

Simplification – Frequently Asked Questions

What is Simplification?

Simplification is a strand of work within Renewal and Reform – seeking to remove barriers to mission and ministry through revising existing legislation. The workstream developed following consultation with dioceses and parishes about what hinders churches from being effective in their mission and ministry.

Why does Simplification matter?

The work undertaken by Simplification can and does make a real difference by giving more flexibility and facilitating change. All changes to Church legislation must be brought before General Synod several times and then be considered by the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, so it can take up to 18 months to be implemented. In addition, it can be confusing to know at which stage each proposal is and how it applies on the ground in parishes.

What has happened so far in Simplification?

There have been a number of successes to date within the Simplification programme, including revision of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, review of the Church Representation and Ministers Measure, review of the Ecumenical Relations Measure and the approval of the Legislative Reform Measure.

General Synod approved the Legislative Reform Measure in July 2017 to facilitate removing or reducing burdens resulting from ecclesiastical legislation. It has established a Legislative Reform Committee, to support the work to amend or repeal some Acts of Parliament and Church Measures by way of orders approved by the General Synod without going through the full legislative process that applies to Measures.

The Legislative Reform Committee is currently consulting on a number of proposals to amend the Patronages (Benefices) Measure 1986. The consultation finished on 24 January 2019, and the proposal will be brought to Synod in July 2019.

What is planned next for Simplification?

Simplification is a long-term change programme considering the legislative framework for the Church. Currently a scoping exercise is taking place to look at further legislation which can be revised, either using the Legislative Reform Measure process or through the full Synodical process. The results of this exercise will be presented to the House of Bishops and Archbishops' Council in the near future, and then presented to Synod in due course.

What does Simplification mean for me?

Much of the changes delivered under Simplification can be quite technical and challenging to understand, as it deals primarily with legislative change. However, the aim is as far as possible to devolve the functions of the Church to the local level, reflecting the reality of a Church that serves diverse communities and localities in many different ways. Simplification means decisions at diocesan and parish level can be made flexibly and proactively, supported by legislation that is easier to understand than before and in tune with the reality of life for churches today.

How Simplification applies to parishes

It will soon be legally possible:

- To keep your curate-in-training on for an extra year if he or she hasn't found the right next step to take.
- To allow curates to be deployed more flexibly.
- To permit parishes in multi-parish benefices to make choices about how many PCCs they have and make the rules in relation to numbers of Church Wardens more flexible. For rural parishes this will come as a welcome relief and should free up time for clergy and laity to live out their vocation in their community.
- For clergy to be able to choose with their PCCs whether or not to wear robes in services, according to the tradition and preference of dress more flexibly during services, reflecting the differing traditions of the parish in which they minister.
- To relax the rules on how frequently communion services and morning and evening prayer should be held in sparsely populated benefices.

For dioceses

It will soon be possible to:

- More easily deploy clergy in non-parish ministries such as new church communities operating under Bishops' Mission Orders.
- Appoint clergy to interim posts to support parishes that have been struggling and in need of effective clergy support fast but for a limited time.
- Simplify the bureaucracy of dealing with church housing during the gap between clergy leaving and arriving in a parish.
- Reduce the human resource burden of reporting sickness and dealing with issues around capability.
- Compensate clergy more equably if their post is abolished during a reorganisation of parishes.
- Create better ecumenical links with growing new churches, particularly in urban areas