# Q & A Summary from 19th September

This is a summary of the questions received and answered across the three archdeaconry meetings on 19th September and includes those received in advance as well as those received from the floor on the day.

**Q:** **How does having faith in Jesus affect the decision making of the diocese? Or is it like any other secular organisation?**

**A:** Prayer and faith is at the heart of who we are, and it shapes us. In addition to this, our values through which we seek to be courageous, collaborative, generous, resourceful, and pioneering. This does not mean that we shy away from challenges or that there are not lessons to be learnt from the secular world, but our faith and context inform everything we do.

**Q:** **“As with many other organisations, the Church of England is being catapulted by the Coronavirus pandemic into deep, if not transformational change. This is not necessarily a bad thing; even before the pandemic many of us considered its systems anachronistic, over-hierarchical and unfit for the needs of the 21st century. However, before we consider vision and strategy, surely we need to consider our mission (in the sense, “What are we here to do?”) and values. How are we going to do that in an explicit and transparent manner?”**

**A:** Absolutely yes. The Bishop’s Address was aimed to do just that, and the vision will continue to be shaped and articulated moving forward. Our values are key and shape not only what we do but how we do things now and moving forward.

**Q: We are not only facing a Covid crisis and unprecedented economic crisis, we are also facing a potentially catastrophic climate crisis, how as churches and people of faith are, we going to deal with that?**

**A:** The environmental crisis is identified as a priority under live|pray|serve as it is a key element for how we as a church should be seeking to have an impact as part of our social engagement. It is also a vital factor in shaping how we will work, and the decisions we make as church.

We have an Environmental group who are working support our response to this important mark of mission.

**Q: The church is about bringing people together in our communities and this needs clergy on the ground above all else. Why would we slash away our biggest asset?**

**A:** We are focussing on growth and the appropriate provision of resource based on context. That resource provision needs to involve both lay and ordained ministry.

**Q: When we’re talking about Team and Collaborative Ministries, hope that includes admin of parishes such as secretarial, financial and treasurers etc. The biggest holdback from thriving is not being able to fulfil the key roles.**

**A:** With soft parish boundaries, roles could be shared. For example, if a Church has a strong team people able to support a school community then that is a good skill to be shared. It would be useful to build up teams to work across larger areas, offering skills to several settings.

Within teams lay roles including administration can be considered as part of the available resource.

**Q: As a Parish we have benefited from a senior member of staff working as part of our Parish, could this be adopted and de-centralise the Diocese, focussing on outreach.**

**A:** Some Diocesan roles have had a parish element to them. All possibilities are being looked at currently and will be at the different stages of this change journey.

**Q: We were asked about the importance of rural ministry and asked to consider that parishes, particularly in rural areas, represent real communities not just post code areas, and Covid has shown us the importance and spiritual value of these communities.**

**A:** Agree on importance of rural ministry. Every parish however, represents a real community which is why we want to hear from you all about what a thriving church looks like in your community, and for us to consider how our parishes can truly reflect our communities.

**Q: Could the Archdeacon please be specific about how urgent it is to take decisions about which churches will remain open and which licensed clergy posts will be funded in future? There appears to be a wide range of possibilities in people's minds: between 'within the next three months' and 'sometime, someday'.**

**A:** The time for thinking and discussing is not. The process and timescales will be clearer by the end of the year with a process of change happening through 2021 and onwards. The steps and timeframes will be communicated.

**Q: Is the Church continuing to recruit staff or is there a general freeze on recruitment due to the financial crisis caused by the Covid Pandemic?**

**A:**  There is a presumptive pause on all lay and ordained posts which are vacant.

**Q: There are a number of vacancies on the Island. How are you prioritising them? What is your criteria?**

**A:** Important to hold vacancies while we progress through this planning phase. Those which are progressing now (on the Island and indeed elsewhere) are those where substantial structural change has already taken place.

**Q: It is very important that the CofE is seen to be making organisational savings across the church, equally at reducing the number of Dioceses as well as parish priests and churches.**

**A:** This is a national discussion rather than a local one, but it should be noted that fewer dioceses does not necessarily bring savings and any that are achieved do not automatically occur at diocesan and therefore parish level.

Collaboration between dioceses is appropriate in certain areas of work and as a diocese we have effective at doing just that. We already share a joint finance team, education team and Board of Education with Winchester Diocese. To benefit from economies of scale we also procure IT services as part of a Consortium with Winchester and Guildford Dioceses.

**Q: How do you propose to identify and implement significant "efficiencies" and savings in other areas - including reductions in bureaucracy and cross-cutting activities driven from the centre. These plans should be set out in detail before parishes and deaneries are asked to look at further reorganisations and cuts in sharp-end clergy numbers - which we believe would portend very harmful and counter-productive long-term consequences.**

**A:** The work of the team who work from the diocesan office, covers a range of functions (including statutory and support) but as a whole it is there to support the parishes and schools in the diocese. As such, the process of reviewing DBF structures and resourcing needs to work alongside the review of parish structures.

