



The Report of the 2013 Survey of Deanery Lay Chairs is published by the National Deaneries Network.

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Cover price of printed copies £1.00

Deaneries Mission or Mystery



**A report of a survey of
Deanery Synod Lay Chairs
by the
National Deaneries Network**

www.nationaldeaneries.net

Survey of Deanery Synod Lay Chairs

1. Mission or mystery?

Lay Chairs of Deaneries are busy, active, people, playing a positive role in the life of the Church. Our survey of lay chairs paints a picture of dynamic and productive Deaneries around the country, most of which take a lead in mission locally and provide a valuable source of support to their parishes, and which are keen to be even more active. In fact, they are frustrated that, through lack of recognition of the potential, they can't do more.

Does this sound familiar? Maybe not: look more closely, and, while reporting favourably on their Deaneries' productivity and keenness to act, almost half the lay chairs who responded think that the Deanery "isn't sure about its role", and two-thirds believe it "is a mystery to most people".

A paradox! Perhaps the answer is that no matter how dynamic and useful the Deanery is, this message isn't being communicated to the people in the pews on a Sunday morning. Nor does it seem to be accepted by some of the clerical establishment. And perhaps, more widely, the fact that the Deanery message isn't getting through lies behind the conventionally negative views of Deaneries and parish representatives on Deanery Synods.

2. About this survey

One third of Lay Chairs were sufficiently interested and committed to respond to the survey. In all, 207 Lay Chairs submitted responses, a pleasingly high response rate of 32.6%. The survey was sent to all Deanery Lay Chairs for whom we had email addresses, and to any others we knew of or who contacted us having been alerted by a colleague (including some by hard copy). This amounted to 634. The survey was also sent for information to Diocesan Lay Chairs and Diocesan Secretaries.

The survey was carried out in July 2013

There were 19 questions covering the running the Deanery, its activities, the views of the respondents, and the Lay Chair role itself.

The full survey results can found on the National Deaneries Network website at www.nationaldeaneries.net. This summary report covers the following:

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Q6	Being a Lay Chair; how do Lay Chairs see the role?.....	p6

Advice/good practice for parishes?
Attending PCCs (apart from your own?)

12. What more could you do or contribute to any of these issues? (Please explain)
13. What resources or support would be most helpful to you as Lay Chair?
14. What training have you received or is available?
15. What skills do you bring to being a Lay Chair?
16. As Lay chair how well do you feel valued

By the parishes?
By the laity on Synod?
By the clergy in the Deanery?
By the Archdeacon/Diocese?

17. How do you see your role as Lay Chair

Supporting your Dean?
Leading meetings of Synod?
Leading lay groups working on projects or ideas?
Championing laity issues?
Ensuring Deanery business is transacted?
Moving the Deanery into new or renewed activity?
Liaison with parishes?
Liaison with neighbouring Deaneries and or diocese?

18. Describe how you see the role of Rural/Area Dean

Pastoral support for the clergy
Managing church business in the Deanery
Supporting parishes in their activities
Initiating activities in the Deanery or part of it
Actively supporting you
Actively supporting lay involvement in church business

19. What do you think the Deanery can do that parishes can't?

List of survey questions

1. How long have you been Lay Chair?
2. Do you chair meetings of the Synod?
3. Who pans the Deanery meetings?
4. How frequently do you meet/talk to your Area/Rural Dean?
5. Do you attend meetings of the chapter?
6. In your role as Lay Chair what formal contact do you have with the Bishop and/or Archdeacon?
7. Do you have, or are you developing, a Deanery Mission Action Plan?
8. Does your Dean invite you to comment on strategy or management of the Deanery?
9. Do you have any input or are you asked to advise on parish appointments or changes in the disposition of posts or resources?
10. Would you say your Deanery or Synod:
 - Is active and outgoing?
 - Actively supports mission?
 - Is seen as a source of help and support by parishes?
 - Has positive and useful meetings?
 - Meets occasionally but doesn't deal with practical Issues?
 - Doesn't do much?
 - Is a mystery to most people?
 - Would like to be more active?
 - Is clear and focused?
 - Isn't sure about its role?
11. Are you or Synod involved in the following:
 - Parish share apportionment?
 - Applications to the Diocese for grants or loans?
 - Any other local resource decisions?
 - Appointment of school governors?
 - Deanery-wide mission activities?
 - Other Deanery-wide activities (administrative, social, fundraising etc?)
 - Clergy training?
 - Lay training?

