

2 August 2023
Sent by email

Dear Colleagues,

Re: Next steps following the 'Bishops and their Ministries' Phase 2 consultation

Executive Summary:

- No national centrally-led approach to restructuring or combining dioceses
- Proactively encourage inter-diocesan collaboration
- Invitation to an online workshop to look at inter-diocesan collaboration

We are writing to you in our capacities as Chair of the Dioceses Commission and Episcopal Lead for Transforming Effectiveness to update you on some of the Dioceses Commission's recommendations following the second phase of the 'Bishops and their Ministries' consultation. Thank you very much to the many of you who responded to the consultation – the feedback you gave was insightful and has been hugely helpful in helping us to shape some next steps as we look together at how we can best support the Church to be the most fruitful and effective in its mission.

Having listened to the responses, the Dioceses Commission has agreed with the Archbishops that there will be no 'big bang' or centrally-led approach to restructuring or combining dioceses at this time. This would be a distraction from the mission and ministry that is underway across the country in parishes and dioceses, would absorb hard-pressed leadership time, and would be an additional burden on the already constrained resources of the Church at all levels.

That is not to say that we have heard no voices for change to improve the mission and ministry of the Church. We have heard views that our structures can prevent mission and ministry, and lead to resources being deployed in the wrong places. The Dioceses Commission is ready to support any diocese that wants to review its work and structures, including proactively looking at the possibilities for shared vision and closer working with another diocese. But we stress that this must be led locally, not centrally.

However, the Dioceses Commission would very much like to encourage and support inter-diocesan collaboration (though not imposing additional structures), and indeed there was some enthusiasm for this in many of the responses we received. This can be one way in which we can more efficiently deploy resources and raise standards in the service we are providing to our parishes. This is something that the Transforming Effectiveness programme began to look at in 2021 and resulted in two pilots in the West Midlands and Eastern regions to explore proactively ways in which they could work together more. We are aware that this is also already happening in other regions and dioceses for some functions, whilst others have said that they might be interested in exploring certain areas further. Some of the suggested areas for collaboration have been Net Zero, Racial Justice, Ministry Training and Education, for example. This can be on a regional level between several dioceses, or between just two or three. There is evidence that operating at scale, pooling talent and sharing

resourcing can deliver savings as well as increasing breadth and resilience, thus giving the opportunity to deliver more and better services to our parishes. We therefore strongly encourage dioceses to explore inter-diocesan collaboration and to integrate this into their diocesan strategies.

We want this form of collaboration to be the norm rather than the exception. To progress further we would like to gather together those who are already collaborating with other dioceses and those who are interested in exploring further. We would like to be able to share best practice in order to be able to support others to do more in future, and also to put our heads together to really think about what areas would work well for inter-diocesan collaboration and how this can be an effective way of enabling mission in our communities.

We therefore are inviting those leading on inter-diocesan collaboration projects and those who are interested in beginning or expanding projects to join us for an online workshop in the autumn this year. This can be in any topic area and any office-holder, be that Diocesan Secretaries, Bishops or another senior diocesan staff member. If you or a member of your team are able to help us in this way, please contact the Secretary to the Dioceses Commission, Jenny Axtell, via bishop.consultation@churchofengland.org.

You will remember that the consultation also sought your views on the role of suffragan bishops. Those have identified some deeply practical issues of training and management that are being taken forward.

We are aiming to make these suggestions known more publically in the coming days. We very much looking forward to hearing from you and to meeting some of you to talk more about collaboration and to learn together. If you have any questions please contact Jenny.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Caroline Spelman
Chair, Dioceses Commission

The Rt Revd Martin Seeley
*Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich and Transforming
Effectiveness Episcopal Lead*

N.B. This letter has been sent to all those who were consulted for the 'Bishops and their ministries' consultation:

- Archbishops' Council members
- Archdeacons
- Church Commissioners including the First and Third Church Estates Commissioners
- College of Bishops
- Deans of Cathedrals
- Diocesan Clergy Chairs
- Diocesan Lay Chairs
- Diocesan Secretaries/Chief Executives
- Secretary General of the Anglican Communion