



wedding fees.

The General Synod has backed a regional trial to offer Church of England weddings free of statutory fees following a debate brought by Blackburn Diocesan Synod.

Members voted in favour of requesting that the Archbishops' Council design and implement a time-limited regional trial providing wedding fees free of all statutory fees.

The Council has been asked to report on the impact of the trial on the number of weddings conducted, the pastoral and missional contacts made, and charitable giving in connection with weddings.

The report would also detail the projected parochial and diocesan finances as a result of the trial.

Synod members backed the trial – brought in an amendment by the Ven Mark Ireland from the Diocese of Blackburn - instead of a wider proposal from the diocese for fees relating to marriage to be set at nil or at a minimal amount across the Church of England.



Rev Dr Tom Woolford, presenting the Blackburn Diocese motion to the Synod, said the current system of waiving fees in the event of hardship 'patronises the poor' and 'robs the struggling' of their dignity.

Speaking in favour of no statutory fees but suggested voluntary donations, he said: "What would certainly happen if we abolished statutory fees is that most couples would make a donation."

"We would still be getting an income from weddings but by way of a donation of what couples can afford, some would give a great deal while some would only be able to afford to give a little.

"What is more if by abolishing the fee we get an increase in the overall number of weddings, then even if the average donation per wedding is less than the current statutory fee but we get more weddings then we may not overall be that far off, we might even be better off."

Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn, who tabled the amendment, said a time-limited trial would send out a message to the nation.

This message is "the Church of England is here for you and we want to serve you whether or not you come to Church. We think marriage is something really special; for you to have the opportunity to make a public commitment in front of your family and friends, and in a place where you can see God's blessing, and you should not be put off from that by cost."

Supporting the Archdeacon's amendment to the motion, The Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell added: "This seems to me to be the right thing to do, but also the right way of doing it... This is a chance for us to do something which I believe could be really good for us, good for our soul."

Speaking after the amended motion was carried, Rev Dr Tom Woolford said: "I'm delighted that the motion was approved. While everyone likes the principle of free weddings, there is understandable anxiety about the unknown effect on church finances of doing so: the amendment to authorise a regional trial means we can allay those concerns.

"I'm hoping and praying the trial goes really well and we can bring a motion for the full abolition of wedding fees in due course."

More information

The full wording of the amended motion is as follows:

'That this Synod request the Archbishops' Council to design, fund and implement a time-limited, regional trial of providing weddings free of all statutory fees, and report back to Synod on the impact it made on the number of weddings conducted, pastoral and missional contacts made, on charitable giving in connection with provision of wedding services, and on projected parochial and diocesan finances.'

The motion was passed with the following votes recorded:

- Bishops: 15 for, 4 against, 2 abstained
- Clergy: 104 for, 19 against, 8 abstained
- Laity: 180 for, 17 against, 7 abstained

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