- Q7 Mission and mystery; how little the Deanery is understood p7
- Q8 Frustrated enthusiasm; what more the Deanery could do p9
- Reflections & recommendations; making more of the Deanery p10
- List of survey questions p14

NB where proportions of respondents are quoted this refers to proportion of those answering that question. Numbers of respondents to each question are shown in the survey results.

3. Background

This survey followed the well-attended **National Deaneries Network (NDN) conference in October 2012**, when discussion turned to Lay Chairs' involvement in Deanery activities. The feeling – from both laity and Rural/Area Deans present – was that the laity was not contributing as much as it could because “the system” didn't offer the opportunities to do so. Yet we know that many Lay Chairs are committed to making better use of Deaneries to support mission and parish work, and are keen to find effective ways to do this and to support their Deans. So NDN thought it would be interesting to find out more about what Lay Chairs do and what they think about Deaneries in the Church today.

The **2010 survey of Diocesan Bishops** carried out by NDN, to which 70% replied, revealed – although Dioceses ask their own Deaneries to undertake different tasks - that most believed deployment of clergy and collection of funds were the most important aspect of Deaneries' work: mission came next. Despite that authoritative response from the Episcopate, we are aware of widespread views that, on the one hand, parish representatives on Deanery Synod are not the most active or the most representative, because committed people don't want to give time to pointless meetings; or, on the other hand, that lay people only put themselves forward for Deanery Synod in order to pursue a particular agenda particularly in voting for members of General Synod; or indeed that Deanery Synod membership is used to evade regulations about the length of time individuals can serve as elected members of their PCCs.

The issue has come to the fore again recently with the recommendation of the General Synod Business committee for the creation of a separate college to provide the **electorate for lay members of General Synod**, replacing the current arrangement whereby Deanery Synod lay members form the electorate. This was rejected by General Synod in November 2013 but the debate has created more interest in the effectiveness of Deanery Synod.

Every two years **about 100 Deans and Lay Chairs meet at NDN conferences**, demonstrating a commitment and appetite for Deaneries to achieve more, if only they were empowered and better recognised for the contribution they could make.

As we know from the conferences, this contribution is being recognised in some areas of the country, where, for example, the Deanery has become the engine for managing parishes and the work of the Church locally, for changing the culture better to rise to new challenges. This enthusiasm, the valuable exchange of ideas and experience, and the frustration at wasted potential, which we see in conference discussions, do not support the negative view of Deaneries – and the survey is further endorsement of a positive story.

Main themes

4. Running the Deanery (Q1-Q6, Q8,Q9)

Over 1/3 of Lay Chairs who responded are in their second term, and another 1/3 have done more than that. Most chair Synod meetings, and, although about 2/3 say that the Dean plans the meetings, almost 1/2 meet their Dean at least monthly, others every two-three months.

Q4 How frequently do you meet or talk to your Area/Rural Dean?

Monthly	More of-ten	Two-monthly	Quarterly	Never	Other
14.7%	32%	8.3%	7.4%	0.99%	36.2%

More than three-quarters are invited by their Dean to comment on Deanery strategy or management. About three-quarters of respondents have input to clergy appointments and about half to lay appointments – this may reflect policy in those Dioceses where Deans and Lay Chairs participate in interviews or shortlisting.

Most also, as Lay Chair, have meetings of some kind with their Archdeacon and/or Bishop: over a quarter said this was about every three months, and more ad hoc. Very few had no contact at all.

Q6 In your role as Lay Chair what formal contact do you have with the Bishop and/or Archdeacon?

Regular	Annually	Quarterly	Ad hoc	Never
25%	14.5%	26.5%	30%	4.7%

Deaneries: more mission and less mystery!

We shall return to this:

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The Hayes Conference Centre
Swanwick

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the job of mission or managing parishes. Perhaps Lay Chairs are perceived by some of the clergy and the clerical hierarchy as meddling or exceeding their remit in things they don't understand. If so, this could be overcome perhaps by greater openness, consultation and working together.

What have we learned?

