

The deanery

Proposals for change

In paragraphs 5.2 to 5.11 we have set out the concerns expressed to us about the operation of deanery synods. We are quite clear that the deanery continues to be a useful level in the Church, intermediate between diocese and parish, for certain purposes and we believe there must continue to be means through which parishes can be encouraged and enabled to consult and work together and to relate to and be consulted by the diocese as a whole. We see the purposes of the deanery as including arrangements for:

- bringing together representatives of the parishes and providing a focal point for the discussion of common issues;
- being the means of helping parishes to decide how best to minister to the needs of a particular locality;
- being a means of mutual support and encouragement;
- undertaking certain tasks given to it either by the diocese or by parishes.

The deanery can be an effective focus for consultation, for providing information, for liaison between parishes in matters of common concern and, if the relevant power is delegated to it by the diocese, for allocating quota among the constituent parishes and advising on the deployment of clergy within the deanery.

We have serious doubts, however, whether the present deanery synod as defined by statute is the best means by which these desirable purposes of the deanery can be met. We have come to the view that the establishment of deanery synods with functions and membership prescribed by statute is not a sufficiently flexible way in which to enable and encourage parishes to work together in mission, evangelism and pastoral care. Deaneries need to be freed from the structure, though not the principles, of the synodical system if they are to carry out their role more effectively.

We recommend that the statutory requirement for deanery synods to be part of the formal structure of synodical government should be repealed. In proposing the removal of deaneries from the legislative framework of synodical government, we are not rejecting the idea or importance of deaneries, either in terms of their carrying out responsibilities on behalf of the diocese or as local units of collaborative mission and ministry. We believe it to be more appropriate that each diocese should be free to establish, after consultation with the parishes, local assemblies for consultation and action on shared issues which best suit the particular circumstances of the diocese and deanery. We do not seek to prescribe what these assemblies might be. The dioceses should, we believe, have the flexibility to establish particular schemes for consultation, advice or decision-making which would release the skills and energies available within the parishes for addressing together particular tasks.

We recommend each diocese should be required to produce a scheme or schemes for deanery arrangements, to be approved by the diocesan synod, and which should be subject to review every five years. As we have said, we believe that it would be wrong to prescribe these nationally but that they should reflect local preference and needs. However, we suggest that they should be based on a number of principles. In particular they should:

- provide the opportunity for both clergy and laity to share in the shaping of deanery strategy and activity;

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- provide for the election of a lay chairman who will exercise lay leadership alongside the rural dean;
- ensure that both rural dean and lay chairman are recognised by the diocese for consultation and communication purposes;
- clearly define the functions which the diocese will expect to see carried out by the deaneries; and
- provide for consultation on pastoral organisation at deanery level.

5.12 We further recommend that the diocesan determination of deanery arrangements should be strengthened by the repeal of the present provisions in the Pastoral Measure 1983 which require a pastoral scheme or order to be made by the Church Commissioners before a deanery boundary can be altered and the enactment of provisions allowing the primary decision with respect to the alteration of deanery boundaries by the re-allocation of parishes within deaneries to be made by the diocesan synod so as to effect the grouping of parishes most suitable to local needs. If this recommendation is accepted it will be necessary to provide a right for any parish objecting to a re-allocation proposed by the diocese to appeal to some independent body.

So far as the functions of deaneries are concerned, we see these best being determined at diocesan and deanery levels. Dioceses will want to use deaneries for a variety of purposes, not least as they have regard to the principle of subsidiarity. This may include using them as a channel for communication, the constituency from which membership of diocesan boards and committees is drawn, or as the mechanism through which the apportionment of quota / parish share is determined.

The Recommendations

13.7 There is much dissatisfaction with the existing system of synodical government at the deanery level, albeit not with deaneries as such. It is important that groups of parishes should be able to work together in many ways in furtherance of the Church's mission and suitable arrangements need to be in place to make that co-operation effective. But we have concluded that the statutory deanery synod is not always, or even generally, the best institution to achieve that objective and that dioceses should be free to devise arrangements best suited to local circumstances which vary so greatly as between different parts of the country and indeed within individual dioceses. Our detailed recommendations are:

- that the statutory requirement for deanery synods to be part of the formal structure of synodical government should be repealed (see paragraph 5.19).
- that each diocese should be required to produce a scheme or schemes for deanery arrangements to be approved by the diocesan synod and which should be subject to review every five years (see paragraph 5.20).
- that the diocesan determination of deanery arrangements should be strengthened by the repeal of the present provisions in the Pastoral Measure 1983 which require a pastoral scheme

or order to be made by the Church Commissioners before a deanery boundary can be altered, and the enactment of provisions allowing the primary decision with respect to the alteration of deanery boundaries by the re-allocation of parishes within deaneries to be made by the diocesan synod so as to effect the grouping of parishes most suitable to local needs. If this recommendation is accepted, it will be necessary to provide a right for any parish objecting to a re-allocation proposed by the diocese to appeal to some independent body (see paragraph 5.21).