

**Theology of Cathedral Governance:  
Notes from a consultation held at St George's Windsor on 1-2 April**

Note by the Third Church Estates Commissioner, Dr Eve Poole

General Synod debated the report of the Cathedrals Working Group (CWG) in July 2018, broadly endorsing its recommendations albeit with some reservations e.g., around chapter membership and the proposed Vice Chair, the role of the bishop and reporting lines for residentiary canons, the role of the Administrator, the role of Council, proposed regulation by the Charity Commission, and cathedrals with parishes – all of which have been given further thought.

One concern was that there could have been more theological consideration in the CWG report itself. In April, I therefore convened a Consultation at St George's House in Windsor, kindly sponsored by the Church Commissioners, to discuss the theology of governance in a cathedral context. The Consultation comprised 13 cathedral deans – nominated by their peers – along with 2 bishops and 6 theologians, some of whom were also cathedral canons. During our 24 hours together, we explored the ecclesiology of cathedrals, their particularity, history and context. We discussed the complex lines of mutual authority and accountability that exist between bishops, cathedrals and dioceses; and the proper relationship between these church links and those with secular stakeholders both locally and nationally. We explored what it is for the bishop and dean to thrive together in this context, and we examined in detail the disputed elements of the CWG report in the light of the theological themes that emerged. We worshipped and ate together, and left Windsor with a shared sense of the great opportunity that world-class governance would represent for cathedrals.

In particular, there was strong support for the co-regulation of cathedrals by both the Church Commissioners and the Charity Commission, as embodying the dual church/state affiliation of the nation's cathedrals. Further, there was encouragement for cathedrals to retain their Councils as vital non-statutory ways to bring together the widest possible stakeholder group into a formal arrangement with the cathedral, but through covenant not contract. This would allow each cathedral to bespoke their own membership locally, and to model Trinitarian relationality in a way that is much harder to do where the body involved has a statutory composition and legal duties to conduct.

A note of our time together is attached, which contains a blog summarising our emerging thinking. I hope that Synod members will find it helpful in preparing for the July 2019 debate.

EVE POOLE



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

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# Theology of Cathedral Governance

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## Notes from the Consultation

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held at St George's House, Windsor

1 – 2 April 2019



ST GEORGE'S HOUSE

# Attendees

Very Revd Peter Atkinson, Dean of Worcester  
Revd Prof Paul Avis, Hon Prof Durham University  
Very Revd Peter Bradley, Dean of Sheffield  
Mr Matt Chamberlain, Church Commissioners' Secretariat  
Ms Becky Clark, Director of Churches and Cathedrals, Archbishops' Council  
Very Revd Dr John Davies, Dean of Wells  
Very Revd Adrian Dorber, Dean of Lichfield  
Miss Natasha Dyer, Cathedrals Liaison Officer, Archbishops' Council  
Revd Canon Dr Julie Gittoes, Residentiary Canon at Guildford Cathedral  
Dr Paula Gooder, Chancellor St Paul's Cathedral  
Very Revd Jonathan Greener, Dean of Exeter  
Very Revd Nicholas Henshall, Dean of Chelmsford  
Very Revd David Hoyle, Dean of Bristol  
Rt Revd John Inge, Bishop of Worcester  
Very Revd David Ison, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral  
Very Revd Stephen Lake, Dean of Gloucester  
Revd Canon Jessica Martin Residentiary Canon at Ely Cathedral  
Mr Michael Minta, Head of Church Commissioners' Bishoprics & Cathedrals department  
Very Revd David Monteith, Dean of Leicester  
Very Revd Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark  
Very Revd Catherine Ogle, Dean of Winchester  
Dr Eve Poole, Third Church Estates Commissioner  
Revd Professor Ben Quash, Prof of Christianity and the Arts, King's College London  
Rt Revd Alastair Redfern, retired Bishop of Derby  
Very Revd Andrew Tremlett, Dean of Durham  
Revd Dr Sam Wells, Vicar at St Martin-in-the-fields

# Session One:

## **Towards an ecclesiology of English cathedrals, by Paul Avis**

### **Chaired by Adrian Dorber**

Paul Avis introduced a paper exploring the ecclesiology of cathedrals, accompanied by responses from Adrian Dorber and Julie Gittoes, which had been circulated to attendees prior to the consultation.