The responses of the Lay Chairs in our survey show that they are making *a huge contribution* to the work of the Church and its mission, but that this is too little understood and its potential not always recognised. The survey makes it clear that, in at least a third of our Deaneries, a lot is going on and they are making a significant contribution. Equally important is to recognise how much of this contribution is down to the Lay Chair, both through supporting the Dean and through mission and other activities.

**The role of Lay Chair of Deanery Synod
is worthy of respect**

As for the Deanery structure, what other entity can offer a readymade structure for collegiate action at local level, sharing resources and ideas, taking some of the heat off individual parishes? What other entity offers the laity the chance to work together to manage change?

The National Deaneries Network thanks all those Lay Chairs who took the time to respond to the survey, and for their illuminating and interesting answers. Together, they have shown that there is a level of enthusiasm, dynamism and activity in Deaneries almost completely belied by the little recognition they receive in some quarters and the low level of understanding and appreciation. Let us hope that this survey will help change attitudes and encourage the Church hierarchy to lead the way in realising this potential, to the benefit of parishes, congregations, the clergy, and the Church as a whole.

Deaneries seem to be, unfortunately, still a mystery to most people. But the survey shows how active many actually are, and that they are doing good, positive work. We must de-mystify them, and unlock the potential, in the interests of achieving the Church's mission through the difficult challenges we face now and in the future.

5. Deanery activities (Q11,Q18)

Few respondents answered Q11 about what they or the Deanery Synod did, suggesting that the others were not involved in the activities listed. Nevertheless, taking the Lay Chair and Synod together, over half of respondents said that they were involved in apportioning the parish share, and that that they provided advice or good practice for parishes. More significantly perhaps was the over half who said that they or Synod were involved in Deanery-wide activities of some kind, and more who said that they were involved in Deanery-wide mission activities.

With the low response rate to this question, the figures below are calculated as a proportion of all survey respondents in order to give a more complete picture. Even on that broader basis, we see that almost two thirds are involved in Deanery-wide mission activities, personally or as Synod.

Q11 (extrapolation): are you or Synod involved in the following (figures for all survey respondents):

Activity	Lay chair	Synod	No reply
Parish share apportionment	38.6%	19.3%	42%
Applications for Diocesan grants/loans	28%	17.3%	54.4%
Other local resource decisions	31%	16%	54.5%
School governor appointments	0.38%	23%	72.9%
Deanery-wide mission activities	35.7%	28.5%	35.7%
Deanery-wide social, admin etc	31.8%	23.6%	44.4%
Advice for parishes	38.6%	17.8%	43%
Attending PCCs	25.1%	0.77%	67%

Asked about the Dean's role (Q18), the majority of respondents (¾) said that it included supporting parishes in their activities, and 83% that it involved initiating activities in the Deanery or part of it.

6. Being a Lay Chair (Q14-Q17)

Supporting the Dean is key task!

Supporting the Dean was seen by almost all Lay Chairs to be their role, and, almost as many, leading meetings of Synod. Around 70% felt that their role involves ensuring Deanery business is transacted, liaison with parishes, championing lay issues, and moving the Deanery into new or renewed activity.

Q 17: how do you see your role as Lay Chair?

Supporting Dean	Leading Synod meetings	Transacting business	Leading on lay issues	Liaison with parishes	Deanery new activity
93.6%	82.4%	73.4%	70.2%	69.7%	69.1%

Few (12%) lay chairs feel very well respected and valued by the parishes (Q16), although a third do feel valued to some extent, and another third feel “accepted”: average score out of 5 was 3.3. However, about three-quarters feel valued to some extent by the laity on Synod, with overall score of 3.95, and almost as many by the clergy (3.7). Interestingly, they feel more valued by their Archdeacon or Diocese at 4.02 (although this overall score is belied by some of the individual responses to Q12, below).

Almost all respondents felt that they are able to understand the needs of laity. About 75% said that they brought to the role abilities in organisation/management/finance; in pastoral or people skills, in communication, and in understanding the Church.

The majority of respondents did not answer the question about what training they had received; about a quarter said they had had training on Diocesan/Deanery organisation and finance, fewer on developing mission, and a very few on chairing meetings.

