

GENERAL SYNOD

MISSION AND ADMINISTRATION

A background note from the Secretary General

1. The Church, like other public institutions, has grown in administrative complexity over the years, meaning that diocesan structures which were originally intended to be pastoral and ecclesiological entities have evolved into administrative units. Any modern organisation is now required to meet stringent legal, financial and regulatory requirements, and to report regularly on how it is meeting these requirements. All of these functions require people with the appropriate professional skills to service them. Diocesan offices (and costs) have grown accordingly over the years.
2. It should be recognised too that the institutional structure of the Church, in which there is a separate legal entity for each parish and each diocese, militates against some of the efficiencies that might otherwise be achieved in a unitary structure. One example is insurance contracts, which have to be drawn up individually with each parish rather than being procured nationally or at a diocesan level.
3. Recent years have seen some initiatives on the part of the Church to reduce costs and centralise some administration where appropriate. These are as follows:
 - **The Parish Buying programme:**¹ Established in 2010 and administered by an external supplier, this scheme provides a centralised procurement service for key areas of spend such as energy and office supplies so that parishes, cathedrals and dioceses can reduce the cost and paperwork of procuring these services individually. In 2016 £12.5 million of contracts were processed through the Parish Buying service producing savings of £1.2 million for hard pressed parishes.
 - **Parish Giving Scheme:** Parishes from 14 dioceses currently participate in the scheme whereby Gift Aid claims are administered on behalf of individual churches taking away a tedious administrative burden from parish treasurers. In 2016 £16.5 million of Gift Aid claims were made and returned to parishes and this total is expected to rise to £21 million when a further six dioceses come on board in the current year (and we have the capacity to manage gift aid claims on behalf of the whole church if dioceses choose to participate).
 - **Safeguarding:** Since 2014, the Church of England has sought to encourage a more consistent approach to Safeguarding practice across all parts of the Church of England by growing its central Safeguarding resource and issuing a range of new policies and practice guidance on Safeguarding, accompanied by a comprehensive Training Programme which is currently being rolled out.
 - **Generic Legal Advice:** There has been no significant demand from dioceses for centrally provided legal services. Rather, they seem to welcome the accessibility and responsiveness of a locally provided service. However, there is a recognition of the potential value of generic

¹ See: <https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/>

legal advice which seeks to address the questions most commonly raised with registrars, with a view to reducing the calls on them for ‘entry level’ advice – which, as Mr Oldham points out in his briefing paper, increase the cost of diocesan retainers. The Fees Advisory Commission, supported by the Legal Office, is therefore already working with the Ecclesiastical Law Association (which represents the registrars) towards the production of generic advice on frequently arising issues, whether by the Legal Office or by registrars themselves.

- **Common Awards Scheme:** In 2013, the Church of England launched the Common Awards Scheme to bring under one umbrella the educational programmes of over 20 theological and ministerial educational institutions that were previously validated by 19 universities, thus saving costs for dioceses and providing greater consistency of training outcomes.
 - **A new Church of England website:** Work is under way to develop a new Church of England website portal as an aid to evangelism. Providing a central point for guidance and information for dioceses on legal and other governance matters is one area which is being explored in 2017 as part of this initiative. We will - as part of this project - be enhancing our very popular Parish Resources website which provides simple guidance to parish treasurers and administrators on all aspects of their role and function.
 - **Payroll Services:** Administered at national level by the Finance and Resources Division, this operates a central payroll system for 8,000 active Clergy in the dioceses, 800 Staff in the NCIs and Pensions Board homes and 18,000 Pensioners based in the UK and overseas. The Division is exploring the opportunity to extend the service to diocesan payrolls but it is likely that the costs of rolling it out further would be prohibitive given the separate legal status of every parish (each with a separate HMRC reference code)
 - Finally, the **Renewal and Reform** initiative is an ambitious programme of work stretching across all dioceses to address some of the deep-rooted missional challenges facing the Church of England. The **Simplification** work stream has introduced a number of items of legislation to reduce the administrative burdens on dioceses and parishes and to free them up for mission.
4. As Mr Oldham recognises there are further initiatives in the pipeline including the proposed launch later this year of a single Church of England recruitment portal. The National Church Institutions are open to exploring other opportunities as they arise, recognising though that sometimes ‘central’ doesn’t mean better, and that some things will and indeed must remain managed at diocesan level in an episcopally ordered Church.
 5. Should Synod pass the motion from Mr Oldham, it will be for the Archbishops’ Council to review whether there are other aspects of diocesan and indeed parish administration which could benefit from a more centralised approach, in consultation with the Church Commissioners and the dioceses.

WILLIAM NYE
Secretary General

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