### **Cathedrals as churches**

Paul believed the Cathedrals Working Group (CWG) report had underplayed the primary role of a cathedral simply as a church. He reflected on the post-war building of Coventry Cathedral, where the instruction to the architect had been to conceive an altar with a building around it. While cathedrals were often special buildings, their primary identity was to facilitate the gathering of Christians for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel, teaching the faith, and celebrating the sacraments. All cathedral activities flowed from the eucharistic event, he said. Without this purpose and identity, these special buildings were merely museums. Others present questioned this focus on the altar, noting that cathedrals pre-dated such frequent celebration of the eucharist, and suggested that the cycle of daily prayer was a more appropriate measure of the particularity of cathedrals. Some also felt that that cathedrals were characteristically public spaces, open daily, in which people were convened, communities served, and in which worship also took place.

If every cathedral, like every parish church, was first and foremost a church, what then makes a cathedral different? Paul ventured that the cathedral was no ordinary church but an exceptional church. While there was nervousness about underplaying the outstanding work that takes

place in parish churches of all kinds by proclaiming the 'special' nature of cathedrals, it was also agreed that the scale of a cathedral building, the scope of its operations, the intensity of its activity, the outstanding quality of its preaching and music, and the range of skills its clergy and lay people all equipped it to do what most parish churches could not: to take a leading role in the mission of the church within the diocese. It was not for cathedrals to call themselves exceptional, or to define what it meant to be the 'mother church'. The wider world would decide these things for itself. So what language ought cathedrals use to speak to their whole range of stakeholders? How should they avoid 'special pleading' for cathedrals but articulate for the whole Church and beyond what unique contribution cathedrals could make – as part of the whole body of the Church – to its mission?

### **The cathedral and the diocese**

Paul contended that the CWG report had given the erroneous impression that cathedrals were somehow separate from dioceses. In fact, a cathedral stood within a diocese and was a major and significant component of it. Their ministry and witness should permeate the diocese. A diocese was both a geographical area and an area over which the bishop had been given oversight. The bishop was the geographical area's chief pastor, the overseer of its pastoral ministry, the principal minister of the sacrament within it (in person and through the agency of other ministers). Cathedrals shared in the ministry of the bishop, and this rooted them firmly within the dioceses.

### **The cathedral as the bishop's seat**

The name 'cathedral' comes from the presence of the cathedra, or bishop's seat, from which s/he would teach and govern. In the modern era, teaching and governing was necessarily

modulated to what people were willing to receive. It was also reliant on the time, energy, money and talent of volunteers who therefore needed to be motivated and mobilised by reasoned persuasion, the seeking of assent, and the giving of moral value. In a cathedral, lay persons joined the clergy in exercising this ministry each according to their own role and calling, and the bishop and dean were both embodied in the celebration of the sacraments. The bishop had oversight of every aspect of worship, personnel and fabric in the diocese but his or her oversight of the cathedral and its clergy was not immediate or direct. Cathedrals were not autonomous institutions but had day-to-day independence in the running of their affairs, subject to appropriate checks and balances. Constitutionally, they had a penultimate rather than ultimate authority. Cathedral clergy like all other clergy paid canonical obedience to their bishop but this did not make it proper for bishops to refer to one as 'my cathedral'. On the other hand, neither should the bishop ever be referred to as a 'visitor' in the cathedral. S/he belonged there and had the right to preside and preach there; it was his or her spiritual home. The cathedral supported the bishop's ministry, but the CWG report should have acknowledged that the bishop also supported the cathedral's ministry. There was, or should be, reciprocal fellowship of prayer and mutual counsel.

#### **The mission of the cathedral**

As noted above, cathedrals were primarily churches, but exceptional churches with capacity to do more, particularly in relation to outreach, than parish churches. While parish clergy went out into communities and made relationships with individuals and groups, cathedrals could not do this without trespassing. Instead they were able to attract people and groups in. In that sense, parish churches' mission was centrifugal; cathedrals'

was centripetal. Cathedrals were characterised with a dynamic of gathering and sending. Gathering people in with events and liturgical or other attractions, by providing a spiritual home for Christians (not only Anglicans) and as yet uncommitted people, and sending them out (e.g. as the newly baptised, confirmed or ordained). In sending mode, the cathedral shared its resources with the wider diocese and wider community, fulfilling its role as mother church of the diocese.

The group observed that evangelism and mission were terms used in all contexts as part of the Church of England's struggle to define its future. Because of anxieties around future operation – being a going concern or, more fundamentally, being concerned that there is anyone who wants the CofE parish system to keep on going – the methods of mission and evangelism were increasingly being defined by their measurable outcomes, such as number of confirmations, or numbers on the electoral roll. Cathedrals in many ways had benefitted from this, as their general low-threshold approach had proven attractive over more than a decade of measurable growth by many criteria. However it was worth questioning how much the current pressure to evangelise in a way that could be measured and reported needed to be played in to. The Church tended to manage what it measured; any form of observation had an impact upon the thing being observed.

