

Senior Posts and Gender



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Key question

In July 2014, only 14% of Deans and 21% of Archdeacons were female. Does this indicate difficulties for women in reaching senior Church of England positions, or are the low numbers related to the relatively recent ordination of women and the length of time taken to achieve senior posts?

Analysis

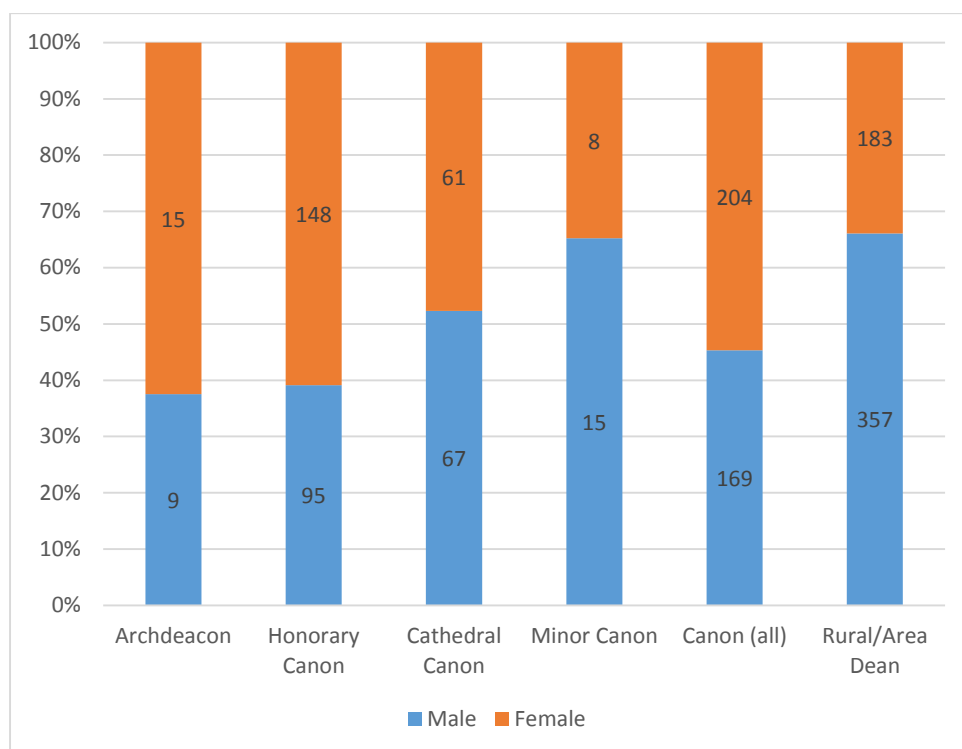
Table 1 gives the numbers of clergy ordained since 1994 (i.e. since the first women were ordained priest) who have achieved different senior positions within the Church, along with their average age and average length of time between ordination and (first) appointment to the post, broken down by gender. For example, of all the women ordained since 1994, 15 have held or currently hold the position of Archdeacon, and it has taken them an average of 13.5 years to get there, at an average age of 51.3. Figure 1 demonstrates graphically the gender distribution of the numbers of posts held.

These data refer to the first post held in each category by any one person. Cathedral Deans are not included because of low numbers (only six women, all of whom were ordained deacon between 1983 and 1992; the first female appointment to Dean was in 2000; the two most recently ordained male Deans were ordained in 1993 and 1998).

Table 4.1 – Senior role appointments by gender for ministers ordained from 1994 onwards

Role		Number of Posts	Average Age at Appointment	Average Length of Service at Appointment (years)
Archdeacon	Female	15	51.3	13.5
	Male	9	45.7	14.3
	Total	24	49.2	13.8
	Female %	63%		
Honorary Canon	Female	148	55.8	11.4
	Male	95	50.7	13.7
	Total	243	53.8	12.3
	Female %	61%		
Cathedral Canon	Female	61	47.4	7.9
	Male	67	42.4	8.1
	Total	128	44.8	8.0
	Female %	48%		
Minor Canon	Female	8	49.1	5.6
	Male	15	39.3	7.0
	Total	23	42.7	6.5
	Female %	35%		
Canon (all)	Female	204	52.9	10.0
	Male	169	46.5	10.9
	Total	373	50.0	10.4
	Female %	55%		
Rural/Area Dean	Female	183	53.7	9.6
	Male	357	47.8	10.2
	Total	540	49.8	10.0
	Female %	34%		

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We can see that, crudely, the more senior the role, the more likely it is that a woman will have achieved it: 63% of first Archdeacon posts held by clergy ordained since 1994 have been filled by women, as opposed to 34% of Rural/Area Dean posts. Among the factors potentially influencing these findings are that women up to this point have not been admitted to the Episcopate and have therefore had no means of progressing beyond the post of Archdeacon, and that, since 1994, more men than women have been ordained and are therefore available for the role of Rural/Area Dean.

Table 1 shows that women tend to reach senior positions at a higher age than men, but take marginally less time to get there, which is consistent with women being on average older than men at the point of ordination. It should be noted that this age difference may mean that some women have longer prior experience which may equip them for senior posts. Some women may also have been deaconesses for several years before ordination.

Conclusions

Although the current numbers of women in senior posts are low, the time taken to reach those posts is similar for men and women. Compared with their equivalent male cohort, relatively more women are reaching the higher senior posts. However, there remains a large gender imbalance in the number of Rural/Area Deans.