Neither did all respondents tell us what resources or support would be helpful. Of those that did, the majority wanted ideas and good practice (about half all survey respondents), with networking with others the second most useful.

waiting to go home”, made up of weak parish reps who just like going to meetings (or those who are working to their own agenda).

Questions raised: the survey suggests that these Deaneries are trying to respond to the challenges facing the Church. So should the Church make better use of Deaneries, and, if so, why doesn’t it? Should the Church make more of lay leadership at Deanery (and other) levels? To do so, the survey suggests that there are some important developments required, not least in shifting the mindset of those who are overly cautious or suspicious of Deaneries and/or the greater involvement of the laity.

1. **Communication:** firstly, the Deanery needs to communicate about itself better to the parishes and to the Church in general. Why not put greater emphasis on the Deanery as the unit for reporting news and developments, ensure that gets into parish newsletters, and actively invite congregations to contribute through their Synod reps. Encourage Synod reps to report to PCCs and seek their views. Lay Chairs, and Deans, could attend more PCC or parish meetings to talk about Deanery opportunities (or Lay Chairs could attend parish worship). There might then be a virtuous circle – **as the Deanery is perceived to do more, its profile will be raised** and parishes will see it as a valuable source of strength.
2. **Legal status?** We may lose a significant source of enthusiasm and drive if this potential in Deaneries is not unlocked. Where Deaneries are working well, the Senior Staff support and work with them, because they see the potential benefit to the aims we surely all seek to achieve. Would Deaneries be taken more seriously if they had formal legal status, and should we pursue that thought? **Is the problem the uncertainty about what a Deanery should do, and would a formal definition of its role help?**
3. Perhaps **the laity needs to build a higher profile:** local clergy have the Chapter to bring them together – perhaps Lay Chairs need to get their lay members to meet and work together, forming a closer purpose and Deanery unity. They could discuss matters of interest or concern to the laity, agree priorities and actions, help share activities and ideas between their parishes; maybe it would be good for them to discuss issues confronting the Church generally, appointments or reorganisations, maybe even the elections to General Synod in which they vote. If this wouldn’t be practical because of time demands, set up an email circulation.
4. **Working with the clergy:** scores for the question about feeling valued – as opposed to accepted - suggest that many Lay Chairs see this as a thankless job. Yet they (and some of their Deans) see their relationship in a productive light, as one of mutual support and working together, a source of rich ideas, and a resource willing and able to take on much of

One respondent felt that the Deanery was the only show in town as the Church could no longer support the expensive parish model with its high overheads and inefficiencies.

But many felt that the Deanery was inhibited by its lack of formal power so that opportunities for these activities were lost. Without support from the hierarchy – Bishop, Archdeacon, even the Dean in some cases – the Deanery could not seize the potential of its size and collegiate nature.

Frustration at lack of recognition of the Deanery’s potential was strongly evident in the responses to Q12; at the same time, enthusiasm for the Deanery to fulfil its potential was as evident as in Q19. When asked what more they could do as Lay Chair, some respondents’ frustration at the lack of recognition and acceptance was striking – the most vivid perhaps being the respondent who likened not having a dog collar to wearing Harry Potter’s cloak of invisibility.

Many respondents regretted that they were not consulted by the chapter on issues and decisions affecting the laity. On the positive side, many were enthusiastic to do more by way of Deanery-wide activities, eg helping the Church locally be more outgoing through joint action between the parishes; they also felt they could raise the profile of the Deanery and involve the parishes more, develop lay training, and participate in developing a growth strategy. But, against that, a number of respondents reported inadequate support, and the clerical hierarchy’s unwillingness to recognise or to value their contribution as Lay Chairs, which they find disheartening and frustrating.

General reflections and considerations

Shortcomings: of course our excellent 33% response to the survey still means that two-thirds of Lay Chairs were not sufficiently interested or motivated to contribute (although we may have had incorrect addresses for some). And we do not know the circumstances of those who replied, so the responses probably cover wide variations in number of parishes in the Deanery, and variations in geography and demography. A small semi-rural Deanery with few benefices spread over a wide area, for example, may have a very different experience and different views from an urban one with a lot of parishes and a very diverse population, differences which will not be apparent in these responses. We must recognise that these differences mean that **there might not be the same potential everywhere**, although at least some of the survey findings will be relevant to all.

