals do not play because they are young, but they have a youth because they must play.").

Play, as previously described, is a universal practice and part of the human condition. Evidence and references go back to the prehistoric era. Early artefacts from Yangshao Culture during the Neolithic Period (4800–4300 BC) have been found at Banpo village in Xi'an, China and small carts, whistles shaped like birds, and toy monkeys have been recovered from Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, cities in the Indus valley between 3000 and 1500 BC.[19] Tomb paintings from Egypt and depictions on Greek vases appear to show children at play and objects from these times include spinning tops, wheels, seesaws, kites, hoops and various models apparently used for playing games. The Greek writer Aristophanes in *The Clouds*[20] writes about a father discussing with Socrates his son's skill in playing with toys made from pomegranate rinds.

Aristotle and Socrates wrote about the value of play and Plato believed play had value as a means of education and as a way of producing good citizens although his teaching has been criticised by some as a justification of manipulation and control of children. It is interesting to note the linguistic link in Greek between *paidia* (play) with *paides* (children) but this should present no surprise when we learn that in Ancient Rome a school was called a *ludus* (child's play). However, it appears that education was not about developing the child so much as turning the child into an adult; at which point play supposedly became irrelevant. Aristotle saw a clear difference between education and play with the latter being merely a pause in work. The antithesis of work for him was not play but *leisure*.

Plato strongly promoted learning through play as an alternative to learning by compulsion. In Book VII of Plato's *Republic,* Socrates suggests that play is where education should begin: "Don't use force in training the children in the studies, but rather play. In that way you can better discern what each is naturally directed towards."[21]

Plato's view was that Play had value in that it describes an activity that has charm, brings pleasure and affords no ill. In effect, it is an activity that *doesn't matter*. Whilst Plato promoted play as an educational tool for children he was less positive about it for adults, considering it something we might grow out of and being of questionable moral value. In the Ancient Near East, play was a somewhat different concept to how it is understood today and would include music, philosophy, art, literature and poetry. Child's play was strictly confined to the *ludus* (school and/or playground). Play was often seen (in a somewhat derogatory sense) as an alternative to exertion and (productive) labour and consequently undervalued. Plato certainly valued it as an instrument for children's training but its *ludic*rous irrationality in his eyes made it simply an amusement for the young with little value for the sensible adult.

Centuries later, Augustine took a different approach to play when he reflected on how he was beaten for playing instead of getting on with his schoolwork.[22] Unlike Plato, he took a position more akin to the later Puritan writers; that play was an ungodly diversion that had no value in the pursuit of education. Augustine's writings were to have a lasting effect on the view taken by many later writers that games and similar pleasurable activities including the lusts and passions aroused by sexual intercourse were sinful and wrong.

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[19] Kevin J. Brehony, "Theories Of Play" *Encyclopaedia Of Children And Childhood In History And Society* Paula S. Fass (ed.) (USA: The Gale Group Inc. 2004), p. 826.

[20] Aristophanes *The Clouds* (USA: Start Publishing LLC 2012), p.38.

[21] Plato *The Republic* (Edinburgh: Black and White Classics 2014), 537a.

[22] Augustine, *The Confessions Of St. Augustine* tr. E.B. Pusey (London: J.M. Dent and Sons 1953), Book 1 pp. 10, 19.

Throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, there is little written about play as a singular activity although Pieter Breughel the Elder's painting *Children's Games* (depicted on the cover of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*) appeared around 1559 and depicted some 84 different games. Philippe Ariès[23] suggests that childhood was not understood as a separate phase of life until the eighteenth century (and generations later in the lower and middle classes) and thus the play of children (apart from in infancy) was not differentiated from that of adults. In effect, people were babies until the age of around 7 when they were reckoned to be morally and intellectually responsible and considered adults. Neil Postman and Eric Erikson both lamented the undermining and even disappearance of childhood in their day and Postman wrote that childhood was an invention of the Renaissance.

> Along with science the nation state and religious freedom, childhood as both a social principle and a psychological condition emerged around the 16th century. Up until that time children as young as 6 and 7 were not regarded as fundamentally different from adults. The language of children, their way of dressing, their games, their labour and their legal rights were exactly the same as adults. It was recognised, of course, that children tended to be smaller than adults; but this fact did not confer on them any special status.[24]

Schiller and Spencer both made connections between the play of humans and the play of animals. Both wrote about the expending of "unemployed energy" and Spencer, one of the foremost thinkers and writers of the Victorian era argued that in children the energy that in the animal world would be expended in "fight or flight" would, in children, be re-channelled through play. Sam Gill criticises Huizinga's scant references to Schiller as misrepresentation. Gill says Schiller drew on Kant for much of his inspiration and in his Aesthetic Letters[25] describes three forces, which he terms the *form drive*, the *sense drive* and the *play drive*. This last impulse balances the other two and gives form to the aesthetic quality of Beauty. Schiller believed humanity is only fully human when it plays.

Karl Groos[26] built on the *surplus energy* theory and described play as the development of an instinct necessary for survival. We play in order to prepare for life. Groos describes how the higher animals are able to use less than their full complement of energy and so are able to express exuberance in other ways that could easily be described as play. Groos explains the "play" of animals in some detail and finally concludes that both Schiller's and Spencer's theories of surplus energy were inadequate to explain the phenomenon of play and its foundation as to be found in instinct. This evolutionary theory of play was developed by other theorists in the twentieth century.

James Mark Baldwin popularised Groos' theories in the US, editing much of his work whilst contributing ideas of his own. His contributions to the ideas of evolution were considerable and controversial and with G. Stanley Hall wrote about race recapitulation, the idea that the individual repeats the development of the entire race and Hall in particular stressed this was a form of play. Hall had a widespread effect on his generation and encouraged many doctoral students who went on to be influential themselves. Hall believed adolescence was a period of life that should be prolonged in order to encourage proper socialization. Whilst his theories on

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[23] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries Of Childhood* (England: Penguin 1960), p. 125.
[24] Neil Postman, "The Disappearance of Childhood", *Childhood Education*, 61:4, 286-293, (1985), <DOI: 10.1080/00094056.1985.10520201>.
[25] F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* tr R. Snell (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965)
[26] K. Groos, *The play of animals*. (New York: Appleton, 1898).

race recapitulation fell out of favour in later years, he is still remembered as making a major contribution in the field of developmental psychology and education.

One of Hall's doctoral students, the educationalist, John Dewey, who wrote in the early twentieth century, developed a curriculum around work and play. It was Dewey who first stressed the idea that work was done for a purpose whereas play was more an end in itself. In my book *Prophetic Balloon Modelling*[27] I explore the idea that Work is something we *have* to do, Rest is something we *need* to do and Play is something we *like* to do. Whilst work is (and, in fact should *only* be) a means to an end, play is an end in itself, enjoyed for its own sake. Play is important because it is fun. In contrast, Dewey apparently had a very low view of play, suggesting that apart from work it was foolishness. He also described play as arbitrary, fanciful, morbid, aimless and useless. He distinguished work from labour (or drudgery) and suggested amusement rather than play as an antidote. Whilst his view of play is also in stark contrast to the high position held by Huizinga, Dewey's concept of play is also very different. Indeed, he even described it in terms of work saying both "were equally free and intrinsically motivated, apart from false economic conditions which tend to make play into idle excitement for the well to do, and work into uncongenial labour for the poor."[28] It is unfortunate that Dewey's contention that play was aimless was refuted by other play theorists since the aimlessness and purposelessness of play is exactly what gives it its identity. Writing at the other end of the century Spariosu, Gordon and Johnston stressed this repeatedly. Dewey seems to have entirely overlooked the autotelic nature of play, presenting it as simply a subordinate means to an end in a society where the Protestant work ethic was held up as a model of good practice.

As social mobility and emancipation grew in the twentieth century, play developed and toys and games became more widespread. Playgrounds were built and the areas that had previously been limited – time and opportunity – grew also. Places where children could play were developed and new industries were established that provided toys and games for children to enjoy. Sport began to be widely enjoyed, watched and participated in and youth groups were begun, like the Scout Movement, initially with a strong emphasis on moral development as well as social interaction.

A key milestone in the history of Play theory was reached with the publication of *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* in 1938. Sutton-Smith refers to its author, anthropologist Johann Huizinga, as one of "the three truly great 20th century play theorists"[29] (the other two being Spariosu and Fagen). Huizinga it was who invented the word "autotelic" to describe play as something that is an end in itself. Huizinga addresses play at a much deeper level that it had been hitherto studied. He describes it as "older than culture"[30] and something that all humans, even all mammals, engage in. He pulls away from the Platonic notion that play is training for life or Locke's assertion that it is educational. Huizinga gives play a much more all-encompassing definition. He does however, cite Plato throughout his book and obviously sees his writing as of major importance. "Play cannot be denied. You can deny, if you like, nearly all abstractions: justice, beauty, truth goodness, mind, God. You can deny seriousness, but not play."[31] Play, argues Huizinga, is at the root of our striving for God. Play is expressed

[27] John Guest, *Prophetic Balloon Modelling – Foolish Reflections On Work, Rest And Play* (Guildford: Eagle, 2000).
[28] John Dewey, *Democracy And Education* (New York: Free Press, 1916) p. 24.
[29] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity Of Play* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997) from the Introduction.
[30] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* p.1.
[31] Huizinga, Ibid. p.3.

through language, law, war, poetry, philosophy and art and enables the establishment of civilization. Although occasionally criticised for taking a more aesthetic view of history, Huizinga has produced a classic work, placing play at the heart of the formation of life. His definitions of play, whilst obviously struggling as much to grasp the meaning, still set the standard by which so many others express their positions.

> Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself, accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life.[32]

One great twentieth century contributor, Roger Caillois, defines play as an activity that is essentially free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed-by-rules and make-believe.[33] He critiques Huizinga's book as an original work but complains about his failure to adequately explain the variety and diversity of games. "Play", says Caillois, "is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for the establishment."[34]A somewhat cynical view, perhaps, and overly dependent on those games which depend on chance and avarice yet fascinating as a comment on contemporary trends and obsessions.

Another key contribution to the Play agenda was made in the middle of the twentieth century by Dr D.W. Winnicott, who contributed a number of case studies illustrating his theories of Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena. As both a psychoanalyst and a paediatrician, Dr Winnicott was keen to show his work as a distinctive contribution to the understanding of culture and creative living. His most distinctive contribution is the idea that psychoanalysis is the modern expression of play.

> I can now restate what I am trying to convey. I want to draw attention away from the sequence psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, playing material, playing, and to set this up again the other way round. In other words, *it is play that is the universal*, and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships; playing can be a form of communication in psychotherapy; and, lastly, psychoanalysis has been developed as a highly specialised form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others.[35]

Play in Psychoanalysis

In an essay published in 1907 Sigmund Freud noted that "the creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of fantasy which he takes very seriously—that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion—while separating it sharply from reality."[36]

In 1920 Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and play impacted a new field; that of psychoanalytic theory. Freud cites children's games as one of the four areas that provide evidence of forces that work beyond this all-pervasive pleasure principle. Freud put forward

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[32] Huizinga, Ibid. p.28.
[33] Caillois, *Man, Play And Games* pp. 9, 10.
[34] Caillois, Ibid. pp. 5, 6.
[35] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing And Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd. 1971), p. 41.
[36] Peter Gay, (ed.) "Sigmund Freud, Creative Writers And Daydreaming" *The Freud Reader* (New York: Norton 1989), p. 437.

the idea that children played as a demonstration of a repetition compulsion where a child consciously chooses to repeat or re-enact a pleasurable experience.

Arising out of Freud's influence but somewhat opposed to his approach was Melanie Klein's use of play as a form of child psychotherapy and psychoanalytical study relating to the meaning of play. Klein was able to pioneer a whole approach to the analysis of children's needs through play and this was further developed for use with older children and adults. She wrote:

> ….my work with both children and adults, and my contributions to psycho-analytic theory as a whole, derive ultimately from the play technique evolved with young children. I do not mean by this that my later work was a direct application of the play technique; but the insight that I gained into early development, into unconscious processes, and into the nature of the interpretations by which the unconscious can be approached, has been of far-reaching influence on the work I have done with older children and adults.[37]

Klein's approach became a very popular approach to child psychoanalysis and a number of schools working on these principles, including Schmidt's Children's Home in Moscow, Naumberg's Walden School in the US and Neill's Summerhill in England developed in later years. Generally speaking these schools allowed children to play freely without constraint or coercion to learn. Kleinian psychoanalysis still has a major influence across the world today and is often practised in sharp contrast to the Freudian model.

This was the era of the psychologist and Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner were foremost in describing play as a means of learning, problem solving and developing social skills. In sharp contrast to Montesorri's discouragement of make-believe, Lev Vygotsky saw imaginative play among children as a key to their cognitive development. A major part of this was imitation and Vygotsky believed children imitate parents as part of language development and the learning of appropriate social skills. Vygotsky expressed concern that if children became *over-regulated* or their time became too pressured they would become less involved in imaginative play and thus lose critical opportunities for language development and reasoning skills. A key component of Vygotsky's studies, writes Sue Palmer, was the idea of thinking aloud.

> When small children are playing, they often keep up a running commentary on what is happening: "And now the train's going round the tower, and it's banging in to the tower, and – oh no – the tower's toppling down…". Vygotsky calls this an external monologue. As time goes on, the external monologue is internalized as thought.[38]

Lev Vygotsky's contribution to modern play theory is considerable and, although under Stalinist Russia his views were suppressed, after his death many of his writings were rediscovered, translated and published and they continue to inform and develop educational and psychoanalytical work among children and adults today.

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[37] Melanie Klein, "The Psychoanalytic Play Technique" *New Directions In Psycho-Analysis: The Significance Of Infant Conflicts In Man And His Society* (London: Tavistock Publications, and New York: Basic Books 19 53), p.122.

[38] Galina Dolya and Sue Palmer, "Freedom of Thought", *TES,* (30 July 2004), < www.tes.com/news/freedom-thought>, [accessed January 2016].

> A child's greatest achievements are possible in play, achievements that will tomorrow become his basic level of real action and morality. It is the essence of play that a new relation is created… between situations in thought and real situations.[39]

Jean Piaget was a highly influential Swiss biologist and psychologist who developed a theory of play based on observations of cognitive development in children. These stages are *sensorimotor* (from birth to 2 years) when a child learns practice play and repetitious movements. Then follows the *preoperational* stage (2 to 7 years) when children associate objects with words and begin to externalise activity. From 7 to 11 children move through the *concrete operational* stage when logic, rules and reason play a part before they begin to understand the more social nature of play and move to the *formal operational* stage and from thence to a more mature understanding of competitive games and codes of rules. Saul McLeod helpfully summarises Piaget's contribution and explains how a number of criticisms from his contemporaries undermined many of his conclusions, although many of his views still have a strong influence on education today.

> What Piaget wanted to do was not to measure how well children could count, spell or solve problems as a way of grading their I.Q. What he was more interested in was the way in which fundamental concepts like the very idea of number, time, quantity, causality, justice and so on emerged. Piaget was the first psychologist to make a systematic study of cognitive development. His contributions include a stage theory of child cognitive development, detailed observational studies of cognition in children, and a series of simple but ingenious tests to reveal different cognitive abilities.[40]

Vygotsky, Bruner, Dasen, Keating and Baillargeon all argued against Piaget's cognitive development stages and called into question much of his research, its scope and under-generalisability.

Child's Play

Kevin J. Brehony[41] suggests that, as childhood began to be recognised and schools began to emerge at the end of the Long Century, (generally recognised by historians as the period between the years 1789 and 1914) these largely church-led institutions were dominated by moralisers and play was generally seen as a threat to order and authority. During the time of the Reformation, the so-called Protestant work ethic was significant in promoting a view of education and learning that had no place for the Platonic emphasis on play as a tool of learning. The German sociologist Max Weber[42] suggested that Puritan groups went out of their way to undermine all play activities unless they had some biblical connection or clear moral purpose. Any leisure activities, Weber reports, were strictly avoided as dissolution and honest capitalist labour was promoted. However, John Locke, despite his Puritan background, took a view more closely aligned to Plato's that play should enhance education and that if children enjoyed learning they would be more likely to accept it. Locke was opposed to coercion and encouraged appreciation of play. He wrote:

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[39] Lev Vygotsky, "Play And Its Role In The Mental Development Of The Child", *Soviet Psychology* 5:3, (1967), 6-18, <DOI: 10.2753/RPO1061-040505036>.
[40] S. A. McLeod "Jean Piaget's Theory Of Cognitive Development", *Simply Psychology* (2018), <http:/www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html>, [accessed January 2020].
[41] Kevin J. Brehony, "Theories Of Play" p. 826.
[42] M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism* (London: Allen and Unwin 1930).

> None of the things they are to learn, should ever be made a burthen to them, or impos'd on them as a *task*. Whatever is so propos'd, presently becomes irksome; the mind takes an aversion to it, though before it were a thing of delight or indifferency. Let a child but be order'd to whip his top at a certain time every day, whether he has or has not a mind to it; let this be but requir'd of him as a duty, wherein he must spend so many hours morning and afternoon, and see whether he will not soon be weary of any play at this rate. Is it not so with grown men?[43]

Locke was thus clear that children should not be forced into play as a duty but afforded the opportunity for *liberty*, a concept he held dear. Decades later Rousseau wrote in *Émile*[44] that education should be adapted to the various stages of childhood development. In one of the earliest examples of Play Theory, he encouraged play because he believed children should be happy and that more could be learned from life and from peers than from inside the classroom. His own experiences of the countryside in Bossey taught him the value of games and relaxation. This view had a strong influence on the Edgeworths (Maria and Richard) and their writings in *Practical Education*. They began their magnum opus with a chapter on the value of proper toys for children; ones that will excite and educate but not bore or distract them.

> It is surprising how much children may learn from their playthings, when they are judiciously chosen, and when the habit of reflection and observation is associated with the ideas of amusement and happiness. A little boy of nine years old, who had had a hoop to play with, asked "why a hoop, or a plate, if rolled upon its edge, keeps up as long as it rolls, but falls as soon as it stops, and will not stand if you try to make it stand still upon its edge?" Was not the boy's understanding as well employed whilst he was thinking of this phenomenon, which he observed whilst he was beating his hoop, as it could possibly have been by the most learned preceptor?[45]

The Kindergarten founder, Friedrich Froebel, expanded theories of play by making it very much a vehicle of education. He wrote in *Education of Man* that "play at this time is not trivial, it is highly serious and of deep significance."[46] He would give toys to children known as Froebel Gifts which would typically be used as education aids. Froebel recognised early on how simple playthings could guide children in their early years but also had value for adult development.

> Realising how the gifts were eventually misused by Kindergarten teachers who followed after Froebel, it is important to consider what Froebel expected the Gifts to achieve. He envisaged that the Gifts will teach the child to use his environment as an educational aid; secondly, that they will give the child an indication of the connection between human life and life in nature; and finally that they will create a bond between the adult and the child who plays with them.[47]

The *"Montesorri Method",* which endures to the present day, blended work and play similarly although Maria Montesorri wanted to make a clear distinction for children between fantasy and

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[43] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1693), p. 73.
[44] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Èmile* or *On Education* tr Allan Bloom (USA: The Perseus Books Group 1979).
[45] Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (Providence and Boston: Francis Lippitt and T. B. Wait and Sons, 1815), pp. 22, 23.
[46] Frederick Froebel, *Education Of Man* (New York: Appleton 1887), p. 55.
[47] Joachim Liebschner, "A Child's Work, Freedom And Guidance" *Educational Theory And Practice* Frederick Froebel (ed.) (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2002), p. 82.

reality. This apparent contradiction is ably explained by Angeline Lillard[48] who shows that, whilst there appears to be constraint and rigid structure to lessons, children are actually given much choice in what and how they learn. She writes that Maria Montesorri originally thought that rewarding children with small toys would encourage learning but later discovered children enjoyed learning *for its own sake* (my italics) and that itself was the reward. The enjoyment of learning became an end in itself; no external inducements were required. Montesorri education resembles playful learning in many ways, it seems, and children who participate have great *fun*. They are, however, discouraged from make-believe.

Judy Diamond, writing for the Association of Science and Technology Centres, cites the well-documented Berkeley Guidance Study conducted in California. Under the direction of Jean McFarlane, this major study followed the development of 248 infants who were born in Berkeley, California in 1928-1929. This sample was divided into two groups; an intensively studied group, which provided detailed annual information on socioeconomic conditions and family patterns, and a less intensively studied "control" group, which was matched on social and economic characteristics. Most of the children were Caucasian and Protestant, and two-thirds came from middle-class families. The basic cohort includes 214 of these children and their families who participated in the study through the 1930s and up to the end of World War II. Annual data collection ended in 1946, but there were two adult follow-ups (1959–1960 and 1969) in which most of the children participated. Usual information on play was gleaned from this study, particularly regarding gender differences in play and both Erikson and Bruner built on this. Diamond points out that Bruner saw play as a means of acquiring information and maximised flexibility by experimenting with different combinations of behaviours that would not otherwise be tried. Play also allowed children to try out basic subroutines that would later lead to more skilled activity. Bruner theorised that social play minimised consequences of behaviour in an environment that was less risky than in *real* life and helped more fully develop social communication.
Judy Diamond summarised the value of play as a tool for learning as follows:

- play provides both adults and children with experiences on which to build later learning;
- play promotes flexibility and possibly creativity in problem solving, which may or may not lead to more successful problem solving; and
- play can relieve factors that inhibit learning, such as stress. [49]

Tamsin Kelly[50] describes physical, social and emotional, communication and language and imagination and creativity as being the key areas where children engage in games and play and thus learn how to better interact with the world around them. Each of these essential areas will be a part of their games and it may easily be seen how this helps a child's early years development. She quotes Nicola Butler (Chair of *Play England*) who writes "children have an innate need to play; it's what they're biologically programmed to do."[51] It might be argued that it is what we all need to do; all humans and all animals too. Play is built into our DNA and comes as naturally as breathing.

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[48] Angeline S. Lillard, "Playful Learning and Montessori Education" *American Journal Of Play* 5:2 (2013), (pp. 157-186), <http://www.eric.ed.gov>.
[49] Judy Diamond, "Playing And Learning", *Education Learning: Theory And Practice*, <http:/astc.org>, [Accessed January 2017].
[50] Tamsin Kelly, "Why Children Are So Captivated By Play", *HuffPost* (2017). <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk> [Accessed January 2017].
[51] Kelly, "Why Children Are So Captivated By Play".

Ms Kelly also cites psychologist Linda Blair[52] who encourages parents to fully involve themselves in the play of their children; to have fun together. She writes "your child will learn something new every time he plays. Therefore, the more often you allow him time to play, the broader will be his knowledge base, and the better prepared and more eager he'll be for school – and for learning in general."[53] Tamsin Kelly emphasises the importance of allowing space for unstructured play, for unhurried play, for play outdoors and the opportunity for a child to play and dream alone because all these will help them better prepare for life.[54]

Francis Wardle juxtaposes this preceding view of play with the counter view put forward, (he says) by school administrators, many parents and most politicians that it is "a waste of time, off task behaviour, needless coddling of young children, messy and noisy, unstructured and un-educational – an unaffordable luxury in an ever-more competitive world."[55] His view of play is rather restricted and his definition lacking in breadth. Wardle's approach has been somewhat superseded by later writers but he bemoans the rise in solo activity screen-watching and harks back whimsically to the days of more natural play experiences in parks and woods. As a counterbalance to more technology inspired instruction, Dr Wardle cites Motor/Physical play, Social play, Constructive Play, Fantasy Play and Games with Rules as areas where children can more fully develop their life skills. As with Butler, Blair and Kelly (above), he emphasises the value of play that "provides the ultimate curriculum for social, physical and cognitive advancement."[56]

The Games We Play

> A mere game may be thought of as a set of relationships and activities prescribed by a set of rules, often including the designation of a space and the definition of an objective. Games, in general, may be designated as a particular kind of activity. But one may also think of game as the designation of a state of mind, a mental strategy, or an attitude. The word "game" is sometimes even used as a verb, as in such phrases as "to game a situation," though I think it a remarkably inelegant one. The play of a game is a result of a grammar of interaction as specified in the terms of rules and objectives. Common to the rules of a game is a description of "the play." A game "in play" subjugates its goal or objective to the holding together of opposing forces, an oscillation or back and forth movement among them, without resolution. There is no play when this principle fails or ceases to be operative; at that point the play of the game is over. Play is not game; game is not play. Game is played. There is the play of the game. [57]

Games have a significant element in the pursuance of play but are not all that play is. Many games have more of an element of seriousness than others and have a variety of facets connected to real life that have a bearing on psychological identity and interpersonal transaction. Many games involve play but not all games are pleasurable. Some games are closer to the pure concept of play and are indulged for their own sake and no ulterior motive.

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[52] Linda Blair, *The Happy Child: Everything You Need To Know To Raise Enthusiastic, Confident Children* (London: Hachette Digital, 2009).
[53] Blair, *The Happy Child* p. 102.
[54] Kelly, "Why Children Are So Captivated By Play".
[55] Francis Wardle, "Play As Curriculum", *Early Childhood News* March/April (1999), <http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com>, [Accessed January 2017].
[56] Wardle, Ibid.
[57] Sam Gill, "Play" *Dancing Culture Religion* Richard Carp and Rebecca Sachs Norris (eds.) (USA: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 5.

Not all games may appear at first sight to be confined to entirely leisure pursuits. The Games of the Roman amphitheatre were "games" where gladiators would maim and kill one another for the entertainment of the viewing crowds. Gambling is almost as old a concept as the idea of play itself and whilst being a source of pleasure it has connected corollories that fit more easily into the category of work.

