Restoring the Value of Parishes:

The foundations of welfare, community and spiritual belonging in England

Esmé Partridge

CIVITAS

Restoring the Value of Parishes:

The foundations of welfare, community and spiritual belonging in England

Restoring the Value of Parishes:

The foundations of welfare, community and spiritual belonging in England

Esmé Partridge

CIVITAS

First Published
November 2024

55 Tufton Street
London SW1P 3QL

email: books@civitas.org.uk

ISBN 978-1-912581-61-0

Typeset by Typetechnique

Printed in Great Britain by
4edge Limited, Essex

Contents

Author

Esmé Partridge is a researcher, writer and recent MPhil graduate from the University of Cambridge. She previously worked as a consultant on a number of religious freedom initiatives, including the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Christianity in the Holy Land. Her work has appeared in publications including *The Critic, First Things*, Theos Think Tank, *Times Literary Supplement* and *UnHerd*.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Canon Dr Alison Milbank, Emma Thompson, Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent, Bishop Andrew Rumsey, Bishop James Newcome, Dr Rupert Sheldrake, Madeleine Davies, David Barclay, Eddie Tulasiewicz, and Revd. Franceso Aresco for comment.

Introduction

In an LBC radio interview this Easter, the world's most famous atheist Richard Dawkins described himself as a 'cultural Christian'. By this he meant that he values the Christian heritage of our nation – its architecture, its music, and even its morals – despite welcoming and indeed actively encouraging the decline of the faith that first inspired it. 'I am happy', the author of *The God Delusion* explained, that 'the number of people who actually believe in Christianity is going down'. 'But I would not be happy', he continued, if 'we lost all our cathedrals and our beautiful parish churches'.[1]

Unfortunately for Dawkins, the correlation between the two is now indisputable. The 2021 census revealed that, for the first time on record, less than half of Britons (46 per cent) identify as Christian, and even fewer of those with the Church of England.[2] This follows a steady decline from a 59 per cent Christian population in 2011, and 72 per cent in 2001.[3] With dwindling congregations, thousands of those beautiful parish churches have had little choice but to close their doors. Since 1969, over 2,000 have been made redundant; around 15 per cent of the total number which fill the English landscape.[4]

The situation is worsening rapidly. Almost 300 parish churches were closed between 2016 and 2021 alone,[5] and dioceses[6] foresee that they will close some 300 more in the near future.[7] As analysis published by *The Daily Telegraph* found, this 'works out as an average of 56 less parishes every year and marks the fastest rate of parish closures in

70 years.'[8] Those that remain are struggling to survive, with some 9,000 places of worship on Historic England's 'heritage at risk' register.[9] It is estimated that parish churches have a combined backlog of repairs worth at least £1 billion, on top of annual maintenance costs of £150 million;[10] costs they cannot afford without donations and heritage grants which are increasingly hard to come by.[11]

The decline of England's medieval parishes, whose stone steeples rise above every town and village, is a tragedy even for 'cultural Christians' like Dawkins. For centuries they were the beating heart of local communities, marking the major moments of life through the rites of baptism, marriage and burial. They are places of communion both in the sacramental sense and in terms of providing, as the Bishop Andrew Rumsey puts it, 'common ground' between the members of communities and between people and place.[12] To this day, churches contribute social services such as food banks, childcare and counselling, the economic value of which the National Churches Trust (NCT) has valued at £55 billion per year.[13] Both spiritually and socially, parishes are an integral part of English life. Yet we are losing them at a rapid rate.

Secularisation has undeniably been a driving force. After the cultural revolution of the 1960s, traditional religion in Britain came to be replaced by liberalism and an ethos of moral relativism. This posed a challenge to religious institutions in general, but especially to the paternalism of the parish model (the vicar would once have 'corrected' his parishioners' behaviour in public, exercising a moral authority that would be unthinkable today). Alongside this came the emergence of what the sociologist Grace Davie called 'believing without belonging'; private forms of faith which occur outside of communal settings and traditional

leadership.[14] The New Age movement and 'Mindfulness' are popular examples, both of which take spirituality away from the Church and into the private (and increasingly digital) realm.

