

**BRADFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION****A background paper from the Dioceses Commission**

1. The Bradford Diocesan Synod Motion requests the Archbishops' Council 'to formulate proposals for reductions in the numbers of episcopal and senior clergy posts, taking into account reductions for the number of stipendiary clergy since 1979; and submit a report with recommendations to the General Synod within three years'.

**Diocesan Bishops**

2. Any proposal to reduce the number of dioceses would need the approval of the Dioceses Commission, the synods of the dioceses concerned (unless the Archbishop of the Province is satisfied that there are wider considerations affecting the province or the Church of England as a whole) and the General Synod. Such a proposal could be initiated by the dioceses concerned or by the Dioceses Commission.

3. There has been a longstanding difference of view as to the optimum size for dioceses. Some advocate small dioceses roughly comparable in size to the Diocese of Bradford, while others advocate merging such smaller dioceses in order that no diocese should, for example, cover less than one ceremonial county. In 1974, after the issue had been discussed for seven years, the then Standing Committee concluded that 'there is no one pattern of episcopal organisation to which the Church of England would wish to commit itself'. In 2008 the Archbishops suggested to the new Dioceses Commission that it would be better not to attempt to arrive at an optimum size for dioceses but instead to examine the country area by area, asking what configuration will best serve the mission of the Church in each area. The Commission plans to begin this work by reviewing the dioceses of Yorkshire from the autumn of this year. The Commission has no agenda to reduce or increase the number of dioceses, but cannot exclude the possibility that ensuring the best configuration to the communities that the dioceses serve might involve merging existing dioceses and/or creating new ones. More details about the Commission's work may be found in its first Annual Report (GS Misc 920) and on the Church of England website at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/commissions.html/diocom/>

**Suffragan Bishops and Archdeacons**

4. When the Archbishops bring s. 17 of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 into force, the Dioceses Commission will have the power to require the full process for creating a suffragan see (including approval by the General Synod) to be gone through in order for a vacancy in an existing suffragan see to be filled.

5. The House of Bishops has agreed that the Church Commissioners' financial support for episcopal ministry should, from January 2011, be allocated in accordance with a formula rather than according to the number of bishops in each diocese. If the money were not spent on support for bishops it could instead be allocated to the cost of archdeacons. The Dioceses Commission envisages that it will use its powers to ensure that due consideration has been given to whether any suffragan see that falls vacant is still needed, and that the ministry of someone appointed would be properly episcopal in nature. Subject to this, the decision as to whether to fill the suffragan see or not will be taken in the diocese concerned.

6. The roles of suffragan bishops vary widely across the dioceses. Some have formal or informal responsibility for oversight of a geographical area within a diocese, while others assist the diocesan across the diocese as a whole, often with responsibility for specific aspects of its mission and ministry. Another provision of the 2007 Measure that is not yet in force will place the diocesan bishop under a duty to keep the provision of episcopal ministry and oversight in his diocese under review. This will

offer a context in which decisions can be taken at the diocesan level about the episcopal ministry and oversight that are needed in the particular context of the diocese concerned.

7. Decisions as to whether the number of archdeacons should be kept at its present level or reduced are already taken at the diocesan level, as are decisions as to whether an archdeaconry should be combined with either parochial responsibilities or a residentiary canonry. The Dioceses Commission has no responsibility for such questions. To formulate national proposals for a reduction in archidiaconal posts would seem to go against the current trend towards the devolution of responsibility for such matters to the dioceses.

8. The motion's assumption that the number of bishops and archdeacons should be in proportion to the number of stipendiary clergy may be questioned. Oversight of stipendiary clergy is only one element in the work of bishops and archdeacons. They also oversee self-supporting and active retired ministers, and Readers, and these categories have grown in number as the number of stipendiary clergy has reduced.

9. Furthermore, bishops are not just overseers of the clergy but also chief pastors and fathers in God to the people of their dioceses (including those who do not regularly attend church). They are leaders in mission (which could suggest that their number should be related to an area's population and mission potential). Arguably, the number of parishes, places of worship and congregations (including congregations formed under bishops' mission orders) that are overseen by bishops and archdeacons is at least as significant in terms of workload as the number of people who worship in them.

10. Finally, consideration needs to be given to the increasing burden that is placed on bishops and archdeacons by church and secular legislation and by current understandings of 'good practice'. Arguably, any reduction in workload as a consequence of reduced numbers of stipendiary clergy and of worshippers has at least been offset by such increasing demands.

### **Cathedral clergy**

11. The term 'senior clergy posts' also embraces cathedral deans and residentiary canons. It is even less clear that such posts should be in proportion to the number of stipendiary clergy (rather than in proportion to the needs of the church concerned). The Church Commissioners are required (by the Cathedrals Measure 1999, s. 21) to pay the stipends of the dean and two residentiary canons of every English cathedral (except Christ Church, Oxford). This has been taken as the minimum requirement for a cathedral (as distinct from a large parish church) and thus the number of deans and part of the number of residentiary canons relates not to the number of stipendiary clergy but to the number of cathedrals.

12. Any reduction in the number of residentiary canons in a particular cathedral is decided locally. Again, to formulate national proposals for a reduction in cathedral posts would seem to go against the current trend towards the devolution of responsibility for such matters to the dioceses.

13. The Dioceses Commission's responsibility in this area is limited to the number of cathedrals, which may be affected by diocesan reorganization. However, the number of cathedrals does not necessarily relate to the number of dioceses. Were the Commission to conclude that the number of dioceses in Yorkshire ought to be reduced, for example, it might nevertheless recommend the continuance of some or all of the cathedral foundations concerned if it judged that the Church's mission to the city or cities and area(s) concerned required this.

On behalf of the Commission

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Chair

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