

Cornwall's Save the Parish and the Truro diocese

From Canon Alison Milbank

Sir, — I have returned from a recent three-day visit to those worried about the effect of pastoral reorganisation in Cornwall. My experience of meeting lay people of at least 20 parishes in different areas of the diocese and a number of the clergy is so at odds with what is presented in your report ([News](#)) last week that I could weep.

Far from being perpetrators of “harassment”, the people I met were faithful, imaginative, and anxious to craft a positive way forward for their diocese. Promised 82 stipendiary clergy by their Bishop in a BBC radio interview, they had worked out a plan of how manageable clusters of three parishes could thereby be established, which would allow both missional outreach and proper cure of souls, as well as regular celebration of the eucharist. This is key in a traditionally high-church diocese, where in large areas they are now being expected to exist on a regular fare of communion by extension, in which they become passive recipients of the sacrament rather than active liturgical communities.

Far from being mean-spirited, they are praying for the well-being of the clergy now being appointed, in some cases, into such difficult positions. My visit was made complicated by the telling fact that so many would speak to me only in secret; and clergy were scared even to be interviewed in their own homes, because of fear for their jobs, in the knowledge that some priests who questioned diocesan plans had had been threatened with disciplinary action.

I urge those inclined to believe the professional communications of the diocesan bureaucracy over the lived experience of the people to go and meet them. If the Church of England survives in Cornwall, it will be because of the heroic witness of its laity.

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Working with the
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Sir, — For the past six months, I have come out of retirement to step in as Acting Archdeacon of Cornwall in the diocese of Truro, after the death of the Ven. Paul Bryer. I read with interest your report last week. It has been my lived experience that sourcing posts that are fruitful and sustainable has been an absolute priority in this diocese.

Would it be unreasonable to suggest that the Church of England is good at producing plans, most of which remain just that, plans? What I have found in this diocese, however, is a strategy to see plans become reality, and change implemented. Change is never easy. Sometimes it can be painful, but it is necessary if the gospel is to be presented afresh to this and future generations. I have found believers who are faithful, doggedly determined, and distinctly Cornish (which in my view is a very positive thing).

As I come to the end of my time in the diocese, I can say that it has been a joy to share in licensing services for new ministers, and with an appointment made of a new archdeacon. I give thanks to God for the faithful ministry of the whole people of God — both lay and ordained: those in the parishes and those in diocesan posts. Much as some would like to create an “us and them” scenario, I have been grateful to all those who I have worked alongside for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Long may it continue.

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