Games and Play are used as ways of making sense of the world and this is particularly true in interpersonal connection and especially in the area of sexual relationships. The insights of Transactional Analysis explore the ways in which game playing develop and mediate relationships between different groups in society.

"Game Play" as a form of psychological outworking can even be played out on the international stage between peoples, cultures and nations to achieve desired ends although, as with less macrocosmic activities, this "formal" play begins to move even further away from the basic concept of autotelic amusement. George R.R. Martin explores this greater game concept via the fantasy world of Westeros in the book and TV series, *A Game of Thrones*.[58]

Examples of formal play are participation in activities such as sport and leisure and may involve vigorous or sedentary behaviour on the part of the player. Some forms of play include a goal for the participant that is different from merely providing pleasure. Some play involves single person participation but most play involves more than one person and in many cases a whole group such as in "team games". Even when play is undertaken by a single individual there can still be a role for the observer.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, psychiatrist Eric Berne began to explain human behaviour using the playing of games as a metaphor. Whereas Freud and his peers explained behaviour through listening to conversation, Berne studied social interaction and the ways people related to one another. He called this Transactional Analysis and his seminal work *Games People Play* was published in 1964. Although Berne is recognised mostly for his contributions to psychoanalysis and sociology, for the purposes of this study, his work is most interesting for its descriptions of the way people *play games* with each other. His definition of games is enlightening.

> A Game is an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively it is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or, more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or "gimmick". Games are clearly differentiated from procedures, rituals and pastimes by two chief characteristics: 1) their ulterior equality and 2) the payoff. Procedures may be successful, rituals effective, and pastimes profitable, but all of them are by definition candid; they may involve contest, but not conflict, and the ending may be sensational, but it is not dramatic. Every game, on the other hand, is basically dishonest, and the outcome has a dramatic, as distinct from merely exciting, quality.[59]

Berne listed Life Games, Marital Games, Party Games, Sexual Games, Underworld Games, Consulting Room Games and Good Games and further subdivided each category. His game

[58] George R. R. Martin, *A Game Of Thrones* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
[59] Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 44.

names were somewhat quirky and eccentric and didn't always resonate with popular experience. Critics of Berne suggest TA is over-simplistic and taking little account of mental illness or psychological conditioning. One response to TA – *reparenting* became later discredited and led to a subsequent devaluing of Berne's approach. Books like *I'm OK, You're OK*[60] from the TA stable, were criticised for not taking sufficient account of other fields of expertise. Nevertheless, Berne's populist language won him many followers and his approach to social interaction still has a lot to teach us on the wider issues of play and what is now known as Game Theory.

Caillois devoted much of his book *Man, Play and Game* to demonstrating how games contribute to life and culture. He classifies games under four main rubrics: agôn, alea, mimicry and ilinx.

> All four indeed belong to the domain of play. One plays football, billiards, or chess (agôn); roulette or a lottery (alea); pirate, Nero, or Hamlet (mimicry); or one produces in oneself, by a rapid twirling or falling movement, a state of dizziness and disorder (ilinx).[61]

With the advent of the digital age, play as a consciously engaged-in activity has become very widely available and with the wide use of smartphone technology, everybody seems to be playing games everywhere. There has been a similar expansion of understanding of game theory and play theory and a wide variety of articles written on the subject of play. Gwen Gordon attempts a "universal definition" and lists the areas of atomic, biological, "higher animal", psychological, cultural and cosmic play. She juggles the concepts of order and chaos and explores how play bisociates them in a tantalising mélange. In the rather poetic conclusion to her article she writes:

> While this is, indeed, a rule-bound universe, within the rules, as within any game, the play ensues. If the rules and order become too restrictive, trickster chaos stirs things up, disrupting the status quo, and revitalizing the play. Play requires both boundaries (order) and the impulse to cross them (chaos). When chaos and order are balanced we find highly sensitive, flexible, cosmic erogenous zones filled with exquisite play—dynamic spiral galaxies that give birth to planets and planets in which liquid water offers the universal play bow to life, which responds by bursting into a billion forms of play. By offering a universal definition of play, we hope to not only expand our vision of the cosmos, building on without diminishing our scientific heritage, but also provide the basis for understanding the transformative powers of play at all scales of the universe.[62]

In addition to the writing of the theorists and theologians, there are the usual contributions from the practitioners who *do* play. These include game theorists, game designers and those involved with children's play in all its varied aspects. Ian Bogost is a professor of interactive computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is also a philosopher and game designer. Whilst his book *Play Anything*, is enjoyable and engaging, his arguments that *life is not a game* and that we do not know how to play can be challenging. Bogost argues that games are not appealing because they are fun but because they are limiting. It is the limitation factor that make the games fun. He writes:

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[60] Thomas A. Harris, *I'm OK, You're OK* (New York: HarperCollins, 1967).
[61] Caillois, *Man, Play And Games* p. 12.
[62] Gwen Gordon, "What Is Play? In Search Of A Universal Definition" *Play and Culture Studies*, Vol 8, (Spring 2008) (pp. 16, 17), <http:/www.gwengordonplay.com/pdf/what_is_play.pdf>, [Accessed November 2015].

> Over the course of this book, I will upset the deep and intuitive beliefs about seemingly simple concepts like play and its supposed result, fun. It's not only that we don't know how to play effectively; it's also that our ordinary sense of the term is wrong. We think that in play we do what we want, that we release ourselves from external duty and obligation and finally yield to our clearest innermost desires. We think we know what we want, and we believe that we are in control of our fates. But all these beliefs are mistaken.[63]

Bogost writes in an engaging rhetorical style, drawing on personal experience of life in an allegorical fashion that is appealing to a preacher. His book is filled with compelling sound bites and intriguing and even eccentric cross-references. However, the arguments may go too far. *Deep and intuitive beliefs* may indeed be upset and the abandonment of Huizinga's principles are disconcerting and his arguments that play should not be self-indulgent seem to be missing the point of play as non-sense and point-less. In some ways, his position seems to work at a more experiential level but this misses the deeper ontological level explored by some earlier writers where play becomes sacred because it is wholly *other*.

In contrast, Berne goes as far as to suggest that all life is a game. In something as simple as acknowledging a person we pass in the street, we play a *game* in the way we respond. Setting the groundwork for the psychological framework of Transactional Analysis, Berne describes how the "game" proceeds with each passer-by offering the other a "stroke" (worth so many points), varying in intensity according to the prevailing circumstances. Although TA has been criticised by later writers who have either dismissed or amended it, the argument is still well made that rituals and games with in-built rules still dominate social intercourse across all cultures. Here we begin to touch on a dichotomy that has intrigued many writers (and increasingly in later years, play theorists) that is the distinction between an Apollonian order and discipline and a Dionysian trend to passion and chaos.

A Christian Understanding of Play

Robert K. Johnston, in *The Christian at Play*, takes a more theological approach to the subject. Seizing on Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, he emphasises the love the great twentieth century martyr had for play, recounting how, in prison, he read many stories and novels "just for fun."[64] Bonhoeffer believed life should be a combination of work and play and that the church should rediscover friendship, music, games and happiness and thus be reconnected with the Middles Ages. If the Church could reimagine the idea of freedom, then it was best suited in the modern world to fully appreciate the joy of the aesthetic values of art, music, games and play.

Professor Johnston discusses contributions on the area of play from Keen, Moltmann, Berger and Lewis, looking at Total Ideology, Politics and Preparation for Religion. The discussion of the three theological options is interesting. Johnston posits biblical models of play from a "Greek", "Protestant" and "Hebraic" standpoint. He goes on to discuss play in its relationship to work (a popular approach amongst many writers) before returning in his conclusion to

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[63] Ian Bogost, *Play Anything: The Pleasure Of Limits, The Uses Of Boredom And The Secret Of Games* (New York: Basic Books, 2016) p. xi.

[64] Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian At Play* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997) p. 141.

Bonhoeffer, who has clearly influenced him strongly. Johnston argues passionately that Bonhoeffer's stance will lead us to a better and more integrated life.

> Our work dominated value scheme and our reigning technocracy have obscured our vision of life's full possibilities. In this situation the Christian church could serve a prophetic role within the wider society –if it only would. Unfortunately, Christian theologians have scarcely fared better than general society in understanding the necessity of a balanced life. Some have included play within their work agendas, while others have made play central to their mission of self-fulfilment. But whether "play as politics" or "play as total ideology", the results have been similar: life has been reduced to something less than itself. We as a church do not know how to play.[65]

Johnston's book is engaging and interesting, particularly from a theological standpoint, and shows a wide understanding of the subject of play as it relates to church life and life in general.

Jürgen Moltmann's contribution to play theory is particularly worthy of mention not only because he is an eminent professor of theology but because he handles the subject itself in a playful way. Wes Ellis[66] comments on his work *Theology of Play* where Moltmann encourages us to move from more adult ideas of work-orientated goal and purpose to a more childlike position of enjoying God for His own sake. This he sees as a journey from law to gospel. Moltmann reiterates the idea of play as being purposeless and done for its own sake. Ellis brings this out clearly (italics are direct quotations from Moltmann):

> *...to confuse the enjoyment of God and our existence with goals and purposes sacrifices the freedom of liberation* that is the good news of Jesus Christ. *Life as rejoicing in liberation, as solidarity with those in bondage, as play with reconciled existence, and as pain at unreconciled existence demonstrates the Easter event in the world.* We are to learn from children and learn to play, to play without any "purpose" as such. Indeed the very *question of purpose is the question of the adult in the child who doesn't want to play anymore but needs goals in order to make something respectable of himself*. The Christian life, according to Moltmann, is not to be envisioned as a 'purpose driven life' but, perhaps, as a game of delight in the God who creates and redeems the world for nothing.[67]

Ellis describes *The Theology of Play* as "one of Moltmann's greatest works";[68] a bold claim for such a well-respected academic but a powerful endorsement of the influence of play. Nevertheless, Johnston criticises Moltmann for his lack of consistency. He believes Moltmann emphasises promise over fulfilment, ethics over aesthetics and mission over rest[69] and thus over-politicises play to stress its function more than its self-contained meaning.

Johnston turns to a sociologist and to a literary critic in Peter Berger and C.S. Lewis respectively to present a truer picture of play in what he (to my mind unhelpfully) describes as "preparatory to religion."[70]

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[65] Johnston, Ibid. p. 143.
[66] Wesley Ellis, (Review of "Theology of Play" by Jurgen Moltmann) *Goodreads*, <http:/goodread.com>, (2013), [Accessed October 2019].
[67] Ellis, Ibid.
[68] Ellis, Ibid.
[69] Johnston, Ibid. p. 70.
[70] Johnston, Ibid. p. 71.

> Berger believes that play carries within itself the capacity for ecstasy. That is, in play we are able to step outside the "taken-for-granted reality of everyday life" and open ourselves up to the mystery that surrounds us on all sides. Play has a transcendent dimension, though it is important to note that this theological rootage is found not in the mystical or extraordinary but in a basic experience common to all.[71]

Lewis, of all writers the most readily recognisable, not for his literary critiques or even his remarkable theology, but for his widely read fiction in *The Chronicles of Narnia* now made even more famous by Walden on the big screen. His creation of Aslan as a kind of metaJesus and the world of Narnia beyond the wardrobe door presents us with a more than allegorical description of the world of play and its value. Johnston suggests that Lewis shows us "play can become the avenue through which God communes with us."[72] Lewis not only writes of the value of play (without literally describing the word) but experiences it in his life. In *Surprised by Joy* he writes of the *joy* that can be known from an external source which has some resonance with Spariosu's description of the *irenic* experience, though Spariosu might cite a less theistic explanation.

Lewis and Berger's understanding is not as ideological as Keen's nor as politicised as Moltmann's but, Johnston insists, it does present play as part of God's intention for humanity, the way in which we should most profoundly relate to Him. He cites Bonhoeffer again in a remarkable passage sent to Eberhard and Renate Bethge.

> I wonder whether it is possible (it almost seems so today) to regain the idea of the *Church* as providing an understanding of the area of freedom (art, education, friendship, play) so that Kierkegaard's "aesthetic existence" would not be banished from the Church's sphere but would be re-established within it? I really think so … Who is there, for instance, in our time, who can devote himself with an easy mind to music, friendship, games, or happiness? Surely not the "ethical" man but only the Christian.[73]

In Berger and Lewis at least, the understanding of play seems to have moved beyond the sterility of academia to the empirical. Play, it seems, cannot just be studied; it must also be *played*.

Of less eminence but no less interest is *Fools Rush In* by the late clown-priest Roly Bain. Bain's writings on games, play and foolishness come from a wealth of first-hand experience, entertaining churches and communities with circus-based antics conveying a spiritual message. He writes:

> The clown reminds us that we're allowed to fail, that we can learn from failure, laugh at failure and move on. … In a society that is geared to success, even success at all costs, the clown is a necessary counterbalance to that mentality. Here stands a walking disaster, a happy failure, a total misfit who is yet capable of all things and seems to be in touch and tune with things that others never even dream of. But of course it can go wrong and does go wrong if we lose that element of playfulness– the weak remain weak if they're not happy in their weakness and cannot play with it and in it.[74]

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[71] Robert K. Johnston, Ibid. p. 73.
[72] Robert K. Johnston, Ibid. p. 80.
[73] Robert K. Johnston, Ibid. p. 81.
[74] Roly Bain, *Fools Rush In* (London: HarperCollins, Marshall Pickering, 1993), p.70.

Bain's work reminds his readers of simple values and enduring truths wrapped up in humour and childlike naivety. His homespun bathos disguises some important lessons for the would be play theorist that may well translate into the wider world and, although *Fools Rush In* caters for rather a niche-market, it nevertheless conveys an important message that matches Spariosu's liminality.

Another faith writer who has contributed to the debate over play theory is Jean-Jacques Suurmond whose interesting book *Word and Spirit at Play*[75] explores how a theological understanding of play contributes to the twentieth century phenomenon of Pentecostalism. Suurmond is a Dutch columnist and pastor who was converted in the 1970s, when active as a hippie, turned to the Christian faith and became involved in the Pentecostal movement. He studied at the Central Pentecostal Bible College and received his B.A. from the Continental Bible College in Brussels and his M.A. and Ph.D. (1983) at the Fuller Theological Seminary in California. He also holds the European certificate for psychotherapy (ECP) and had a practice as a gestalt therapist from 1999 to 2010. Nowadays, he works in Haarlem as a preacher, counsellor, supervisor/coach and lectures in the field of spirituality.

For the purposes of this study, Suurmond's work is of particular interest, not so much as it contributes to an understanding of charismatic practice, but as a treatise on play as an expression of God. Ford[76] uses the concept of dance to describe the interweaving movement of life and the Greek term *perichoresis* to describe what takes place within the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit dance and *play* together. In effect, Suurmond describes God as *autotelic*, insisting that both those who claim the need for God and those who see Him as irrelevant and superfluous begin from the wrong premise. God is not "useful"; He is an end in Himself. Suurmond further insists that we need to replace the question "how does the world work?" with the question "why does the world work?" and from there move to the conclusion that "the world is called into being 'for nothing' in a pure game of love"[77] and that we, created in His image, were made for pla*y*. Suurmond warms to his subject, explaining that when we live playfully, fully enjoying the benefits of the *Sabbath*, then we become more fully human and even begin to resemble God. Purposefulness and utility are in fact delusions of a neurotic civilization.

Suurmond further explores Sabbath play in church history and critiques the church's desire to establish form and order at the expense of the life of the Spirit. He gives a number of examples of the detrimental effects of this policy. He also explores play and humour, a theme taken up elsewhere by Kuschel[78] who looks at Sarah in the Old Testament, Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Mozart, Kafka and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Suurmond says that those who can laugh at themselves are the freest and most human. More than anything, Suurmond stresses that Pentecostalism and its corollary, charismatic renewal, are an outworking of the playful and dynamic nature of God expressed through humans becoming what they were created for.

Threshold

[75] Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *Word And Spirit At Play* Translated by John Bowden from the Dutch *Het Spel Van Woord En Geest Uitgeverij Ten Have Bv* (London: SCM, 1994).
[76] David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living* (London: Harper Collins [Fount], 1997).
[77] Suurmond, Ibid. p.31.
[78] Karl-Joseph Kuschel, *Laughter: A Theological Reflection* (London: SCM, 1994).

One of the foremost proponents of play theory in the late twentieth century has been Brian Sutton-Smith whose prodigious output (50 books and more than 350 articles) has consistently promoted the theme that play applies not just to children but adults as well. He builds on Huizinga's ideas of play being so central to life and suggests that it has a powerful evolutionary aspect as well. In *The Ambiguity of Play*, Sutton-Smith lists ideologies (or "rhetorics") of play relating to progress, fate, power, identity, imagination, self and frivolity. His writing is complex and as inter-disciplinary as the subject he addresses. He takes as much effort to emphasise what play is *not* as what it *is* and thus underlines its paradoxical nature. As Robert Fagen (a favourite of Sutton-Smith) says:

> The most irritating feature of play is not the perceptual incoherence, as such, but rather, that play taunts us with its inaccessibility. We feel that something is behind it all, but we do not know, or have forgotten how to see it.[79]

Sutton-Smith tackles head-on the whimsical and paradoxical nature of play which is picked up in the title of his *magnum opus* on the subject. He deals immediately with the idea of *threshold* or *liminality* that is so much the theme of Spariosu's writings

> We all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity. Some of the most outstanding scholars of children's play have been concerned by this ambiguity. For example, classical scholar Mihail Spariosu (1989) calls play "amphibolous," which means it goes in two directions at once and is not clear. Victor Turner (1969), the anthropologist, calls play "liminal" or "liminoid," meaning that it occupies a threshold between reality and unreality, as if, for example, it were on the beach between the land and the sea. Geoffrey Bateson (1955), biologist, suggests that play is a paradox because it both is and is not what it appears to be. Animals at play bite each other playfully, knowing that the playful nip connotes a bite, but not what a bite connotes. In turn, Richard Schechner (1988), dramaturge, suggests that a playful nip is not only not a bite, it is also *not* not a bite. That is, it is a positive, the sum of two negatives. Which is again to say that the playful nip may not be a bite, but it is indeed what a bite means.[80]

Mihai Spariosu has written and contributed to eighteen books, many of which touch on play, fantasy and what he terms *liminality*. In *Literature, Mimesis and Play*[81], *Dionysus Reborn*[82], *God of Many Names*[83] and especially *The Wreath of Wild Olive*[84]. Spariosu attempts "to sketch a broad genealogical outline of the concept of play in Western thought, with special emphasis on the agon between aesthetics and ethics, or between poetry and philosophy, as initiated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*"[85]. He is fascinated by the ethereal idea of *liminality* or threshold, a modern concept that explores the passageway between worlds and replaces the hitherto popular word *otherness*.

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[79] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity Of Play* p. 2.
[80] Sutton-Smith, Ibid. p. 1.
[81] M.I. Spariosu, *Literature, Mimesis And Play* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1982).
[82] M.I. Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn: Play And The Aesthetic Dimension In Modern Philosophical And Scientific Discourse* (New York: Cornell University, 1989).
[83] M.I. Spariosu, *God of Many Names: Play, Poetry And Power In Hellenic Thought From Homer To Aristotle* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991).
[84] M.I. Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature* (USA: State University of New York Press, 1997).
[85] Spariosu, *Wreath* p. xii.

> Spariosu's book is one of the most compelling accounts of the nature of play that I have ever encountered. Its breadth and depth of knowledge are remarkable, its understanding of the importance of play acute. I know of no other book that probes the notion of play from as many different angles and that manages to provoke as many different questions on the topic as this one[86]

Spariosu's ideas are fascinating, the breadth of his knowledge, the focus of his writing and the ingenuity of his application. His presentation of the *playful critic* who fosters cooperation rather than combat is compelling since it resonates greatly with my own approach which holds in tension the professional order of a parish priest with the playful provocation of a clown; a kind of *liminal* ministry. I appreciate that many, if not most, clergy take a far more vocational view of ordained priesthood than I but then the dynamic (one might almost say "mystical") overlap between the clown and the clergyman means that the "call" is just to be different and in that difference to *make* a difference. Francis of Assisi would send out his disciples with the admonition *Go into the world and preach the gospel … use words if you have to*. Not all that may be conveyed of truth, insight and wisdom applies to the printed page or even the spoken word. Sometimes, and in my experience, often, clowns "say" a great deal more than theologians and even have significantly more opportunity to do so.

Professor Spariosu is widely respected and draws on a wealth of knowledge to convey his arguments. His exploration of *liminality* may have other resonances for the practice of ministry, in particular in its relationship to ritual and rites of passage common to parish clergy. Arnold van Gennep[87] used the concept of *liminality* in his description of the three stages of rites of passage.

A significant factor in play theory is the tension between play that is seen as orderly and governed by rules and the play that is chaotic and irrational. Sutton-Smith contrasts these two approaches and cites two of his favourite authors in Huizinga and Spariosu. Huizinga's whole work deals with play as part of history and culture in an orderly way, almost presupposing a tidy pattern for life. Although he covers the more *disordered* manifestations of play relating to war, games of chance and the role-plays associated with social interaction, he tends to emphasise ritual and pattern and play as a tool of education. Spariosu, on the other hand, is not afraid to explore play as a chaotic pre-rational drive that will not be confined by rule and regulation. One might expect a Transylvanian play theorist who writes stories about vampires and werewolves to be unafraid of controversy and Mihai Spariosu attempts to go places other more conventional writers avoid. It seems it is the very indefinable nature of play that has caused many Western philosophers to keep play within the realms of understanding or keep play within the sphere of the playground, nursery and park. It is the tension between Apollo and Dionysus, touched on by many play theorists, that wrongly differentiates work and play or fails to grasp the nettle of play as agonistic, eccentric or meaningless. Gordon explores this with her concept of play as a chaos *trickster* who loves to subvert the rules, though perhaps she creates a false dichotomy between order and chaos where play has a foot in both camps, both working within the rules to create a game and breaking the rules for *fun*. Berne alludes to this in his definition of games as being separate from rituals, pastimes and procedures, though his use of the word *dishonest* can be misleading. Games must have rules to be games and yet must also break the rules in order to be fun. Gordon admitted the difficulty in her task of finding a

[86] James S. Hans, Wake Forest University, quotation on the back cover of M.I. Spariosu, *Wreath.*
[87] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routlege, 1960).

universal definition of play, a task most twentieth century play theorists consider an exercise in folly, and then proved her point by closing her monograph with a demonstration of whimsy. What fun!

Now the review begins to touch on the heart of the subject that challenges many philosophers and theorists so strongly. How do we define *Play* and how do we seriously examine the subject without ourselves being caught up in its Puckish embrace? Can we apply rationale and even scientific study to an issue that is so indefinable, so all-permeating and so mischievous? Is it possible to bring objective and rigorous academic attention to the matter with a straight face and a cool head? Is a theoretical framework possible for such an elusive yet ontologically endemic issue? Can the paradoxical fact that play is important because it is *not* important have anything to do with its *liminal* nature as a phenomenon that plays on the beach between the reality of the land and the fantasy of the sea? As we consider this, we turn to the issue for which this phenomenon may have a prophylactic or at least mediating value.

The Understanding of Stress

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. According to *Psychology Today*:

> Stress generally refers to two things: the psychological perception of pressure, on the one hand, and the body's response to it, on the other, which involves multiple systems, from metabolism to muscles to memory. Through hormonal signalling, the perception of danger sets off an automatic response system, known as the fight-or-flight response, that prepares all animals to meet a challenge or flee from it. A stressful event —whether an external phenomenon like the sudden appearance of a snake on your path or an internal event like fear of losing your job when the boss yells at you—triggers a cascade of hormones including adrenaline and cortisol, that surge through the body, speeding heartbeat and the circulation of blood, mobilizing fat and sugar for fast energy, focusing attention, preparing muscles for action, and more. It generally takes some time for the body to calm down after the stress response has been triggered.[88]

Stress is the state that occurs not just in response to negative circumstances; it is as much a normal part of life as emotional expressions or particular mind-sets and ways of thinking. Stress puts the body on alert to defend itself from danger or to distance the individual from that danger, real or imagined. As such, stress is a vital part of life and essential for normal living. The area of stress and pressure that is the focus of this dissertation is what is sometimes referred to as "negative stress" - the pressure and related anxiety that leads to dysfunctionality in the human condition. Further, this work deals almost exclusively with the stress that arises from the *practice of ministry* engaged by clergy and church leaders.

Hans Selye, considered by many to be the father of the stress concept refers to stress as General Adaptation Syndrome (G.A.S.) and describes stress as essentially "the rate of wear and tear in the body and also as the non-specific response of the body to any demand."[89] Dr Selye immediately calls us to recognise that stress is not necessarily a bad thing since it has both positive and negative connotations. He draws the distinction between *di*stress and *eu*stress. The

[88] Stanley Coren, Samoon Ahmad, Christopher Bergland and Robert Enright, "What Causes Stress?", *Psychology Today* (2017) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/stress>, [Accessed January 2017].
[89] Hans Selye, *The Stress Of Life* (revised edition) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), p. 1.

latter can provide the resources we need to cope with daily life; in fact, it is essential to wellbeing.

