

Growing churches are giving churches

The Diocesan Parish Share Review Group has discovered that growing churches also tend to be giving churches, Revd Jane Baxter, a member of the group, told the October Diocesan Synod.

A survey conducted by the group, to which 111 churches responded, discovered that parishes which had planned for the future through Growth Action Plans, Mission Action Plans or in other ways, whatever their size, were more likely to pay their parish share in full. Yet over 40% of the respondents had no plans for the future of their parish.

Nor did many have regular preaching and teaching about the biblical principles of Christian giving, yet where such teaching was given it was the most significant factor in changing attitudes to parish share and increasing the amount paid. The group also discovered that clear communication of diocesan finances to parishes is a vital on-going task.

Presenting the Group's final report to Synod, Jane Baxter explained that only half the diocesan budget is met from parish share. "In 2011 it paid for many of the costs associated with the provision for our clergy: their stipends, national insurance and pensions, and some of the costs of housing them," she said.

"But parish share did not pay for all of the costs of housing our clergy. Neither did it pay for clergy training, support for mission in parishes or other necessary costs. These relied on a combination of income from external sources and income generated from internal activities and from reserves."

The Group had re-assessed the current Parish Share formula which had been introduced in 2008, which had resulted in a year-on-year rise in the amount collected for all but one of the last five years, despite the recession. "The figures suggested to us that now was not the right time to make radical changes to our system," she added.

However, it recognised that there was a lack of transparency over some special allowances and insurance calculations, and the Group recommended changing these.

Its recommendations and conclusions were:

- To replace the special allowance with the possibility of a deanery adjustment. Every parish will be placed in a category based on information from the Office of National Statistics on Weekly Average Household Income. A Benefice will need to make a request to the Deanery and justify it if they are to receive an adjustment. The maximum levels of possible adjustment were given in the full report.
- To use an Average Sunday Attendance figure calculated over four years rather than three in order to give slightly more help to growing parishes.
- That we are not yet in a position to de-couple insurance from parish share calculations due to national discussions with our insurers, EIG.
- However, we do recommend that work continues to see whether interim arrangements can help iron out some of the current inequalities. It has been suggested that this could involve using the annual grant which the diocese receives from EIG.

Having begun her presentation by reminding the Synod of the biblical principle of giving characterised by generosity and grace to support the work of God in the world, Jane Baxter concluded it by quoting one member of the group who had said, "Until the hearts of parishioners are opened by the generous love of God the Father, through Jesus Christ, I suspect that wallets will remain closed."

There were a number of questions and comments of detail in the ensuing debate which covered such matters as the discrepancy between average Sunday and average weekly attendance, levels of giving, and communicating the reason for the share to parishes. Bishop Donald stressed that "If everyone gave 5% we'd have more than we need and could give some away." And Paul Adams (Stewardship Adviser) said he hoped that parishes in benefices would work together and support each other willingly.

Bishop Donald told, by way of encouragement, of a large church in his previous diocese which sent a large cheque to support the work of another parish of a very different churchmanship, and asked that it should remain anonymous. The generous gift continued for some years.

The motion: "That this Synod receives the final report of the Parish Share Review Group and approves the recommendations contained therein" was carried *nem con*.

Growth will cost us just 41p per head!

Strategies being put in place to promote growth in the diocese will cost each church goer just 41p per week, Michael Truman, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, told the October Diocesan Dynod in presenting the budget for 2013. "Surely this is a small price to pay," he suggested.

The additional funds being requested will be used to reduce the length of interregna and to finance an intern scheme for young people exploring a vocation. There are increased growth-related budgets for Adult Education and the work of the Director of Ordinands, and money is being set aside for the triennial conference for Clergy and LLMs in 2014.

Mr Truman explained that a budget is not "We have x amount of money, what shall we do with it?" but a plan of operation expressed in monetary terms. So we decide what we're going to do, and then work out what it will cost us. If we start the other way round, we will not achieve what we aim for.

Our plan of operation

"Our plan of operation surely is to strengthen and renew the life and worship of the Church in this Diocese and bring as many people as possible to know and love Jesus Christ," he said. "The aim is to reverse the decline in clergy numbers for this is essential for church growth," he added, quoting Bishop Donald.

Both the Board of Finance and the Bishop's Council have spent time discussing ways of achieving this and these are reflected in the budget projections. Presenting the proposed budget for 2013 he noted that the requested increase is £450,148, of which £204,477 is accounted for by inflation alone. A contingency of £90,000 is included for unknown items that might crop up.