Another factor is multiculturalism. The unprecedented rate of immigration since 1997 has displaced Britain's Anglican majority in terms of demographics alone (even if, as is the case in cities such as London, many ethnic minorities are Christian). Just as significant, however, is its effect on underlying social attitudes. According to the sociologist Paul Heelas, there is a direct correlation between exposure to cultural difference and 'detraditionalisation';[15] the undermining of previously unquestioned traditions and norms. This is because the encounter with other cultural 'meta-narratives' threatens the exclusive legitimacy of those which were once the default. Whereas once most people would attend church on Sundays, in a pluralistic age such conventions are called into question. Anglicanism is now just one of many competing belief systems within society, and has subsequently lost its cultural dominance despite remaining the established religion.

Thirdly, and quite independently of religion, is the fact that the strong local attachments upon which the parish system was originally premised no longer exist. This has increasingly been the case since the industrial revolution, but is especially so in today's hyper-mobile society where fewer people integrate into their local communities in the way they once did; a trend also evident in the decline of pubs, post offices and village halls.[16] While some of this is a result of economic hardship, it may also be related to the rise of what David Goodhart calls 'anywheres': people who move for education and work and tend to be less rooted, and so less invested, in their immediate surroundings (as

opposed to 'somewheres', who live close to where they grew up and have family connections to a particular area).[17] This, combined with the other external factors, can explain much as to why parish churches have come to be underused and undervalued.

These, however, are only half of the story: there are also internal factors which have been furthering the extent of the decline. Making headlines in recent years is the argument that the Church of England has itself been neglecting the needs of parishes, with a diminishing proportion of the Church Commissioners' funds going towards parochial ministry. In dioceses across the country, numbers of stipendiary incumbents are being reduced by up to 53 per cent.[18] In Leicester, 98 clergy members are set to become 80 by 2026; in Hereford, 72 will become 55; and in Bath and Wells, 178 will become 128.[19] These cuts are part of a process which the Church calls 'pastoral reorganisation'; the closing of parishes or merging them into large groups which share the same 'team' of clergy. An example of the latter is Cornwall, where the Truro Diocese plans to merge 23 parishes into one so-called 'mega-parish', causing much controversy and criticism from parishioners in the region.[20]

These choices are not, it would seem, being made out of financial necessity: the Church Commissioners are the custodians of a £10 billion endowment fund which was originally instituted for the sole purpose of providing support for parishes.[21] Why, then, is it not being spent on saving them? This is the question posed by the campaign Save the Parish, established in 2021 by the Rector of St. Bartholomew's Church London Revd. Marcus Walker and journalist Emma Thompson in response to growing concerns about church closures and mergers across the country. They argue that a managerial ideology within the Church of

England has led to funds being misspent on administration – with roles in human resources, safeguarding, and diversity and inclusion proliferating in recent years – as well as costly 'strategic development' schemes and forms of Christian mission which appear to decentre the role of the parish in Anglican life.

Some defend disinvesting in the parish system on the basis that it has become financially unsustainable. Churches today are reliant on the donations of their congregations, and these are reported to have fallen by 14-15 per cent in recent years.[22] As church attendance dropped by 19 per cent after the pandemic, the number of people giving regular donations to parishes has gone from 538,000 in 2015 to just over 400,000 today.[23] However, Save the Parish argue that the Church itself is responsible for making parishes dependent on donations in the first place – having transferred their other income-generating assets to the dioceses in 1976[24] – and that closing and merging parishes will only worsen the problem, since doing so reduces services and vicar time, thus leading to reduced attendance and giving. It is within the Church's power, they argue, to restore the value of parishes, even in the face of challenging cultural factors.

This report will consider what such a restoration might look like, beginning in Chapter One with an exploration of what the parish system is and how, even today, it makes an unparalleled contribution to national life. While the religious role of parishes is of course paramount, Chapters Two and Three will consider other parish assets such as their heritage and charitable contributions. Chapter Four will then address how all of these are at risk as a consequence of collapsing institutional support for parish clergy, prompting the all-important question of Chapter Five, 'where is all the money going?'. After examining the key issues, it will

turn in Chapter Six to constructive reforms at the heart of revitalising the parish. As the biologist, author and advocate for saving the parish Dr Rupert Sheldrake says:

> 'There is so much potential for parish churches, and because there's been so little imagination put into them over the years… the chance of making a difference with the Church of England is much greater than any other area. Since it has sunk so low in terms of popularity and use, the only way is up.'[25]

Some of Sheldrake's optimism could go a long way. As the state of the parish seems indeed to have reached rock bottom, now is surely the time to act – before many more of our beautiful buildings are forced to close their doors, 'left rent free to rain and sheep'.[26]

1.

What is the parish?