Doublet refers to Selye as the *inventor* of stress and comments "the only way you can feel stress is through your imagination."[90] In his recent book, *The Stress Myth*, Doublet seeks to show that stress, whilst a legitimate experience, is a state of mind rather than a disease or condition. Understanding this, says Doublet, will help us to treat sufferers more effectively rather than helping those "making a living out of the stress or depression industry."[91]

Cooper and Dewe[92] present us with a helpful overview of stress with their short work and remind us that the term stress was originally applied to machinery in the industrial revolution. Writers have described stress as either the effect of strain placed upon a physical body or the result of the depletion of energy expended in keeping that body functioning. Both metaphors come from industrial parlance. Cooper and Dewe give us a helpful history of the last three centuries which show the development of stress up to the modern day. Just as the Industrial Revolution originated the term stress, so the eighteenth century began to link the conditions we now refer to as *stress* or *stress-related* as having a nervous origin although they were then referred to in such terms as *nerves, vapours* or *hysteria*. An antithesis began to develop between a purely mechanistic understanding and, with the developing understanding of psychology, and more ethereal or "spiritual" forces. By the end of the nineteenth century three founding forms – the *conscious*, the *unconscious* and *adaptation* as expressions of psychology - were in evidence.

Writers on the subject of stress are quick to assert that historically, understanding of the term has differed widely. Not only is there the tension between a biological and mechanistic understanding and a more psychological and unconscious explanation but also a growing confusion as the meaning of the word and the condition it describes becomes less clear with the passage of time. It is almost as though stress becomes a term to describe a culture and mindset rather than a specific condition. Cooper and Dewe quote Ader who describes stress as "a label that has become progressively more descriptive than explanatory."[93]

The main aim of Cooper and Dewe's work is to emphasise that an understanding of the history of a subject will deepen one's appreciation of its purpose and meaning. This is particularly true when we approach the issue of stress. In addition to the insights of the past, Cooper and Dewe add the organising concept of the future, the distinction between description and meaning and the moral responsibility to understand stress as the four themes that will significantly assist us in reducing the "human suffering associated with ill health."[94]

The physician Keith Sehnert has produced a mass-market paperback that addresses the issue of stress as a condition to be understood and managed.[95] Writing from a Christian perspective, Sehnert uses examples from his own practice and studies to illustrate his points. In place of eustress Sehnert uses *unstress* to describe the condition we should aim for. He points to the three stages of stress outlined by Selye: alarm, resistance and exhaustion. Sehnert emphasises that his experience of dealing with the symptoms of stress is that it is a wake-up call for the

[90] Serge Doublet, *The Stress Myth* (Chesterfield: Science and Humanities Press, 1999), loc. 157.
[91] Doublet, Ibid. loc. 4128.
[92] Cary Cooper, and Philip Dewe, *Stress: A Brief History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 85-86.
[93] Cary and Dewe, Ibid. loc. 1421.
[94] D. Bartlett, *Stress: Perspectives And Processes* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998).
[95] Keith Sehnert, *Stress/Unstress* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981).

individual to act in order to prevent further deterioration. He suggests five ways to manage stress, these being change to work and social environment, managing emotions, learning remedies to unstress, looking after your physical needs and providing for your spiritual needs. Sehnert closes his work by saying "Stress/Unstress is more than a book about how to handle stress. It is a book about how to handle life."[96]

Writing in the 80's, before the world "went viral", Gordon MacDonald[97] writes of the need for carefully disciplined facets of everyday life to ensure escaping the dangers of burnout and breakdown. MacDonald writes about *Safe Places*, *Still Times* and *Special Friends*. He illustrates this with bible passages, stories from his life experience and helpful analogies that resonate with everyday practice. The three phrases italicised above relate respectively to *the Map*, *the Diary* and *the Address Book* of our lives and it is here, as MacDonald emphasises, we discover who God is, what God wants and how best we can do God's will. These provisions in our lives all help us to adjust our Work/Life balance (a phrase MacDonald never uses!) and restore to us our passion for life and relationship with God.

A few years later Rick Swenson, a Canadian physician-futurist, writes in his seminal book *Margin*, of the need to make "space" in the modern world. Writing for a much wider audience that MacDonald, albeit a more North American one, Dr. Swenson pertinently addresses the modern disease of restlessness and workaholism.
Just as we understand the need for proper utilisation of physical space such as in the ordering of a room or office, so we need also to adjust temporal space so that we do not overload our schedules. We know that it may be physically possible to stuff twenty desks, thirty chairs, forty computers, two photocopiers and half a dozen filing cabinets into an office space designed only for two of each by the simple expedient of racking and stacking them but we would then be unable to do any work. However, in the management of our day, we think nothing of squeezing in meeting after meeting, even to the point of leaving one meeting early to arrive at the next one late, just so that we can do more. We have to learn to live with margins. Quoting the Mennonite author, Doris Longacre, Swenson writes:

> Profit-making work began to swallow Sundays and holidays. No wonder everyone has been getting so tired. Obviously much of this fatigue takes place in the name of making more money, even though the pantry's already stocked. After all, by burning a little more gas and working one more evening a week, it is possible to chase down one more account, open another store, or farm another field. But it may not be possible to love a spouse, children, and the friendless poor at the same time.[98]

Those who write about the Work/Life balance, whether from a sacred or secular stance, often do so from the perspective of shape or rhythm, understanding that emphasis often oscillates between times of stillness and times of busyness and that there is indeed a balance to be struck which is dynamic rather than static, dependent upon circumstances both cultural and psychological.

Stress in the Workplace

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[96] Sehnert Ibid. p. 196.
[97] Gordon MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* (Godalming: Highland Books, 1986).
[98] Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *Margin* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress Publishing Group, 1992), pp. 210-211.

There is an increasing amount of discussion in the media about stress in the workplace. Sir Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University said he was about to embark on a study of the effect of emails on the workplace and their impact on family life, because it had recently emerged as a major issue. "Technology, rather than being an enabler, is creating more stress he said. Data from his research and European studies showed job insecurity affected up to half of employees, many working over 45 hours a week, while one third spent less than one hour a night with their children."[99] Professor Cooper said:

> Instead of using technology to improve people's working lives, thereby increasing productivity, it has become a harsh taskmaster ... We have embraced technology almost too much. Emails are damaging us, we don't control them – they control us. People say they have got through their emails by the end of day, but that's not work. People should be banned from sending emails to each other in the same building. They should be discouraged from checking emails after work, when they should be spending time with their family and returning to work refreshed. A company in California shut the server down after-hours and maybe that's what we have to do, to re-boot ourselves as human beings. Checking emails on holiday – that's sick ...[100]

There are a great many self-help books available advising us how to achieve the best balance between work, rest and play, amongst the foremost being from Dale Carnegie[101] and Steven Covey[102]. In *Death by Meeting*[103], Patrick Lencioni likens business meetings to the drama of watching a movie where a problem is presented, dealt with and concluded. Lencioni posits that conflict is absolutely necessary for effective human relations at work. It seems stress on the screen is entertaining and the appropriate level of stress in the boardroom can be equally effective in livening up boring meetings. Lencioni's highly entertaining book encourages us to take a fresh look at an area that might previously be thought of as counter-productive.

Paul Wilson has produced another light-hearted self-help book on how to generate more calmness and wellbeing in the work place. He writes:

> Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to feel stressed or worried while you're having fun? One cancels out the other. As well, you can overcome many of the long-term effects of stress in this way. It's an old-fashioned concept, I admit, but I believe work should not only be satisfying but enjoyable. Fun even. This applies whether you're an actor, accounts clerk or an ambulance driver.[104]

Although Wilson spends his book describing ways in which stress can be minimised by simple easy-to-learn exercises, he recognises the value of positive stress. "Positive stress is fun and life-enriching"[105] he says.

Self-help books are proliferating where stress increases due to magnified pressures in the work place. Under the heading *Slavery in the City*, The Independent newspaper reported on the death of Moritz Erhardt of Bank America Merrill Lynch who died, apparently from overwork, at the

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[99] Hope, "How To Improve Productivity".
[100] Hope, Ibid.
[101] Dale Carnegie, *How To Stop Worrying And Start Living* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1944).
[102] Stephen R. Covey, *First Things First* (UK: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
[103] Patrick Lencioni, *Death by Meeting* (San Francisco CA: Jossey Bass, 2004).
[104] Paul Wilson, *Calm at Work* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 27.
[105] Paul Wilson, Ibid. p. 33.

end of a seven-week internship[106]. Nick Farndale, writing in The Telegraph, asks "are we getting the balance right?"[107] Citing the Office for National Statistics he quotes:

> Just over 48% of adults still have "relatively low satisfaction" with their work-life balance and believe they spend too long at their desks. Not only that, more than one-third of employees eat lunch at their desks. And research by Thomson Holidays shows that half of working parents don't use up their holiday allowance, and that one in five of us feels too busy at work to get away.

Farndale also cites Julia Hobsbawm, founder of the networking business *Editorial Intelligence* who uses the principle of *techno-shabat* to take a break from mobile and laptop. She says:

> I put sleep central to my efforts at work-life balance. A third of our time should be spent sleeping, a third working, and a third being with your family, friends and having a life. If you aren't getting a third of each you have to ask yourself why not. The challenge is to not think of ourselves as being victims at the mercy of all these choices. It's about managing the choices. So you also have to ask yourself: 'Do I like what I do and do I have any power to change jobs if I don't?'[108]

Hobsbawm's discipline echoes the principle of work, rest and play (a phrase popular with Puritans as well as chocolate bar manufacturers) which many believe is at the heart of a balanced day that promotes a flourishing life.

Stress in the Practice of Ministry

Since this thesis is concerned mainly with the stress associated with the practice of ministry, it is worth considering what evidence exists for this amongst church leaders and particularly with Church of England clergy.

Writing for the Bible Reading Fellowship, Tony Horsfall[109] links the pattern of Jesus' ministry as seen in the gospels to busyness and the pressure of church ministry today. With many years of leading not only a local church but also numerous retreats, Tony Horsfall helpfully cites Jesus' call in Mark 6 for the disciples to come apart from the work place and seek a place of rest. Quoting William Barclay's commentary on Mark, Horsfall notes the value of *rhythm,* getting the balance right between activity and withdrawal, the delicate balance between the market place and the secret place. Like MacDonald[110], Horsfall understands the value of still times and safe places to *be* with God in order that work and service may be more effectively *done*.

It is interesting to note differences of emphasis and understanding portrayed in two different periodicals, separated not only by the Atlantic Ocean but by over a decade and a half of time.

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[106] Joshi Herrmann, "A Year On From Intern Moritz Erhardt's Death, Has Banking Industry Changed It's Ways?", *The Independent,* (10 August 2014), <http:/www.independent.co.uk>, [Accessed November 2019].
[107] Nigel Farndale, "Are You Getting The Balance Right?", *The Telegraph,* (22 February 2013), <http:/www.telegraph.co.uk>, [Accessed January 2017].
[108] Farndale, Ibid.
[109] Tony Horsfall, *Rhythms Of Grace: Finding Intimacy With God In A Busy Life* (Oxford: BRF, 2012).
[110] MacDonald, *Restoring.*

Both *Leadership* [111] and *ReSource* [112] write for a church constituency in an evangelical/charismatic context but whereas the former presents articles focused primarily on dealing with the experiences of the working pastor, the latter discusses the value of Sabbath. *Leadership,* in an issue dealing mainly with preaching, portrays the work experience of seven hard-working pastors, asking: "What's an Honest Day's Work in Ministry?" Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Evangelical and Pentecostal church leaders talk frankly about taking time off, having meals with their families, holidays and the amount of time they spend in ministry each week. The *Ministry Doer's Profile* of the seven showed an average of 7 nights out and 4 working breakfasts each in two weeks and an average of 7 hours a night sleep. Two and half weeks was the average annual holiday period and an average of only 3 meals in a week was taken with family. 9 hours was the average time spent in church on Sunday. The article showed a very strong work ethic amongst these clergy and a powerful belief that their congregations expected them to work hard.

Articles on Sabbath and stillness in the 2010 summer issue of *ReSource*[113] magazine have an understandably more British flavour. Martin Cavender writes of lessons learned about waiting when delayed at the airport in Lusaka and editor Christine Zwart writes of a fear of silence engendered by her first teacher – a nun. There are wonderful articles on experiencing Sabbath from Bishop Gordon Mursell and Rabbi Jonathan Romain and also reflections on holidays, pilgrimages and sabbaticals. In contrast with the earlier *Leadership* observations that profile the typical experiences of American pastors, this periodical offers a lot of practical and accessible advice on how to avoid burnout and get the Work/Life balance better.

Focusing on the stress experienced by Catholic clergy, Fr. Alexander Lucie-Smith[114] writes that, whilst not struggling with the financial and family issues associated with many Church of England clergy, the RC parish priest will experience a great deal of stress associated with difficult people, both practising and lapsed Catholics. He writes: "I have known priests … reduced to nervous exhaustion: not being of combative disposition, they were mercilessly bullied by parishioners."[115]

An even more excoriating assessment of clergy stress is provided by the controversial columnist, broadcaster and vicar's wife, Anne Atkins.[116] Writing in The Times, she says:

> Since my grandfather was a clergyman a hundred years ago, the role has changed from being a low-stress and high-status one, to low status and high stress. Now, 95 per cent of the original vicarages have been sold off, so clergy with large families simply can't apply for many posts. Livings are being phased out, so clergy can be sacked on a whim. There is a compulsory retirement age, with all the implications for those who own no property. And Bishops have become pen-pushing bureaucrats who routinely ignore pastoral problems. Sometimes they behave more like bullies than pastors.[117]

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[111] Marshall Shelley (ed.), "What's an Honest Day's Work in Ministry?", *Leadership Magazine,* Volume XV Number 1 (Boulder, Colorado: Christianity Today, 1994).
[112] Christine Zwart (ed.), *ReSource Magazine* Issue 18 (Somerset: Resource, 2010).
[113] Zwart Ibid.
[114] Fr. Alexander Lucie-Smith, "Are Priests More Prone To Stress And Mental Illness?", *Catholic Herald,* (3 February 2014), <http:/www.catholicherald.co.uk>, [Accessed November 2017].
[115] Fr. Alexander Lucie-Smith, Ibid.
[116] Anne Atkins, "A Vicar's Wife: There Is No One To Fight For Us", *The Times,* (6 January 2010), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6976975.ece>, [Accessed October 2019].
[117] Anne Atkins, Ibid.

Mrs Atkins' article stirred up a great deal of controversy at the time but probably played a role in the encouragement of later synodical moves to investigate clergy well-being. As the earlier parts of this review suggest, stress and breakdown amongst church leaders has grown in the past few decades to a significant degree and an inadequate appreciation of work/life balance in this unique profession coupled with generally poor support from church authorities have been contributory factors. Anne Atkins writes:

> The truth is that if you'd asked me, ten or 20 years ago, to write about the stress on clergy families I would have said, "Stress? What stress?". Yes, honestly. Despite the anecdotal evidence all around me that clergy suffer proportionately more breakdowns, ME, exhaustion and ill health than other professionals (and even more divorce than their Christian lay friends), I still thought that there was lots to recommend working for the C of E. My view is very different now. Partly because we ourselves have been at the sharp end of a system in which employees have scanty legal rights, and partly because the employment of clergy has become very much worse all round.[118]

Another precursor to the Church of England General Synod's investigation of clergy well-being was the book *Public People, Private Lives*[119] for which Anne Atkins wrote an equally scathing Foreword. Jean and Chris Burton have prepared an extensive report based on many years' research into the lives of clergy families across the Church of England. The report makes uncomfortable reading and highlights a number of areas of concern. The Burtons set out to address an overall dilemma.

> We framed our overall dilemma as a question: why does the church, one of his tasks is to care for others, seem to find it so hard to care for its carers? This developed from our professional work with families in many settings and wide-ranging discussions with our senior family therapy consultant, Ros Draper. We were seeking the whole family's perspective by talking to the children and parents together and this was essential to the process. We wanted to use an in-depth study rather than a widespread statistical one, so we recruited 20 clergy families from across the country. We also convened two Reference Groups whose purpose was to comment on what the family said and to give us further information about the church as an organisation. The groups each had six members. One was made up of people involved in the pastoral care and counselling of clergy and their families; the other of those in positions of leadership in the church, including three bishops[120].

After exploring issues of stress and chosen methodology and setting out the findings of interviewing clergy families at both Curate and Incumbency stage and reflecting regularly with their two groups, the Burtons draw their conclusions and make their recommendations before suggesting Resources for clergy families. (These seem alarmingly scarce!) Twelve recommendations are made including Leadership, Training, Conflict, Supervision, Finance, Housing, Health and Pastoral Care[121].

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[118] Atkins, Ibid.
[119] Jean and Chris Burton, *Public People, Private Lives: Tackling Stress In Clergy Families,* (London: Continuum, 2009).
[120] Burton, Ibid. p. 5.
[121] Burton, Ibid. pp. 217-223.

One final significant piece of research prior to the Butler Report[122] is the Experiences of Ministry Project 2011-17 carried out by the King's Business School. This project was conducted with over 6,000 clergy via national surveys, in-depth interviews and week-long daily diaries. The project aimed "to inform national strategies for supporting ministry and shape the future emphasis of continuing ministerial education and development by asking clergy to share their personal experience and views."[123] The research explored the areas of *Effective Ministry Presence*, *Growth Measurement*, *Continuing Ministerial Development*, *Clergy Well-being*, *the Daily Working Life of the Priest*, *Single and Multiple Ministry Contexts*, *Ministries "on the edge"* and, most interestingly for this thesis, *Work/Life Balance for Clergy and their Partners*. The research discovered that clergy tended to spend the largest proportion of their time on administration and other activities. 57% of clergy partners said they did not know where their partner's ministry ended and family life began.

> The wellbeing of clergy in our research compared favourably with other occupational groups, a finding that often comes up in other studies too. Clergy wellbeing is key to their ability to be effective. Despite having highly demanding roles, most priests cope, and even flourish, because they are filled with purpose and derive meaning and fulfilment from their work. Even though they make substantial and frequent sacrifices as part of their role, they mainly do so willingly and see them as worthwhile. However, due to the demands of the job, there will always be priests who are less able to cope and experience burnout and related ill-health. While for many, this will be due to too many demands and not enough resources, the research identified that other clergy who suffered a high degree of psychological burnout were those who sacrificed the most, felt less clear about their calling and were less able to psychologically detach from ministry in their time off. The research suggests that clergy need to juggle issues of sacrifice, growth and well-being for sustainable effectiveness[124].

Baroness Wolf of Dulwich commented at the end of the report that the leadership of the church would do well to take note of its findings.

The most official and central of reports was made to the Church of England at its July synod in 2017.[125] Under the chairmanship of Canon Simon Butler, Prolocutor of the Lower House of the Convocation of Canterbury, the Working Group presented its findings in a full debate, comments from which are cited elsewhere in this thesis. The General Synod approved the report and agreed its motion "That this Synod: a. welcomes and supports the proposal to establish a Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing as laid out in GS2072; and b. invites the Appointments Committee to appoint a Clergy Wellbeing Working Group to bring proposals for such a Covenant back to this Synod by July 2019."[126] As a result, the working group returned to the 2019 synod with the draft of *A Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing*[127] based on the Ministry of Defence's "Soldiering – the Military Covenant" (2000)

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[122] Simon Butler, *Report on Clergy Wellbeing,* (London: CHP, 2017).
[123] Mike Clinton, and Tim Ling, *Effective Ministerial Presence And What It Looks Like In Practice: Insights From The Experiences Of Ministry Project 2011–17,* (London: King's Business School, 2017).
[124] Clinton and Ling, Ibid.
[125] Butler, Ibid.
[126] Butler, Ibid.
[127] Simon Butler, *Covenant On Clergy Care and Well-Being*, (6 July 2019), <http:/www.churchofengland.org>, [Accessed October 2019].

The draft covenant paper and its recommendations was overwhelmingly supported by the 2019 synod. Canon Butler commented:

> There is a widespread acknowledgment that we can and must do better to support clergy in ways that promote good practice and prevent occasional stress becoming a harmful and chronic condition. It will be a great boost to many clergy to see the General Synod taking a lead, and I hope to see the wider church following in the coming months.[128]

The report highlighted the need for better pastoral care of the clergy in line with that generally offered to other caring professions. It also emphasised the need to promote awareness of stress and the dangers of burnout not just throughout the practice of ministry but as part of pre and post ordination training. The Covenant reads:

> The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scripture and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in every generation. In its formularies, the Church of England recognises that God calls some to serve as deacons, priests and bishops to build up and equip the whole People of God. Conscious that such a calling is both a privilege and a demand, we commit together to promote the welfare of our clergy and their households. We undertake to work together to coordinate and improve our approach to clergy care and wellbeing so that the whole Church may flourish in the service of the mission of God.[129]

It remains to be seen how Church of England parishes and the wider church will receive and adopt this covenant but it at least moves the issue of stress as a factor higher up the agenda and it gives hope to many clergy struggling with the stigma of anxiety, depression and burnout.

Conclusion

This review concludes with a consideration of how play and playing might be an antidote to stress.

Robert Fagen,[130] who Sutton-Smith considers one of the three great play theorists of the twentieth century, has written an outstanding book on animal play behaviour. In a work spanning over 700 pages, Fagen sets out a major study of how animals play and what it means for our own understanding of life. In 27 pages of tables looking at major studies, he puts forward proof that play assists physical training. In computer simulations and field and laboratory observations he examines animal play from a sociobiological standpoint and concludes that in animals a form of "selfish co-operation" persists. In a work that Lawrence Harper[131] terms *outstanding,* Robert Fagen provides a wealth of material to inspire and provoke play theorists and encourage further empirical work.

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[128] Butler, *Covenant.*
[129] Butler, Ibid.
[130] Robert Fagen, *Animal play behaviour* (New York: OUP, 1981).
[131] Lawrence V. Harper, (Review of "Animal Play Behavior" by Robert Fagen), *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 57, no. 1, (March 1982): 89-90, <https://doi.org/10.1086/412649>, [Accessed January 2017].

Dr. Sam Wang and Dr. Sandra Aamodt present evidence of the correlation between play and stress in *Play, Stress and the Learning Brain*[132]. Citing Fagen and others they present widespread evidence of play amongst animals of all species including leaping needlefish, water-frolicking alligators, and prankish lizards. Even a gigantic carnivorous Komodo dragon plays dog-like with its keepers. They describe *object play*, *locomotor play* and *social play* as being common to all life; humans and animals, vertebrates and invertebrates. Wang and Aamodt are very clear that in all life, play is fun. They are also clear that play is an excellent antidote to stress and this may be chemically proven.

> One way to find out what play is good for is to take it away from animals and see how they fare. The problem is that this experiment is nearly impossible to do. Animals (including children) are irrepressible; they play under the most adverse of conditions. The only way to get an animal to stop playing is to restrain its mobility. This severe restriction leads to decreases in physical activity and increases in stress, as measured by the amount of the stress hormone cortisol in saliva. Play, exercise, and stress are closely linked. Though the deprivation experiment is hard to do, that very fact means that seeing an animal play already tells us something good about its state. In young squirrel monkeys, low levels of cortisol are associated with high amounts of play, suggesting either that play reduces stress or, possibly, that unstressed monkeys are more likely to play. In bear cubs during their first year of life, survival over the winter is highly correlated to the amount that cubs played during the preceding summer. Play might be an indicator of health or resistance to stress.[133]

Play does not increase the stress hormone cortisol, in some cases people even playing "shoot-em-up" video games have shown decreased levels of cortisol. The research goes on to suggest that play is vital for later life activity – hunting and escaping in animals and the gaining of perceptual, cognitive, social, and emotional knowledge in humans.

> … work in adult life is often most effective when it resembles play. Indeed, total immersion in an activity often indicates that the activity is intensely enjoyable; this is the concept of flow, or what athletes call being in the zone. Flow occurs during active experiences that require concentration but are also highly practiced, where the goals and boundaries are clear but leave room for creativity. This describes many adult hobbies, from skiing to music, as well as careers like surgery and computer programming. Such immersion can make solving a great challenge as easy as child's play.[134]

Not just amongst animals and not only with children do we see the value of play as a mediator of stress. Like a vibrant stream we see play meandering its way through history. Its source may not be fully known but its tributaries enter every culture and every age, reminding us not to take ourselves too seriously or work ourselves too strenuously.

The concept of *play* is as old as life and remains as hard to describe as ever. So many writers have endeavoured to determine what it is for and disagree over its purpose. From Plato to Postman and from Augustine to Ariès, ideas and theories have changed. It is undoubtedly true that the last hundred years and the last two decades in particular have seen an exponential increase in the study and practice of play yet the uneasy balance between work and leisure has

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[132] Sam Wang, and Sandra Aamodt, "Play, Stress And The Learning Brain", *Cerebrum* (24 September 2012), <http:/www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>, [Accessed January 2017].
[133] Wang and Aamodt, Ibid.
[134] Wang and Aamodt, Ibid.

produced a generation of stressed and anxious individuals, uncertain of their role and purpose. In the Church, successive studies have revealed an underlying epidemic of busyness which its authorities are only just beginning to address.

Can play be an antidote to stress? Can the men and women at the coalface of local parish ministry provide evidence of ministry pressure? How important to them is having fun and can it help their well-being? This is the focus of the chapters three and four. First, we turn to the type and scope of the research applied.

2. Methodology

This section explains the philosophy behind the chosen field of research and the selected methodology. It also sets out the reasons for taking this particular course of action in order to develop the necessary theoretical framework.

What is Participative Action Research?