Parish share important

The payment of parish share becomes even more important as currently the diocese faces potential deficits in the next three years. If the deficit occurs, explained Deputy Diocesan Secretary Graham Cuthbert, it will be met from reserves. "But we hope that the deficit will not be as great as is currently projected." There no plans for cutting staff, Bishop Donald added. However, Mr Truman warned that before long the diocese will be called upon to meet clergy pension scheme deficits.

The budget requests an average increase of 3.8% but the individual increases for Benefices might be above or below that, Mr Truman stressed. Parishes requesting additional

clergy would be asked to pay the full cost of their remuneration. "Only by growth and working hard together will we achieve what Bishop Donald has set before us, to be a growing church to serve the people of this diocese" he concluded.

Bishop Donald reported that there has been an increase in the payment rate this year which, he said, is hugely encouraging.

Points raised in discussion

A number of matters were raised in discussion. Bishop Donald said that the diocese had no set policy on the length of an interregnum. "We're not allowed to declare a vacancy until the priest has started their new job or signed a resignation deed for a future retirement date," he explained. "We have started some aspects of the process informally before the due date but legally we can't do everything. Parishes are sometimes very slow in producing their parish profiles which delays an appointment."

David Wiseman (Greater Northampton) pointed out the need for preaching on spiritual resilience as well as on giving, for people feel the pressure of economic recession and unemployment. We should also stress the fact that we are all in this together and that we are thankful for what is given, he added.

The motion that this synod (a) approves the proposed budget for 2013 as outlined in the 2012-14 Budget Book; (b) authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend a sum not exceeding £12 million in 2013; and (c) notes the budget position for 2014 was passed *nem con.*

A summary leaflet showing the budget with detailed figures relating to the various aspects of the plan of operation is available at: www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/budget2013





“Lay people have a real voice”

Lay people as well as clergy and bishops have a real voice in the church that is heard and encouraged, Bishop Donald told the Synod. “It’s one of the joys and delights of the Church of England,” he said.

He was speaking in a homily during the opening Eucharist, instead of giving a full Presidential Address. Referring to William Tyndale, the martyr who was celebrated in the

church calendar the day Synod met, Bishop Donald stressed that Tyndale’s concern was to make the Bible available to every lay person to find the truth of it for themselves.

His work was a predecessor to the King James (Authorised) Version. He did not have the same level of scholarship as later translators, but was concerned that the Bible should be available in

everyday English and not be the Latin preserve of the clergy.

He thanked everyone for being willing to serve on Synod and to be involved in the decision making of the diocese and regretted that for legal reasons children could not be elected onto Synod. “We are a church of the people who have a real say. Let’s not lose that; let’s cherish and celebrate it,” he said.

Above: Bishop Donald addressing the Diocesan Synod meeting, which was held at the Malcolm Arnold Academy in Northampton.

Meeting dates for 2013:

The Diocesan Synod is due to meet twice next year on:

**16 March and
5 October**

Other Synod business

Election of Chairs:

The House of Clergy and House of Laity met separately at the start of the Synod to elect their respective chairs. The Revd Canon Margaret Johnson was elected as Chair of the House of Clergy and Mr John MacMahon Chair of the House of Laity.

Houses Committee:

This group oversees matters relating to clergy housing. To make its membership and meetings more realistic, it proposed to reduce its size and to meet more frequently, thus dispensing with the need for the additional Executive

Committee. The Synod approved this nem con.

Annual Accounts:

Michael Truman thanked the church and deanery treasurers and the expertise of the diocesan office for their work. “Without the experts in the office we wouldn’t have the results we have now,” he said. Synod members had been sent the annual accounts and report and were asked “to take note of the Chairman’s Report and the Accounts of the Diocesan Board of Finance for 2011”, which they duly did nem con.

General Synod:

As always, Synod received a written summary of General Synod business which was supplemented by comments from one of its representatives, on this occasion Andrew Presland. He drew attention to Revd Stephen Trott’s (Brixworth deanery) private members motion expressing the conviction that Christians are called to manifest their faith in public life as well as in private. He drew laughter when he pointed out that in strict legal terms the Church of England doesn’t exist as a single entity!

On chancel repair liability:

It was pointed out that each PCC has a duty to register any chancel repair liability that exists. Generally, trustees have to enforce such provisions in law, but in some circumstances the PCC can go to the Charity Commission to ask to be relieved of the responsibility to request the money. In a recent case, the Charity Commission gave that permission in another diocese.