

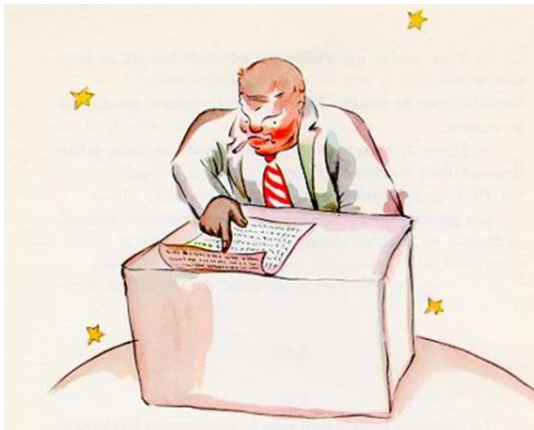
GENERAL SYNOD

Mission & Administration

'That this Synod, considering the ratio of time and money spent in administration to that spent in mission to be too high throughout the Church of England, and noting the very effective facilities provided for parish statistics collection and clergy payroll:

(a) confirm that the principle of subsidiarity should not be applied to purely administrative functions; and

(b) request the Archbishops' Council to consult with the Church Commissioners and dioceses, with the objective of establishing centralised administrative facilities so that other functions which can be handled more efficiently thereby are transferred accordingly.'



The fourth planet belonged to a businessman. This man was so much occupied that he did not even raise his head at the little prince's arrival.

"During the fifty-four years that I have inhabited this planet, I have been disturbed only three times. The first time was twenty-two years ago, when some giddy goose fell from goodness knows where. He made the most frightful noise that resounded all over the place, and I made four mistakes in my addition. The second time, eleven years ago, I was disturbed by an attack of rheumatism. I don't get enough exercise. I have no time

for loafing. The third time--well, this is it! I was saying, then, five-hundred-and-one millions--"

"Millions of what?"

The businessman suddenly realized that there was no hope of being left in peace until he answered this question. *"Millions of those little objects,"* he said, *"which one sometimes sees in the sky."*

"Ah! You mean the stars?"

"Yes, that's it. The stars."

"And what do you do with five hundred millions of stars?"

"I administer them," replied the businessman. *"I count them and recount them. It is difficult. But I am a man who is naturally interested in matters of consequence."*

The little prince was still not satisfied. *"If I owned a silk scarf,"* he said, *"I could put it around my neck and take it away with me. If I owned a flower, I could pluck that flower and take it away with me. But you cannot pluck the stars from heaven . . ."*

"No. But I can put them in the bank."

"Whatever does that mean?"

"That means that I write the number of my stars on a little paper. And then I put this paper in a drawer and lock it with a key."

"And that is all?"

"That is enough," said the businessman.

"It is entertaining," thought the little prince. "It is rather poetic. But it is of no great consequence." On matters of consequence, the little prince had ideas which were very different from those of the grown-ups.

"I myself own a flower," he continued his conversation with the businessman, "which I water every day. I own three volcanoes, which I clean out every week (for I also clean out the one that is extinct; one never knows). It is of some use to my volcanoes, and it is of some use to my flower, that I own them. But you are of no use to the stars . . ."

The businessman opened his mouth, but he found nothing to say in answer. And the little prince went away.

"The grown-ups are certainly altogether extraordinary," he said simply, talking to himself as he continued on his journey.

[Abridged extract and image from 'The Little Prince' by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry]

1. Along with so many others, I have direct experience in commercial life of huge improvements in operational and administrative efficiency over the past 10-15 years: improvements that are now being extended across the public sector. Particularly in those organisations whose activities are geographically spread across the country we have seen how administration has been co-ordinated and supplied as a service so that people 'on the ground' can concentrate on the job in hand: whether in the health service or running a network of building society branches.
2. The Church stands almost alone in hanging onto dispersed administration (in some respects like a 'comfort blanket'), and is therefore denying itself local resources that could be focused on mission: both in terms of people time and money. Why is this?
3. You could say that the Church always takes a long time to change, but I think there's an added problem: allowing **subsidiarity** to apply in an area where it doesn't belong.
 - **Subsidiarity:** 'The principle that a central governing body will permit its member states, branches, local government etc.. to have control over those issues that are deemed more appropriate to be decided at a local level.' (Chambers Concise Dictionary)
4. Mission and ministry are of course eminently well-suited to subsidiarity, but the Church doesn't stop there. It applies the subsidiarity principle to all issues, including matters which are purely administrative. Indeed this central governing body of General Synod doesn't even take a considered oversight, let alone any form of approval, over the overall finances of the whole Church. Our budget discussion each summer is restricted to the Archbishops' Council's finances, and has the reverse effect of pushing yet more administration work to the dioceses.
5. So whether we duplicate administration between 42 dioceses or 16,000 parishes, we are masters in the art of duplicated administration

6. In over 20 years' experience as a member of General Synod I have never seen this central governing body debate where to draw a subsidiarity line between this and issues of Church growth, but this is exactly what you are now invited to do.
7. And it could save the Church as a whole over £15m pa in money spent on the wrong things, and it could free up a huge amount of human resource to doing the work of Christ: not just those employed in administration, but also those people, often ordained, who are tied up in interminable meetings about local administration.