Technically speaking, the term 'parish' refers to the area of land under the clerical jurisdiction of a church. This was, from the Middle Ages until the late 19th Century, 'the basic territorial unit in the organisation of this country',[27] and still exists today as a form of local government. Especially in rural areas, the parish continues to define the contours of geography even where these have been overlaid by modern administrative boundaries.

Theologically speaking, the parish is the spiritual heart of the community. It represents what Bishop Andrew Rumsey has called 'the Anglican covenant with place'; the binding of the Holy Spirit to a particular location.[28] Parish churches were established as sacramental centres where people would go to be baptised, married, and take communion, and where they would be pastored by priests who provided the 'cure of souls' (hence the term 'curate'). It was hoped that the parish would not only ensure salvation in the next life, but also allow each community to realise its full potential in the present one; an ideal evoked by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

> 'To every parish throughout the kingdom there is transplanted a germ of civilisation… in the remotest villages there is a nucleus, around which the capabilities of the place may crystallise and brighten.'[29]

The first parish churches emerged between the 7th and 10th Centuries, once Britain's earliest Christian communities had taken root. Originally, they served as outposts of

minsters – larger religious buildings from which priests would spread the faith – but many were then established by local landowners for the use of those residing on their estates. Thousands of these churches were built throughout the Middle Ages, transforming the appearance of the countryside in a relatively short space of time. Indeed, England's conversion to Christianity has been described as a monumental 'landscape event'.[30]

As of clerical reforms instituted in 1215, it was declared that the priests of parish churches would no longer be under the control of their landowners, but would be overseen by the bishop of the local diocese (dioceses being the organisational divisions of the Church attached to a cathedral). Despite this, the buildings continued to finance and effectively govern themselves. As historian Nicholas Orme has noted, parish resources and boundaries were always provided locally as opposed to by a central authority. Church leaders merely 'adopted the parish system; they did not create it.'[31]

By the end of the 16th Century, there were over 9,000 parishes in Britain. Almost every acre of land fell within one, creating a system of geography which 'gathered' the country together and provided a 'symbolic unity that it lacked at the level of secular authority.'[32] It has been argued that, because of its ecclesiastical structure, the people of England had a sense of national identity long before the invention of the modern nation state.[33]

The parish also provided a sense of local belonging and identity. In addition to worship, it became the centre of community celebrations and festivals, the collection of taxes, the resolution of civil and legal disputes, and welfare.[34] This continued to be the case even amid the Reformation and the English Civil War, and in fact it was during this period that the parish was given an official administrative role. In the

16th and 17th Centuries, Poor Laws were introduced which created a commonwealth system centred around it. These were accompanied by new settlement laws, under which a person's legal home was their parish.[35] By consequence, the parish priest was not only a curer of souls, but served a much wider social function. As Jeremy Morris explains:

> 'The parish priest of early modern England and Wales did not minister to a specialised, distinct group of Christians self-defining as "Anglican", nor did he conceive of his tasks as exclusively concerned with religious needs; he served and led a whole community, assuming that all members of that community were his pastoral and moral responsibility by virtue of living within his parish.'[36]

The parish was perhaps at its peak during this period, being at the heart of communal life and providing numerous local services from the licensing of public houses to the running of schools. Towards the end of the 17th and 18th Centuries, however, this began to change. Already since the Reformation, nonconformist sects had posed a challenge to Anglican hegemony, but had been barred from establishing their own places of worship. With the Toleration Act of 1689, this ceased to be the case. Subsequently, other religious meeting places began to emerge, and with them parallel social organisations. Although these groups were numerically small (only five per cent of the population were recorded as nonconformist in 1676),[37] they began to offset the institutional dominance of the Anglican parish.

This trend continued with the rise of nonconformity in the Victorian era and the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which finally gave religious freedom to all Christian denominations. Since this new pluralism meant that people were no longer attached to their parish church by default,

a secular civic system for registering births, marriages and deaths was introduced in 1836. For the same reason, Church Rates – taxes which had been collected for the maintenance of parish churches and clerical stipends – were abolished in 1868. These were part of a series of reforms implemented in the 19th Century which led, in effect, to the 'local disestablishment' of the parish.[38]

Another was the introduction of the Local Government Act in 1894. As urbanisation took hold, the medieval pattern of parishes had become inadequate for administrative purposes, mainly because they were unequal in size: while some were only a few hundred acres large, others spanned thousands of acres.[39] It was in response to this that a new system of wards and municipal boroughs was created. Although 'civil parishes' were still incorporated within this structure, Bishop Andrew Rumsey suggests that by this point they had become a 'relic of their former self',[40] losing the spiritual stronghold which they had sustained throughout the Medieval and Early Modern periods.