Participative Action Research is the method used in the empirical area of the research because it appears to be the most effective and practical in demonstrating the veracity of the theoretical framework. But, what is Action Research? Eileen Ferrance writes:

> Action research is not what usually comes to mind when we hear the word "research." Action research is *not* a library project where we learn more about a topic that interests us. It is *not* problem-solving in the sense of trying to find out what is wrong, but rather a quest for knowledge about how to improve. Action research is *not* about doing research on or about people, or finding all available information on a topic looking for the correct answers. It involves people working to improve their skills, techniques, and strategies. Action research is *not* about learning why we do certain things, but rather how we can do things better.[135]

The subject of leadership and ministry has been widely read and a number of different churches where alternative models of leadership and decision-making are exercised have been visited. Teaching on issues arising from church growth and church planting has been carried out both in the researcher's own parish and in other congregations and overseas. Prior to this work almost four decades involved full-time in the practice of ministry with all its consequent stresses and strains has been closely experienced. In common with many church leaders the introduction of new ways of doing things has been carried out persistently and regularly always with the aim of trying to persuade congregations to deepen their commitment and, occasionally, to improve personal understanding and practice.

During the past few years there has been a new approach to these issues, primarily because two major influences have required it. Firstly, postgraduate studies have repeatedly highlighted the thoughts and teachings of others on issues pertinent to the subject. This has widened horizons further and encouraged an engagement in much greater and more participative dialogue with the possibility of change for the better. Secondly and entirely coincidentally, ministry in the researcher's parish (Saint Margaret's Stanford le Hope) has passed through a period of pressure and stress closely connected to issues arising from leadership, communication and decision-making. Without dwelling on the specific details of these matters, they have served as unavoidable catalysts for change and have themselves deepened the experience of research and study.

During these past five years particularly, the insights of Participative Action Research have proved invaluable in sharpening focus and drawing out key elements that move towards a satisfactory conclusion. Empirical research (set out in the next chapter) deals mainly with the work of PlayGroups comprising a cross-section of local clergy discussing the issues arising from stress in the practice of ministry and exploring the phenomenon of play as a shared experience and a possible response to the need for wellbeing and flourishing in parish ministry.

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[135] Eileen Ferrance, *Action Research* (Providence: LAB at Brown University RI, 2000), pp. 2, 3.

In studying Action Research, the work of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön in Action Science, the observations of Paulo Frière in education and the writings of John Pritchard and Paul Ballard in practical and pastoral theology have been significant as well as a number of others including Peter Senge. The insights of Action Research in a whole variety of disciplines, particularly medicine and education, has proved to be useful in highlighting where the gaps and misunderstandings exist that often lead to more conventional solutions being inappropriate and ineffective in addressing the needs of pressured and overstressed church leaders. The constraints of time and the strain of over-availability has consistently meant that there is little time to reflect, assess and learn what changes need to be made to bring resolution or, if those changes are made in part, they are inadequate to solve the problems experienced. In addition, the huge, and at least partially unanticipated, developments in electronic communication have contributed to wide increases in pastoral expectation with its consequent exponential effects. The life of a parochial minister in the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth century is very different from that of the twenty first as the internet leads to a generation of independent and opinionated "experts" and an expectation of 24/7 availability. The developments have been quite radical and the consequences widespread. The responses considered will need to be equally radical and thorough. The insights of Action Research will be crucial for a number of reasons.

Is this Methodology Suitable for Stressed Clergy?

The response to the need to cope better with stress in the twenty-first century church must do more than just treat the symptoms; it must dig deep towards the underlying causes. The project process had already developed before it was realised that appropriate action didn't always follow on from the decision to think, consider, discuss and reflect. Sometimes action and event are followed by a period of reflection, theological or otherwise, which leads to a more reasoned and lasting outcome. Argyris, Putnam and Smith reflect on this in their discussion of decision theory[136] and Schön refers to it as reflective conversation with the situation.[137] Action Research, as the adjective implies, is not unconnected from actual practical theology; the problem is that the practice often proceeds without the reflection and, as MacDonald has observed, unexamined work has little value[138]. It is a valuable insight to realise that the busyness of work and ministry often allows little time for review and evaluation and one event can lead to another without opportunity for adequate processing and reflection.

Much of the daily business of parish life is concerned with planning events (services, meetings etc.) and then delivering them. Immediately afterwards, new events are being planned and there is often just not enough time for theological reflection on the events themselves. Participative research includes a spiral of cycles of action and research that include the four major phases: plan, act, observe and reflect.[139] The latter two phases will include appropriate methods and techniques of evaluation and theological consideration. Ministerial pressures and unenlightened attitudes mean that these latter phases are often excluded. As many practitioners observe, they are vital catalysts to learning, growth and development. A number of important

[136] Chris Argyris, Robert Putnam, and Diana McLain Smith, *Action Science: Concepts, Methods And Skills For Research And Intervention* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985), p. 36.
[137] Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action* (USA: Basic Books Inc., 1983).
[138] Gordon MacDonald, *Restoring.*
[139] Ortrun Zuber-Skerrit, (ed.), *Action Research for Change and Development* (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Group, 1991).

lessons have been learned from engaging the principles of Participative Action Research in the development of new systems to respond to the difficulties arising from the stresses of leadership and modern local ministry. New paradigms of understanding may even emerge from the process. McNiff and Whitehead write:

> There are two main reasons for doing action research. First, you can improve learning in order to improve educational practices. Second, you can advance knowledge and theory, that is, new ideas about how things can be done and why.[140]

These practitioners operate largely out of an educational background and, indeed much PAR has been done in the sphere of education as well as medicine. However, the application is equally appropriate in the theological dimension. Ministry without due process of reflection can be sterile and, worse still, lead to tautologous conversation and downwardly spiralling practice. Proper research and evaluation can help to understand what is actually happening rather than just what appears to be or what the minister thinks *should* be happening. In this way not only is more knowledge gained but also there is learning on how to really improve the way things are done. Moreover, the chaotic and elusive principles of play can provide an oblique and releasing environment where such enlightenment may take place.

John Elliot, working in an exclusively educational context, was able to explore some fascinating instances of PAR application to teachers and pupils that have important resonances in a local setting. It may be observed that it is all too easy to get so caught up in the mechanisms of ministry that the purpose for which it is practised can be obscured. Ministers, engaging in largely unexamined activity that allows for little collaborative reflection, continue to promote the way they do things without sufficient consideration of why they do them and for whom. Ministerial practice becomes fixed in a dogmatic rut and consequently far too serious!

In Elliot's experience of conducting these methods in schools, the education system itself or the fixed ethos of the school prevented sufficient openness to change and teachers often cited the problem of finding enough time to undertake adequate research. Local experience of primary and secondary schools would seem to bear this out as new government-inspired programmes and systems further restrict both pupil contact time and space for evaluation.

The transformation of school cultures attempted by practitioners like Elliot have been severely hindered by an unwillingness to change in a system where "this is the way we do it" is endemic. The powers that be are still very strong and can exert significant influences that inhibit effective change. He writes: "Hierarchies can transmit power without authority inasmuch as the latter implies the legitimate use of power in the eyes of subordinates."[141]

Sadly, this seems equally true in the church. Hierarchical power is still seen as invested in priests and bishops and there are often more "top-down" decisions made than is entirely conducive to effective change. In a previous study utilising Participative Action Research and the collaboration of a representative Focus Group, the research was rendered more effective by the application of PAR principles. By way of illustration, this author's own experiences echo this principle.

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[140] Jean McNiff, and Jack Whitehead, *All You Need To Know About Action Research* (London: Sage, 2006), p.1.
[141] John Elliot, *Action Research for Educational Change* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991), p.57.

For many years my continual complaint had been that nobody was talking to me and, when I was able to wring answers from reluctant parishioners it seemed the common complaint was that the rector didn't listen! Wider study in the discipline of Action Research shows this to be a common problem across large organisations where traditional values of authority, privacy and territoriality erect barriers to progress. I had believed for some time that my approach was open and collaborative yet I was still unaware that perceptions were different. I was *seen* as unapproachable and I *appeared* to be unwilling to listen and, as Swinton and Mowatt observe, the Practical Theologian asks: "is what appears to be going on within this situation what is actually going on?"[142] What appeared to be going on in the system of leadership and decision-making in St. Margaret's was a process of consultation that would hopefully lead to effective change and reduction of stress. What was actually going on was a process that inevitably led to a pre-determined conclusion; what Argyris and *Schön* call *espoused theory* and *theory in use*. I hope to show similarly that an appreciation of the epistemological foundation of the Play principle might have a transformative effect upon the perceived practice of ministry.

Single and Double Loop Learning

In this earlier study, a move to double loop learning was facilitated when collaborative interaction with my Focus Group enabled me to address my own long-held paradigm of leadership. The comments of my partners in the Focus Group meetings were inspiring but the process of engaging with them was even more inspiring as a discipline of change. I learned important and valuable lessons! My governing variable stated that a leader needed to have followers in order to be a leader. In other words, it was not possible to find out where people were going and just walk in front of them; they had to be led. This mindset governed my behaviour and trammelled my ministry. One of my Focus group partners said: a good leader spends time finding out where people want to go. I believe my true double loop learning started at this point. This ongoing methodology might draw in the Play principle to enable a more flourishing ministry and consequent improved wellbeing for the minister.

It might be argued that it is only through true implementation of this methodological process that we can discover this to be the case and work collaboratively for change of the underlying system of governance. In that earlier study, reflection on the process journal, study of PAR cases and discussion with Focus Group partners had enabled this epiphany to take place. In the same way it may be said that because play is, by its nature, antithetical to much of the restrictive regulation of ecclesiastical frameworks, it can bring a fresh approach to understanding how negative stress can be more effectively managed. It is hopeful therefore that a similar methodological approach may yield similar benefits. Effective action research, proper observation and reflection plus discussion through the PlayGroups should enable increased wellbeing and better responses to stress.

The problem of inadequate and incomplete observation and reflection leading to systemic failure in large organisations is well documented. It happens when behaviour is changed but not the governing variables that led to that action in the first place. When it takes place despite apparent efforts by management or leadership to address the issue, it is said that *single-loop learning* has taken place.

[142] John Swinton, and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* London: SCM Press, 2006), p. v.

> When the consequences of an action strategy are as the agent intends, then there is a match between intention and outcome, and the theory-in-use of the agent is confirmed. If the consequences are unintended and especially if they are counter-productive, there is a mismatch or an error. The first response to error is typically to search for another action strategy that will satisfy the same governing variables. For example, if the agent wants to suppress conflict (governing variable) and to this end avoids saying anything that might be controversial (action strategy), but others raise threatening issues anyway (mismatch), the agent may try the strategy of talking volubly about issues on which everyone is likely to agree. In such a case, when new action strategies are used in the service of the same governing variables, we speak of *single-loop learning.* We do so because there is a change in action but not in the governing variables.[143]

When the agent or leader is able to change the governing variable that led to the errors of behaviour and mismatched action strategies we can say that *double-loop learning* has taken place and there is a possibility of real change. Where persistent errors in learning are taking place such as failure to overcome a perception of not being a good listener or having an espoused theory of being approachable and willing to change, it is an indication of double-loop problems. Practitioners speak of *first* and *second order* change or of Model I and Model II action strategies.[144] The point is that observation and theological reflection carried out in the context of properly shared Participative Action Research can lead to more effective addressing of the issues that give rise to the problem. We find ourselves finally breaking out of the cycle pursued in single-loop learning and taking a new path. Those who have consistently had their expectations for change dashed, are given new hope that something will finally be done. There is then the possibility of genuine change and better learning which bodes well for future development. The philosophy and practice of play understand well the management of tension, the vagaries of chance, the pressures of semblance and the experience of vertigo and loss of control. Once again, my own experience has borne this out.

My past personal experience of Focus Groups in facilitating Participative Action Research has been very helpful in enabling me to perceive the pitfalls of single loop learning where I was unable to bring about improvement. I was fixed for some time in an espoused theory the consequences of which meant that my views were paramount and that in any given situation I was more likely to be right than others! Argyris, Putnam and McLain Smith refer to this mindset as "application of the cybernetic principle of negative feedback mechanisms" (quoting Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson in *Pragmatics of Human Communication* Reggie Victor 1967 p. 31)[145] and explain it is like the thermostat which turns on a boiler when the temperature falls below a certain level. This is *single loop learning* where the underlying governing variable has not been changed. If something as "Dionysian" as the Play principle is going to break radically in to the tight and rational "Apollonian" structure of the historic church, then clergy will need to be willing to alter their governing variables appropriately.

As to specific methodology, the findings of a number of key studies, particularly the report presented by the Society of Mary and Martha at the turn of the century[146], the work carried out by the Burtons among clergy families during the first decade of the twenty first century[147] and the studies on clergy wellbeing conducted by the House of Clergy Standing Committee for the

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[143] Argyris, Putnam, and McLain Smith, *Action Science* pp. 85-6.
[144]Argyris, Putnam, and McLain Smith, Ibid. pp. 87 and 102.
[145]Argyris, Putnam, and McLain Smith, Ibid. p. 87.
[146] C. Lee, and S. Horsman, *Affirmation and Accountability* (Exeter: The Society of Mary and Martha, 2002).
[147] Burton, *Public People*.

General Synod in 2017[148] have helped the empirical research section of the work. In addition, the findings of interviews conducted with key clergy and other individuals through one-to-one meetings and focus groups (PlayGroups) have provided vital material.

Three Kinds of Empirical Research

The empirical research has explored three types of engagement. First, there have been two PlayGroups, comprising a number of ordained ministers grappling with questions around play and stress in ministry. These have been interactive and dynamic and allowed for theories and ideas to be tested against personal grassroots experience.

One-to-one interviews have added value to the research by allowing for more one-to-one analysis of the issues as the author of the thesis has engaged with a small number of clergy and teachers at different stages in their working lives, explaining their own issues with play and stress.

Targeted questionnaires have allowed participants to consider carefully on their own a number of questions concerning the areas of play and stress in ministry and possibly reflect over a longer period what effect these have had on their lives.

All three types of engagement have been carried out with individuals representing the diverse nature of the Church of England and some teachers from primary and secondary schools. It should be pointed out that, whilst being a fair sample of local ministry in this episcopal area, there is no representation from the BME community and little from those of a greatly differing theological standpoint. Given the space available, it has been necessary to restrict the sampling somewhat but it would be interesting to explore this in subsequent research, perhaps investigating the ministry experience of diverse cultures, different spiritual viewpoints and other faiths and denominations. It has to be said that here there has been more emphasis on the type and nature of ministry and its effect rather than the background of the specific individual.

The PlayGroups in this study included an Area Dean, a hospital chaplain, a non-stipendiary Team Vicar, a multi-benefice incumbent, a stipendiary Team Vicar, a curate and a single-benefice vicar. Both male and female clergy were represented and at different stages in ministry. There was also a wide age range. It is also worth saying that all clergy interviewed brought experience of the so-called secular sphere, both in what they had done prior to ordination and in what they are engaged in now.

The one-to-one interviews were with a Team Vicar on a large new housing estate, a new curate in a Team Ministry, an incumbent of a multi-benefice of rural parishes, a retired priest with considerable experience in person-centred counselling, a senior diocesan leader in Mission and Ministry, a city-centre incumbent with a senior role in General Synod and a senior diocesan bishop.

Most of the individuals highlighted above completed a previously sent questionnaire looking at the issues of stress experience and play and each spent at least an hour in a recorded interview. Portions of the edited and anonymised transcripts of those interviews, albeit considerably truncated, are set out in this chapter. For ease of clarity of understanding the content alternates

[148] Butler, *Report on Clergy Wellbeing.*

between italicised and normal script. Further quotes and reflections are set out in the following chapter.

In addition to interviewing clergy, there have also been shorter interviews with a number of local teachers and headteachers. This has been in order to both widen the perspective of the research and to consider the views of those involved in a more secular and specific area of care and development. Although *play* is most frequently attributed to children and most often experienced during school hours and teachers will have a most particular experience of this, the educationalists have also been questioned on their own personal experience of *play* and *fun*. In addition, the increasingly stressful environment of primary and secondary education gives the teachers a view on the other significant factor in this research.

Appendix One lists the 17 participants in this Empirical Research with their gender, approximate ages, their roles and the nature of their participation. *For the purposes of confidentiality and to minimise possible identification, they have been listed as characters from the Old Testament.*

Towards a Listening and Learning Team

Action Research, as Kurt Lewin its pioneer discovered and as so many subsequent practitioners have found, changes you in the process of its practice. Many of the questions and comments raised in the PlayGroups and interviews arise out of assumptions based upon the underlying governing variables so prevalent in the church and so much a part of generally recognised parochial ministry. Research based upon participative and open discussion may begin to challenge some of those assumptions. It may even be that the participants find their own long-held beliefs about the way we do things being challenged in such a way as to suggest new courses of action; *double-loop learning* that leads to real change. It is hoped that this change may lead to a new practice of listening and learning; the genesis of a paradigm shift in the practice of ministry. Perhaps they might even become a part of the kind of listening and learning team that Peter Senge writes about.

> Most of us at one time or another have been part of the greatest team, a group of people who functions together in an extraordinary way – who trusted one another, who complemented one another's strengths and compensated for one another's limitations, who had common goals that were larger than individual goals, and who produced extraordinary results. I have met many people who have experienced this sort of profound teamwork – in sports, or in the performing arts, or in business. Many say that they have spent much of their life looking for that experience again. What they experienced was a learning organisation. The team that became great didn't start off great – it learned how to produce extraordinary results.[149]

PAR process and the progress of PlayGroups and personal interviews will hopefully show that such a community, such *a listening and learning team*, must surely be the church.

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[149] Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline,* (London: Random House, 1990), p. 4.

3. Empirical Research

As commented in the last chapter, it would not make sense to research a subject as active and all-pervasive as play from a purely intellectual and academic standpoint. Play has to be experienced; to be *played*. Equally, stress now has such a strong (and still inadequately realised) effect upon clergy in the practice of ministry that it must also be researched empirically through existing data and via interviews and focus groups actually discussing these matters. It is not the purpose of this thesis to set out a systematic plan of action recommended to church authorities in response to these issues; some of that is already taking place to a small extent in the Church of England. Nor does this monograph engage fully with the strategy of Participative Action Research sufficiently to enable the *double-loop learning* that it recommends as the best way for the church to address the need to change its traditional *governing variables*.

Successive chapters in this work now seek to set out the evidence for the types of stress experienced by clergy at different stages of ministry and primarily in the parish context and then analyses how *play* and *playing* may help.

It is worth restating at this point, the aims set out in the introduction:

1. To research the importance of play as an autotelic activity within a context that is often about being driven to succeed and ministry that is frequently discharged to please other people.

2. To investigate the idea of 24/7 "ministry on demand" and examine play as a response to flawed management in the parish pastoral arena and over-availability experienced by the parish priest leading to stress.

3. To present play, imagination and "fun" as a possible antidote to stress, pressure and burnout in parish ministry.

The research is now beginning to postulate that play in its widest understanding is an activity that doesn't matter. The interviews and playgroup discussions set out in this chapter explore if this is indeed the case and whether clergy on the whole tend to be *playful* and *fun* people or at least individuals that engage regularly in leisurely and non-goal-centred activities.

This chapter progresses first with the comments of the two Playgroup meetings, then the individual clergy interviews and their individual questionnaire comments and finally considers the interviews with the teachers and headteachers. The chapter ends with the results of the ten questionnaires.

CLERGY

PlayGroup One: 15.15 - 16.30 16th September 2018
(Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Haggai, Malachi and the author)

In the two PlayGroups, alternate paragraphs are italicised to differentiate roughly between the different contributors.

The Introductions.

I've been in Grays for twelve years and I have just come back from holiday and this week is so busy that it probably feels like I could do with two weeks back on holiday. As you know I have got three daughters and two of them are at University.

I'm a Team Vicar and married to someone who is also a vicar and I have two stepchildren and four grandchildren and I'm a potter and an artist and enjoy walking and I have just bought a bike and I'm going to learn to surf!

I live in Billericay and I'm a Team Vicar in Grays, part time. I'm not stipendiary and being part-time I can say ooh, I can't do that because I'm not here and next week I'm on holiday and so I've got to work really hard before I go and so in some ways you don't actually quite get the holiday like I used to get when I was an optometrist. At the end of the day I could go home and forget about everything until I get back the next day. It's not the same is it? I've got two children and three grandchildren. I like doing all sorts of things, like gardening, reading and puzzles and being with the family all together when we love board games.

I'm doing a curacy and previously been a teacher for 25 years and children's worker for three years and don't do anything that's not *play if I can avoid it. I'm married with two children and two grandchildren and I'm afraid that I don't take life too seriously.*

I'm a local vicar and have been there 9 years now and before that I was a curate. I don't take life too seriously and my parish is a wonderful mix and I've been able to spot the fun in things and having had some serious moments as well. I'm married with one son, he married a year ago. I've no particular mode of play; I like gardening, photography and wildlife.

I'm a Christian and I'm the leader of three local parishes and came back from holiday last week. I've got a lot of things to do. We enjoy hill walking as a family and on holiday we walked the Pennine Way and I decided when I came back from that holiday that I would go to Keep Fit from then onwards and try to reclaim my level of fitness and since we have come back from holiday I have done no exercise whatsoever! I was going to cycle here today but I didn't have time to cycle here so I need to put that right. Apart from that I have a husband and a son who is in his GCSE year.

The Discussion.

I would like to say as a part-time vicar in some ways it means that I am more focused or perhaps I am more working in the parish and that because I am not here for certain days in the week the days when I am here I am very focused and I don't know if I would ever be able to maintain it for six days with the same kind of focus and so in fact I have plenty of time for the garden and walking and whatever else I do. It is a good reason to not be working but I can't achieve as much as everybody else but there you are. There is, as it were, a Job Description for a vicar but it's fairly fluid is it not? Some people do tons more than others. I want to throw that into the equation because when some people have done all the set services but there is still time they then say let's go do some more and make sure their diary is full. Others will say I've done all the things I need to do and I would like space.

I said yes because I know that play and having time to play is so important because like other people I don't take life too seriously. I know I do *take life too seriously and I actually need to*

have something structural that I do differently otherwise I find it too hard to keep it working and there is always something more important and something more to do and there is always me wanting to do more stuff and I do.

My first unofficial training incumbent gave me the advice that every day should be divided into three sections and one of those sections must be a non-work section. I listened at first to what she said but very quickly found that I was feeling awfully sectioned every day. There are always morning things to do. There are always afternoon things to do. With clergy there are always evening things to do.

I don't think that I'm very important so I'm quite happy to take an hour off or a whole morning or afternoon. If I want to read a book for half an hour I do. Having said that there are things that are going on that I don't get invited to and I think what is wrong I am the vicar I should be there so that in principle I'm not paying much attention to that matter but in practice I think that it would just go a little bit better if I was there, though obviously I cannot be involved in everything. I have not quite achieved the standards that I have set myself.

Where I am, when I came, for example, people didn't lead the intercessions in the majority of services. There are some people who think that the priest should do intercessions but some do hope for that but that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't laid on a training for it to enable those people to do it. I think quite a lot of my role, though only in the third year in this benefice, is that I am needed not because I'm being called to one but to give other people confidence to enable them to take on a role and ultimately they can believe in themselves without the need of me but at the moment there are a lot of similar things going on in the benefice where I do need to be there. I don't think that it comes out of the sense of being important but I want to be there to encourage and enable lay ministry, but it takes time.

Well I don't really like to be told how to do things I don't like to do. I'm not a manager. I always avoided it when I was working for Boots and the stuff I'd been trained to do for preaching and the leading services and even the visiting which I love and social events and all the rest of it. I'm not very good at IT. It takes longer for me because I've never had the training for it and hunting for things online leaves a lot to be desired and things like that when I need things and I think to myself I don't know how to do this and I've not been trained in it but that is partly because I was still working when I was a curate. I was working for Boots and so I missed a lot of training. I do find that a bit more stressful and I'm taking longer doing some things every day and it's things that I don't particularly know about or really want to do. The only thing that I would say that in my congregation I don't have a large reservoir of people who are IT literate and I don't have people to ask to do things for me and so jumbles a lot of stuff for me.

In my church we are better placed than most. We have got a modern office and we have got an administrator but it's just odd bits and pieces which kind of hit me, and it's the usual things like safeguarding and the risk-assessments and that sort of thing.

There are general things that clergy are facing in particular and there is also a layer that society is placing on us that we need to be countably successful.

I think it is probably true that the Church does not have a good theology of failure. I don't know if it is true, I don't have any knowledge outside of teaching. I was a teacher not necessarily above average of some skills but my results were sometimes below average and therefore not

a very good teacher. I don't know how many above average teachers there are but you can still be trained and even then, 50% are not going to be above average. The same with everything we try to count.

I'm really interested in this thing "stress". Is it caused by stuff outside or is it caused by my reaction to stuff outside or is it a coming together of the two so is it my expectations or other people's expectations? I also think that there is an element of me of doing stuff I don't think I'm called to do.

So much of ministry is like plate-spinning and my time is taken up with the distraction of keeping all the plates spinning and stopping them crash to the ground. Juggling is fine. All the time it is working and juggling with things. I quite enjoy juggling. I won't try to do it now; it takes ages. It is fun until someone adds in another thing to juggle and its too many.

I think that sometimes completing something to do that is on my desk these things that I see spinning on my desk and when something is done and gone that makes me feel better. That plate is done and I need not worry about it and when it is finished it gets put back into the cupboard again. We had a long standing and much respected member die and so this week I have had to spend quite a bit of time sorting that out and in a very selfish way I'm glad when it has happened. I know that it is important that I try to do that well and as we all understand here the family gave me this enormously thick A4 pack of papers and this lady, as well, had dementia and so they were telling her life story and somebody very helpfully gave me her life story and expected me, of course, to read it and incorporate it, and I sort of smiled very appreciatively and thanked her but inside I thought this is going to take ages to read and it caused stress. This was somebody I was very fond of but I felt stressed. She did some very interesting things … I need to speed read.

I like doing something that is totally engrossing, all-excluding. I might play a computer game. These things require our attention I can't be distracted over other things because if you do you lose the track of things it just draws your mind away from things.

