

GENERAL SYNOD

Diocesan Synod motion: Add confirmation numbers to Statistics for Mission

Summary

It would be practically feasible to ask every Church of England church to report confirmation numbers on their Statistics for Mission form. This would place an extra burden on the clergy and lay people who collate the information and complete the forms. It would place an extra burden on the Data & Analysis team, which would need to be resourced. The possible usefulness of the resulting dataset needs to be thought through, and balanced against the additional burdens that would result and the additional resource required.

The current situation

1. Church of England parishes record the details of the candidates whom they prepare and present for Confirmation in their parish Confirmation Register.
2. Bishops' Offices collate figures regarding candidates at every Confirmation in their Diocese and share this dataset with the national Data & Analysis team. The information about Confirmation numbers is therefore available to the national Data & Analysis team at a diocesan level but not at a church or parish level. This has been the case for at least the last 20 years. It is possible that at some point in the past Confirmation figures were sought from individual parishes.
3. For many decades, Confirmation figures have been included in the annual Statistics for Mission publications (and in earlier statistical publications with different titles). Most recently, these can be found in the tables published alongside *Statistics for Mission 2022*: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/statisticsformission2022_tables.xlsx .
4. The Statistics for Mission form, through which we seek, from each Church of England church, information relating to church attendance and participation, does not ask churches to report the numbers of Confirmations of candidates whom they have prepared. The one exception is that the Diocese of Liverpool has a bespoke version of the form that does ask for this information (split into people aged under 16 and those aged 16 and over). The Diocese of Liverpool is entirely responsible for that subset of the Statistics for Mission dataset.

Possible approaches

5. It would be practically feasible to ask every church to report, on their Statistics for Mission form, the number of Confirmations of candidates whom they have prepared. This would give the national team, and diocesan colleagues, access to church-level information regarding Confirmations. It should be noted that:
 - a) Reporting this information would place an additional burden on clergy and/or lay people in every church.

GENERAL SYNOD

- b) Collecting, checking, analysing, and publishing the information would place an additional burden on the national Data & Analysis team.
- c) Not every church completes a Statistics for Mission form, and not every candidate for Confirmation is presented by a parish church (e.g. candidates from schools, universities, and other Chaplaincies) so the current practice of requesting Confirmation figures from Bishops' Offices, and processing the resulting dataset, would need to continue.
6. Some details would need to be worked out, including making sure that we can frame any question(s) such that each person confirmed is reported exactly once (this might be a relevant issue in multi-church parishes, or in settings where people worship at several different churches within a benefice).
 7. One alternative, for any diocese that would like to do so, is to ask about Confirmations as part of their Articles of Enquiry – which can be done within the diocese, without increasing the burden for anyone in other dioceses, and without needing the involvement of the national Data & Analysis team. The team would happily be involved to give some guidance. This option would be quicker to implement, and would be a useful pilot to make sure the question is asked in a suitable way and to demonstrate the usefulness of the information.
 8. The Data and Analysis team receive suggestions from many different people, with many different roles, for questions to ask on the Statistics for Mission form. Our usual practice is to consider all suggestions seriously, giving thought to the practicality of collecting the required information by this route, the burden it would place on those people who complete the forms, and the likely usefulness of the information. We decide these matters in consultation with NCI and diocesan colleagues. We aim to avoid the forms getting longer and more arduous to complete with each passing year, lest this have possible negative impact on response rates and therefore the usefulness of the dataset as a whole.
 9. A question that we ask of anyone who wants to collect new information is, “What will you do with it?” It is important that if we are going to increase the burden of data collection we do so for good reason.
 10. Members of the Canterbury Diocesan Synod – and anyone else who would like to be involved – are encouraged to talk to the Data and Analysis team to talk through in more detail some of the options and the points above.

William Nye, Secretary General
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