Just as geography became rationalised, the institution of the Church too became rationalised and increasingly centralised around this time. In 1836, the Established Church Act was passed, which equalised the stipends of bishops and reconfigured diocesan boundaries as well as introducing additional dioceses to accommodate new urban settlements. This was implemented by a new national body called the Ecclesiastical Commission, the forerunner of the modern Church Commissioners. Arguably, the founding of the Ecclesiastical Commission was the moment at which the modern Church of England came into being. Whereas previously parishes had managed their own affairs and finances, from the mid-19th Century the oversight of a central commission became a standard part of church life.[41]

One of the advantages of centralisation was the ability to commission the building of new churches *en masse*. In the mid 19th Century, around 300 new Anglican churches were being built each year, reaching a total of 3,500 by 1875.[42] Another wave of church construction began in the 20th Century to accommodate new suburban populations, especially in Greater London: between 1923 and 1944, 49 new parishes were created. Though rural attendance declined, many of these new urban parishes proved highly popular. Throughout the 19th Century, 60 per cent of people attended church; a percentage which was actually *increasing* up until the 1930s.[43]

At the same time, parishes began to lose the autonomy which they once had. The current body of Church Commissioners was established in 1948, followed by the Synodical Government Measure which led to the creation of the General Synod in 1970: the central gathering of church leaders to approve legislation, forms of worship, and budgets for the whole of the Church of England.[44] In 1998, the Archbishops' Council was created as an executive body to lead and coordinate the work of the Church, thus adding an additional level of oversight where previously organisational decisions had been made between the Church Commissioners, bishops, and parishes themselves. Through these reforms, senior Church leaders came to assume more control over parishes – and their finances – than ever before.

Previously, parishes had sourced their own income through donations and the Church Rate tax. Much of their wealth, however, was generated by the land they owned, known as glebe. As of the Queen Anne's Bounty Act of 1704, it was decided that the wealth of parishes should be centralised and used to buy glebe in deprived areas, the income from which would help to support the parish church. As of the

Endowments and Glebe Measure of 1976, this land was transferred from parishes to the Diocesan Boards of Finance in exchange for the payment of a standard stipend to every member of clergy. What this effectively meant was that these assets – which had originally been from and exclusively *for* the parish – would now be owned and controlled by the diocese. As a result, parishes no longer directly benefit from the use of their surrounding land, being instead dependent upon donations – much of which are also expected to be transferred to the diocese as part of a regular contribution called the parish share.[45]

It was also in the last quarter of the 20th Century, coinciding with these organisational changes, that parish attendance suddenly began to decline. Estimated congregant numbers fell by 26 per cent between the 1960s and 80s in the onset of the cultural revolution.[46] Since then, concerns about the sustainability of the parish have only grown. Some believe that the Church's historic endowments ought to be invested in other means of spreading the Christian faith; ones which are not bound to such small and functionally outdated geographical units. Such views, and their influence on the priorities of senior Church leaders, will be covered in Chapter Six. For now, it is worth considering two aspects of parishes which are still of indisputable value today: their heritage, and their social contributions.

2.

The historic parish

A recent public consultation led by the National Churches Trust found that 71 per cent of people value church buildings as places of national and local heritage.[47] This majority, which includes not only Christians but also those of other faiths and none,[48] is significant but not surprising: churches are some of the oldest and historically rich pieces of architecture in the UK, with places of worship making up 41 per cent of all Grade I listed buildings. They are, as the Revd. Marcus Walker has put it, 'treasure houses' of national history.[49]

In some cases, the heritage of parishes predates even the Middle Ages. Many of the early minster churches and their surrounding parochiae[50] were built on ancient pagan sites, in accordance with the Pope's instruction that temples:

> '…ought not to be broken… for if said temples be well built, it is needful that they be altered from the worshipping of devils into the service of the true God'.[51]

So it came to be that many parishes were established on already sacred ground, sometimes in the presence of magnificent yew trees which predate the church buildings by hundreds of years.[52]