I have found that walking the Pennine Way was really good and walking all day and drowning out stuff that was completely far away. But even doing that some issues would be there each day and I would have to really work hard to get rid of them. Being physically removed from the parishes helped me and being in a completely different environment doing something physical which required quite a lot of effort and all those things were all-consuming and it really helped. I think it is hard when you return to the Rectory and that study is there and it's so easy to go in there and even when your husband says no you tell yourself come on in there that's enough you can slip back in there and I'll just do this and I want to get this done before I go to bed or I will be thinking about it and I haven't quite established how to find something to do which takes me far away for a period of time.

I think that another things is the advances in technology. One of the emails I was looking at, a number of people were waiting for my thoughts and guidance, apart from actually saying you know I'm on holiday these don't actually matter you know. I didn't reply, I did in the evening but I was sort of stroppy and I got back to just prior to this incident which actually was on my 'phone. The same thing happened the next day so I didn't reply.

I tell my congregation that I am going on holiday next week so I don't take my emails with me so if you need to contact me you text me and I'm not coming back before my holiday. I hate

the fact that somebody texts me at night just because they are bored and they can't sleep so they sent me a text message and it wakes me up.

I turn it off in the evening and don't turn it back until the morning so it's switched off. There is a positive side and I recognise that failure and I think that it has changed for the whole sense and not just for the clergy but for the whole set of work-life balance. Just last week how many people go to work by train and are away from work or are continuing to work because of their emails on their journey.

Do you give your phone number to a certain amount of people? Everybody knows my 'phone number. Do you have more than one 'phone? No - I only have the one. People can contact me by Facebook as well. I really am public property!

When I moved I made a conscious decision to change tack actually. Some people have got it but the vast majority haven't thus it reduces some of the stuff I get. I can read the emails if I need to without people needing to know my 'phone number. Some people have two mobiles - one for work and one for personal. There are a handful of people who have got my mobile because of my work that's the only way that I can communicate with them. Most people just use the landline and seems to work. On holiday I did have just one 'phone with me for emergencies but I only text my family.

I told people that unless the problem started with the word URGENT with a capital letter I would not read it. I have in the past looked and said I'll just read this email at the start of my holiday and it's something upsetting and that will sit with me for days and this should not happen and this has gone wrong and I could have changed this so I now try very hard not to look at any emails unless it says URGENT on the top. I don't give out my number except to the wardens. So, if it rings it is either a spam call or family.

What is your understanding of play? Give a definition or explanation of what play is …

It is something that is not work. So how to define work? It is not play! It enables you to laugh. Have to work at it sometimes as well.

I think for me sometimes trying to tackle my garden is a form of play and it would have some significance. It could be something like achieving something. Does that imply that play can't teach you anything? Can it teach you something which can affect what happens next? It can relax you and put you in a better frame of mind and help you. It has a lasting effect but the play doesn't carry on in the work to other work, whereas a work activity can carry on to other work. For me play comes to an end, I've finished with that or I've weeded that flower bed. It doesn't affect the next job that I have decided to do.

Possibly. As one of us said earlier when he finished a job he feels good because he has achieved something. This morning I sat with a lady and we played, I was only listening and we talked about all the things that she had done; she learned to play and enjoyed doing it and listening to her lifted my spirits and my work. But on your time sheet it would still be work wouldn't it? On the other hand, when people say to me what work do you do I say hospital chaplain if you can call that work. The boundaries are not tidy.

What's the connection between play and fun? Just work can be fun! Fun and play are often synonymous. As a teacher any work that we did with the children that wasn't fun probably didn't work.

I think to come to a definition to play you have to understand psychology and your mind and know what play does to your mind and know how to lead your mind. All our minds work differently and the things for me that are play may not feel like play to other people for each one is different. I don't think you can define play by defining the activity I think you can only define it by the affect it is having on someone's life. Writers have struggled for different reasons to define it.

We used to spend our time sailing and racing in a dingy trying to win, concentrating hard trying to get every ounce of the wind that was about and you are concentrating so hard you could not think about anything else and afterwards you were physically tired and you were totally relaxed from any stresses you might have had in the past. You are concentrating in doing that to such a degree that you forget about all the other cares of the world.

I went to a quiz evening at one of the churches a few months ago: someone ran it from the congregation and it was fun but I was conscious that my husband and son were at home on a Saturday night and that stressed me but I did enjoy it. I did feel guilty though because there was the feeling that I should have been watching a DVD with my son and having fun with them so that whilst I did enjoy it but because I am a member of a family and have a child to care for at home it wasn't the same play as it would have been for example that I didn't have any time at home I could have gone out with them.

Those things overlap. Were you there because you wanted to be or because you ought to be? I was there because I thought I ought to be. But when you go out for a meal with parishioners, is that work or play? Is it ministry time or personal time and does it become personal time if you talk about something over the dinner table which relates to the church or the parish? How does that work out? Silly example but where do you put your expenses at the end of the month? Do you put the petrol down that you use to go to that person's house? That's where the overlaps are and as you said had you been a single person you might have just gone along to that and felt that that was a nice evening and you got something out of it, it wasn't necessarily worthless.

I've been in that position before when you have expected it when I was a school teacher. Personal circumstances and how you perceive things make a difference. Do we invite our families along and kid ourselves that it really is social? They come to support you but may not necessarily want to.

Keep Fit group with people used to go to church with. Those people don't know me as ordained. Just normal!

Even if it is work, if it has the same effect as play, then it IS play.

Jean-Jacques Suurmond – worship is play and should be play. God is not a means to an end. God is "pointless". Worship should be play.

Value in having space that is separate from work. A space that refreshes. If you are playing some parishioners might think you are not working.

People who consider that they are "at church" on their time off from work. We have to be sensitive to that.

Worship as play? Hard when you are "leading" it.

PlayGroup Two: 15.15 - 16.30 16th November 2018
(*Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi and the author)*
All participants in this playgroup were given puzzles to play with and some interesting books to consider.

Discussion of Stress …

Physical effects of stress. There are four things that mediate stress and one was playing and laughter.

What are the causes and main areas of stress?

Loneliness and isolation. Experience of being in a large crowd (of strangers) and feeling lonely and isolated. Times when you don't feel part of the in-crowd. Sense of feeling overwhelmingly lonely in a large crowd in a church context. Homesickness. Not "in the know". Socially excluded provoking feelings of personal inadequacy. We all develop our own techniques of dealing with it.

Wherever I go, all the time, I feel like I'm the one on the outside.

Strange that we all feel like this at times. It is a view held in common yet we all feel at the time we are the only one feeling isolated.

Three signs of a lonely leader: over-connected online, overly busy and overly driven. Overly simplistic model? Can be features of people trying to fill the void. Easy to become quite lonely.

Looking for self-authentication and meaning. Where? In the online world?

Benefits of audiobooks. Remembered being read to when young. Is that isolating?

Very different from Facebook etc. Doesn't drive the same impulses.

Society changes and the way it works speaks to the way people expect it to work. Living in bygone days as part of a family of ten in one dwelling. Later living down the road but still "living in each other's pockets".

We like to be liked. That is part of the problem. We care about that and that makes it difficult to confront. But isn't the opposite end of the spectrum sociopathic? If you don't care?

Is the stress we feel connected to that experience? How can we mediate that? How can we lower the stress levels?

Should we say to people: “Be realistic!” or should we say “Be supernatural!”? Should we say “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs!” or should we say “Expect a Miracle!”?

When a problem is seen as not objective but subjective. Don’t necessarily blame someone. Just see it as a problem to be solved that we don’t all agree on.

The blame culture. Is there a solution? Sometimes there isn’t and we just need to agree that it cannot be sorted out. Instead of blaming someone else and making it their fault. This reduces stress.

Sometimes you get more stressed trying not to be the problem! Changing and then believing that actually I didn’t need to make that change.

Funny how little things bother you. Is it a cause of stress or a response to stress?

Unplanned interruptions cause stress. We react. Is that just busyness?

We can feel helpless but how serious is that compared with people who really are helpless? We can offer to show these people where help is available but they are still made to feel helpless. They hate being made to feel like that.

NHS – terrible feeling of being unable to cope. It shouldn’t be like this! Eventually we think I’m going to have to look after my own needs - I think I must take early retirement. Same in education. Autonomy of the patient is very highly respected.

We want to feel that we have some sense of control. It is easy to give ourselves glib answers. It is actually hard having to deal with lack of autonomy.

Extended families would mean a much more balanced view and better support. The need for absolute autonomy would be less necessary.

The spirit of the age is you don’t need anyone. You are self-contained. Selfish. That is the spirit we are fighting against.

When we model single-person ministry sometimes in rural areas but also in city centres, are we not pandering to the spirit of the age (the spirit of individualism)? We should be modelling co-operation and team-building. It doesn’t seem to be happening sufficiently. Is there an in-built psychosis in us that militates on us working more closely together?

I appreciate working as part of a team. Teams work where people are prepared not to be the boss.

<u>Discussion of Play …</u>

Three issues to consider as an experience of play …

a) Solitary pursuits. b) Team games. c) Being silly as an expression of play.

Advantages of one over the other? Depends on personality types. Not much experience of team games and mostly bad ones. However, doing a jigsaw with my wife.

Not drawn to quiz nights where there is an element of competition. OK with one team against another but not competing one on one.

Quite like board games. Tokaido? A nice board game but very gentle and Japanese. Pandemic? Team of 6-8 but not competing against each other but against the game, against the disease that has broken out. You have to work together.

Are you competitive? Yes! Happy with a game that I am more likely to win.

Values of team games is they help you to control that competitive spirit. You place the team before the desire to win. Each member of the team is given the opportunity to win. People-orientated rather than goal-orientated?

Do you favour the person who is good at something or encourage all the team? The danger of putting all your eggs in one basket. Nobody is trained or steps up because there is a really good person dominating one ministry. You lose the basket!

In The Apprentice*, they will all do well if the team wins but they fight like cats and dogs. The team is important but Alan Sugar models something different. He promotes a one man/woman model of business leadership.*

Being Silly. Inappropriate at times. But being silly is brilliant!

But is it more than brilliant? Is it necessary?

To be willing to be ridiculed without being humiliated.

Essential to have people with whom you can be silly. Me mostly with my wife but also with some people at church.

Doing water-aerobics on holiday was incredibly silly. Great fun. Absolutely hilarious!

Play is pointless. Being silly is pointless.

Micah Monday, 29th November 2018 at 14.17.

Ordained in ’88 Ten years before qualification in professional counselling, person-centred approach. Ten years in parish ministry. Then 17 years in specialist counselling as bishop’s advisor. Retired at 65. Extensive experience of other people’s stress. Fairly extensive amount of counselling. Research fellow. Interest in spirituality.

Tried to balance life. If immune to stress then unable to fully empathise but if went under as a result of stress then undermined the virtue of what he was trying to do with colleagues. Principle of statutory day off is inadequate. Clergy don’t have enough. Wrote a PhD thesis over nine and half years part-time. Incredibly difficult but when done found it valuable and nourishing. Enormous sense of satisfaction. Tried to retain a day off plus a significant part of another day to do whatever sustained him. What is it that makes you feel glad to be you, that energises you clearly in a way that is beneficial to you as a human being and as a minister? That indeed could be any part of parish work … or it might be something different. Personality

profile of so many parish clergy from past until now has been more introvert than extrovert. Anthony Russell has written a lot about this. Introvert needs down time to recharge, doing something that isn't relational. The ministry tends to become more important than our humanity and thus God gets squeezed out. Our humanity is essential.

Churchianity can move us away from Christianity. Moving me away from church towards spirituality. Church stuff is the last thing I want to do!

Mobile phone availability can be intolerable. The archdeacon who phoned the diocesan secretary at 10.30pm on Friday night for non-urgent business: inadequate boundaries!

Counselled hundreds of clergy during my 17 years including senior clergy. Saved some from losing their ministry and even their lives! I made an annual appt with my diocesan bishop for an "MOT" and checked his priorities. Reported any concerns proactively to the archdeacon. Collision of expectations?

Going to a Santana concert and "bopping" for three and a half hours – biological energy that carried me through the next several days. Pope Francis is not too churchy. He manages to "twinkle".

Hosea Wednesday, 9th January, 2019 at 10.00.

Regarding stress in ministry, the General Synod of July 2017 received a report in which Revd Simon Butler asked "what should we expect of one another that the Church's ordained ministers should be happy, fulfilled, and effective in their vocation?"[150] The Bishop of Chelmsford spoke about the burden of being a bishop which often felt like carrying a heavy weight in a lonely role. As a bishop, he aspired to be a vicar for the vicars, this was not always possible. He welcomed the report which freed bishops from feeling guilty for not being able to care for their clergy as much as they would like to.

How did **Hosea** react to this?

It is stressful being a vicar to the vicars. I take solace from the fact that this is a shared ministry. Prefer that local people related to their local leader. The "guilt" associated with not visiting etc. Slight guilt in unmet needs.

Importance of "one another care". Need to be a caring Church. Not necessarily by senior leaders but nevertheless known and cared for.

Do clergy need to take more responsibility for their own wellbeing? Who are they responsible to?

I think it is often personality driven. Sometimes clergy contact me over trivial matters. Communication is so much easier because of email etc so I am much more accessible. We need to understand clergy lifestyle and working practice. Clergy are stipendiary, not waged. It is not a job. It is your life.

[150] Davies and others, "Causes Of Clergy Stress", 2017.

Simon Butler's report to General Synod not theologically strong enough on time and sabbath. Put day off, leisure time, holiday, prayer, study time etc. etc. into your diary first before anything else. Generally speaking emergencies are few. We were made for Sabbath! More than just day off, holiday etc. It means what you need in order to flourish. Facebook comment by a local priest: Thank goodness today is my day off. Response from other clergy: Day Off! What's that? (example from a devilish culture. Vile!)

How do we promote Kingdom values and the upside-down nature of ministry and pay attention to due care and management? Disappearance of days and weeks and seasons. 24/7 availability. Sabbath as a principle. I was offered a coach to help me and this has been so good. Building a culture of coaching and support.

Negative and positive nature of stress …

Play as a phenomenon of life. GK Chesterton quote: "if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing badly." Perfectionism is a dangerous thing.

Play is an expression of Sabbath. Bumper sticker: "On the seventh day God went wind-surfing" Great!! Sabbath is joy. The good creation that God has made. Enjoy it! I take play seriously in my own life. God has made me a creative person. Write. Cook. Play Music. Make pictures. Very seldom have a bad night's sleep.

I have never stopped giving time to the things that bring me joy. Even if it is just for 10 minutes. And that has made an enormous difference and I am better equipped to deal with the stress and the strain.

Is "antidote" the right image? Not the medicine. Play/Sabbath is the vaccination. Feeding something that is needful in me so I have immunised myself against the ravages of stress. We find times for the things which give us joy. Not "you must have a day off" but "what gives you joy?" Invest in that.

Daniel Monday, 22nd October 2018 at 14.10

Vicar of this parish since 2015. Major role in Canterbury archdiocese. A safeguarding matter led to need to address issue of clergy well-being. Elected with a mandate to face this issue and spent a year on a report July synod. Make a covenant similar to the military covenant. Responsibility of the church to care for those they "employ" especially awareness of local congregations. They see themselves as consumers rather than carers.

Response from General Synod to report by July 2019.

Challenge of multiple benefices in rural areas. No real strategy for clergy to be properly cared for. Attempting to reduce the age of people offering for ministry. For young 40+ years of work. A very "flat" area with little chance for promotion.

Examples of stress? Pressure from institution but also from the community around. The latter predominates. The unenvied job. Careful about the language of stress. Difference between stress and strain. Doctors don't always adequately differentiate between good and bad stress.

Never-ending nature of the work. Can you go to bed thinking about the nature of what you have done rather than what you have not? If you are well you should be able to manage.

Pastoral supervision. If we could afford it everyone who have it provided. Regular and structured and providing accountability

My experience is that bishops are usually better at welcoming clergy who ask for help than those who struggle on alone. There should be re-education so that in things like MDRs, open questions are asked so that clergy do ask for support.

Electronic communication can be an issue for some people. A consumer generation. Ability to multi-task is reduced. No nuance in social media. You don't know what the person is like at the other end of the communication. You only learn by your mistakes.

Play. Read Go to theatre, opera. Not a player at the "clown-end" of things. In play you lose yourself. You forget yourself in leisure. You get caught up. You lose yourself in that other world.

I am quite a boundaried person. Took a funeral of a comedian. Had a ticket for a comedy club. More at the "Rev" end. Situational comedy. Very dry and dark sense of humour. You laugh because it is a world you know.

Participating in aspects of play will impact on ministry. Watching a profound film for example influences the way I work. Just switching off is very needful.

Need to move to a model where we have shared episcopacy. How can we expect one person to hold all that stuff? Not a monarchical system. Where we can learn to be more ourselves. God calls me and he calls you.

Habakkuk Tuesday, 5th February 2019 at 10.30

Something might take us completely by surprise. We cannot do anything about that. But we can do something about our normal routine. We need someone to ask the tricky questions.

It doesn't work just with a questionnaire. Because our responses are different we have to be sure that those who work with us are open to us responding differently to stress. We are not all the same.

Is being a clergyperson more or less stressful than other jobs? Surveys suggest that clergy are at the lower end of the spectrum. Not as stressful as being (say) a police officer. Depends on who we are and how we handle.

Many clergy just bumble along and respond to pastoral crises. A pretty steady routine.

However, most clergy see themselves in a leadership role and hence change will be on the agenda and churches are very conservative places. Allergic to change despite our gospel being about change.

There is a greater expectation particularly for paid clergy. Oversight role. Having to supervise other clergy. More complex environment. For some that is difficult because they assume what works in one place will also work in another. We put so much emphasis on training a curate we think all clergy equally able to lead in any situation. Anywhere in the country.

Other factor – parish priest role can be very lonely. Very singular. In diocesan office I have colleagues I can have a quick conversation with. Bitch and brag groups don't talk about vulnerability. Willingness to share engenders trust.

If our family life isn't thriving then our ministry won't either.

Too many of the new clergy are putting too much emphasis on their own wellbeing and not sufficient on the sacrificial call to ministry. More clergy in "tick over mode" who need more of a kick up the backside. It is a sacrificial calling.

There are people who are overwhelmed by too much work but at the other end of the spectrum there are clergy who are taking too much care of themselves.

Play is an activity that doesn't have a productive outcome. Not for a purpose. Is it connected to Happiness? You cannot pursue happiness.

What is play for one may cease to be play for another because there is another dimension to it.

Consider Stephen Covey's matrix. The quadrants: Urgent, Important etc. Q4 contains displacement activities.
If we are productive Covey says we should not spend any time there. Is that right? There are times we need to do a displacement activity. Doing it because it is NOT important. Is play in Q2 or Q4? Do you play only to achieve? If so it is goal orientated. Play can be productive but that's not what it's about!

Where are the boundaries between something healthy and unhealthy, good for us and not good for us?

Inappropriate Grace. Takes us beyond the mundane. Play can be a spontaneous aspect of something that is not play. You have to be careful. Being "on the edge" Hopefully guided by the Holy Spirit! Faith is spelled R.I.S.K.

Need to explore risk and safety. We need places of safety but we shouldn't always look for them. For some it is extreme sports! You cannot always exclude risk.

Joel Wednesday, 7th November 2018 at 10.30

Been a curate for seven and a half weeks!

Prior to ordination worked at Church House. Media development. Full time project officer to sort out the occasional offices. While at Church House I got the call to ordination. When someone says this to you it is like a fire inside and if it is of God no one can put it out. Despite what the C of E might throw at you. Then I got married! Lots of people "nagged". Person who

most pushed me then became a bishop! Finally, I yielded and began training part-time at St. Melitus.

Pressures and stresses of work at Westminster and training, study etc. Commuting!! Juggling between training and work. Work for clergy means out of the 9-5 pattern. Out of hours work. Fighting for budget etc. Funding issues. Flat out all day every day. Getting used to study and discipline of essays. I am a perfectionist too! Lucky to change to 4 days a week. Rigorous course plus all the formational stuff.

I learned that I was more resilient than I thought. Also developed some amazing friendships. Still got that support network.

Bit apprehensive about first funeral. Balance between support and being too aloof. Thoughts of running my own church in three years' time! Good with process. Admin? Everyone has their structures. Accountability is vital. A lot of good people around to go to. Other ordinands had some stress. Some found it harder than others.

More a "warm" than "playful" person. My husband is more playful. I don't do stories, fiction, films etc. More interested in art and craft. Can be serious when involved in work stuff. Likes structure. Try hard not to get cross with unstructured people They have a right to be like that. Like to know what is in the diary if possible.

Not too OCD!

I like to plan. Headings. Charismatic background helps. But best charismatic worship is planned. I am a people person. Structure can help people have an experience of God. Joy of C of E being broad. There is always structure but you have to be willing to throw it out if necessary.

I am very people orientated. Mild extrovert. Great outdoors. Sense of space and freedom needed. Not particularly into travel abroad. Gardening. Cross-stitch. Goals to aim for yet liking process.

Day off – too much filling up with things to do. Last one was a duvet-day. Great! Maybe do that once a month. Doing nothing is OK.

My definition of play: activities that bring pleasure but have no outcome that would be described as "productive" by our "visible results *orientated"* society.

Play talks you out of yourself. When you play you are not doing. My husband plays (D&D) when he has had a bad day and afterwards he is a better person. Being alone and playing is a way of helping after being with lots of people.

Self-help and mindfulness only go so far. Playing is what does it. Having fun. Wasting time. Not being productive.

Jonah Monday, 19th November 2018 at 2.00

Born in East London. Grew up in Leytonstone. Non-church background. Very little understanding of Christian faith. Girlfriend took me to Christian youth group. Blew me away! Read Journey Into Life. Everyone knew I was out of my depth. Crunch prayer when I asked Jesus if He was real. Had a vision of Jesus showing me His wounds like He did to Thomas.

Start of a new beginning. Got involved with ministry in local church. First a Reader and then I was ordained in '99. When I asked they told me I wouldn't survive the C of E sausage machine. I might lose my faith!
I am an evangelical charismatic. C of E structures not cause as much of a problem as I thought they might.

Boundaries are much more blurred nowadays. Working for the diocese has been surprising to see who you can work with you. God has been at work. It shows how gracious God is.

Stress can be a problem so need to plan well ahead. Got to work with all kinds of different people. You have to work with the C of E! Heard stories that would make your hair curl. Some of the clergy were so rude! And some diocesan officers were not believers. These people were getting such a bad witness from clergy.

Learned a lot about stress that clergy are under. Churchwarden who has been there for 50 years and doesn't want to change. Churches that don't want to be different. Envy towards nearby more successful churches. When clergy clash at chapter and take things too personally. Stress from PCCs that are intransigent.

Many clergy very happy in their jobs. Stress there but not an epidemic! Many clergy just keep it under wraps. Vicar whose wife had cancer – nobody knew. Old-fashioned view where you kept it all under wraps. You have no problems.

Going back to people you trained with – divorce, affairs, breakdown etc. But also, some success.

Hard in my first curacy. Teenage daughters found it hard then. Nearly packed it all in. But it passed. Who said it was going to be easy?! Had a really good training incumbent.

Principle of sacrifice important but unhelpful to have others reminding you that you need to give things up.

Clergy often don't tell their bishop that they are struggling.

Stress mostly inwardly motivated. I am a naturally lazy person. Need to push myself – that is stressful. What relieves stress is to get those tasks done.

Having fun is very important. Both solitary and team games. Pinball games. Space invaders. etc. More team games when younger and fitter. Cycling and snooker. Pool. Like to fix things. Wiring and cables.

Naturally silly! Say silly things. Can be very flippant at times. Can make fun out of something. Not so much doing silly things. In telecom days I would walk around the building on the outer ledge! For fun!

Nahum Tuesday, 18th December 2018 at 4.00

Brought up going to church. Found faith in teens. "Churchgoing" family. God kept at arm's length. Joined CYFA group in mid-teens. Billy Graham rally at Carrow Rd. Made commitment there. Degree at York. St John's. Studied music. CU a bit cliquey. St Michael le Belfry a bit too charismatic! Ordination – no way!! Curtains for church for about a year or so. Chaplaincy assistant at URC? Loughborough teacher training. Teacher in Cambridge. Church hopping. Hard. City centre.

Niggles that perhaps God was calling me but not sufficiently settle in a particular church to pursue it. Then met my husband. Baptist church at Southend. Spoke to vicar of local parish.

Call is to telling people about Jesus. I have jumped through hoops required. Told ordination retreat leader it was my imagination and the leader said you wouldn't be here if that was the case.

Stress from conflict within the congregation. Any conflict directed at me. Easier to handle if between third parties. It is ongoing issues that are more stressful. The most stressful is resistance to change. It is the subversive manipulative behaviour that is most stressful. Aggression directed towards me.

The perfectionist in me probably builds that up to be more than it is. Features more in brain as a result. Too much admin is also stressful.

Strength of C of E is diversity but this also causes difficulties. I have three congregations and three PCCs.

Range of approaches and traditions. Different expectations and reducing numbers of clergy are also very challenging. If you want to be a maintenance church it will be easier unless you yourself as minister are driven to promote mission. Lack of resources.

How I deal with stress is by working on strategies. Keeping day off. Getting out of the parish.

Various things make me laugh. Local school service. Lighting advent candle. Something to laugh at with children's responses. Laughing at myself.

Like walking. Longer holidays. Learning violin? Making spaces for things I enjoy during the working day.

Going into a care home is something I enjoy. Attending coffee mornings. Having a good chat with people. Things that energise!

Three congregations etc. Can be quite busy. Rushing from one thing to another.