#### **Authority and the cathedral**

In the modern Church, authority was both necessary and contested. It could not be asserted. In the Church, authority was a function of the whole body. No member was without it in his or her own sphere, but all were able to give or withhold consent for it. It was inherently relational and always negotiated. With authority sat accountability and with all parts of the body of the

Church ultimately remaining under the authority of Jesus.

The group noted that in addition to the ecclesiological account of accountability, thought needed to be given to how accountability should be embedded in a cathedral context. How did ethics inform our ecclesiological understanding of accountability? The Nolan Principles were noted, in particular the principle of transparency, and it was agreed that there needed to be clarity about which individuals or groups were responsible for delivering which outcomes and by when. But to whom was chapter accountable? The Church had struggled with this question – to which there was no clear answer – for some time. The existence of Cathedral Councils had been debated one way and then the other and was still unresolved. Different cathedrals ministered in different contexts and it was difficult to apply a single model of accountability. The group agreed that cathedrals should not principally be accountable to the bishop but should have layers of accountability, e.g. to the college of canons, the Cathedral Council (providing face-to-face accountability which was healthy and helpful), the Charity Commission (it was important to be accountable to a non-Church body), to the whole cathedral community, and mutual accountability within chapter itself. And what was the ‘cathedral community’? The group discussed that the worshipping congregation was one stakeholder but not necessarily the primary one. Primary stakeholders might be people that had never attended to worship, and therefore this was a complex matter. The group also agreed the language being used to describe cathedrals – “mother church” – could be seen as matronizing and domesticating. It was mentioned that cathedrals should look outward and engage with the world in language everyone would feel comfortable with, reflecting cathedrals and their impact in a unique way.

# Session Two

## **History and context, presentation by David Hoyle**

### **Chaired by Eve Poole**

David Hoyle spoke to a number of slides, summarised below:

### **Conversation shaped by context**

Theological language was culturally conditioned and conversation belonged in a time and a place. Historian Eamon Duffy had demonstrated this explaining that the state of the souls of the blessed was called refrigerium, which was a place of refreshment and coolness prior to entering into heaven. Also, in 1580 the local people in Hohenbucko, Brandenburg complained about Pastor Steinbrecher, worried that – as a scholar rather than a farmer - he would destroy the fields he farmed. Essentially they were worried that his talents were corrupted by rural life, again demonstrating that context changes us. In the light of these two examples, where was the Church now in its thinking about governance and the successes and otherwise of cathedrals? The CWG had referred to cathedrals as “one of the Church’s success stories, bucking the trends of numerical decline, exerting a growing influence in civil society, and demonstrating an effective way of engaging with contemporary culture”, but this was not the whole story - there were important questions about the structures governing them. If cathedrals were maverick – bucking trends – how far should this be embraced? Did they need to be more structured?

But how should historical context be defined? And, in turn, what does it tell us about the purpose of the cathedral? Simon Jenkins had referred to cathedrals of great memorials to the nation’s past while Jon Cannon, in his book *The Great English Cathedrals (and the world that made them)*, suggested that history ended in 1538. As noted above, some saw the cathedral as essentially an

altar but in the 16th century they contributed to the intellectual health, a period where the pulpit was more significant.

### **The changing relationship between cathedral and bishop**

It was commonly accepted that a cathedral was the seat of the bishop but this had been expressed in different ways. In one cathedral the constitution stated that every person or body having functions should have due regard to the fact that the cathedral was the seat of the bishop; another bishop had acknowledged that the way in which individual bishops related to their cathedrals may vary but the existence of the cathedra symbolised wider ministry and an expanded sense of mission and connectedness. The language, too, had changed through history, Saxons understanding the word cathedra to mean the bishop’s authority and the current definition of the bishop’s seat coming more recently. The relatedness to the bishop had also changed through history, chapter houses helping bishops’ ministry before resistance grew. It was noted that the bishop’s seat was ‘side-lined’, i.e. not in a physical position from which one could preside, symbolising the complexity of the relationship which in itself owed much to an historical accident in the 12th century when cathedral’s and bishops’ estates were separated, at a time when western Christendom was becoming more institutionalised, which led to bishops and cathedrals litigating against each other about land matters. Examples were given of cathedrals keeping the bishop out in the 14th century, but in more recent times, bishops had ‘moved back in’ to cathedrals to teach and preside; they regarded cathedral clergy as colleagues and critical friends, and perhaps saw cathedrals as a theatre for episcopacy. Deans were part of bishops’ staff teams – a helpful element of independence – and some shared in the bishop’s/ diocese’s vision and strategy while others had a separate one. In view of all this, might it be more appropriate to refer to cathedrals as the ‘First