Certainly up until the Reformation, parishes continued to be sites of para-Christian activity, including the celebration of local festivals and folk traditions (Morris Dancing, for example, has long been associated with the parish church). Often, they contain remnants of this history, abounding

with evidence of folk memories such as local woodland deities.[53] They provide an insight into the English spiritual imagination as it has evolved over the centuries, as well as many other aspects of local life and human experience. N.G.J. Pounds went so far as to describe the parish church as:

> 'A tabloid newspaper, complete with its page three: the villager expected to see, reflected in wood or stone, paint or glass, the thoughts which filled his own mind, from the sublime representation of his faith to nightmarish grotesques [...] illustration in the medieval parish church spanned the whole gamut of human thought and emotion. This is what makes it so valuable as a social document.'[54]

In the more literal sense too, parishes are archives of human history. They are 'community mausoleums' which protect the memories of generations past,[55] their names engraved on headstones in the cemetery if not the church walls themselves. It is partly thanks to parish churches that we possess extensive ancestral records, including those of notable local figures and heroes who died for their country in the First and Second World Wars. The encounter with their stories is as humbling as it is inspiring, and reminds us of society's crucial contract between the dead, the living and the unborn.

Finally, there is the material treasure they contain. Church buildings are home to the rich musical heritage of Anglicanism, including pipe organs, bellringing, and the choral tradition. In their architecture, they boast remarkable features in the form of wood, stone and stained glass, from vaulted ceilings and capitals to monuments and misericords.[56] Perhaps their most valuable asset is their uniqueness: each parish church has its own local style or *genius loci* characterised by the use of materials and

vernacular styles typical of its surroundings.[57] Different shades of stone, for example, tend to be found in different regions, and the stylistic techniques used inside and out reflect the particular skills of the craftsmen who worked there. This aesthetic localism is something to be cherished in an age where generic, homogenous styles of architecture predominate. The parish church, by contrast, is something deeply rooted in its environment.

These are just some of the reasons why 71 per cent of people believe heritage to be one of the major purposes of church buildings.[58] But this should not give the impression that parishes are mere relics of the past; for they continue to play an active and vital role in local communities, not least through charity and welfare.

3.

The living parish

As mentioned, churches have been centres of local welfare since at least the 16th Century, when Poor Laws were implemented through the parish system. Though they lost this official status as a result of the 19th Century reforms, they have continued to provide numerous forms of charity and social service, often doing so more effectively than local councils. This has especially been the case in moments of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Grenfell Tower fire, when the Church was able to provide the material and emotional support for victims that local authorities could not.

Journalist and Save the Parish member Revd. Giles Fraser describes how, in the days after the fire, St. Clement's in Notting Dale 'became a hub for grieving families, generous donations of clothes and food'. The simple fact that the church could 'open the doors and turn the lights on' in the first place was, he comments:

> '…precisely the difference between the church and a local authority that had become arms' length from its residents, continually dealing with local people only through intermediary organisations.'[59]

Parish churches, unlike councils, are personally embedded within their communities, making them ideally placed to respond to emergencies (in this case, one of the priests had himself been a Grenfell resident). On an everyday basis too, churches are a refuge for some of the poorest in society, as well as those who are bereaved, facing addiction, or simply in need of community. Churches are, the National Churches

Trust says, the 'safety net that stops our most vulnerable people falling through the cracks'.[60]

These claims are supported by a wealth of evidence, provided by ResPublica's 2013 report *Holistic Mission* and, more recently, the National Churches Trust's 2020 report *A House of Good*.[61] While the former demonstrated the sheer range of social services provided by churches – from Mothers' Unions and toddler groups to credit unions and homeless shelters – the latter endeavoured to quantify their overall economic contribution to society. The NCT's figure was initially estimated at around £22 billion per year, but has since been revised in line with HM Treasury Green Book guidance to reveal the actual social and economic value of church buildings to be £55 billion.[62]

In terms of direct market value – activities and resources that can be given a cost, such as the time taken to perform a service – the study found that each individual church building generates around £34,750 of value each year. This includes counselling and mental health services, food banks, youth groups, and drug and alcohol support. The value of these four activities alone amounts to around £200 million, based on the amount that it would cost the government or another organisation to provide an equivalent service. Also included in their calculation of direct market value were the various forms of voluntary work which are organised around church buildings. In 2020, each church reported an average of 214 volunteer hours per month; hours which, if paid at national living wage, would cost around £850 million per year.