Some of it we put upon ourselves. People expect to see you around. With multiple parishes people wonder what you are doing. Prefer meeting people to doing admin. Sometimes family need to tell you to take a break.

Day off is not sufficient. Easy to compartmentalise. Need to integrate.

TEACHERS

Ezekiel Tuesday, 5th March 2019 at 1.20 pm.

Definition of play: some form of activity or interaction that would maybe not have a direct outcome. Do something you enjoy and take great comfort from.

What do for fun? Outside of school – sport. With children. With dog. Set up for that. Being playful. Messing around. Making things up. In cooking playing around with different ingredients or at work with different ideas.

Play as part of work? Yes! Part of job to be playful as well as serious. Best parts. Memorable learning experiences. Early years where learning is through play but later on becomes more structured. Is this retrograde?

Pressure from outside.

A huge change in the way children play over recent years with advent of Internet. A lot of time spent with screen. Having a virtual life. Big migration from real to virtual. Steps to mitigate influence?

Not so much reading because tech has taken over.

Email danger. Create a charter of agreement. Only one whole school email a day. Action research on planning and marking. Moving from in depth marking to live feedback so better focus on teaching and learning.

Is play an antidote to stress in teaching environment? Children do understand that balance.

Amos Monday 25th March 2019 at 10.00.

Do children suffer from stress? Mental health issues. People are more aware of it and there are more strategies.
Not a taboo subject anymore. Teaching the children to have a positive mindset in order to be good learners.

To not be as stressed.

Peer pressure increases stress. Stress in secondary but now in primary as well.

Is stress increasing across the board? Hard to tell. Always been there but not so spoken of. More confident to talk about it. More support in place.

Play – school ethos? What opportunities for pupils. Nursery provision. Early years curriculum is mainly about play. Lots of different type play activities available.

What changes take place in the sphere of play? Curriculum pressures and from outside bodies. Needing to develop skills produces pressures.

Always make sure there are opportunities to use social and sharing skills in the class room. Allow time to let off steam. Some children find that hard. Computer games? Fresh air is important but ICT open for a bit mid-day but even these are linked. They cannot bring their own devices.

Lots of opportunities for physical play and real practical play.

Boundaries? Between work and play? Blurring of edges? More play in early years. Later – aimed at social skills.

Fun at work? Yes! Teacher teams do have down time together in staff room. Social stuff.

Play impact on stress for teachers? Yes. Thinking about employees knowing there is always someone to talk to. Openness. Sharing burden and stress. Culture of sharing.

Definition of Play? Something Fun you like to do that isn't necessarily the norm.

Zechariah Monday, 25th March 2019 at 1.45.

First started as a teaching assistant in 1996. Then a break for a child and then full time since about 2000.
Importance of imagination. No lesson cannot be done outside. Bogged down by targets and measurable achievements. Social and emotional learning often takes a back seat.

Use of imagination and stories as links to learning targets. Done this way it is NOT stressful! Through role play you then get emotional development. You create the environment as a practitioner. Building resilience.

No replacement for the interaction. In a manic world. Concerned for how busy life has become for families.

Children held back in detention are the very children who most need to play – to let off steam.

It matters enormously! Doing things that don't matter and taking forward an understanding of that is so vital.

Freedom of play and freedom of time. Mental health such a big bubble. Amazing world full of adventure that we have to make sure children and adults have the opportunity to access.

Obadiah Tuesday, 30th April 2019 at 4.00pm.

Changes? Added stress because of changes in system. Little guidance and mapping. Moving from one system of grading to another. Not equivocal. Changes in looking at data. Data becomes a key focal point. Trying to keep on top of marking is very stressful.

No light at the end of the tunnel. Always something hanging over you. Ofsted. Monitoring. No time to do it all.

Safeguarding such a key issue. Planning and prep of good quality lessons takes so much time. Holidays are not holidays. Anybody who says they had six full weeks in summer is lying!

A certain level of stress helps to keep you going. Sometimes it is overwhelming. Some reach point of meltdown.

What keeps you going? Classroom interaction. Passing on knowledge. Teaching about religion is a passion.

Giving them the avenue to travel down. A child doing something they couldn't do before without your help. You can't buy that!

Teaching a gift and a privilege.

Younger colleagues struggle especially in secondary school because children are not much younger than you.

A lot of pressures there because they come out of training so soon. Colleague and peer-mentoring is so vital.

Great difference between children of 30 years ago and children of now. Way they are raised is different. Moral values. Respect.

What do for fun? Lot of physical exercise. Candy Crush. Boot sales. Eat out. Date night. Not much spare time. Grandchildren.

Having fun in school. Even with students. Playing together.

Some aspects of play that can be destructive just as some aspects of stress can be positive.

Having fun. Dancing. Putting your tongue out.

QUESTIONNAIRES

As part of this empirical section, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to better understand their views on ministry, stress and play. Ten Questionnaires were completed by the participants, some of whom were part of one or both of the two Playgroups and some of whom recorded personal interviews. The questions on the Questionnaire were as follows:

1. **What is your current role in ministry?**
2. **How long have you been in this position?**
3. **How is a typical working day divided? Give some examples of what you do.**
4. **Describe the areas of ministry that most energise you.**
5. **Describe what you find most stressful in your working day.**
6. **Give some examples of stressful situations you have recently experienced with colleagues.**
7. **What kinds of things do you do to relax?**
8. **What do you find most helpful in coping with the pressures of work and why?**

9. **What resources are available from your faith group to help manage stress?**
10. **On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being high) how stressful and pressured is your current ministry?**
11. **Give your personal definition of "play"**
12. **Would you describe yourself as a playful person? If so, why? If not, why not?**
13. **What do you do for fun?**
14. **Make a list of your top ten games, sports and hobbies.**
15. **What do you think are the most popular pastimes in this country?**
16. **Do you engage in sports and games with your colleagues in ministry and/or members of your faith group? What kinds of things do you do?**
17. **Describe what is most valuable in play in developing character and personality**
18. **In what ways might play be a valuable tool in combating stress?**
19. **Would you like to participate in a play seminar and/or clown workshop?**

Individual participants (with pseudonyms) in the questionnaire responded as follows:

What is your current role in ministry and how long have you been in this position?

Malachi	Team Vicar (non-stipendiary). 8 years.
Nahum	Priest in charge of three churches. 8 months.
Zephaniah	Assistant Curate. 2 years and 7 months.
Jeremiah	Priest in charge of six churches and three parishes. 5 years for 3 churches, 3 ½ years for the other three.
Haggai	Incumbent priest in a single parish. 7 years.
Isaiah	Assistant curate (training). 6 months.
Micah	Retired from stipendiary ministry with PTO (*permission to officiate*) to take occasional services and preach but main ministry is counselling, counselling supervision, research and writing. 4 years into retirement.
Joel	Curate. 7 ½ weeks.
Jonah	Team Vicar in Church of England Team, responsible for an Anglican congregation. 9 months.
Hosea	Bishop 9 years.

How is a typical working day divided? Give some examples of what you do.

Malachi	Morning prayer, preparation of the services etc, visiting in care homes, training and Bible study, food bank organising, the running of the church, DCC.
Nahum	Morning prayer, admin, staff meeting, visits, groups, funerals evening meeting.
Zephaniah	Morning prayer from 7.15 till 8.00 (Monday to Thursday) followed by breakfast and dog walk. Then either school assemblies (twice a week) or paperwork/service preparation. Sometimes the dog walk might be later. Occasionally there might be a visit in the morning or afternoon. I would typically take a break for lunch of around an hour. Twice a week I have early afternoon school visits and twice a week I have afternoon bible studies. Once a week we have a lunchtime staff meeting. I try to take a session off somewhere in the day – if there's an evening meeting then I might go for another walk, or do some cooking or have a nap. If there is no evening meeting I might watch TV or catch up on personal emails or phone calls or go on my personal Facebook page. If I have had a quieter day I would do the paperwork or email/work social

	media in the evening. If I have a recreational book on the go I tend to read in the evening. Books for work I tend to read in the morning.
Jeremiah	Assembly, admin, funeral visit, emails. Meetings in the evening.
Haggai	Flexibility is necessary, but I try most days to isolate a small section (two hours maybe) for myself.
Isaiah	Prayer, reading, writing reflections or sermons, meetings.
Micah	Every day is different. I seek to balance work and play.
Joel	No such thing as a typical working day. I always start with morning prayer, but I may have staff meetings, one to ones with congregation members or members of the public, emails to answer, theological reflections to write for IME2, training days to attend, sermons to write, sessions to plan, services or youth group to run, toddler group to attend, etc. etc. It's hugely varied.
Jonah	(% of typical day) early morning prayer 3%, emails and communication 10–15%, meeting parishioners in church café 20%, preparation for the future events 20–30%, official meetings 10– 30%, pastoral visits 3–30%.
Hosea	No such thing as typical, but always starts with prayer.

Describe the areas of ministry that most energise you.

Malachi	I love visiting individuals and groups. Food bank. Leading seekers groups, training and Bible study groups. Designing posters.
Nahum	Being with people. Uplifting worship, pastoral work.
Zephaniah	I love to either see unchurched people come to faith and equally to enable churchgoers to be released in ministries and to begin to live their faith.
Jeremiah	Being out and about in village, meeting people, work in schools, communion, funerals, weddings and baptisms.
Haggai	Meetings with individuals. Thinking. Writing a good sermon.
Isaiah	Children's work. Messy Church. Worship.
Micah	Meeting others in relational depth, creativity, contemplation.
Joel	Spending time with people, both those that are church members and those that are not, whether that's in official activities or not.
Jonah	Meeting new people, checking up on new Christians, faith-sharing courses, finding new ways to share the Gospel.
Hosea	Talking to people about the gospel.

Describe what you find most stressful in your working day.

Malachi	Managing people who are unreliable. Challenges of being custodians of a listed Church building and a sick church hall.
Nahum	Too much church admin!
Zephaniah	Admin and paperwork. Unreasonably demanding people. Days when there is no time for a power nap!
Jeremiah	Feeling I can't get it all done. When things are emotionally difficult and I am blamed.
Haggai	Mass meetings and meetings that I have to do lots of planning for. New things.
Isaiah	Schools work, conflict resolution.
Micah	Blissfully very little now.
Joel	As someone new to ordained ministry I'm still settling into the fact that there is very little structure to the day, and I'm finding that quite stressful at the moment.

	I'm also aware that there's always more you can do, and knowing when to draw the line can be quite hard, and that you spend a lot of time working on your own.
Jonah	I think catching up with things I should've done earlier. I can be an awful procrastinator!
Hosea	Disciplinary matters.

Give some examples of stressful situations you have recently experienced with colleagues.

Malachi	Dealing with someone who failed to carry through the job he was responsible for.
Nahum	If there is conflict.
Zephaniah	I find it frustrating when people do not listen or communicate properly.
Jeremiah	Chair of Friends very accusing in email.
Haggai	Running a leadership day by myself for 20+ leaders.
Isaiah	The disagreement between PCC members fled into argument. One party walked out, I stepped in to encourage resolution.
Micah	Our bishop is very opaque to questions about confidentiality and confession.
Joel	Mainly clashes around ideas of how things should be done or what is important, plus some difficult pastoral situations we are dealing with as a team and learning everything to get up to speed!
Jonah	Surprisingly few examples. Conversations which become emotionally draining e.g. problems I cannot fix which I hear over again.
Hosea	No comment.

What kinds of things do you do to relax?

Malachi	Knitting, colouring, reading, sudokus, crosswords, gardening, birdwatching and (with others) games like Carcassonne and settlers of Catan.
Nahum	Walk, cycle, laugh! Play musical instruments.
Zephaniah	Power naps! Walking or playing with the dog. Cooking. Going on Facebook (personal more than work). Chatting to/being with family and friends. Reading. Listening to audiobooks or watching TV on catch up in the bath! Playing music very loud.
Jeremiah	Paint, do pottery, gym, Pilates, walking, time with husband and friends and family.
Haggai	TV. Photography and birdwatching. A glass of wine. Sometimes reading. Listening to music.
Isaiah	Play games, watch TV.
Micah	Walking, reading, music, painting, massage, contemplation.
Joel	Cross-stitch, spending time with my family and friends, watching documentaries on TV, walking outside, going away to the Northern or Western Isles, escaping on weekends away, exploring towns and shopping and gardening.
Jonah	Going out, eating and drinking with wife, seeing family, visiting shops especially charity shops, boot fairs, DIY, cycling, watching old films, sci-fi, whodunnits?
Hosea	Sleep, eat, read, write, walk.

What do you find most helpful in coping with the pressures of work and why?

Malachi	Regular time off.

Nahum	Spending time out of the parishes to pray and reflect.
Zephaniah	Interacting with family, personal friends because (a) it's a distraction and (b) you can share stuff. Also watching or playing with the dog because she makes me laugh every day. Walking the dog also gives me space to talk to/shout at/praise God - especially down at the estuary/seawall as there is so much space and it is a "thin space"
Jeremiah	Physical exercise, laughing, pottery.
Haggai	Having a wife! Half-day photographing birds or DIY.
Isaiah	Preparation of materials.
Micah	Striving for work life balance; rest; relaxation, recreation.
Joel	Getting away– I am pretty hopeless at drawing boundaries with work mentally and so it helps not to be in the same environment as I am when working.
Jonah	I find conversations with others most helpful, appropriate unloading of issues, keeping a sense of humour remembering its God's church!
Hosea	Time away.

What resources are available from your faith group to help manage stress?

Malachi	I am in a New Wine core group when we pray for one another.
Nahum	Retreats, spiritual advisor.
Zephaniah	Prayer partners, support groups both virtual (on Facebook) or actual as I find it helpful to talk things through and out. Worship music. Christian self-help type books. Spiritual director.
Jeremiah	Prayer, support from colleagues– being able to talk. Spiritual director.
Haggai	Group support - not useful to me. Friends in ministry.
Isaiah	Fellowship and hope.
Micah	Very little. The theology of self-giving militates against it. My support for these things comes much more from the counselling community.
Joel	Online resources (e.g. the Sheldon Hub), various publications available on the market, prayer, support from CMD officer in charge of curates training, support from Training Incumbent.
Jonah	I am aware of pastoral support (e.g. spiritual direction, coaching) which I have taken up. Not aware of anything that is specific to stress support?
Hosea	Good colleagues.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being high) how stressful and pressured is your current ministry?

Malachi	4.
Nahum	5, but it varies.
Zephaniah	5 though may be pushed a bit higher at present due to job hunting.
Jeremiah	It varies. 6 - 8.
Haggai	7.
Isaiah	3.
Micah	1.
Joel	4–5, but I'm aware that I've only just started and my training incumbent is being mindful of not giving me too much to do at the moment!
Jonah	6.
Hosea	7.

Give your personal definition of "play"

Malachi	Doing something that doesn't matter.
Nahum	Something fun allowing relaxation and escape from work and often laughter.
Zephaniah	Doing something that's fun and creative.
Jeremiah	Something that refreshes me where the end result doesn't matter - it's in the being not doing.
Haggai	Connectivity, the main justification for which is the (potential) enjoyment intrinsic in that activity.
Isaiah	Problem solving.
Micah	Expressing oneself without fear.
Joel	Activities that bring pleasure but have no outcome that would be described as "productive" by our "visible results orientated" society.
Jonah	To be myself, like being myself, I'm not caring what others think.
Hosea	To participate in the sabbath.

Would you describe yourself as a playful person? If so, why? If not, why not?

Malachi	I am happy to waste time, especially when I'm with other people.
Nahum	Yes. I enjoy doing fun things and used to be a bit of a practical joker!
Zephaniah	Yes, because I am creative and optimistic. No when I forget myself and think ministers have to be terribly serious and grown-up.
Jeremiah	I can be and I can get too serious. I like to dance down the aisle at the end of service. I like to laugh.
Haggai	Yes, because I look for opportunities to play. I don't take myself too seriously. God is good.
Isaiah	Yes – often playing, needing minimal encouragement.
Micah	Yes and no. I am quite serious about most things but with a good deal of humour.
Joel	No, not at all! I mostly quite serious by nature except in relationships with those closest to me.
Jonah	Yes. I like doing enjoyable things and being "stupid" at times.
Hosea	Yes – I play hard, because sabbath is the climax of the creation and the joy that awaits us.

What do you do for fun?

Malachi	I have real fun with my grandchildren. My side of the family all like table games.
Nahum	Play musical instruments; go for walks; sing.
Zephaniah	Cooking/entertaining. Playing with the dog. Going out with or to friends and family. Going to new places. Going to theatre/cinema.
Jeremiah	Play with grandchildren. Pottery.
Haggai	Photography. Walking. Gardening. DIY. Eating. Computer "driving" games. Reading (usually non-fiction). Watching some television.
Isaiah	Number puzzles, lights teasing, being entertaining.
Micah	Friends, family, dog, humour, music, dancing.
Joel	Cross-stitch, spending time with my family and friends, watching documentaries on TV, walking outside, going away to the Northern or Western Isles, escaping on weekends away, exploring towns and shopping and gardening.
Jonah	Playing on PC, fixing things, just being outdoors, sitting and talking to people, watching TV.

Hosea I cook. I eat. I sleep. I write. I read. I watch the football. I walk. I watch movies. I consider lilies. I play the guitar. I make lino prints.

Make a list of your top ten games, sports and hobbies.

Malachi Keep fit, walking/birdwatching, bananagrams, knitting, reading, gardening, board games etc sudoku.

Nahum Don't really play games but enjoy them when I do!! Used to play squash, badminton. Like wide game outdoor type activities and problem-solving activities such as 'get all these people across the river' type challenges. Also singing; playing the guitar; hill walking; cycling; camping; reading; learning the violin; writing songs; any outdoor pursuits activities; I like skiing but haven't been for years!!

Zephaniah Cooking. Reading. Solitaire on the phone. More or less anything if it's done with people I love to be with. Swimming. Being with the dog. Exploring new places. Camping/clamping. Learning new things. Cinema/ theatre.

Jeremiah 1 pottery 2 painting 3 walking 4 gym 5 Pilates 6 running 7 swimming 8 meals out 9 baking 10 gardening.

Haggai Photography. Walking. Gardening. DIY. Eating. Computer "driving" games. Reading (usually non-fiction). Watching some television.

Isaiah Call of Duty, pool, coding, films, dining out, sailing, inventing, coffee with friends and family, reading, listening to music.

Micah Watching the cricket, listening to music, gardening, walking, walking the dog, massage, reading, writing, conversation, contemplation.

Joel Cross-stitch, shopping, spending time with those I love, walking outside (preferably by the sea or in beautiful countryside)

Jonah Football, snooker, cycling, car maintenance, travel, Cluedo, music, quiz nights, pubs, sailing.

Hosea 1 writing 2 walking 3 music 4 reading 5 cooking (and shopping for food) 6 movies 7 sleeping 8 eating 9 chewing the fat 10 lino printing.

What do you think are the most popular pastimes in this country?

Malachi Fishing, TV.

Nahum Not sure but many pastimes seem to revolve around technology. Running seems to be popular.

Zephaniah Drinking! Fishing/angling. Cinema? Gardening.

Jeremiah Fishing.

Haggai TV. Pubs. Football. Tennis. Going to concerts.

Isaiah Watching TV.

Micah Social media and television, football.

Joel Depends which age group you're looking at I suppose, but probably sports, shopping and going out.

Jonah Online shopping, watching X Factor/Strictly type programmes, social media, personal fitness and image, Costa and Starbucks.

Hosea Probably (and in no particular order) shopping, music, sport (from the armchair)

Do you engage in sports and games with your colleagues in ministry and/or members of your faith group? What kinds of things do you do?

Malachi	Beetle drives with church and local friends but none with clergy colleagues.
Nahum	No not really.
Zephaniah	Not anymore but I used to play badminton and croquet with previous faith friends/colleagues.
Jeremiah	No. I do sport with other people.
Haggai	No.
Isaiah	Table tennis (when rarely available)
Micah	N/A
Joel	No.
Jonah	Early days here. I would like to invite others to quiz nights, indoor games etc.
Hosea	Not really. I walk (if that counts) and still swim a bit.

Describe what is most valuable in play in developing character and personality

Malachi	It gives the opportunity to relax. Competitive games help us to lose gracefully.
Nahum	It often involves working with other people. If it is a competitive game, it means you sometimes win or sometimes lose, which is the same in life. Team work skills are learned.
Zephaniah	The opportunity to be uninhibited, curious explorative and experimental. To test things out in a relatively "safe" space.
Jeremiah	I am learning to be okay about making mistakes and learning from them.
Haggai	Lone play: you can quickly learn if you are a "rule breaker" or a "rule keeper". Develops creativity. Group/team play: camaraderie, cooperation. If you are competitive, you can get it out of your system in a non-threatening way. If you are not competitive (I'm generally not very) then you can hone.
Isaiah	Relaxation into casual conversation leading to more honest interaction.
Micah	Not taking oneself seriously. Fitness and agility. Teamwork.
Joel	It helps creativity and teaches you how to have fun.
Jonah	Opportunity for time out, to be yourself and not shaped by external pressures in ministry.
Hosea	To enter the kingdom of heaven requires becoming as a child: play, creativity all help.

In what ways might play be a valuable tool in combating stress?

Malachi	They take our minds off our stressors for a while. We get things in a better perspective.
Nahum	Play usually involves laughter; it takes one's mind off the stressful things and physical exercise may combat surges of adrenalin???? It can be relaxing.
Zephaniah	Because it is often joyful and distracting.
Jeremiah	It makes you switch off and focus on something else and helps get things back in perspective.
Haggai	Stress is most harmful when it is constant. Play breaks into the cycle. Play also reframes what is important and what is not - at least for the period of time you are playing. This is if it persists for a while beyond the play, and lets you see things from a different angle.
Isaiah	Distraction from the issues causing stress, encouragement to engage in supportive conversation.
Micah	Relaxing, energetic, fun.

Joel It can help you take your mind off the stressful situation, and help you to be creative in a different way.

Jonah As long as it is proper play appropriate for the individual. Allowing oneself to really enjoy play without feeling guilty about doing it.

Hosea You stop taking yourself so seriously. You are closer to God (who is Lord of the sabbath)

Would you like to participate in a play seminar and/or clown workshop (delete as applicable)?

Malachi Yes.

Nahum No thanks.

Zephaniah Possibly!

Jeremiah Possibly.

Haggai Not at present. (I have done a clown workshop before. Learning to run one – now that might interest me.)

Isaiah Yes both.

Micah No.

Joel No.

Jonah Yes to both.

Hosea Not really. Though I do know how to juggle.

Postscript. I would like to record my personal thanks to the clergy and teachers who contributed anonymously to this chapter. Thank you for engaging with me in discussion and for sharing your important insights into stress and play. I value your partnership and appreciate the vital contribution you have made to this work.

4. Analysis

It has been an intriguing and inspiring experience to sit with church leaders and others to discuss issues surrounding stress and play. In many ways, the burgeoning theories of this research have been confirmed by the comments and insights of the participants but there have been some surprises as well. Stress has been as deep-seated an experience as expected and, in some cases, more intense than could be guessed although there has been a clear strand underlining that a certain level of stress is required in order to carry out the practice of ministry most effectively. In this section, whilst commenting on the empirical research, to make the comments more apparently grounded in reality, I have avoided the pseudonyms whilst retaining anonymity. Direct quotes from the contributors have been italicised.

Play has been a more widespread phenomenon than expected, even in the higher echelons of the church and this has spilled over into a more realised theology impacting on daily parochial practice. Although there seems little evidence of "play" and "fun" being used as words in common theological parlance, (there still seems a reluctance to engage with terms more associated with the nursery and playground) clergy do easily communicate concepts of rest, leisure and sabbath as vital to flourishing ministries.

Teachers are understandably more willing to initiate discussion on play, especially as a learning tool, and also happy to share that their work environment benefits from a playful attitude amongst colleagues.

It would appear that the major factors of negative stress relate to managing change in an environment when people are generally resistant to change. There is often a sense of powerlessness experienced by those in parish ministry and the problems of resolving conflict are clearly stressful. Even those with the authority to manage change find it difficult, especially in the area of disciplinary matters. Administration and paperwork, coupled with the custodianship of ancient buildings are often felt to be issues that detract from the more central call to mission and ministry. Stress levels vary with most being medium to high and slightly less being medium to low.

All of the participants are energised by activities involving people although these activities often generate the situations that lead to stress such as confrontation and conflict. Resistance to change is a high factor in stress. One participant with wide experience of diocesan ministry commented that *all the blame was foisted on the clergy*. There is noticeable among some church leaders a highly-developed sense of responsibility leading to a feeling of being driven. Clergy sometimes have a sense of feeling "I can't win" and that whilst the large amount of good done is often ignored, one small failing will be highlighted and criticised. Another commented that different expectations, reducing numbers of clergy and the lack of resources were challenging. They said *if you want to be a mission church then all this will cause stress*. A rural vicar commented *I want to get that balance right and I want to manage my stress levels and by keeping fit and playing I enjoy the job. I thought that this was an important area of research to look at - how play is important for people in ministry.* Many of the questionnaires showed that parish clergy endeavoured to maintain a proper work/life balance with space for recreation and study as well as more mundane pastoral and administrative tasks.

The two Playgroup sessions were very stimulating. Discussing the issues of the *lonely leader,* that they were *over-connected online, overly busy and overly driven,* the group *agreed that online communication is generally almost always socially isolating.* It said: *we are moving*

from very communal living to very individualised living ... family breakdown ... people living alone ... no more meals around the table ... or people sit at the same table and don't communicate. Changes in culture and society meant clergy were often called upon to adapt their expectations and make adaptations in the practice of their ministry that might put pressure on their own experience and theological understanding. The rapid expansion of electronic communication has a big part to play in this.

