

SIMPLIFICATION OF BENEFICE GOVERNANCE

Notes for PCCs

Context

1. The word Parish means ‘those outside the house’; a definition that captures the nature of parochial ministry. It is not just a calling to lead a congregation of committed believers, it is a calling to serve a whole community, whether they are currently inside ‘the house’ or not.
2. Our parochial structures were first introduced to the Church precisely to achieve this aim recognising that our ministry goes beyond our own buildings, members, and structures. Parish structures continue to provide a vital framework for this ministry today, but, as the social landscape of the country has changed, the resources of the Church reduced and the nature of community and understanding of ‘local’ has evolved our structures have remained comparatively static.
3. In recent decades our response to declining numbers of stipendiary clergy has been to simply add more parishes to each vicar’s responsibilities, creating larger and larger benefices, stretching the parochial structure without consideration for its long term sustainability or the impact of ever increasing workloads on our clergy.

Single PCC

1. We believe we are already at a stage in many multi parish benefices where simplification of governance is needed. Since 2000 we have seen a 30% reduction in stipendiary clergy posts in the diocese, a 38% reduction in attendance but only 7% reduction in the number of individual parishes and PCCs. As we are forced to cut clergy posts¹ further in response to Covid19 and create more and larger multi parish benefices the need for such simplification grows more compelling and urgent.
2. We propose that each benefice should have a single PCC. The principal function and purpose of the PCC is the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent (rector, vicar or priest in charge) in promoting the mission of the Church in its parish. This will be far simpler and we think more effective with a single PCC.
3. We recognise the importance of the local and the Church’s engagement with each community within the parish. However, as Christian neighbours, PCC members are called to represent the parish rather than being representatives only of a particular place or constituency within the parish.
4. With a smaller overall number of PCCs our diocesan support can be more proactive in helping them comply with legislation, best practice and strategic planning. It is worth noting that around 15% of all parish office roles (Churchwardens, Treasurers, Parish Safeguarding Officers) are currently vacant, with many people already fulfilling multiple post in a parish.

¹ The current changes will result in the reduction being nearer 40% since 2000. National projections show that total stipendiary clergy numbers are expected to reduce from 7,200 to 6,040 (16%) by 2039. *Ministry Statistics 2019 Report*.

PCC Subcommittees

5. Whilst a Local Church Council (or any other name for a body representing each locality) ties in the local to the PCC, we think that alongside the good such a body might do, any form of this body creates and establishes unhelpful extra layers of governance and tends to a focus on the individual parts at the cost of the whole body.
6. Rather than any form of LCC we recommend each PCC has subcommittees focused on aspects of the parish's mission and ministry (e.g. Worship; Fabric; Finance; Discipleship; Social engagement) and that each of these subcommittees be formed of those with appropriate gifts and skills from across the parish along with one or two PCC members.
7. The basis of subcommittees is therefore from an ecclesiology of gift/skill rather than place. We would expect most of the work of a parish to be done through the relevant subcommittees.
8. Such subcommittees will need to help the PCC attend to the good working of the Church in each place.
9. Parishes may wish to consider identifying Church Stewards in each place. Whilst not a formal title or position, we are suggesting that where a parish finds it helpful and appropriate, one or more people in a church could be identified as Church Stewards. A Church Steward being someone who they themselves and whose local church are happy to be contacted due to their committed care for their local church and who take a degree of responsibility and accountability for it.

Timing

10. We think that the most appropriate time to make this change is as part of the diocesan-wide benefice restructuring that is planned. The two hold together.

Richard Brand, Colin Harbidge & Mat Phipps 11.12.20