church of the diocese' rather than the bishop's church? Ultimately the commitment of cathedrals to serving the bishop and diocese was a good one. And mutually beneficial: the cathedral could provide the theatre for episcopacy while the bishop could bring the diocese in.

### **Cathedrals' distinctiveness**

It was noted that cathedrals' generous inclusion or low threshold for involvement was part of their attraction. In addition, as the parish church nationally became more congregational, the cathedrals' role in ministering to other parts of society (e.g. businesses) became more important. While at some points in history cathedrals had deliberately excluded people, even heavily guarded and castellated themselves, they also had the opportunity to open their doors to large numbers of people and in doing so demonstrate unity. This could be contentious, e.g. a cathedral ministering to the LGBT community was better-appreciated by the wider population of the city than it was by a significant proportion of the Church membership – but regardless of opinion on contentious issues, the cathedral nonetheless had the opportunity to be inclusive on a scale which other churches could not. It was important to recognise the different ways of touching society: a resource church brought people from the 'outside world' into the church building while a cathedral went out into the city to name Christ. Both were valid, valuable and complementary.

### **Cathedrals' place in mission**

Secular society increasingly identified with cathedrals – many cities even adopting them as part of their branding – understanding them to be places of effective outreach while ambivalent to their approach to mission. Like other churches, they were centred on mission and worship but approached these differently, perhaps more episodically and event-focussed. The language of 'mission' needed some care. What did liberal

Anglican evangelism look like? Cathedrals were no less missional than other churches and indeed shared with resource churches the tendency for social entrepreneurialism, but often they had a different approach to evangelism, cathedrals using the building itself – and the sacred space within it – as an experiential evangelism tool hand in hand with preaching and teaching. While these sacred monastic spaces had at points in history been set aside for specific people, they could now be opportunities for engagement and for demonstrating holiness. It was necessary to protect them – not to allow them to be trampled and spoiled – but not in order to exclude, rather to maintain them as places with the ability to convene people and perform activities in the name of Christ.

The dean's apostolic ministry relied more on the interpretation of events and less on membership and concepts of measurable outcomes like electoral roll. Fundamentally cathedrals were well placed to proclaim the kingdom of God and it might be helpful therefore to think of the 5 Marks of Mission as that single Mark with four ways of achieving it. At a time of fractiousness in the world, it was important for the Church to tolerate diversity in its own approach to mission; to recognise these complementary offerings to Christians and non-Christians in various contexts. In some respects, the traditional view of cathedrals was counter-cultural, e.g. maintaining in a changing context some aspects of liturgy, teaching and music which parish churches were no longer able to maintain. The group agreed that the cathedral did not belong to chapter, the bishop, to the congregation, or the city, precisely because it belonged to all of them and more. But complexity should not deter us from seeking the appropriate theological position with which to inform new approaches to cathedral governance, and from speaking to the various stakeholders within and outside of the Church. On a practical level, this complexity argued against over-legislation and in favour of a practical set of legal arrangements which could be applied to each cathedral and its needs in its context.

## Session Three

### **The Dean and Bishop Relationship: discussion between Alastair Redfern and John Davies (respectively former Bishop and Dean of Derby)**

#### **Chaired by John Inge**

The group observed a discussion before asking questions. Points raised are summarised below.

Bishops have authority for the coherence of the ministry of word and sacrament in the diocese. In this context, numerous individuals and bodies had legal rights and the bishop's job was 'holding it together'. As such, his or her authority was largely negotiated.

There was no easy measure of why a cathedral was extraordinary - in the Derby diocese, some 300 churches had a bishop's seat; many were special in various ways including their size. The bishop's challenge was to recognise the nature of the 'projection' that the cathedral, and therefore the dean, could do. He or she needed to understand the role of the cathedral building and the ability of the dean to inhabit the space, modelling to all priests in the diocese and seeking to achieve a range of representation in a public space. The particularity of the cathedral might be summed up as the dean in relation to the bishop within that space.