Senior clergy commented *our responsibility is to build a church where people are known and cared for.* One said: *in a sacramental faith it helps if that care is embodied in a person. ... Clergy come from a line-managed universe and they find it quite hard to function in one that isn't line-managed - they want to know who their line-manager is.*

Understanding this, it appears, is vital to discerning what kind of organisation clergy work in. It is clearly a vocational profession but one wholly unlike all others. The bishop said:

> *If you count hours you will go mad! One minister said to me: "When I say my prayers in the morning does that count towards my working hours?"! We work on the biblical principle of time. It all belongs to God. We need to understand the principle of Sabbath. It is a command but also the climax of the creation. Maybe it is a commandment because we fail to receive it as a gift? As far as the scripture is concerned, put leisure/Sabbath in and ring-fence it. The rest is "life". Don't count the hours you work; count the hours that you rest.*

This is a quite distinctive approach to parish ministry and the "vocation to the priesthood". It appears that this unique quality is insufficiently communicated to ordinands preparing to take the collar and, in the thoroughly commendable desire to teach management principles, something of this *sacramental* quality appears to have been lost. Perhaps the *liminal* essence at the heart of play can help to turn the clergyperson away from the daily grind and towards the Sabbath rest. Spariosu perhaps has some lessons to teach us in this regard as he deals with the issues of literature and life in a "ludic-irenic" form rather than a combative one. The pragmatic disciplines of the management culture must be balanced by more metaphysical aspects embedded in the practice of play.

The clergy counsellor commented: *Bishop John Pritchard said clergy should always have a day for that which made them feel distinctively themselves. Whatever that might be. Time for that string of the bow which if it is neglected decays or goes slack.* Comments were made about *self-medication* and it was pointed out that *in the Church of Scotland each minister has a wellbeing budget.* Is this something that the newly-emerging *Covenant for Clergy Care and Well-being*[151] might consider?

The General Synod contributor said:

> *My whole hope in this is that as much as possible everyone will realise that for the good of the whole body of Christ we need to care for the carers. We need to do that for ourselves, we need to do that for one another and one of the challenges is for our bishops to lead because they are appalling at looking after themselves.*

And the senior diocesan officer commented:

[151] Butler, *Covenant.*

> *There is too much emphasis on training in advance and not enough on equipping in context. Those who are practitioners of life-long learning find it easier to adapt and find new models that work for them in different situations which overall then are less stressful than those who think they've got it all and they're trying to apply old models in new situations and I think that's much more stressful.*

Appropriate pre and post ordination training and teaching is vital it seems and a clear part of that should include a place for fun, play and recreation. The newly ordained curate remembered that they were taught the *importance of rest but no mention of play!* One response to this thesis might be to ensure that a good understanding of the value of play, recreation and fun was added to the curriculum of bible schools and theological colleges.

The teachers similarly recognised the pressure of stress in their own field. One teaching assistant said:

> *Pressures and expectations have increased on staff and on children. The increase in technology is a pressure but I provide an enabling environment. Outside. I love that. Playing outside. Like it was 15 years ago. You don't need the latest gadget to amuse them. You need time to engage with a child. Create an environment where they can be social beings. ... I absolutely am privileged to work in an environment that allows me to do that.*

Here too it seems there is a clear link between the healing value of play and the pressures that come from areas like emerging technology.

One primary school teacher commented that we have produced *a generation of children who get bored easily* and another said s*ocial media is a big issue. There's always something new coming out. It's hard to keep up with it. We have a rapidly-changing world.* By contrast, another said *it's not particularly stressful. It is demanding but I see my job in a different way. It is multi-faceted so working with the children is its own antidote to stress.* It is clear that spending time with young children in a playful environment can help to hold harmful stress at bay. This might be something that clergy can learn the value of by focusing more acutely on children and schools' ministry in the parish. Projects like *Open the Book*[152] and *Messy Church*[153] have been proven to have a beneficial effect not only on the recipients but also the practitioners.

Clearly, stress in primary and secondary education is a very big issue and recent changes in the way schools are run and curriculum delivered has only intensified this. One teacher said *education could be a stressful environment if you don't put children first. We must focus on improving our work/life balance. Putting the emphasis on the pastoral side and getting the balance right sensitively with colleagues.* Another said *stress levels have increased for me as head but it is a different type of stress. It's a big responsibility. It's important to have a positive mindset you can always go back to.* Clergy might learn from this when church is often an environment of challenge and chapter meetings sometimes portray an underlying and sub-conscious competitive streak. A positive outlook can be assisted when the fear of looking unable to cope is significantly diminished.

[152] https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/.
[153] https://www.messychurch.org.uk/.

A secondary school teacher shared that their *stress pressures are intense. There is always another goal, always another job to do, another set of books to mark.* They commented further that the *pressures on young Newly Qualified Teachers is immense. There is a deeper level of stress.* They went on:

> *Several younger teachers in my school have not coped. The pressure leads to illness, poor work/life balance. It is all work and no life if you are going to do the job properly. At exam time it increases tenfold. To do the job properly you need 20 hours a day every day including weekends. It's not just the actual teaching but everything that goes around that.*

The same teacher contracted Hemiplegic migraine as a result of stress and had to take three months off work. They said:

> *I had to get back to being me. The only antidote was to do something for myself. I started Zumba classes and rediscovered walking and cycling. After that it put my whole life into perspective. I don't let stress get the better of me anymore. Consider the importance of a level of self-medication. Something that takes your mind away from that tedium. Because if you don't it drags you down. There's a burst of wellbeing around you. Not just love and connection but that whole relationship.*

Whilst not overtly apparent, targets and goals in the Church of England can sometimes be a source of stress, whether it is the (relatively) recent challenge of meeting the Parish Share/Family Purse contribution or the simple pressure to grow the congregation; the proverbial "bums on seats" project. Feeling that it all depends on them and even that this itself might be a judgement on their own competence and capability is a constant source of stress for parish clergy. Contributors to the questionnaires highlighted administration, meetings, lack of structure and unreasonable people as major causes of stress.

According to the World Health Organization stress is the health epidemic of the 21st Century with it accounting for nearly half of all sick days in 2016.[154] Statistics from the Health and Safety Executive show Education as a sphere where stress levels are higher than average[155] but anecdotal evidence as well as the findings of General Synod[156] and reports from the Burtons[157] show regular parish ministry to also be highly stressful.

Clergy shared that *every day is so important we have to do the thing that is most important to people and if we don't support them I think that is a source of stress* and *at times it can be quite overwhelming.* One commented:

> *I don't find that as pressurised as resistance to change. That seems to be where the source of stress is. It can be quite unpleasant at times. The stress for me comes*

[154] "The Truth About Stress", *The Truth About,* (London: BBC One Television, 4 May 2017), <http:/ www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05p5v5f>, [Accessed October 2019].
[155] Health And Safety Executive, *Health And Safety Statistics*, (2018/19), <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/>, [Accessed October 2019].
[156] Butler, *Covenant.*
[157] Burton, *Public People.*

primarily from resistance to change from people within the congregation and that I find much more difficult.

Another said:

I think that the source of stress can be of spinning plates and I realise that one is about to crash and then I can't give it up. That sense of having never finally finished or doing any one thing as well as I know I could. We need to get that resolved but I am very conscious that the sense of plate-spinning is a creator of stress. Sometimes it's not just wobbling but I am heading to the ground (crash!) and then I am hurriedly trying to pick up the bits.

An incumbent of a multiple benefice said:

Maybe I'm not trained to or not skilled at it but if I don't do it who will? So I think that there is that sense as well of being frustrated that I seem to end up as running six churches when I'm passionate about mission and all the people who don't come to church and all that stuff and yet I have spent a lot of my time on stuff and some of it makes a difference and some of it doesn't. I really do not know!

In some ways, the Church has managed to maintain and even promote an environment that harks back to a lost "Golden Age" and that all change within that environment is inherently bad. Despite the grudging acceptance of the pace of change in the secular world, congregations (many of them increasingly elderly) are stubbornly resistant to change and clergy, faithfully taught to be pastorally caring, even to the sacrifice of their own wellbeing, face the increasing stress of ministering to the obstinate and intransigent.

Some clergy said *stress is about too many balls to juggle ...* and another said *boundaries are blurred and maybe that is a source of stress.* Still another commented:

Another cause of stress is Conflict and Confrontation. Most normal people don't like confrontation. In our sphere of work, we often are the people who have to do it. Because nobody else is going to do it. And some people are very difficult to deal with!

"Line Managers" like archdeacons and bishops don't always give sufficient support when clergy face this resistance to change and the Burtons[158] cite several instances of clergy fearful of admitting their shortcomings for fear of being deemed "not up to the job." Balancing this pressure within a playful attitude might help.

Discussion in the PlayGroups showed that a lot of stress arose from conflict and unrealised expectations, both from clergy and lay people. *Sometimes we have to initiate conflict. And we hate it! We often just have to do it. We have to accept that.* Others said:

Clarity of decision helps both us and the person we are confronting ... The clearer you can be the better ... This lowers stress because stress is often connected with uncertainty. Stress arises out of trying to "square the circle". We want it all to be sorted and it is not going to be. It can't be done and we have to accept that.

[158] Burton, Ibid.

One said *loss of autonomy -when you feel you are not in charge of what is going on* was a major stress factor. One area of uncertainty in Church of England ministry is a degree of ambivalence in regard to lines of communication and hierarchies of power. Who looks after the vicar? The churchwardens? The bishop? The vicar's wife or husband? God? And do these same individuals have management of the vicar or are they semi-autonomous? Stress often arises from this uncertainty and especially when it occurs differently in different traditions and areas of the country.

Both PlayGroups contributed helpful observations on stress with the usual (and often experienced) anecdotes on whose anxiety levels were the highest. *When two or three are gathered together they will tell funeral stories!* By contrast, the individual clergy interviews drew forth many helpful comments. The clergy counsellor commented tellingly *my own stress levels have come down since leaving stipendiary ministry. It took 14 months from retirement to be able to say I had now left behind the exhaustion of that work!* He further stated *there are a number of key areas in ministry that are stress-inducing. A major one is 24/7 availability. Mobile phone availability can be intolerable.* This has been a recurring factor in this study's consideration of clergy stress. Some clergy have responded by clearly withdrawing from social media platforms and allowing very reduced information of their mobile phone details. The Church of England has in recent years begun to take the Internet more seriously and presented many seminars on the value of Information Communication Technology but it has made insufficient inroads into responding to the stress it may generate in the practice of ministry. An emphasis on fun and playfulness exercised by those clergy who do choose to use social media, either as part of their ministry or in their leisure time (are these separate?) can often take some of the stress out of communication over the ether. Internet trolls often take great delight in insulting the Church and its clergy whom they deem legitimate targets so turning these comments into humorous responses can take some of the sting out of the criticism. However, it may simply be the quantity of communication, much of it from congregational members and diocesan officers, that causes negative stress levels to rise and clergy to feel that their workload is increasing exponentially.

A senior clergyman commented on the July 2017 General Synod Report[159]:

> *Regarding stress in ministry, the General Synod of July 2017 made a report. Revd Simon Butler said at its worst the church moulds us into a straight-jacket that slowly ekes away our human goodness into a caricature of Christ. Some of the expectations of congregations were poisonous, setting us on pedestals only to rejoice in knocking us off again, treating us as amateurs in a world of professionals, expecting a perfection that hides great hypocrisy. The Bishop of Chelmsford spoke about the burden of being a bishop which often felt like carrying a heavy weight in a lonely role. As a bishop, he aspired to be a "vicar for the vicars", this was not always possible. He welcomed the report which freed bishops from feeling guilty for not being able to care for their clergy as much as they would like to.*

Another senior figure referred to *the "always on" generation* and further commented *having a day off is very important and I stick to that. Not putting too much in the diary so there is flexibility. Many clergy have not learned to manage their diary adequately so more stress arises.* Most of the clergy interviewed in this research evidenced a good understanding of the value of rest and recreation. However, it was often compartmentalised and a little stilted. It

[159] Butler, *Report on Clergy Wellbeing.*

would be good to see a growing awareness of the phenomenon of play woven into the fabric of daily work in such a way that even the most sacred becomes *fun*.

A diocesan department head said:

> *Stress is universal. I like David Ford's definition as "overwhelmings". I don't think of it as exceptional. Of itself it is not a bad thing. It depends how we handle it and how frequent it is. For most clergy there are more stressful or busier times of the year and there are also some more fallow times. The danger is when we think we should work flat out – that is not healthy. We should not look at it in isolation. It's how we handle it. We are all different. How do we handle conflict? Some personality types handle it better than others. Stress responses are deeply personal. It is how we are formed as human beings.*

At the other end of the spectrum a newly-ordained curate commented that there was *no time to process* and further reflected *the process makes you incredibly vulnerable. Also … you hear of lots of people who have "fallen off the wagon". How many will still be in ministry in five years' time?* These comments appear to underline the contention that lack of time to process and reflect in daily ministry is a major contributory factor to stress. This is further underlined by the comment of an incumbent in a rural benefice who said they were *happy to be busy. That's not so stressful but there is not enough time to review. I feel guilty for being too busy.* They said *having space to review is important. Yes. Jesus had time to reflect but we seldom do.* If the church is going to truly become the *listening and learning* team that Peter Senge[160] refers to, then it will need to encourage its leaders to make time to reflect and review. Building this attitude into pre-ordination training and post-ordination maintenance as one of the building blocks of effective parish ministry will, it might be said, go a long way to reducing the stress factors. Clergy will begin to engage in true "double-loop" learning[161] that will help them to better manage their own work/life balance.

Guilt, busyness, conflict and confrontation, 24/7 availability and failure to adequately manage the work/life balance were common factors apparent in the empirical research. But were *play* and *fun* seen as possible antidotes? Did clergy see these things as important or even essential ingredients in the practice of ministry?
Before looking at the way clergy view play as a response to stress, it is worth considering how teachers view play, not just as that practised by their pupils but also that experienced by their peers and themselves.

One primary head commented *play is not assessed in the same way as "work".* We need to *set up an opportunity for play. Our biggest commodity is use of time. We should model playful camaraderie, playful nature, laid back.* Also, it is *better to use "fun" rather than "play" because happy children learn better. Make the whole environment Fun. "Funday Friday". See learning as being Fun and school being Fun. Attendance is fantastic because they see it as Fun. Everything you do is fun and that is the playful nature.* Clearly, the simple understanding of making activities enjoyable promotes good engagement for the children and improves the atmosphere for the teacher. This seems a good lesson for the practice of ministry in the parish setting too!

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[160] Senge, *The Fifth Discipline.*

[161] See *Time For Play?* Chapter 2.

Another primary school headteacher reflected on the value of *learning through play. Learning about personal social and emotional issues. The only way at this stage is through play. Even as adults we need to experience something, make mistakes, find things we can't cope with and work through that. We are learning sharing. Children love to play. They'll play with anybody and everybody.* This harks back to Plato's understanding of play being something that encourages learning. Armand D'Angour[162] suggests he (Plato) does not propose banning play altogether, but harnessing it to utilitarian purpose.

> For example, if a boy is to be a good farmer or a good builder, he should play at building toy houses or at farming and be provided by his tutor with miniature tools modelled on real ones . . . One should see games as a means of directing children's tastes and inclinations to the role they will fulfil as adults.

A teaching support assistant working with the very youngest children had a number of important comments to make.

> *Early learning goals – the majority are assessed through play; through a freedom of environment and how they access it. Making relationships. Social and emotional. But that is not a measurable importance in education as it goes through. It's not a result on a piece of paper – and it should be! I believe there are wonderful practitioners. Play is at the centre of the learning environment. I am privileged to make it the centre!*

They also said *Play is the best method for learning* and *learning through play should not stop through KS1 and 2 and into secondary school and on into adulthood. We don't stop playing. We don't stop exploring and investigating. It takes a different form. If your enthusiasm has been curtailed when you were young …!* This takes us back to Hall's comment (attributed to George Bernard Shaw)[163] and links very well to an appreciation of the value of play throughout life. We really do <u>not</u> stop playing!

In regard to the value of play combatting stress they said *Play is definitely an antidote to stress. You can tell the difference if children have not had the chance to play.* They further commented *people need to give more importance to basic playing. Play takes so many forms. What good is a degree if we can't utilise those social skills?* Finally, the teaching support assistant said *the definition of play – having fun exploring learning and also reflecting and adapting. Bottom line social interaction. Makes you want to go and investigate. Doing things that make you happy. Freedom of play and freedom of time. Play is an antidote to the pressure of that time.* Clearly a profound understanding of the value of play! What good <u>is</u> a degree, in chemistry, literature or metaphysics (!) if you have not adequately learned the value of play? Further – what good are these academic skills if you have not really learned to play at all?

Finally, a secondary school teacher commented *play is doing something that leaves you feeling completely and wholly happy. Mentally physically … that gives you that aura of wellbeing.* They said *the definition of play is "doing something fun that you enjoy". Something that is good for you that makes you feel better. It does help to mediate the stress levels.* It was perhaps not surprising that both primary and secondary teachers had a good understanding of the value of play and particularly its application to negative stress. The words *wellbeing* and *fun* were mentioned, the first of which is a common current buzzword in clergy circles as something to

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[162] Armand D'Angour, "Plato and Play: Taking Education Seriously in Ancient Greece", *American Journal of Play,* 5: 3, (Spring 2013), pp. 293 – 307, <https:/files.eric.ed.gov>, [Accessed July 2019].

[163] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence.*

be aimed for. Teachers seem to understand the effect of creating both a happy and a learning environment that help to lower stress levels.

The clergy participants were equally insightful on the value of play. Speaking out of many years of counselling stressed vicars, the retired advisor said *extroverts get energy from the process of relating; introverts need to recharge. The dimension of playfulness is profoundly valuable for us as human beings. So many "religious" people are too serious. God has got a "light heart"*. The secular sphere has learned some time back that play has great therapeutic value and in hospitals as well as schools, playfulness and fun play a big part in flourishing individuals.

The bishop said simply and profoundly *I have never stopped giving time to those things which give me joy!* and the senior General Synod member said *having a day off is very important and I stick to that. Not putting too much in the diary so there is flexibility. Many clergy have not learned to manage their diary adequately so more stress arises. We have got to learn to be more playful in that.* It seems, despite reservations, that playfulness has its place, even in the higher echelons of the church hierarchy and those who begin to understand it for its own sake uncover a hidden treasure that has many advantages.

The diocesan department head asked *where are the boundaries? Play fiddles with the boundaries. Sometimes it needs to produce stress. But that is "Fun"!* The idea of "fiddling with boundaries" connects to many of the ideas postulated by the likes of Spariosu and Sutton-Smith and the concept of *liminality* or a "cross-over" point and is further taken up in their next comment which has resonances with Wang and Aamodt's encouragement to pursue tasks that promote "flow".[164]

> The idea of "flow" can be in a work or leisure context. Where you are so captivated you lose all sense of time. It could be in work or it could be in play. It is something where you cannot think of anything else. The other is about the difference between strength and developing learned behaviours. You can see what I am good or bad at but only I know what energises and resources you and which you enjoy doing but the learned behaviour costs you something and it is hard work. There is always crap that needs to be sorted out. Where we can use strengths, our wellbeing is improved and our need for play perhaps reduced. But if we have to keep using our learned behaviours it is really hard work and perhaps we need to pay more attention to our play life.

They also added *inappropriate grace ... takes us beyond the mundane. Play can be a spontaneous aspect of something that is not play.*

Clearly, the equation is not simple. Play does not just replace the boundaries to balance an unstructured working life nor does it release all stress, taking the tension out and relaxing the pressure. Sometimes play by its nature creates more stress but, in the exercise and experience of play, we learn to manage negative stress levels and understand more of the sacred quality of *fun*.

The new curate had much to say on play but commented *social media describes how to get more done. Even the self-help movement is about how to do this to get better. Play runs in the face of all that, doesn't it? Wasting time!*

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[164] Wang and Aamodt, *Play, Stress and the Learning Brain.*

One incumbent stated *Christians mostly have a good sense of humour but some clergy don't. Some young clergy need to lighten up and not take things so seriously. It's God's church and not ours!* and another commented *having a good laugh is important! It's a way of relieving stress.* They said *we need to incorporate some playful part in each day*. What a trivial and profound statement! Perhaps more of us need to discover the value of wasting time, particularly in a culture and environment where such a thing is anathema; where time is money and money means status and identity. Play reminds us that time is not a fire in which we burn but a companion on the journey; not a slave master but a beloved friend who encourages contemplation and release. For a person of faith, time that flows into eternity means no past is ever lost because there is a future that stretches ahead for ever. And play is the activity that can capture us in the now!

One vicar said *perhaps play is an activity that lifts our spirits* and maybe *play is a form of release whereas work is a means to an end.* One commented:

> *Just a silly thing like chasing a child around the garden can "frighten" them (here comes the monster!) and then there is a certain amount of stress and if you push it too far you might frighten them and yet through the network it is great and they squeal with laughter and fun but the fun comes with the stress of play. It's like people on a roller coaster get stress.*

Some further comments were *play is not just about enjoyment. It is also about being refreshed and released, letting go and being in the moment.* There is a *level of refreshing that is just being myself and not a priest* and *there must always be times when you can be silly if for only the reason that we stop seeing ourselves as absolutely perfect or right in some sense. To be seen as not perfect but as human: this is essential.*

This is *play* at an ontological level where we begin to engage in fun as an expression of who we are as *homo sapiens* and if we discover the essential importance of having fun, being silly and playing purely for its own sake then perhaps we might redefine ourselves as *homo ludens*.

On the subject of play as "silliness" there were some interesting comments from clergy, so often portrayed as paragons of sensible British reserve.

> *If you can be silly it stops you taking yourself too seriously and therefore defuses a major cause of stress. If I haven't got anyone to be silly with and if I haven't got the privacy to be silly with myself then I build an image of myself that cannot succeed really and that is a huge cause of stress.*
> *Being silly can be a real antidote to stress.*

Perhaps that was one of the secrets imbibed by the many eccentric clergy who graced the pulpits of cathedrals, chapels and church buildings down the ages where sanctimony was salted with silliness to increasing degrees from the Orthodox *salos** to characters like Lancelot Blackburne, sometime bishop and pirate![165] Less "niche" but no less eccentric was *God's Own Fool*, the radical Francis whose methods of mission were playful and provocative and whose

* a kind of early-church priestly fool

[165] Fergus Butler-Gallie, *A Field Guide to the English Clergy* (London: Oneworld, 2018). pp. 141 - 143.

namesake Pope Francis once chuckled and said of a speech-impaired child who rolled around in front of his papal throne at the Vatican: "leave him, leave him to play here."[166]

Finally, one participant shrewdly observed in relation to combatting stress:

> *Independence is everyone's desire but we should be encouraging interdependence. Interdependence to non-Christians and even too many Christians feels like weakness but actually it is an enormous strength and lowers the stress-levels no end provided you know those people and can trust them to treat you as you.*

Play can be solitary and separate, engaged in by clergy on their day off like Revd Robert Walker skating on Duddingston Loch[167] but even he played with others and play seems to be its most beneficial when it is played *with* others, as in games. Play that relies on interdependence encourages not only the virtues of co-operation (even in activities that are competitive) but also promotes a shared understanding of participation without guilt in time-wasting and fun. The collegiality emphasizes and gives permission to the enjoyment for no other reason than the pleasure of itself.

Finally, the questionnaires were sent out to ten members of the clergy, whose nineteen questions (see previous chapter) revealed various pieces of information about the participants. The scope covered clergy from recently ordained up to four years into retirement and was evenly distributed between male and female. Prayer and administration seem to be the main areas of daily ministry.

A typical working day would involve, as expected, meeting and interacting with various different people, both in and outside a church context. It may be noted however that a large proportion of work was carried out in a solitary context, even where the clergyperson was already part of a team. This would suggest not only a greater susceptibility to stress but also less of an impetus to engage in play.

Many of the clergy emphasised their recognition of the need to take time off during the day but it was also clear that the practice of ministry could easily become a 24-hour exercise. In a job where there are no set hours, there has to be a conscious decision to stop. Although most clergy (certainly those of incumbent status and above) have the autonomy to decide when and where to take a break, it is also significant that not having someone around to decide when you do so can be a negative factor.

100% of the participants mentioned meeting with people as one of the things that most energised them, with worship, evangelism, schools work and occasional offices also being mentioned. By contrast, people were also a major factor in the areas that were most stressful in ministry. Meetings and administration were also significant factors as were situations involving conflict. A couple of participants mentioned time management and the feeling of not being able to get it all done. Looking after aging and decrepit buildings was also a stress factor. Money management and fund-raising are clearly factors invoking stress and nearly all parish clergy are called to be involved in this area throughout their ministries.

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[166] AP, "Pope Chuckles As Boy Climbs On Stage And Interrupts Speech", *The Guardian,* UK Edition, [video] (28 November 2018), <http:/www.theguardian.com>, [Accessed November 2019].
[167] See Introduction.

Realbuzz.com cites the top ten causes of stress as time management, unhealthy lifestyle, taking on too much, workplace (and home) conflicts, inability to change circumstances, non-work-related issues (illness, bereavement, care for dependents, moving house, debt problems), over-seriousness, stressful situations and major life changes.[168] These are modern approaches to 21st century stress but clearly clergy in the practice of ministry experience a number at work without taking account of personal factors. Those highlighted in the questionnaire results are italicised above. The fact that work and personal life overlap with the vast majority of parish clergy working from home serves only to increase susceptibility to stress.

