

Letters: How the bloated bureaucracy of the Church is pushing parishes to extinction

Plus: the need for growth; punishment for shoplifters; safer cycling; Paul McCartney's guitar; and a feline taste test

By Letters to the Editor
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CREDIT: David Rose

SIR – As the retired finance director of a major institution and current treasurer of a rural parish, I take issue with the secretary general of the General Synod, William Nye, who claims that the central Church is supporting frontline ministries.

In my parish we have so far seen nothing of the £3.6 billion he speaks of. Rather, we are faced with annually increasing demands for our contribution to diocesan costs.



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To anyone with an understanding of parish finance, it is the overhead cost of the diocesan system that is the problem. There is an urgent need for that cost to be severely cut by merging the 42 dioceses, reducing the number of bishops from the present 113 to something closer to the 26 of 200 years ago. With the resultant savings and Mr Nye's £3.6 billion, it would be possible to increase the stipends of parish clergy across the board.

Meanwhile, the bell is tolling.

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Donald R Clarke

Tunbridge Wells, Kent

SIR – The “dossier” reported on by Gabriella Swerling makes for shocking reading, with accounts of inadequate consultation and coercion of clergy and parishioners in Cornwall.

It contradicts the Diocese of Truro’s claim that the reorganisation of all its churches into giant groups or “mega-parishes” is not “top-down”. Indeed, a document issued to parishioners in one of Truro’s 12 deaneries stated: “We are not seeking opinions on God’s given vision”. The people have no right to legal representation in this unequal process.

Many of the testimonies in the dossier are from clergy who wish to remain anonymous. Presumably because they fear for their positions, they are denying themselves the opportunity to initiate the (discredited) Clergy Discipline Measure against the diocesan hierarchy. The Church of England’s exemptions from freedom of information and employment legislation further hinder recourse to normal civil HR procedures. The episcopal ordinal asks newly ordained bishops to declare that “by the help of God” they will “exercise authority with justice, courtesy and love”.

The appropriate response to the dossier would be to hold a formal, thorough and independent investigation into how a proper process could possibly be conducted in this unjust, unkind manner.

Sir James Burnell-Nugent
Modbury, Devon

SIR – At a meeting earlier this year in a packed Westminster committee room, MPs heard from parishioners – from a variety of traditions and dioceses – about their fast diminishing trust in the Church of England’s hierarchy. Several reasons and examples were given, from the new doctrinaire centralism to the appalling treatment of clergy and laity alike.

Given the singular failure of the Church’s hare-brained schemes for renewal and growth, the dismissal of the Save the Parish movement’s constructive criticism and the suicidal nature of “managed decline”, it is small wonder that ordinary people throughout the land are demanding answers. But what can one do in the case of an unelected and unaccountable oligarchy?

Rev R C Paget
Brenchley, Kent

SIR – There is no death knell ringing in Quorn in the Diocese of Leicester.

Our church has been in interregnum for nearly two years. We are growing congregation numbers at services, and have managed to stay rural and non-happy-clappy.

We are predominantly led by laity. Sure, we have problems, but we work together and we get over them. God helps us. We have an SATB choir that sings at choral evensong once a month, and we have brilliant clergy preachers visiting us to take services most weeks to augment our stunningly successful associate minister (lay).

Jesus taught us the value of love and hope, and I love our church.

Keith Croysdale

Lay member, Bishop's Council, Diocese of Leicester