A productive relationship between bishop and dean relied on trust and – in their case - a shared hinterland of understanding on theology, engagement with society, and more. The relationship could be seen as a 'broad frame', containing free space within which the dean could operate. In the Derby example, the bishop and dean had regularly shared information but the bishop had never attended chapter. Instead the

dean attended bishop's staff meetings, effecting and symbolising the close working relationship but not in the 'dean's space'. The cathedral should not be 'swamped with episcopal authority', it was suggested. The cathedral was not a space for the bishop to contest; the key issue was how together could the bishop and dean use the cathedral to articulate publicly the Church's offering? Also, how together could they put their theological interpretation into the churches of the whole diocese (since people brought to the Church by some traditions would not encounter the cathedral)?

While the Derby 'case study' had been an example of this relationship working well, how could it be encouraged where there was not a 'shared hinterland' or instinctive understanding? It was suggested that this could be encouraged by bishops and deans meeting together more often, through the appointment of former deans as bishops or vice versa – to encourage shared experience – and through cathedral placements for bishops-elect. It was also suggested that the Church needed a greater theological literacy in general and in particular should explore the complexity of 'mission', which was currently too narrowly defined. Joint exploration of what mission looked like in a range of contexts would automatically broaden the 'hinterland'. It was noted that good dialogue between residentiary canons, administrators and others could also 'free up' the bishop and dean to nurture their own working relationship.

The group reflected some more on issues around the distinctiveness of cathedrals. They were a reminder that there was a bigger, broader, more historic Church; that there was among the many welcome new initiatives, something inherited. Cathedrals, unlike parish churches, were not

'owned' by their congregations in the same way. A wide range of individuals and bodies owned a stake in cathedrals and their activities and, while their range and profile differentiated them from parish churches, it was important to recognise this difference as complementarity, not superiority. Lay volunteers welcomed the opportunity to be involved in setting cathedrals' agenda for contact with society and as such embraced this difference, as did people from outside the Church – but only if it were articulated appropriately, generously and without inward-looking or special pleading. Again, the 'broad frame' was the best way for the bishop and dean together to articulate this. Should there be a shared mission between the dioceses and cathedral? It was discussed that some had separate missions and that, rather than seeing this as a problem, it might be good to show difference.

Cathedrals were not spaces to be contested. However it may be worth thinking about how the relationship between bishops and deans looked to the outside. Most members of the public would be vague on the difference; but there was a constituency whose expectations and experiences were relevant. It was important to be clear for areas such as the bishop attending Chapter (in what capacity? With what expectations?). How in practice should accountability work? The CWG suggestion that bishops should attend chapter meetings was problematic, the group suggested. Bishops were more than visitors in their church, but they were not trustees and could not therefore share responsibility for chapter's business, so the CWG's suggestion that they should automatically attend chapter could compromise them. On the other hand, for the dean to be the only conduit between the bishop and chapter could be dangerous and it was entirely proper, indeed necessary, for a bishop to require assurance that the cathedral was being run effectively. There was

a risk that a bishop could be accused of meddling if he or she attempted to be involved in chapter's business or negligence if he or she did not. It was suggested that bishops should meet with chapter, each in their own corporate capacity, rather than the bishop attend as part of chapter. It was noted that, while accountability was a key part of the discussion and an important development in the cathedrals sector, there was a risk of binding people in process and thus reducing their ability to embrace properly the whole range of stakeholders. Further discussion was therefore needed about his important relationship.

Much of the division between ecclesial authority and cathedrals came as a result of accidents of history (C13th land transfers etc), not conscious choice. How did this affect decisions now?

The relationship between bishop and chapter could be a broader one than bishop and dean. There was also the matter of the interface between the bishop and the executive to facilitate direct conversations.

Part of the recommendations of the report was concerned with the need for checks and balances; the bishop/dean relationship was seen as part of that. How to encourage flourishing of the common life of all of the cathedral community?

## Session Four

### **The theology of governance. Chaired by Eve Poole**

Julie Gittoes, Paula Gooder, Jessica Martin, Ben Quash and Sam Wells discussed the theology of governance, observed by the wider group which then joined in the discussion. This is summarised below.