Meanwhile, non-market value – activities and outcomes which are less easily quantifiable – was conservatively estimated at around £10 billion each year. £1.4 billion of this is generated from the health and wellbeing benefits of

simply going to church, based on evidence that attending religious services makes people feel happier and healthier.[63] Most of the total figure, however, pertains to the wellbeing impact of charitable services and especially food banks. Faced with the cost-of-living crisis, record numbers of people are struggling to feed themselves and their children. According to the UK's major food bank charity The Trussell Trust, 655,000 people used a food bank for the first time between April 2023 and March 2024.[64] The majority of food banks in the UK – of which there are now more than the number of McDonald's branches – are attached to a church building, making them perhaps the most significant charitable contribution of parishes today.[65]

In addition, many churches now provide 'warm spaces' for those struggling to heat their homes, where they can work, socialise, or simply sit and have a hot drink. This initiative, launched in 2022 by the interdenominational Church Works Commission and the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, has seen the opening of thousands of heated spaces across the UK, 10 per cent of which are attached to a church building. Thanks to the donations of six trusts and foundations, the Warm Welcome Campaign has recently been able to give £1,000 grants to 164 faith-based warm spaces in some of the most deprived areas in the UK.[66] This funding, they report, has gone 'far beyond the monetary value, enabling spaces to keep their doors open, and giving them a greater sense of being part of a national campaign.'[67]

David Barclay, the director of the campaign, also reports that many warm spaces have evolved into other community activities, such as dinner times for families and social gatherings for students.[68] This has created a range of new volunteering opportunities as well as access to advice and guidance; reduction in financial pressures for individuals;

and reduced isolation and loneliness.[69] As Save the Parish campaigner Alison Milbank says from her experiences of church-based warm spaces in Nottinghamshire, they have become a refuge 'for lonely people as well as cold people'.[70] In a time where it has been said that we are facing a loneliness epidemic,[71] they provide a much-needed opportunity for conversation and friendship with other members of the community, and also make accessible the many other forms of support offered by churches.

These are just some of the charitable and social services which church buildings provide, in addition, of course, to their spiritual ones. For many of us, going to church provides a vital space for reflection and contemplation of that which is higher than ourselves. Even outside of services, they are places which speak to us about the divine, be it through art – as light illuminates the stories told through stained glass – or liturgy in the bibles left in the pews. In the modern world, they are some of the few remaining places which exist to lift our minds to the transcendent.

Parish churches are, as the National Churches Trust puts it, both a 'House of God' and a 'House of Good'. Since both aspects have developed alongside each other over the course of centuries, the parish is an institution that would be incredibly difficult to replace; some would say it is irreplaceable. As the NCT's report highlights, if all of its charitable services were not provided voluntarily, local and national governments would have to spend millions of pounds if they were to provide equivalent services. With every parish that closes, numerous facilities and services go with it, putting a potentially immense pressure on other already struggling sectors.[72]

This is now a major risk. Not only are church buildings closing at a record rate, but numbers of clergy in those that

remain are fast depleting. While many of the charitable initiatives attached to churches are run by volunteers, the support of a dedicated ministry is vital to their organisation and outreach. It is also parish priests who are uniquely positioned to provide direct support for those in their communities, being the first point of call in times of crisis. Their capacity to do so, some argue, is being seriously hindered by changing priorities within the Church of England, and what appears to be a collapse in institutional support for parish ministry.

4.

Collapsing support for parish ministry

The historic ideal of the parish priest is someone who, as well as providing a 'cure of souls' in the religious sense, offers pastoral support and guidance to those in their community. It is their presence which allows a parish to become the 'germ of civilisation' that Coleridge described: traditionally, clergy would cultivate close relationships with local business owners, farmers, and schoolteachers, supporting them in their work so that the whole town or village could flourish.

Increasingly, priests are unable to fulfil these roles – if they are present in the parish at all. In just 70 years, the number of paid clergy within the Church of England has almost halved, from 13,075 in 1959 to just over 7,000 in 2020.[73] Even more posts are now being cut in response to low church attendance during and after the pandemic, with parish donations having fallen by 14 per cent in five years.[74] A leaked internal document from 2021 revealed that the Church was planning to 'prune' the number of paid priests by 10-20 per cent.[75] Though the Archbishops' Council has since asserted that there is 'no national plan to roll out cuts to clergy or buildings',[76] reductions in stipendiary clergy are a stated part of many dioceses' strategy documents, which claim that these reductions are being made out of financial necessity.