Question six of the questionnaire cited conflict as a major stress factor with specific issues relating to disagreement or failure to communicate properly. One participant was unwilling to comment on this section at all. It is clear that clergy are often the butt of disagreement and the focus of conflict but even more so when they inevitably become involved in trying to mediate disagreements between others.

On the positive side, questionnaire participants listed a wide variety of activities they did to relax. Slightly more than 50% of these seem to be participated in alone but it was encouraging to see there were many incidents of time spent relating with family and friends. It was equally encouraging to see the variety of things engaged in that were seen as therapeutic. These included activities that were spiritual and physical and relational or just simply taking time off.

In terms of management of stress slightly more than half admitted to stress levels that were 5 or above (where 10 was the highest stress) and one said it could be as high as 8. Although parish priests are not generally thought of as having the most stressful occupations, it is worth noting the comment of Archbishop Justin Welby[169] and the findings of the Butler report.[170]

It was pleasantly surprising to see definitions of play being broadly in accord with the findings of this work to date, although some of the clergy definitions were somewhat complex. “Fun” was used once as was “sabbath”, “escape from work” and “laughter” but also “connectivity”, “problem solving”, “expressing oneself without fear” and “being myself”. One defined play as an activity that had no outcome and another as doing something that did not matter. These definitions generally overlap with the findings of many of those who write on play, previously cited in this research and indeed two concur on the overriding theme that play is engagement in “something that does not matter”.

The majority of the participants considered themselves playful people, some in quite radical ways, although one said they were definitely not and another said they were sometimes too serious. Many clergy like to see themselves as playful but are not often considered so in the public perception. Despite *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Rev.*, the clergy are more often laughed *at* than *with*.

Fun activities for the clergy are also mostly solitary but there is a significant interaction with other people. Most of the participants equated relaxation with fun so the answers to question 13 were very similar to the answers to question 7. It might be interesting to further explore the different understandings of play and rest and also how these issues might be differentiated and taught separately in clergy training.

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[168] Realbuzz Team, “Top 10 Causes Of Stress And How To Beat Them”, (2019), <http://www.realbuzz.com>, [November 2019].
[169] Davies and others, “Causes Of Clergy Stress”, 2017.
[170] Butler, *Report on Clergy Wellbeing.*

Clergy participants had a good understanding of popular games, sports and pastimes in society at large but 90% of them did not engage in any of these with colleagues or other members of their churches. This seems to reflect the fact that whilst play is seen as important it is still not widely discussed or experienced in clergy circles.

The last part of the questionnaire invited comments on the value of play in life and particularly as a tool in combatting stress. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, these practitioners saw play as having value for relationship building and increasing personal wellbeing rather than just preparing them for improved workplace abilities.

Play helped them to relax and make interaction more honest. It helped physical skills and coordination and improved fitness, agility and teamwork. Some contributors touched on the more metaphysical values of play such as *creativity*, *being curious*, *exploratory* and *experimental*; even *having fun*! There was much mention of playing with others although this had not been overly demonstrated in the earlier examples of types of play they had participated in.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of the questionnaire was the view of the participants regarding play as a possible antidote to stress. The idea of *perspective* was mentioned several times and play was seen as valuable in *distracting you from stress factors*; being able to see things from a different angle. A different kind of creativity was involved and one was brought *closer to God* in play. It was possible to really enjoy *play as a separate activity* and engage in it without feeling guilty. The physical nature of play was emphasised and that it could be both *energetic* and *relaxing*. The exercise of play could *combat surges of adrenalin* associated with stress and *laughter* would take your mind off the stressful areas. One participant mentioned that *stress cut through the cycle of constant stress and reframed what was important*. As had been said a number of times before, *play stopped you taking yourself too seriously*.

As a footnote, it was a little surprising to observe that 3 participants were willing to engage in a subsequent play seminar/clown workshop, 4 would rather not, 2 were possible participants and 1 would be interested in learning to run one! Perhaps this indicates that clergy are potentially more playful than might be supposed!

This chapter has sought to analyse the empirical research and seems to show that clergy and teachers both engage in playful activity and experience fun. Some understand that it is a learning tool that helps us relax and enables better interpersonal relationships. There is insufficient evidence to show that current understandings of the value of play in parochial ministry is adequate at this time to change the governing variables which dictate the way clergy work is practised but it can still be seen that the factors present may offer hope for a more stress-free future if the underlying lessons are properly learned.

It might be worth commissioning a wider and more in-depth study where changes in ministry training and on-the-job practice that incorporates the principles of play and having fun could be measured to see if such practices might produce greater wellbeing and more flourishing ministries.

The principles of *play* and *fun* must now be laid out systematically and set against the harmful aspects of negative stress. Having reviewed the literature studied and the experiences of the clergy and teachers interviewed, we must conclude whether *play* in *the practice of ministry* can

provide the kind of *theoretical framework* necessary for improved life. This is the subject of the next and final chapter.

Conclusion

"Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering."[171]

A Church of England cathedral has come under criticism for erecting a helter-skelter inside its nave, with a senior cleric condemning it as "blasphemous" and a "mockery" of God and Christian martyrs who died for their faith.[172] The criticisms were made by Rt. Revd. Dr. Gavin Ashenden of the Christian Episcopal Church but his comments were countered by Canon Andy Bryant of Norwich Cathedral who conceived the idea after a visit to the Sistine Chapel. He wrote to me:

> The experience of being pushed and shoved by the vast crowds whilst trying to admire that wonderful ceiling led me to exclaim the Norwich Cathedral was every bit as good. We have the finest collection of medieval roof bosses in the world which in the Nave capture the story of the Bible. They are just too high up for visitors to appreciate them. I explored various options for getting people up and close including a Ferris Wheel (it would not fit through the door). A member of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain suggested a helter-skelter as they are brought in in pieces and built from the ground - most other fairground rides are trailer mounted. From this initial idea I worked up the theme of *Seeing it Differently* which was always missional in intention. Behind a playful idea (helter-skelter) lay a serious intent (helping people engage with the Bible story and provoking questions about faith)[173]

Both protagonists were wrong, I suggest, for both *seem* to misunderstand the nature and purpose of play. Whilst being apparently in opposition, Bishop Ashenden and Canon Bryant simply display different aspects of Apollonianism, tending to structure and function. Perhaps the *playful idea* should have taken more precedence over the *serious intent*? Whilst it is equally laudable to wish to preserve the sacred space of the cathedral and to seek diverting ways to make its architecture more accessible and its mission more relevant, the chaotic whimsy of play still managed to transcend both. I speak from personal experience and not just academic rhetoric since I attended Norwich Cathedral on 14th August 2019 and understood immediately what had brought over 10,000 visitors in the 11 days of its *Seeing it Differently* festival. The atmosphere was glorious, the crowds excited, the ethos deeply spiritual. *Play* was in the air and we revelled in it! I rode the helter-skelter and barely glanced at the frescoes.

Researching and setting out this thesis has been a deeply personal exercise in contextualised theology or, to put it another way, an academic drama of art imitating life! The parallels between the conclusions of the work and the experience of the author have been uncomfortably close. Ten years plus in the making, this work has proved stressful to complete and yet replete with opportunity for play and diversion. We have set out to see if we can establish a theoretical framework that can identify the role of play in coping with stress in the practice of ministry. In

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[171] A. A., Milne.

[172] Victoria Friedman, "Criticism After Church Of England Cathedral Erects Helter Skelter In Nave", Breitbart, (10 August 2019), <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2019/08/10/criticism-church-england-cathedral-erect-helter-skelter nave/>, [Accessed October 2019].

[173] From email correspondence to the author received on 20th August 2019.

our increasingly busy and restless lives; in our overloaded and overstretched ministries, should we find time for play? Is this phenomenon something we should pay closer attention to?

The answer to these questions must in a word be … Yes! If that is so emphatically the case, then why?

Play is a building block of reality, common to all life

The phenomenon of play is deeply rooted in the fabric of life. Our brief literature review has shown that play weaves its merry dance in and out of all aspects of the human experience from Aristophanes to the modern day. It is common to us all and we understand how to participate in it without being able to adequately articulate what it is. Children enjoy it and have done so long before they were considered children. Toys are fabricated for children to play *with* and games designed for them to play *at* and most children do so repeatedly and unselfconsciously. Adults also engage in the distinctive activities outlined by Caillois[174], whether that be sport, gambling, acting or just playing the fool. There has been much written regarding the play of animals, particularly by Fagen and, although it has often been explained as preparation for social skills, the experience of play in animals no more fully explains this than it does in humans.

Unsurprisingly, all four teachers took it as a given that play was a part of life that was integral to the discharging of their professional responsibilities. However, they were not embarrassed to admit that they continued to play as adults, both with their pupils and with their peers at work. What was more surprising is that all the clergy took a similar view and accepted play as vital to their own ministries. They were less forthcoming about the amount of time they spent playing with colleagues but all recognised that a proper amount of play was necessary to enable a balanced life.

We like to play, we enjoy playing and everyone, bar none, engages in it yet, despite its antiquity and widespread influence, many mature adults refuse to fully acknowledge it and the less enlightened still consider it the province of the juvenile.

Play is an experienced phenomenon, developing essential life-skills and necessary growth

Many of us excuse the fun aspect of play by emphasising its beneficial qualities in the development of necessary life-skills such as conflict resolution and team-building. It is intriguing that such a pleasurable and fascinating activity should be the primary method of training us to live more effectively. Writers from Plato and Aristotle, through Augustine, Froebel, Vygotsky and Piaget explained the value of play as an instrument of education and cognitive development. The well-documented Berkeley Guidance Study set out a number of ways in which play assists the development of essential life-skills.

It was to be expected that the four teachers interviewed spoke about the value of play as a vital tool of education, particularly in early years. What was less obvious was the educational value of play experienced by the clergy. They said it taught the value of team-building, learning from mistakes in a safe environment, developing curiosity and creativity and how to relax. Play also enabled transitioning from the trivial to more open and honest interaction. All the clergy

[174] Caillois, *Man, Play And Games,* p. 12.

interviewed and participating in the questionnaire cited evidence of the value of play and the experience of fun in personal growth and development.

Play measurably mediates and diminishes stress

Studies with animals and humans frequently demonstrate that a playful attitude and participation in play lower stress levels. Fagen and Wang and Aamodt have been cited as making significant contributions in the study of animal play mediating stress and although few if any writers have *directly* connected play to the reduction of stress in humans, there is wide evidence to suggest play is a powerful agent of harmony and balance in the human psyche.

Plato writes that play brings pleasure to the participant and Schiller posits that play balances sense and form whilst he along with Spencer and Groos link human and animal play. Whilst many writers down the ages, such as Augustine, Montessorri and Froebel see the value of play as a tool of education, writers like John Dewey differentiate between work and play as an end in itself. Such autotelic value mediates stress because it removes the negative pressure from purpose-driven labour. Play theorists writing in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, by way of contrast, have often liberated their subject from the classroom and playground so it can be seen as more of an antidote to stress. David Clutterbuck suggests play is a powerful tool to mediate stress in the workplace and Wilson stresses the importance of play in the workplace to overcome anxiety. Lencioni even suggests that a proper understanding and use of stress can improve productivity and even make meetings more interesting. Since play in general and a number of games in particular draw on stress and tension to achieve their ends, a good understanding of this aspect of play can also be beneficial.

The empirical research exposed many areas of stress in both the teaching and church professions but also that both vocations had benefitted from playing and having fun. Teachers seemed to "play" more with their colleagues than clergy but that may just reflect the fact that teachers nearly always work as part of a team and clergy often practise ministry alone. That in itself might be a lesson.

Clergy gave clear evidence of understanding play as valuable in coping with stress as well as developing character and personality. Play distracts and provides perspective as well as giving opportunity for rest and relaxation. It liberates from guilt (often a significant factor in parochial ministry) and stops one taking things too seriously.

Play is experienced on the threshold

Spariosu's concept of *liminality*, taken up later as a major theme by Sutton-Smith, is one of the best metaphors for judging play as a metaphysical phenomenon, essentially because the idea of "threshold" is not static but expresses a dynamic passage to and fro between the sides of a doorway where the idea is both the two sides *and* the passage between them. Play is the narrative of metacommunication between the reality of the land and the fantasy of the sea.

Liminality is a good way of describing the tension often apparent in the understanding of ministry as a mediation of religion and mission as an expression of personal faith. It is not often clear but it is seen in how we experience play. When it is seen in a Platonic and Augustinian sense as educational and formative it is Apollonian and clings to the land but when it throws off the vestments of purpose and plunges into the sea it becomes Dionysian and chaotic. At

this point it is definition*less* and seems almost as exciting and frightening as a *bacchanalia*. It is liminal as it crosses and re-crosses the threshold of the beach and, without wanting to overstretch the metaphor, plays the seaside games that many childhood memories are made of.

The threshold concept is applied to play but never to my knowledge in the context of Christian ministry. It is well illustrated from life in the opening paragraphs of this final chapter. Bishop Ashenden and Canon Bryant both seem to fail to fully apprehend play as a sacramental expression of faith which lends meaning to ministry because it dances across the gap between structure and spirit. There is no need to fear that play and its foolishness will undermine the mystery and marvel of an historic cathedral or even fail to win converts – as if that were the primary purpose of play! Nor is it essential to have a fairground ride installed as simply a means of getting people nearer to a beautiful ceiling. Play has the last laugh (as usual) because even if this was the original intention it has birthed many other experiences that linger longer in the soul.

Perhaps the Church is secretly scared to allow play to have its sway because in its fullest expression it cannot be controlled or organised. Once you let play in, you begin to experience the otherness of God at a new level. This experience, which Suurmond has described as play,[175] is transitional (liminal) and takes us to places we may not have been before. It has echoes of Donovan's mission to the Masai:

> Do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, beautiful as that place may seem to you. You must have the courage to go to a place that neither you nor they have been before.[176]

Clerical colleagues have often looked somewhat askance at a clergyman who is also a clown because the two roles appear incompatible yet the interviews and PlayGroups as well as long-term observation give evidence of many serving clergy struggling tentatively to "play on the beach". The encouragement of this work would be for the Church to go to a place they have not been before, to allow greater divestment of form and function to enable deeper and more effective ministry.

Both the ecclesiastical and the educational are "threshold professions" since they link two worlds, connecting the learner to the learning. However, they do more than connect, since both the minister and the teacher move dynamically between the two, causing stress and pressure yet experiencing the joy and "fun" of both sides. The participants in the empirical research shared these experiences of threshold practice sometimes *subliminally* as they related their stories of work and ministry. *Inappropriate grace ... takes us beyond the mundane. Play can be a spontaneous aspect of something that is not play.* Several comments like this reflected the ambiguities suggested by Sutton-Smith and Spariosu; ideas that could not be fully articulated but were nevertheless real experiences.

Play promotes well-being and flourishing ministries

It is easy to confuse *Play* and its effects with rest or retreat as if the phenomenon were a type of "time out" from work, experienced when we needed some kind of break from our labours. Rest and retreat are vital and recuperative but they are expressly not the same as *Play*. It is a

[175] Suurmond, *Word and Spirit*.
[176] Vincent. J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered - An Epistle from the Masai* (London: SCM Press, 1978), from the preface.

phrase almost everyone recognises but it is important to realise life consists of Work, Rest *and* Play.

In a piece recorded for the Today programme on New Year's Eve 2014, Caroline Wyatt interviewed a clergywoman calling herself Suzanne who described her experience of stress and a panic attack whilst on a silent retreat at the Sheldon Community. Following consultation with the support team there she shared:

> They were stunning! They said you're not doing any more of this retreat, you need to talk to Sarah and in the meanwhile, we want you to come in and go into the jacuzzi and have a massage and just relax and be yourself. I was practically in tears after it just because of the release.[177]

The wise practitioners in this scenario realised that the experience of a sacred and solemn retreat was not what Suzanne needed but simply the opportunity to be pampered and cared for; to *just relax and be yourself*. The piece describes the role of parish clergy as being *unboundaried*; a place where *there is no escape* and this can very quickly lead to stress and even to self-harm.[178]

Play promotes well-being because it is *other*; because it is not religious and is not embedded in the business of daily ministry. Concepts like rest and retreat are essential but they still have elements of the work of the parish priest. They are *expected* and therefore sometimes may not go far enough in providing antidotes to stress and anxiety. Many of the writers, especially those writing in an educational context, repeatedly extol the value of the playful environment as an aid to learning but the aspect they insufficiently emphasise is that play mediates and diminishes negative stress to enable freer and more open reception. Had they done, they might have seen more fully the importance of extending the playful environment beyond the school into the adult sphere, indeed, into the rest of life.

Conversations with the clergy showed encouraging evidence of the discovery of play as a tool of flourishing in ministry. The type of play did not matter, whether it was board game, sport or joke telling. The important thing is that play becomes a counterpoint to meaningless toil. Because the play is essentially meaningless itself, it has the opportunity to redeem the work and add meaning and form to something previously mired in tedium. Whilst we *have to* work, we *need to* play and, if we can only admit that we *like to* as well, we begin to establish a framework in which we may be released from professional pressure and tyrannical purpose. The empirical research showed parish clergy clearly saw the value of it where it could be found and the senior clergy had begun to develop ideas as to its inherent value in the life of the church.

Now we come to the very core of this thesis: the meaning of play!

Play doesn't matter

Play – the phenomenon the expects have tried so unsuccessfully to define - is meaningless. We return to Huizinga's *autotelic*, to Spariosu's *liminality*, to Sutton-Smith's *ambiguity* and to Bonhoeffer's *happiness* and *fun*. We are tempted to worry that we trivialise the issue by calling

[177] Caroline Wyatt, "Where Do Vicars Seek Help At Christmas?", *The Today Programme*, (London: BBC Radio Four 31 December 2014), https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02g4m6z, [Accessed November 2019].
[178] Olivia Rudgard, "Pressure To Grow Congregations Leads To 'Clergy Self-Harm' Says Christ Church Dean", *The Telegraph*, (14 November 2017), <http:/www.telegraph.co.uk>, [Accessed November 2019].

it *fun*, but trivialisation is exactly what play expects. The essential meaning of play is that it is meaning*less*, it is engaging in something that doesn't matter and the understanding of this principle is of the utmost importance and possibly the greatest paradox of life.

Paradox is not a concept unknown in the Christian faith. One might think of the 'wealth" of the poor, the "wisdom' of the foolish and the "sight" of the blind. Jesus encourages his followers to find true "strength" in weakness and to "die" so that they might live. Play only matters when it doesn't matter; it only has meaning when we recognise that its greatest feature is that it must have no meaning. Sutton-Smith seizes on this in the opening sentences of his book when he quotes Geoffrey Bateson describing play as "a paradox because it both is and is not what it appears to be."[179] This contradiction, this ambiguity, cannot be stressed enough. The greater the paradox, the greater the understanding of play.

The first clergy contributor defined play perfectly as *doing something that doesn't matter*. To my mind, no author, expert or play theorist has defined the subject better. Three others described it as fun or pleasurable and one further described it as an activity with no outcome. One, echoing "Suzanne" from the earlier BBC item, said *being myself*. The second clergy PlayGroup talked about *being silly*, *being ridiculous* and even being *willing to be ridiculed without being humiliated.* Clergy, so often encouraged to be serious and sensible paragons of sanctity and propriety were talking animatedly about play being *incredibly silly*, *great fun*, *absolutely hilarious* and … *pointless*!

Activities participated in for the sake of *fun* were as diverse as the participants. Sometimes, in a career that is so preoccupied and defined by *doing*, it is liberating to do nothing; to just *be*. The Italians have a phrase *il dolce far niente* which means *the sweetness of doing nothing* which the common British sometimes translate rather more prosaically *Sweet Fanny Adams*.

> A memory comes to mind when you mention *il dolce far niente***.** When I was a child, my parents used to send me to stay with my grandmother while they were at work. She was a warm and caring woman who spent all day doing housework and taking care of her grandkids. Sometimes I saw her putting a chair outside, on her front doorstep, and sitting down for a while just watching the street, greeting neighbours and waiting for the sunset. If I asked her: *"Nonna, che fai qui?"* ("Grandma, what are you doing here?"), she always answered *"niente"* (nothing). This is hard to explain. Literally, *Dolce far niente* is doing anything without getting bored. It's a particular kind of 'me time' when you don't do anything in particular: no massage, no reading, no sleep – just observing the buzz of life around you and recharging your batteries. It sounds like idleness, but it's actually something different. It's more like a break from the rat race. It's a moment to reorganize your energy. It's a way to unwind and to put some distance between you and your life and, magically, to see it better as a whole.[180]

Perhaps, in the end, play may only be defined as an experience we might recognise and remember rather than a concept we seek to grasp. Seeking to give meaning to that which must be *autotelic*, we threaten to debase and transmogrify it before, laughing impishly, it slips from our grasp once more and dances away.

Play is Fun!

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[179] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity Of Play.* p. 1.
[180] Emanuela Aliberti, "Dolce Far Niente". *The Italian Midday*, (22 January 2019), <http:/www.203challenges.com>, [Accessed October 2019].

This thesis has set out to demonstrate that a faith that is fun is more to be appreciated than a faith that is formal. It began with a contemporary vignette from popular fiction describing the death of starship captain James Tiberius Kirk in the movie *Star Trek: Generations*[181]. The actor William Shatner, the all-American hero, spent 79 *Star Trek* television episodes and 7 *Star Trek* movies beating the bad guys, getting out of impossible dilemmas and saving humankind at the very last instant. It was exhausting work, not least for those of us who viewed these stories and their innumerable follow-ups and imitators. But could their exploits be described as "Fun!"?

In the real clerical world of birth, marriages and deaths, holy eucharist and morning prayer, pastoral care and parochial pressure, is there truly a place for fun? Where a minister's life might be caring for the family who has lost a child, raising vast sums for the upkeep of ancient monuments or seeking to maintain a steadfast demeanour in the face of intransigent parishioners as they try to patiently preach and model mission and discipleship, can there be any time for play? *Churchianity can move us away from Christianity* said one of the empirical research contributors and *Pope Francis is not too churchy. He manages to twinkle*.

The world needs a church that understands fun. Presenting the General Synod Report,[182] Canon Simon Butler commented:

> At its worst the church moulds us into a straight-jacket that slowly ekes away our human goodness into a caricature of Christ. Some of the expectations of congregations were poisonous, setting us on pedestals only to rejoice in knocking us off again, treating us as amateurs in a world of professionals, expecting a perfection that hides great hypocrisy.[183]

A church whose leaders have begun to understand the secret of fun, whose bishops have learned to *take play seriously* as the *vaccination* against stress, will be modelling a paradigm of playfulness that will start to undermine such hypocrisy and restriction. In the research, a senior clergyman with responsibility for training commented *play is an activity that doesn't have a productive outcome*. It is *not for a purpose*. We need a church whose clergy and members are willing to move closer to being *on the edge*; to go *beyond the mundane ... hopefully guided by the Holy Spirit*. And the curate shared *self-help and mindfulness only go so far. Playing is what does it. Having fun. Wasting time. Not being productive.*

It is the keen contention of this thesis and its fervent hope that not only can we identify a theoretical framework for the role of play in coping with stress but also that its value in developing life-skills, mediating anxiety, promoting well-being and *just being fun to experience* will make a major contribution to flourishing ministries. Retreats and rest days and sabbaticals must have their vital place but learning (or perhaps just *remembering again*) to play every day, realising that this is as much a part of life as labour and sleep, will establish the minister as not just a leader and a servant of God but as an authentic human being, made in the image of their creator. Most importantly, they will have truly discovered time for play.

> "How do you do Nothing," asked Pooh after he had wondered for a long time. "Well, it's when people call out at you just as you're going off to do it, 'What are you going to do, Christopher Robin?' and you say, 'Oh, Nothing,' and then you go and do it. … It

[181] Carson, *Star Trek: Generations,* 1994.
[182] Butler, *Report on Clergy Wellbeing.*
[183] Davies and others, "Causes Of Clergy Stress", 2017.

means just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering." "Oh!" said Pooh."[184]

[184] A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner,* (London: Methuen and Co., 1928), p. 169.

APPENDIX ONE

(Table of Participants in the Empirical Research: PlayGroups 1 and 2, Interview and Questionnaire)

NAME	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	CONTEXT
Moses	M	54	Clerk in Holy Orders (Area Dean)	PG1
Isaiah	M	58	Clerk in Holy Orders (Hospital Chaplain)	PG1/ PG2 Questionnaire
Jeremiah	F	60	Clerk in Holy Orders (Incumbent)	PG1 Questionnaire
Ezekiel	M	35	Headteacher (Primary)	Interview
Daniel	M	54	Clerk in Holy Orders (General Synod)	Interview
Hosea	M	61	Diocesan Bishop	Interview Questionnaire
Joel	F	44	Clerk in Holy Orders (Assistant Curate)	Interview Questionnaire
Amos	F	34	Headteacher (Primary)	Interview
Obadiah	F	56	Teacher (Secondary)	Interview
Jonah	M	61	Clerk in Holy Orders (Team Vicar)	Interview Questionnaire
Micah	M	72	Clerk in Holy Orders Clergy counsellor (retired)	Interview Questionnaire
Nahum	F	53	Clerk in Holy Orders (Incumbent)	PG1/Interview Questionnaire
Habakkuk	M	65	Clerk in Holy Orders (Senior Diocesan Post)	Interview
Zephaniah	F	61	Clerk in Holy Orders (Team Vicar)	Questionnaire
Haggai	M	58	Clerk in Holy Orders (Incumbent)	PG1/ PG2 Questionnaire

Zechariah	F	56	Teaching and Learning Assistant (Primary)	Interview
Malachi	F	68	Clerk in Holy Orders (Team Vicar)	PG1/ PG2 Questionnaire

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