Cathedrals were already doing a lot of good things, and it was felt that the CWG report had not adequately acknowledged this. It had been commissioned in response to a problem which had damaged the confidence of cathedrals. They should not respond anxiously but positively, embracing their blessed remit to seek the common good. They were not corporate organisations but the new Jerusalem; demonstrations of what was to come; symbols of heaven on earth. They were a hearth, radiating outwards in society, civic society, the nation. While they must positively embrace the need to operate effectively and responsibly, they should not become so well-organised that they lost sight of their fundamental purpose. They inhabited a complex space: worshipping communities, local people, volunteers, businesses, tourists, vulnerable people, schools and higher education institutions, the diocese, parish churches, local government, the media, the wider Church of England and international Church, and more, felt some belonging to and ownership of cathedrals. Relating back to the earlier questions about the bishop's relationship with the cathedral, it was observed here that few of these people and groups would imagine that the bishop would not be significantly involved in some way, and cathedrals should take this perspective seriously. It was also suggested in relation to the common description of cathedrals as 'independent' that 'interdependent' would be a better word.

One speaker mentioned that residentiary canons in particular could be seen as a 'pivot place' where power allowed space for people to confide in; i.e. the role (and person) was not seen as directly 'leadership' and therefore could be conceived to be able to make some difference through their access to power. Some people may be reluctant to approach the dean. It was necessary to look at the hierarchy and accessibility - a model of authority and service would be helpful.

An audit of what people cared about in any structure would be valuable. It was about taking the immediate things people were responsible for (jobs, environment, wellbeing) and aligning this with the larger corporate responsibilities because, as a whole, cathedrals were instruments of care for the wider world. This was significant: there needed to be an integrative system for division of roles ('in it together') focused on care.

It was suggested that the word 'governance' was used unthinkingly and could be shorthand for management, process, professionalism and more. Governance included all these things but its underlying feature was care. Governance was about auditing and attending to the things we care about, i.e. people, finances, fabric, etc. To think of governance in this way was to see it more in terms of ecology than economy. In the case of cathedrals, their corporate care was about recognising that they were instruments of care for the wider world and finding the best way of relating to wider networks of flourishing. It was a mistake to seek governance simply through the imposition of parallel management structure or the addition of professional services. To do so was to alienate and undermine people whose emotional commitment the institution relied on. It would also undermine trust which was crucial if individuals were to admit and learn from mistakes, see risk management as

a conduit of grace, and contribute to a flourishing institution. Cathedrals were places of aspiration, and they held in trust the gifts of numerous others who wished to participate in the holy. It was vital to recognise that good desire was better than fear of failure, and that trust could not be demanded. What governance system would best encourage it? There was also a risk of placing deans under so much pressure that they could not thrive in their roles, which was a dereliction of care for them and an impediment to the achievement of the aims set out above. The role of dean was in some respects an isolated role, but how could this be turned to freedom and confidence rather than hubris?

How could deans develop their teams to share in this accountability? Collegiality was at the heart of cathedral life. How was this best achieved and nurtured in practice? After the theological reflection, what was the practical aspiration? How do you live out collegiality and with whom is it experienced? One reason why collaboration could break down was that it is hard work. An African proverb (“go fast, go alone; go far, go together”) demonstrated the challenge of living collegially when collaboration was complex (deans, bishops, chapter, residentiary canons, administrators, and others) and liable to slow one down. Cathedrals had to fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities (with which they required external professional expertise), core ministry functions, such as ordinations, (in which less executive involvement was appropriate), and seek to identify and pursue mission possibilities beyond their core role (and this third aspect was where the bishop’s role was especially significant), while a smaller group was responsible for maintaining the daily routine of prayer which was the cathedrals’ heart. What was the appropriate model for involving these various groups in the cathedral’s governance? It was a mistake to compartmentalise, e.g. to separate out

commercial activity on the mistaken premise that it took place to fund mission rather than being part of the mission in itself.

Cathedrals were institutions rather than organisations. As such they had a longer future, were able to pass gifts and wisdom from generation to generation. But this also carried the risks of potential complacency or entitlement. Cathedrals should seek to embrace the best organisational elements without losing their institutional character. The modern Church was often better at innovation than repair and understood the concept of impact better than the concept of transformation. Cathedrals could fill such gaps. But care was needed when describing cathedrals’ scope and uniqueness, which were often misunderstood. At a time when parochial clergy were stretched and the patterns of ministry to which they were called were falling away, the relative steadiness and wealth of cathedrals could be a source of frustration and resentment rather than inspiration. It was important to focus not on the special nature of the cathedrals but the things they do for the Kingdom, the things they can speak to an anxious Church and culture.