What 'purely administrative' functions does the motion refer to?

8. Few would argue that the following functions contain a substantial proportion of purely administrative functions:
 - Finance & Trusts/Glebe Management
 - Personnel & Payroll (lay)
 - Information Technology (incl. internet)
 - Premises & Associated Functions
 - Stationery & Printing
 - Legal
 - Insurance
 - Audit
 - Buildings & Property Management
 - Communications & Publishing
 - Synod support/co-ordination
9. We are all aware of the substantial amount of time devoted to these things, but it's still not easy to quantify them in diocesan and parochial accounts. Despite attempts to encourage a common template, terminology and the allocation of expenditure differs strongly from diocese to diocese: there is, for example, hardly any detailed analysis of how the charges of third parties – legal, accountants and other agents – are constructed. Meanwhile there is a plethora of different auditors used, thus entrenching the inconsistency in reporting.
10. Applying administrative consistency will be a key part of making ourselves more efficient.
11. Much of the support work we correctly provide at diocesan level also has a high proportion of purely administrative content: eg pastoral work, redundant churches, training (ministry and lay), ministry deployment, safeguarding, stewardship, education, ecumenical relations, work for the disabled. Many matters are best dealt with at diocesan level, but not all.
12. At present it's necessary to make some broad assumptions to achieve estimates of potential direct savings. Let us assume that the average cost per diocese of administration and the work of boards and councils is just under £1.2m, of which administration functions accounts for £0.5m. If we work on the basis of centralised facilities (not in London!) requiring a staff five times the size of an average diocesan administration resource, and allowing for a residual diocesan average cost of £0.1m, the overall saving in administration costs could be £14.3m. However as mentioned above there are also many areas of administration within support functions, and out of their £30m cost I am confident that savings of well over 10% could be achieved, enabling savings of over £17m pa in total.

Isn't something already happening here?

13. Yes, there are a number of localized and 'small step initiatives: but so much more could be

done if the General Synod gives a clear steer to the NCIs and diocesan secretaries. In some areas – for example, in the south-west – there is good bilateral co-operation in combining administrative support functions. While this best practice is of course welcomed, however, NCI leaders are more cautious:

“Our experience of offering to undertake administrative services to the church at diocesan and cathedral level has been mixed at best. Our separate structures of course leave the dioceses with the choice as to how they undertake all of their administrative functions. Our experience is to work with those who want to work with us.”

“Rather than doing a thorough quantitative survey of all services, we have done some qualitative assessment, and drawn from that conclusions about the best immediate targets. The main area we are focusing on initially is recruitment - both for dioceses and for parishes and other church bodies. We are therefore pressing ahead with a project to establish an online recruitment platform with recruitment tracking tools - which we believe could save considering sums in advertising and HR costs.”

Meanwhile administration is not seen as an area where the Dioceses Commission can act.

So give us an example of an initiative which could really make a difference

14. There are many such: an obvious one is to provide parishes with a much more comprehensive ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ section on the Church of England website, with particular focus on administrative and legal matters. Regarding the latter, here’s the current guidance:

Q. “Whom should I speak to regarding my [legal services] enquiry?”

A. “If you have a specific legal enquiry relating to your parish or a more general enquiry on a matter of ecclesiastical law on which you require clarification, in the first instance you should contact your diocesan registrar for advice.”

15. FAQs should include all frequently asked specific enquiries and the answers to them: eg concerns about the failure to hold an APCM in time. Then before a parish asks a question of a local registrar, they would be required to confirm that they had checked that section of the website before incurring legal costs. This is important as the number of hours done by the registrar feeds in to the cost of the retainer.

If this motion is passed...

16. ...it is my intention to seek voluntary funding for a business plan to be prepared, setting out an overview of the areas from which the Church could benefit most significantly in the short term with the least possible effort. If the principle of subsidiarity is dis-applied from matters which are purely administrative, we should look to the NCI leaders to act on the Synod’s resolve so that we do not remain the least efficient of all geographically-spread organisations within England.

17. So please dispense with subsidiarity for purely administrative matters, and ask the Archbishops’ Council to reduce the burden of administration across the Church.

18. Let’s not be like the businessman in the Little Prince’s story. Let’s be concerned with real matters of consequence.