

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

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*.

15% of all parish office roles (Churchwardens, Treasurers, Parish Safeguarding Officers) are currently vacant, with many people already fulfilling multiple post in a parish.

PCC Structures

5. There are different options here which need to be suited to different contexts and circumstances. These range from, at one end, having a single PCC with membership elected from anyone in the new wider parish; to at the other end, having Local Church Councils (or any other name for a body focussed in each locality) as PCC subcommittees, with terms of reference from the PCC, delegating to them significant authority in a wide range of areas.
6. A middle position would be having an agreed number of representatives elected from each church/former parish, which may help, at least as a starting point, for a new PCC. Wherever they come from, members of the new PCC should understand their role as being to lead and manage the whole of the new parish

PCC Subcommittees

7. Whilst a Local Church Council ties in the local to the PCC, any form of this body potentially creates extra layers of governance and can tend to a focus on the individual parts rather than the whole body.
8. A simpler model is where the PCC has subcommittees focused on aspects of the parish's mission and ministry (e.g. Worship; Fabric; Finance; Discipleship; Social engagement) and where each of these subcommittees is formed of those with appropriate gifts and skills from across the parish along with one or two PCC members.
9. 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.
10. Such subcommittees will need to help the PCC attend to the good working of the Church in each place.

Timing

11. 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 4.3.21