A more sophisticated distinction between governance and management was needed but the Church should avoid lapsing into the easy and unhelpful generalisation that theology was good and secular management theory was bad. Rather it should explore what the theology of management looked like. The discussion on cathedrals was taking place within a Church context that was uncomfortable and unsure. There were as many articles refuting ‘secular models of leadership’ and ‘bureaucratic centralised approaches’ as there were books extolling it. It was suggested that the only aspect of management which could be objected to on

theological grounds was the instrumentalization of people. Management was not simply creeping secularisation and the Church should reclaim words like 'administration' and 'service' which had become part of the management lexicon but were actually spiritual words. The Church should be more than compliant with good governance practice; it should be a model for wider society. High quality line-management and organisational direction was a pastoral, vocational activity and it may therefore be desirable to 'baptise' the role of Chief Operating Officer (COO) to demonstrate that good management was not a departure from cathedrals' pastoral, spiritual motives but a means for exercising them. It was also important to recognise the sense of vocation of lay staff and to avoid violating this by separating them off from the spiritual life of the cathedral. There needed to be a culture of trust. This would enable team members to challenge the dean without any sense of disloyalty and to admit mistakes. The 'one size fits all' nature of the CWG did not adequately reflect these issues; nor did it sufficiently recognise that problems often occurred due to lack of resource or human failings, as opposed to governance structures.

On the specific issue of Charity Commission regulation, it was noted that the experience of PCCs' regulation demonstrated the need to embrace this development for cathedrals as not only inevitable but also welcome. It would help shape a new language for cathedrals' offering to society and new opportunities for collaboration, trust and mutual thriving.

The group discussed the theology of the Trinity which presented the opportunity for intelligent risk-taking. This was about holding factors in tension, rather than seeking neat but sub-optimal solutions, in this case to some of the issues raised by the CWG report.

The group recognised that much of the context of the CWG came from how cathedrals were seen externally. Issues of good fiscal management, proactive and robust safeguarding, responsible management of assets and responsibilities, all came from a need for the external world to know that cathedrals would continue to exist, and to serve. The responsibilities of employing thousands of people, of having tens of thousands of volunteers, including children, of contributing upwards of £220m to the economy of the country every year, were external concerns. It was not reasonable for cathedrals to say 'we are responsible only to God and each other' and to close down the conversation. Nobody minded reporting on obvious obligations such as to grant-funders; this must extend to the more nebulous moral obligations of what cathedrals were.

If we drew from the recommendations around management and governance and finance an origin that is at its heart concerned with continuation, it would take on a different texture. Cathedrals gave and took from the world and so needed to find a shared language with that world. The Nolan Principles of public life were a worldly attempt to articulate good governance; the Charity Commission was a worldly version of bureaucratic control to ensure compliance in key areas of responsibility. Cathedrals through the CWG were being encouraged to find a shared language which could adequately articulate and respond to the demands reasonably placed by a concerned world.

# Session Five:

## **Theology and the CWG recommendations Chaired by Eve Poole**

Members of the group visited seven 'stations' (representing six key themes arising from the CWG report plus a miscellaneous category) engaging each other in conversation and capturing their conclusions, which were then discussed in plenary and are captured below. A blog written to capture a flavour of the event is attached as Appendix A.

### **Closing remarks**

The group concluded that:

- so wide was the sense of belonging to, and ownership of, cathedrals that governance structures needed to be worldly as well as 'churchy';
- dual regulation by the Charity Commission and Church Commissioners was appropriate as it reflected this complex stakeholder base;
- wider society expects cathedrals to excel in liturgy, music, teaching, but also expects them to comply with, and even lead, secular best practice;
- cathedral councils should be retained in cathedral polity as the most appropriate covenantal support structure for chapter;
- but council should be a non-statutory body (this would give it the space to operate in the appropriate way given local needs and the particularity of its own gifts);
- no governance structure could work without trust and good relationships;

– quinquennial inspection was too infrequent and too limited. More regular and on-going review should be done by a combination of peers and external expertise, and should be 'whole life' review rather than purely financial;

– bishops-elect should have the opportunity to experience the rhythm of cathedral life, e.g. through being in residence in the cathedral for a week;

– the role of administrator should be retained (as opposed to COO) but 'baptised' to recognise administration as a spiritual gift and a fundamentally vocational concept;

– the theology of the Trinity should be borne in mind where tensions exist between various recommendations, i.e. not everything has to be resolved and sometimes working with the messy can improve thinking and encourage creative risk taking;

In concluding, the group noted that when the college of deans met in May it would hear about the Windsor consultation and look ahead to the July General Synod meeting. Dr Rowan Williams would be giving the deans some theological input in May, and notes of the consultation would be shared with him. All present agreed to brief their own Synod representatives about the consultation prior to the July Group of Sessions.

