

The swinging pendulum of national Church of England finances

What is happening

The General Synod's "Renewal and Reform" programme includes a change in how the Church Commissioners distributes its investment income to dioceses. Up till now this was distributed (via the 'Darlow formula') to the dioceses serving the lowest income communities. The criticism of the current funding method is it simply props up the old system which hasn't resulted in church growth, and can therefore be just 'funding decline'. The change being introduced is that half the funding (£24 million a year) will now be allocated for "strategic development funding", to dioceses who apply for it to fund specific mission initiatives, where there is a culture of payment by results.

Page 14 of the Church Commissioners Annual Report 2015 (published in May 2016) states:

"A significant shift in the distribution of funding for mission activities and dioceses and ministry support will begin in 2017. One of the Commissioners' long-term goals is to facilitate spiritual and numerical growth in the Church through targeted funding for mission to areas of the country with the greatest need. Through Renewal and Reform, all of the national funding given to dioceses by the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council will be explicitly directed to mission and growth.

The current funding streams for providing dioceses and ministry support and mission activities will be replaced with two new funding streams: lowest income communities funding; and Strategic Development Funding which any diocese can apply for to invest in new growth opportunities. The aim is for the combined funding for dioceses from the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council to be split equally between these two funding streams, moving away from the current allocation system (known as the Darlow Formula) to focus more squarely on encouraging investment in growth.

In 2015 we carried out work to explore how to make these changes. Dioceses currently receiving ministry support funding which require interim support will receive transitional funding from 2017 for up to 10 years. These dioceses will also receive one-off funding at the beginning of the transitional period to help them move away from their current level of support."

What the diocese of Guildford is applying for

Dioceses can apply in April and October each year for strategic development funding grants between £500,000 and £1 million. The Diocese of Guildford is making an application for funds towards Goal 2 of our "Transforming Church, Transforming Lives" Vision and Mission Strategy.

<http://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/about/transforming-church-transforming-lives>

"Increasing believers: Together to increase the number of new Christians of all ages through persistent prayer, confident faith-sharing, life-giving worship, and the development of 100 new worshipping communities by 2027."

Advantages of the new funding model

The Bishop of Burnley, writing in the journal *New Directions* in February 2016 referred to the research publication into church growth “From Anecdote to Evidence” and then gave his own summary:

“‘Churches grow when they do some stuff.’ It increasingly seems to me that exactly what churches do is secondary and indeed is so context-based as to be non-transferable. What makes one church grow could cause its neighbour to close. Only the local church itself knows what will work in their setting. What matters is doing *something*. What matters is taking positive steps to reach out beyond an existing congregation to those on the fringes. And that is what is meant by ‘intentional evangelism’: it means doing some stuff.”

The change in funding to fund specific mission initiatives should help with this, because it should encourage us to take those steps, and we have the freedom to decide what steps are best to take in our own context.

The Church Times of 28 October 2016 interviews the Revd Chris Russell (whom I remember from university days when I was a member of the Durham Inter-Collegiate Christian Union and he was the President) who is the Archbishop of Canterbury’s adviser for evangelism and witness, and a member of the Archbishop’s evangelism task force:

“His sub-group within the task force has made three recommendations: more paid children- and youth-work posts; deanery mission action plans for work with children and young people; and dioceses to make a priority of evangelism and witness with younger people.

Mr Russell questions whether broader cultural changes account for the lack of young people in church, pointing to the fact that there are places where this work is being “done really well”. As a youth worker at St Andrew’s, Chorleywood, he saw the youth group grow to 200 people, “and it wasn’t that hard. We just provided safe places to hang out and have fun, and then drew young people into the worshipping life of the Church . . . My fear is that, because there are fewer and fewer young people [in church], it is now seen as something we just can’t do.”

There is a danger, he thinks, that people feel that if they don’t have a “young, cool youth-worker”, then they can’t do youth work. “My best volunteers were older people,” he reflects. “Many young people are missing grandparents and parents, and we could provide a family environment.””

Criticisms of the new funding model

The Revd Alexander Faludy wrote in *The Church Times* of 26 February 2016 of his concern that given that there is the same amount of money and it is just a re-distribution, the funding for mission initiatives has to come out of a reduction in funding for normal parochial ministry; but normal parochial ministry is still needed to make a mission initiative sustainable:

“in Newcastle we are to see a reduction of £700,000 p.a. of “block grant” funding from the Church Commissioners phased in over a decade. Some money will be recouped through grant applications for time-limited evangelism projects. Such

initiatives are of limited value, however, if there is not a properly resourced parochial network to draw people into as faith and discipleship deepen.”

The fear is that those parishes doing God’s work daily for the long haul will lose out on funding because they have not packaged what they do as a ‘mission project’.

My prediction

It was right to change the old funding model of payment by formula to prop up dioceses and parishes with little consideration of whether the money was having any effect. The introduction of a new system which targets money for specific mission projects which are assessed on results is a needed change. However, in about 10 or 15 years time, I expect it will be recognised that the pendulum has swung too far in that direction, and there will be more recognition that traditional parish based ministry is at least as important as funding ‘fresh expressions of church’, and that there will be a further adjustment of the funding model that will be somewhere in between the old system and the new one.

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