

## **GS2222: Mission in Revision**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **Why has GS2222 been published?**

The Church Commissioners are responsible for the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. This is the legislation that enables Bishops to organise some of the mission and ministry in their diocese and it allows church buildings which are no longer needed for regular public worship to be closed and new uses found for them. The Archbishop's Council, through the Legislative Reform Committee, asked the Commissioners to complete a review to see if there were ways to simplify and streamline the processes, as they are administratively complex and take up a lot of time for all those involved. They wanted to see if there were options to reduce the administrative burden of managing the processes on PCCs, clergy and the diocesan teams who manage the system.

#### **When was the deadline for responses?**

The consultation period on GS2222 ended on 31 October 2021. All submissions have been considered and a paper of that analysis has been presented to the February 2022 sessions of the General Synod as GS Misc 1312.

#### **Would the proposals in GS2222 weaken the parish system?**

No – a good reform of the Measure will strengthen, not weaken the parish system. We are looking at how changes to the system could help the parish system to become more sustainable and what more can be done in terms of decision making at local level.

#### **Why was there no formal consultation with parishes as part of this process?**

The publication of the Synod paper GS2222 represented the start of a consultation process. There was a debate in Synod and the paper was published at the same time to ask the wider church for its views. The consultation will have run for three and a half months at the point at which this phase is completed.

Prior to the Synod paper in July 2021, the Church Commissioners were asked by the Legislative Reform Committee to initiate a review and bring a draft paper to Synod. At this stage, and given the limited timeframe, it meant that there could not be a large scale consultation process with parishes prior to publication, but there was consultation with individual Archdeacons, clergy and lay people, and a wide range of interested parties as part of the initial phase of the work.

The Synod paper GS2222 is a discussion document for debate, not a set of actual proposals and the intention is to seek feedback through this consultation exercise on GS2222 before developing any proposals. The Commissioners will report back to Synod in 2022 and will seek a view on what consultation process would be appropriate if the work is to be taken further and new legislation is considered.

As part of the work to date, we did a joint project with the University of Oxford and the Churches Conservation Trust. The University hosted several zoom sessions with a wide variety of interested parties to inform the debate. This included members of the Anglican communion from other countries (to compare international practice), clergy and lay people with an interest in the topic, members of other Christian denominations and other faith groups, and heritage experts. The report of those discussions is on the review web page under the additional information tab.

## **Why is simplification a good idea?**

The system should be easier to understand and easier to manage for the benefit of all involved, whether at parishes, dioceses, or members of local communities. That is also a good idea because it means that dioceses can spend less on the administration of the processes and more on parishes and mission. Simplification is not an outcome in itself – the outcome should be better mission and ministry in the parish. From a governance perspective it is also important that people understand these processes better. There is a lot of confusion about the way the current system works, and it is not well understood. It would be easier to encourage greater participation in the processes if they were simpler to understand.

## **Does simplification mean that people will lose their rights?**

Not necessarily. Making a process simpler to manage does not mean that people will lose their rights. For example moving from a two stage to a one stage consultation process if that were a proposal could still enable people to express a view and have their voices heard effectively.

## **Is GS222 proposing changes to people's rights?**

Various people have rights of consultation and appeal within the Measure. This is a very sensitive area, and it is not one where any change would be suggested without much care and thought. That is why the paper has sought views about the importance of those rights and where people think the balance should be in terms of having a right to object and a right of appeal. The data shows that there has been a significant drop in the number of people contributing to the consultation processes in the Measure – so this is a point about systems being proportionate.

## **Would giving the dioceses the power to decide the outcomes of schemes create a financial conflict of interest or mean that those in charge were 'marking their own homework'?**

Not necessarily – it depends on what models are considered. No detailed work has been done on this yet, but other options could include having an elected body at diocesan level to make the decisions, which would be separate to the Bishop's Council. The review is considering a range of options.

## **How can this work be taken forward when the Emerging Church programme has not yet been finalised?**

The consultation paper recognises that the Emerging Church work, discussions on vision and strategy and other reviews, provide part of the backdrop to this debate. The Commissioners will work with the Emerging Church steering group and bodies responsible for Synod business to ensure that any proposals are brought forward at the appropriate time, so they can fully allow for any changes which will come through the Emerging Church work.

## **Why are churches closed?**

Churches are closed when there is no longer a pastoral need for them, or if they are no longer viable and so not benefiting the cure of souls. It is always a difficult decision and it is not one that is ever taken lightly.

**How many church closures are there?** The system for allowing the closure of churches for worship and dispose of them so they can be used for other purposes was put in place in 1968. The rate of closure has been relatively steady since the 1990s at 20-25 per annum.

## **How does the Anglican church compare with other denominations?**

The Anglican church has closed fewer churches than the Methodists or Catholic church as attendance has declined.

## **Is there a national plan to close churches?**

No – it does not work like that. The Bishop and diocesan team in each diocese are responsible for managing any processes around closure as part of their planning to help the Church in each diocese to serve its community as well as possible and to flourish. Requests can come from the bottom up (the parish) or top down (the diocese). In our experience, closure decisions almost always originate with the parish. There is no national coordination of closures.

## **Are 368 churches likely to close?**

We asked diocesan teams to give us an estimate about the number of closure they might bring forward in a 2-5 year period. There are concerns that increasing financial and demographic pressures might make it more likely that more closures will be necessary. The 368 figure comes by aggregating a worst case scenario based on the indications we were given, and does not represent an actual figure. Closure is a slow process, and it is often the case that dioceses do not bring forward as many as planned and that circumstances on the ground change over time.

## **Are clergy entitled to compensation if they lose their office?**

Yes – clergy are entitled to one year's stipend and housing and pension contributions if they lose their office because a pastoral scheme makes changes to their parish or benefice. Where dispossession happens there is also a period of an extra 6 months before the scheme comes into effect to allow time for adjustment. There is a Clergy Transitions Service to help clergy who go through this process.

## **Can clergy go to an employment tribunal if they are dispossessed?**

No – clergy are not employees, so they are not able to go to employment tribunal if they want to protest against dispossession. However, they can seek leave to appeal against a pastoral scheme to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The paper suggests that more needs to be done to improve the processes around dispossession and give clergy a better appeal route.

## **Does church closure lead to clergy dispossession?**

No. Church closure and dispossession are separate matters. While a pastoral scheme might include provisions which would result in the dispossession of a clergy person, and also provide for the closure of a church building, they are not linked as such, as a clergy person is not licenced to a building, but a parish or benefice.

## **What will happen next?**

We received a good deal of feedback from dioceses, parishes, individuals, and organisations. A white paper with legislative proposals will be prepared for the July 2022 General Synod sessions.

**Pastoral and Closed Churches Department**

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