**Q: We are told the diocese is making cuts but we have no idea of what they are or will be. Why not?**

**A:** If we simply set out to make cuts we risk a spiral of decline. We are looking to develop structures which meaningfully support mission and growth in a way which is affordable. That takes time and planning. We are looking to make a journey of radical and transformational change and that means consultation and conversation as part of a process.

**Q: How can such apportionment of spending on office costs as against clergy be justified and why should it not be cut hard, and cut first?**

**A:** The team provides support to parish ministry as well as statutory functions. It is there to serve parish ministry with essential work of safeguarding, property management as well as mission support. The supporting nature of the roles mean it is a concurrent process of consideration and one which is being taken seriously.

**Q: Parishioners and PCCs look to the ceiling when we dip into reserves to pay Parish Share. Just prior to Covid we devised a Mission and Stewardship plan and campaign. Are the Diocese doing as much as they can to cut costs? It would be helpful to have more direct communications with parishioners about Diocesan cost cutting.**

**A:** The budget process has looked like no other year before. The Bishop’s Council and the Diocesan Finance Committee have been meeting much more regularly. Today is the start of the process of looking into 2021. After this event we hope to put out a pack covering the questions today. We will follow that with information about the budget and parish share indications.

Our Finance Chair is working hard to provide an FAQs page in the website to help to support deaneries, parishes and treasurers with frequently asked questions about parish share and diocesan finance generally.

**Q: All Parishes will be pleased to have a 5% reduction through formula. The biggest expenditure is stipend, therefore it would be reasonable to reduce stipend by 5% too, if not more. Is this up for consideration? When talking about Pastoral Reorganisation, it is important to be respectful and to also respect traditions.**

**A:** Looking at how to sustain a thriving Diocese in Depth, Impact and Number means we want and need growth focussed structural conversations. Within that there is a reality that the level of resource will be different in the light of circumstances. The question to therefore how do we best deploy resources to enable growth rather than how much do we have to cut. As indicated in the Address, we do not have the resources to sustain the Stipends and Salaries that we have at the moment. Despite dipping into the reserves, the CBIL loan enables us to meet the commitments in the short term, however the loan will have to be paid back.

**Q: Are you able to indicate the likely magnitude of reduction in stipends that we are realistically working towards?**

**A:** It is difficult to be specific with the uncertainties to which are alluded ahead of us. The likelihood is that things will get tighter over the next quarter and year. The most critical thing is to restructure for the future and not to have conversations dominated by a percentage at this stage.

**Q: Need to be transparent, if we’re considering 10-20% cuts at parish/ ministry levels, is the same to happen at Diocesan level?**

**A:** Everything is running tightly, sharing joy and pain together. Salaries and Stipends need to recognise the good work done by the Lay and the ordained colleagues employed centrally and across the Diocese. Some roles are statutory. We’re looking at the diocese as a whole to make best provisions to allow us to go further and to have central structures which are resourced at the right level to support parishes and schools.

**Q: Are you considering redundancies, closing building, the big things? Where are you looking to save money?**

**A:** In terms of central support, we must structure to support at parish level. It is a concurrent process; the call is to look as to what would truly serve mission and ministry in your circumstances. Yes, redundancies and new structures will be considered for the DBF as well as how and when we travel, the use of technology to support virtual meetings etc all of which has cost saving potential. Every aspect of the budget is under review and will continue to be so as the change journey evolves.

**Q: What plans are there that will enable the diocese to reduce the call on the parishes for funding thereby enabling the parishes to focus on Mission to our communities?**

**A:** Parish Share funds mission and it is through this that lay and ordained ministry is funded locally. We have worked hard over many years to base parish share on a fair formula which enables ministry to be funded across the diocese. We are planning for growth which is first and foremost a mission imperative but it also, with good stewardship, will support the financing of local mission and ministry. Alongside this, we acknowledge the need to develop new and more diverse income streams.

**Q: Although we do not have a Vicar at present, his accommodation is being rented out. This is an extra central funding stream. Will this be taken into account in respect of our deficit or vacancy?**

**A:** A ‘vacancy rate’ is already factored into the budget each year to keep parish share costs down as far as possible from the outside. Equally, associated rental costs provide income into the property budget which enables the repairs on clergy housing and this income is also budgeted each year. This again s already therefore factored into the parish share ‘ask’ each year. Therefore such income and vacancy related savings do not bring capacity when they occur as they have already been taken into account in the budget and subsequent parish share allocation.

**Q: Might there be a way of capping the parish Share demand in proportion to the cost of the clergy appointed to the parish? Say 1.5 times the cost (ie stipend, housing and pension) of clergy working in the parish?**

**A:** At this moment in time how we approach parish share is not under review. The first full year under the revised approach, after a period of transition was 2018. A review of parish share in the future is likely but the timeframe has not been discussed.