Typically, clergy cuts are part of 'pastoral reorganisation' schemes where churches are merged into large groups, sometimes known as 'mega-parishes'. In this model, clergy

are reduced into small groups of 'oversight' or 'focal' ministers who manage several churches – as many as 23 – rather than one.[77] This shift towards 'teams' of clergy who serve larger areas can be traced to the 1960s, when the sociologist Leslie Paul proposed to rationalise the deployment and payment of clergy in numerical terms.[78] While this may appear as a solution to declining parish attendance from a utilitarian perspective, the reality is that clerics become too thinly spread to carry out their ministry effectively. Despite considerable evidence from the Church's own growth studies that this causes further decline, cuts and oversight models are being implemented across the country, including in the following dioceses.

Bath and Wells

The Diocese of Bath and Wells plans, by 2027, to reduce the number of stipendiary clergy from 178 to 150 and stipendiary curates from nine to seven.[79] This was decided by projecting a lower level of parish income in the future based on post-Covid contribution figures and the Diocesan Board of Finance's statement that 'we have to recognise that parishes are unlikely to recover their historic ability to give'.[80] However, some congregations in Bath and Wells feel that this projection is misguided because their parishes are in fact 'thriving' and in good financial health. The author of one letter to Save the Parish claimed that the Diocese's new policy meant his local parish would have clergy cut for no good reason, fearing that the decision would be a self-fulfilling prophecy of decline.[81]

Birmingham

In addition to clergy reductions, the Diocese of Birmingham has gone so far as to 'undo' the entire parish system by

restructuring the area into an oversight ministry model.[82] Having classified 100 of its 184 churches as 'struggling', they have now been merged into large groups arranged not by parish boundary but by population size. This has also involved merging 13 area deaneries into just six. In place of conventional parish ministry, they have introduced 72 paid 'oversight ministers', 28 'context ministers' and just 36 'local ministers'. These 'local ministers' (who essentially fulfil the traditional role of a parish priest) are assigned only to popular congregations who can source their own funding. The Diocese says it has made this decision because:

> '…to make the best use of our limited resources, we will have to use our paid people primarily to oversee: to inspire vision, develop strategy, formulate action plans, teach, equip and organise other disciples to be accountable for leading worship, prayer, mission, witness, evangelism and pastoral care to sustain and grow their local communities.'[83]

In practice, this has meant that very few of the remaining stipendiary clergy are attached to one or even two specific churches, instead operating between many at a time.

Chelmsford

In 2019, the Diocese of Chelmsford in Essex already had plans in place to reduce clergy to the 'minimum sustainable number' of 215 by 2025.[84] However, faced with the pandemic, the Finance Committee decided to accelerate the reductions, bringing them forward to the end of 2021. This entailed cutting 60 stipendiary posts in the space of just 18 months. They introduced a traffic-light 'RAG-rating' system classifying the remaining posts either as green ('to be retained or filled if vacant'), amber ('desirable and should be retained if finances permit'), or red ('this post is unlikely

to be filled with a full-time stipendiary incumbent'). The number of 'green' posts was restricted to 150, a conservative figure 25 per cent less than the projected total number, which the Diocese claimed was 'a reasonable worse-case scenario for long-term affordability'.[85] It is unclear whether these plans are still in order since the appointment of a new bishop in 2021, however, it remains the case that significant cuts were implemented that year.

Leicester

Leicester Diocese is undergoing a major reorganisation in which parishes are being merged into large 'minster groups'. In one case, 35 churches are being brought into a single group with one oversight minister.[86] They intend to cut 18 posts, from 98 in 2020 to 80 in 2026.[87] If the number of stipendiary curates is also included in the 2020 figure, this amounts to a total clergy cut of 38 per cent.[88] They say that they do not seek to:

> '…abolish parishes, but rather seek to put them on a footing that is sustainable for mission and ministry in the 21st Century, and are financially self-sustaining'.[89]

But many parishioners on the ground feel the plans to be the opposite of sustainable. One told a local newspaper:

> '…we are in a very small village and the whole thing is the church. We do not see how it's going to survive. It's going to happen so we have just got to make the best of it. But we are not going down without a fight.'[90]

Truro

Similar plans proposed by the Truro Diocese in Cornwall have been the source of major controversy. In 2021, they

launched a proposal called 'On the Way' which would turn the current parish system into an oversight ministry model. In one area, this involves merging six benefices and 23 churches into one 'mega-parish'.[91] Save the Parish Cornwall believes that the plans are undemocratic and will create a 'top-heavy bureaucracy' which 'removes ordained clergy from day-to-day contact with their parishioners'.[92] Ordinary people, they fear, will have even less influence on parish life, having a potentially devastating impact on the community:

