



## **Review of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011**

### **GS Misc. 1312 – Note of fringe meeting**

8 February 2022, 7pm- 8.30pm, Church House, Westminster

#### **Introduction**

The Third Church Estates Commissioner welcomed all in attendance and introduced herself. The Head of Pastoral & Closed Churches gave a short presentation on the review and the analysis of the consultation responses. (Slides attached).

Synod members were invited to work in small groups, consider the following questions and feedback:

- 1. Reflecting on GS Misc. 1312 – What is your response to the feedback?**
- 2. Can you identify areas of the current Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (MPM) which work well and are valued?**
- 3. Can you identify areas of the current MPM which do not work so well, and which could be improved?**

#### **General Comments**

- There was widespread recognition that the consultation about changes to the MPM had acted as a 'lightening rod' and revealed the deep concerns that some Church members have about future direction, with worries about the declining provision of worship and ministry, particularly in rural areas, and about finance and the parish share system.
- Attendees also flagged issues around a lack of trust, particularly between, dioceses and parishes.
- The emotional and financial impact of Covid-19 needed to be recognised - it was a difficult time to talk about major change in the Church. There are concerns about both a drop in volunteers returning to parish work and declining attendance and income at a parish level.
- The timing of the review had been unfortunate because it happened during the Covid lockdown period, and because there are many other reviews taking place at the same time, including the work on Emerging Church with the concept of mixed ecology, and the Governance Review.
- The recommendation to close churches during Covid-19 and lead worship from home had been very difficult, and some feared this might become the normal way of operating, and that it would be made easier to close churches in order to facilitate a change.
- Parishes are under financial pressure, and they have had very limited fundraising opportunities during the Covid period. Income is down and the pressure to pay the diocesan Share is a struggle, which many felt was not well understood by the dioceses.
- If we are a national church, we must have a national presence, 'stores on the high street'. Coming into a church building can be a starting point for a faith journey.

- It was noted that Synod had approved the review of the Measure, and that it would be for Synod to decide how the work was taken forward and to make the decisions on any new legislation.

## **I. Reflecting on GS Misc. 1312 – What is your response to the feedback?**

- The analysis was helpful, particularly the detailed breakdown of the responses to the individual questions, as it demonstrated how wide a range of views there were, and helped people to understand where there were differences of opinion and approach. We will need to work together to develop a consensus.
- There was support for having continued consultation to inform the development of a white paper in light of what had been presented in GS Misc. 1312.
- There was agreement that the Pastoral Measure could be more pastoral, and conversation managed in a better way, particularly given the significant trust issues mentioned above.
- There was support for more co-creation/co-production options, and for taking different approaches – for example using ‘Citizens’ Assemblies’ – giving people in the parish a chance to come up with ideas and solutions.
- It was suggested that changes should be made to the way diocesan mission and pastoral committees are working to give a greater sense of local ownership to proposals.
- There was support for making sure that systems and processes were designed to ensure that people outside the Church community could engage and contribute, and were encouraged to do so.
- There was recognition that the Measure has a careful range of checks and balances to ensure that decision making was fair, and that people were concerned about changes to those checks and balances, given trust was low.
- Members commented in particular on the balance in the MPM in relation to representation rights. It was recognised that consultation is important, and as many people as possible needed to be involved. However, there are issues of proportionality in terms of the weight which might be given to the views of one person in the process – every voice matters, but it could be difficult if church communities had carefully produced and proposed changes and these were then challenged by people who lived outside the parish, or who did not worship regularly at a local church.
- There was enthusiastic support for being able to trial new approaches more flexibly, without it compromising a future scheme.
- There was concern that dioceses were acting outside the Measure in relation to the use of Bishop’s Mission Orders (BMOs) and the consolidation of deaneries. The establishment of new mission initiatives under a BMO and the consolidation of deaneries by a Bishop’s Pastoral Order under the MPM, can be done without much consultation, so the dioceses were not acting incorrectly, but it shows that more consultation is desired when changes are being considered.
- There was a fear that the aim of the review was to make church closure easier, not just a legal simplification.

**2. Can you identify areas of the current Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (MPM) which work well and are valued?**

- The strong consultation processes in the Measure.
- The right of appeal.
- Mature and respectful discussion is seen in some places, but this needs trust. The process works well when there is transparency about the case for change.

**3. Can you identify areas of the current MPM which do not work so well, and which could be improved?**

- Ordinary people do not know their rights in this process. The legal process and language are hard to understand, and can be difficult for diocesan teams to manage.
- The sense of the Parish being the 'bottom' and the diocese the 'top' of the system is not helpful in a cultural sense. It can feel as if the dioceses have all the responsibility for initiating action.
- A multi-parish benefice may not be in the congregations' best interest, but it is difficult to challenge proposals and find alternatives.
- The balance on representation rights, when one person can repeatedly hold up proposals where there is broad agreement that they should go ahead.
- The Review needs to build in mechanisms which help build trust.
- Clear communication of the data on which decisions are made is important.
- There is a sense of parishes increasingly not paying (or not able to pay) their parish share, and there needs to be more transparency and better explanation from dioceses on how the money is spent.
- PCC volunteers are overloaded: it can be very difficult to recruit to PCCs and for church wardens, PCC secretaries and treasurers, and in some areas we are struggling to keep things going, but the non-church going community still expect the Church of England to provide baptism/marriage/funerals and pastoral care even though fewer people are supporting the Church.
- Concerns that parishes may be considered 'unviable' when the issue is a poor fit with the incumbent – a different person could build the church community more effectively.
- In some cases, livings are being suspended by bishops for prolonged periods of time and that is difficult to challenge. It feels as if the parish is consistently being undermined especially without a priest. These prolonged interregna are experienced as a tactic to encourage closure/reorganisation.
- Need to find a way to harness the support of the local community better, including those who do not worship regularly, so the PCC can focus on mission and pastoral activity. New models are needed – for example to create civic-ecclesiastical partnerships and other governance options.
- It would be much better to consult on how to keep churches open and thriving, rather than consult on closure. There is recognition that many people who don't worship regularly will often help look after the church building or grounds.