As well as ignoring such differences between Deaneries across the country, surveys of this type generally can give an unrealistic gloss. However, the strength of some of the positive feedback in these responses must counter – in some Deaneries at least - the traditional view of Deanery Synods as “a group of Anglicans

Q13: what resources or support would be most helpful to you as Lay Chair?

Training	Ideas & good practice	Networking
36.5%	81.4%	65.9%

7. Deanery: mission and mystery (Q7, Q10)

From a well-answered Q7, the majority (86%) reportedly have a Deanery Mission Action Plan or are contemplating one. This perhaps surprisingly high proportion is reflected elsewhere in the survey (if not apparently to the same extent in Q11 above).

Q7: do you have, or are you developing, a Deanery Mission Action Plan?

Yes	Wondering if we might	No
72.5%	14%	13.5%

Responses to Q7 and Q11, taken together, perhaps suggest that the Deanery might have developed a plan, but in some cases it is being implemented by others, presumably in the parishes.

Can the Deanery act as facilitator and coordinator?

If that is the case, it might be a good example of where the Deanery can act as a facilitator and co-ordinator, maybe giving leadership, in support of the work in the parishes – not supplanting parishes, but giving the

Deanery’s leadership to supplement and complement what they can do best. This interpretation would be borne out in responses to Q10.

In Q10, the survey asked for different pointers, positive and negative, to how respondents characterise their Deanery and its Synod. It may surprise those who believe Deaneries are inactive, that almost three-quarters of the 196 who responded disagreed with the proposition that the Deanery and the Synod “doesn’t do much”, and only a small minority said that the Deanery or the Synod only meet occasionally and don’t deal with practical issues.

Over 70% reported that the Synod and the Deanery itself are active and outgoing, with over 90% saying that Synod had positive and useful meetings.

On the other hand, less than 60% felt that the Deanery was clear and focussed (62% the Synod was). Only a little more than half felt that both were sure about their role – 43% said that both the Deanery and the Synod weren't sure. Even more at odds with the positive messages was the view of two-thirds of respondents that the Deanery and Synod are “a mystery to most people”.

At first sight, this seems an extraordinary contradiction. Given the strength of the responses about positive activities and involvement in mission, the high number reporting that the Deanery is a “mystery” suggests that they find “most people” to be unaware of these positive activities. It suggests that those who are involved in the Deanery are doing good work, of which everyone else remains ignorant or uninterested. The implications could be, on the one hand, that Deanery contributions are underestimated and undervalued, and on the other that Deaneries themselves are not engaging the parish community.

More reporting to PCCs required

Perhaps parish reps are not reporting to their PCCs, for their own reasons or because the PCC is not prepared to listen.

It seems further work is needed here!

Q10 (extract): would you say your Deanery or your Synod:

	Deanery	Synod
Actively supports mission locally	75.6%	63%
Is active & outgoing	72%	73%
Source of help to parishes	61%	48%
Has positive & useful meetings*	74%	91.7%

	Deanery	Synod
Is a mystery to most people	64%	66.8%
Doesn't do much	23.7%	26%
Isn't sure about its role	42.85	54.3%
Meets occasionally but doesn't deal with practical issues*	16%	19.5%

** not mutually exclusive, hence overlapping scores*

8. Frustrated enthusiasm

Two, illuminating, questions invited narrative responses from Lay Chairs about what more they could do (Q12), and (Q19) what they thought the Deanery could do which parishes can't. An impressive number, two-thirds, provided comments to the latter question, and about half that to Q12.

There were **distinct common themes** covering what was happening or, in most cases, what respondents felt could be made to happen. Some frustration at a lack of welcome for the Lay Chair's input was evident from both these questions.

Many responses indicated careful thought, and many reflected urgency of need for the Deanery to do more. For example, in responding to Q19, they felt that the Deanery can, in some cases, does:

See the wider picture, be more strategic, and provide support where resources are particularly thin;

Foster sharing of expertise and experience between parishes;

Be a forum for discussion of local and relevant national issues, an intermediary between parish and Diocese, and use its “clout” for local benefit;

Bring resources together for e.g. appointment of specialist ministers or lay workers as a Deanery-wide resource;

Provide lay training particularly in specialised areas such as finance;

Manage the general business of the Church and support parish mission.