**Q: Will any Parish share shortfalls deficits in respect of payments to the Centre be carried over into the next financial year, or will they be written off or discounted in view of the Covid closures?**

**A:** Parish share policy remains as currently framed in terms of arrears being carried forward.

All arears will be assessed at close of books at the start of 2021 in the normal way. Those parishes with arrears equivalent to three months or more parish share will be considered for Viability Focus Process (VFP) by the Diocesan Secretary, Archdeacons, Mission Development Officer and Stewardship Adviser in the normal way. Parishes which would trigger VFP but where mission and stewardship plans are already sound would be asked for a repayment plan in relation to the arrears. If this provides for repayment in a viable timeframe then jubilee could be offered provided there were no reserves which could have been utilised to avoid the arrears in the first place.

**Q: Is parish share fit for purpose? Why attach our boat to a model that appears to be sinking?**

**A:** Parish share as a system is being looked at and considered nationally. At a local level for us a key part of our strategy is also to look at how we develop new and different income streams.

**Q: We’ve been fortunate enough to pay full share, but are aware that some churches have not been able to. What can the Diocese do to help those in the coming year? Where does stewardship rest in all this?**

**A:** The Stewardship Advisor has been furloughed for a long time, he is now back and a key resource helping parishes, giving and parish income.

Behind parish share responses are a mix of issues, including parish reserves varying hugely as do the reasons for levels of giving. There were already cracks in terms of parish finance and income streams, Covid has just made things more obvious. It has been highlighted through this time - parishes that use the Parish Giving Scheme or Standing Orders and where stewardship is embedded as part off discipleship are the ones across the country that have been able to sustain life and contributions.

**Q: Communication is vital, do we have a Communications Policy?**

**A:** Before Covid we knew that communication was an area of work that needed to be addressed. A survey was circulated relating to this, the results have been feeding into a reviewed policy which will develop and shape how we move forward. We acknowledge the effective communication will be important in any change journey.

**Q: It can be difficult to get responses from the Diocese, we need everybody to do their bit. We are relying on people to do things, unpaid, so its important for the Diocese to interact with people and answer questions.**

**A:** Silence is never about ignoring people and parishes but rather a consequence of trying to get through things. We see this as a partnership, in parishes you need our support and we need you, together we are the church in Portsmouth Diocese.

**Q: People in our churches have a variety of talents, could the Diocese find out who has what talents, and where?**

**A:**  We should all be encouraged to take on something else, to use our God given talents, it’s the responsibility of us all to tap someone on the shoulder and encourage them. As a team we will do what we can to explore the skills which are available across the diocese and use them more frequently than perhaps is achieved currently.

**Q: How do we move quickly and radically whilst keeping those who are resistant to change on board?**

**A:** 2020 was going to be a year of conversation and vision and finance; these conversations were to start in March, and then the pandemic took over so we are having to do things differently. We are however a small diocese which enables us to meet, communicate, speak and hear. The Bishop’s Council have just approved a process for deanery engagement, giving the ability for conversation and feeding back, enabling us to be quick and agile around consultation and decision making.

**Q: For some people the Church is the only thing that’s stable, comforting and steady. There are also many people who are facing very personal financial difficulties and worries. There are concerns about clergy who may struggle managing the changes themselves.**

**A:** We acknowledge those feelings and hope to be able to develop a process for conversations to take place and enable everyone one to journey together through this process as best we can.

**Q: If we intend and desire as a Diocese for a collaborative approach on this are their clear guidelines as to when feedback needs to be given? Who to? What is the process from there?**

**A:** Getting a quick enough timetable is important but too fast and we don’t enable involvement and conversation which is needed. Timeframes and process will be shared with deaneries.

**Q: What are the thoughts as to how we get more people involved, people who don’t usually help and volunteer. How to lay the importance of this onto people’s hearts. To reach out to the community and to get the message out to more people and highlight the importance.**

**A:** It is right to want to engage and involve many people, and there is much that we can still do throughout parishes and deaneries. We’ve engaged almost 330 people today. The hope is that this is the start of the conversation that goes to involve you and more people too, so that when the Bishop’s Council as Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee come together we can gather as much shared thinking as possible.

**Q: How do we build mutual respect and general partnership going into this process?**

**A:**  Mutual respect is important. Our calling is to respect people whether or not we are respected back. We need to have the spirit of generosity, of respect and honour. That’s the first thing that we pray and long for being returned. The responsibility starts with each of us.

**Q: Are you considering redundancies, closing building, the big things? Where are you looking to save money?**

**A:** In terms of central support, we have to structure to support at parish level. It is a concurrent process; the call is to look as to what would truly serve mission and ministry in your circumstances. Yes redundancies and new structures will be considered for the DBF as well as how and when we travel, the use of technology to support virtual meetings etc all of which has cost saving potential. Every aspect of the budget is under review and will continue to be so as the change journey evolves.