Dr Eve Poole  
Third Church Estates Commissioner

# Appendix A

## **#TheologizingWithDeans, by Eve Poole**

As I walked up the steps to the Vicar's Hall at Windsor this morning, there were four mallards perched on the wall, looking out over the dawn fields towards the river. As I approached, they stood to attention, and I enjoyed the delicious metaphor for our theological consultation on cathedral governance: getting our ducks in a row. We met for 24 hours; 13 deans, 6 theologians, 2 bishops and 1 Third Church Estates Commissioner, supported by our cathedrals staff from across the NCIs. The Cathedrals Working Group report came before General Synod last July, amidst criticism that its theology was not capacious enough to describe such a complex set of institutions, with myriad roles and stakeholders.

We met to put that right: the deans selected by their peers, joined by leading theologians, to think together about what good governance looks like in a cathedral context. We considered a variety of papers from a range of contributors, and of our 6 theologians, 4 were cathedral canons, so they brought us that insight too. We are busy writing up our conversation so we can share it more widely. Meanwhile, what struck me about our conversation was how very practical theology can be. Because we laid the groundwork at some length in the first part of our consultation, when we came to looking with fresh eyes at those CWG report recommendations that have proved most disputed, we were able to resolve them at speed. Too often, "more theology" is really a request for a delay, but in our consultation it actually speeded things up.

For instance, we spent some time considering the 'community-held' flavour of a cathedral. All sorts of people feel a sense of ownership of 'their' cathedral. Perhaps communities used to feel this about their parish church, and many still do,

but the easy way in which people who might not broach a church door breeze into their cathedral suggests that any governance structure that is too 'churchy' cannot represent them. This swiftly led us to agree that the proposed dual regulation by both the Church Commissioners and the Charity Commission was the perfect way to reflect this complexity. Because the public have a genuine stake, they should quite reasonably expect cathedrals to exemplify excellence in secular best practice, just as they embody excellence in church practices of various kinds, be it music, liturgy, architecture or anything else. And maybe, as we have learned through safeguarding, the very policies that at first blush look bureaucratic might in fact be conduits of grace?

The discussion on regulation shaded into a discussion about accountability, where it also became clear that the Cathedral Council must be the vital mechanism to bring together these various stakeholders, to support the Cathedral Chapter in its more formal governance role. But this was nuanced. Our conversation included a debate about the impossibility of even the best governance structure being able to work in a context where relationships have broken down and trust has gone. It is all too easy to slap law onto recalcitrance, but covenant is better than contract, because everyone needs to work at it. So a Council that is non-statutory would have that vital freedom, to negotiate its particular relationship with the cathedral in its locality, with its particular set of gifts and opportunities.

Theology helped us too with the idea of inspection. If cathedrals aim to be truly excellent, why would they want to wait for 5 years to learn how to improve, and why would they not wait the whole their life to be scrutinised not just the financial bits? There was therefore strong support for the more frequent, comprehensive and ongoing

inspections that are already being piloted through peer reviews. With the right processes and training, these could become the vehicle for spreading the best practice guidance that will underpin the new Cathedrals Measure, as well as providing a catalyst to speed up learning between cathedrals and to develop cultures of continuous improvement.

We ranged far and wide, identifying recommendations both great and small. One was that all new bishops should serve in residence in their cathedral for a week, so they can experience at first hand the rhythm of life there, given that the cathedral is the seat of the bishop. Another was the important reminder that Administration is one of the gifts of the spirit. Perhaps we ought to baptise this job title rather than consign it to the history books, in order to recognise the vocational nature of this gifting?

One key insight though was that we will never resolve some of the tensions that are identified in the CWG report. Nor is it necessary to do so, because it is in the wrestling that we will learn new ways of relating to each other: a neat but wrong solution might well be worse than the inconvenience of uncertainty. In this insight we were inspired by the tension inherent and unresolved most fruitfully in the Trinity, as a model of holding everything faithfully in relationship without the need to tidy things up.

I left Windsor daunted but encouraged by the great calling our cathedrals have to serve the bishop and the diocese, the parishes and the nation, and the opportunity the CWG report represents. It calls the cathedrals to consider again what being the first church of the diocese means in this generation, through the lens of all 5 Marks of Mission, and particularly for those whose only experience of church is when they come to visit their cathedral.

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# Notes





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Church House, 27 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3AZ.