

Angela Tilby: Parishes can say ‘No’ to new schemes



by ANGELA TILBY
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The Revd Brett Murphy interviews Professor Roy Faulkner on YouTube about minster communities

THE Launde Abbey Minster Community was launched on Sunday 30 April. This is the first stage of the [diocese of Leicester](#)’s minster scheme, which seeks to assign all 234 parishes to large groups. They were originally intended to be between 20 and 25 ([News, 8 October 2021](#)), but I hear that one is made of 35 former parishes. Each group will have three priests each (two of them pioneer ministers), plus lay administrative staff.

The diocese will initially receive additional central funds. It will then look to parish share, along with a lot of sold-off parish assets, to solve its deficit.

The scheme is not about merging small and unsuccessful parishes: it involves gobbling up the assets of parishes that are really working. The next area to be targeted is Coalville. The Vicar of Broom Leys, the Revd Brett Murphy, is a warm, energetic Evangelical, who broadcasts on [YouTube](#). He is eloquent about his belief in local [ministry](#). He believes that the parish system enables a ministry grounded in scripture, parishes dividing the country into “little chunks representing the Kingdom of God”. He serves his flock by becoming known to them, recognising that personal contact is the way to make disciples.

Among other fears about the minster model is that it is insensitive to theological difference, which will inevitably make it harder for conservative [Evangelicals](#), among others, to flourish. He understands, as Leicester diocese and others entertaining similar plans appear to have forgotten, that ministry involves imitating the Good Shepherd, who “calleth his own sheep by name”, sheep who “know not the voice of strangers”.

In other words, what Leicester is doing simply contradicts the Ordinal, which makes clear that such ministry is the lifeblood of the Church. In emergencies, people want a priest, not an answerphone or a promise to call back. Mr Murphy speaks out in a [YouTube conversation](#) with Professor Roy Faulkner, a lay member of the [General Synod](#).

The diocese says that there is a consensus about the minster scheme; but some have complained that, when the archdeacons did their rounds to explain the proposals, what they actually offered was three varieties of the same plan. Others have suggested that some who questioned the scheme have been given hints that their future in the diocese could not be guaranteed — which could, of course, be justified, given the inevitable cuts in clergy numbers.

What parishes don't always realise is that they can say “No”: they do not have to agree. They can stand on the evidence that the scheme is unlikely to work: cutting the numbers of clergy usually means a loss in both numbers and giving. The diocese may be broke, but the C of E isn't. It is not too late to divert the central funds — which are being being siphoned off to inflate the power of diocesan bishops — into Mr Murphy's “little chunks which represent the Kingdom of God”.