> 'An easily accessible ordained minister in a parish can often be an invaluable source of comfort and support for people in need who can support people in ways that other agencies cannot. Detach the clergy from the community (an inevitable consequence of the "oversight" ministry model) and this vital part of our Christian life will be lost.'[93]

Save the Parish Cornwall say there is 'deep underlying dissent' to the Diocese's plans but that 'people do not speak up out of fear'. The Bishop of Truro has responded to the campaign, suggesting that their claims are unfounded and that increasing clerical posts is a top priority for the Diocese.[94] Yet those in Truro still feel that the merging of so many parishes will mean sacrificing a form of Christian life which has evolved over centuries for one which they believe to be unsuitable and unsustainable.

Against the evidence

Similar cuts have been implemented in Hereford, Lincoln, Liverpool, and Sheffield. In every case, dioceses speak as if mergers and team ministries are the only way forward: 'We need to *stop* working on our own', the Diocese of Liverpool say, 'and start working in teams covering bigger areas and focussing on mission and growth'.[95] Yet such claims defy the

overwhelming evidence that reducing numbers of clergy per parish does not lead to growth, but decline – including evidence compiled by the Church of England itself.

In their 2014 report, *From Anecdote to Evidence*, the Church's Church Growth Research Programme investigated the key factors which lead to church growth and decline. Their findings clearly demonstrate that the more clergy there are dedicated to one particular parish, the more successful it is. They even provide a positive case study of growth in Suffolk, where the vicar decided not to spread his ministry thinly across the whole area but rather focus on just one church. In doing so, he was able to quadruple its popularity, going from an average weekly service attendance of nine people to 35 people in just one year. The report acknowledges that amalgamations have the opposite effect, stating:

> '…there is evidence to show that in many cases [the priest's] job becomes increasingly focussed on the burden of administration and buildings, and the task of sustaining Sunday worship; all of which can detract from other activities which have an association with growth'.[96]

A further Church of England report by Revd. Dr. Fiona Tweedie, *Going Deeper*, analysed the data used in *From Anecdote to Evidence* to find an even stronger correlation between amalgamation and decline. She did so by isolating other variable factors, such as geography and demographics, to control for the clergy factor. Her results consistently show that:

> '…an increase in clergy is associated with the likelihood of growth in attendance, while a decrease in clergy is associated, on average, with a decline in attendance'.[97]

Church amalgamations, then, are hardly an investment in the future of the parish – and they are a costly investment.

Alison Milbank calculated in 2023 that the Church Commissioners overall were spending £45 million in total just to put them in motion, since the process requires professional 'implementation teams' and other hefty administrative costs. Thus, she concludes:

> '...the Church Commissioners are spending £45 million overall in the dioceses to fund amalgamations which will cause further decline, according to any metric and all available precedents.'[98]

Some senior leaders are of the view that the missing roles can be taken over by volunteers, encouraging what it calls 'lay-led ministry': church leadership by people who have not been ordained as priests.[99] The Archbishop of York has personally expressed the belief that anyone who has been baptised is qualified to lead Christian ministry and mission.[100] However, while there is precedent for lay roles in churches, such as readers, and while volunteers are and have always been a vital part of parish life, the idea that they can replace ordained clergy is theologically contested. Anglican worshippers require priests because only they can administer the sacraments which are integral to their faith. As Revd. Andrew Lightbown explains:

> 'Within the reformed Catholic tradition of the Church of England we are a sacramental church. And it is also incredibly important that at the end of every service people are blessed and sent out to do God's work. You don't do that with a lay-led church. This plan could be rolling back hundreds of years of theology and changing the Church of England.'[101]

It is not just sacraments that are at stake in these new ministry models, but personal relationships. Emma Thompson points out that oversight ministry 'allows clergy little time to comfort the broken-hearted or visit CofE

schools', among the other pastoral roles which they have historically fulfilled. Instead, it presumes that 'local people will step into parish priests' shoes, under the deceptive job description of "focal ministers"'.[102] She and many others believe that such an expectation is simply unrealistic. Far more likely is that the roles will be left unfilled, and parishes left without anyone to shepherd their congregations. Alison Milbank writes that:

> '…we are reaching a point where whole swathes of country parishes are left in interregnum for as long as seven years or organised into ever larger groups'.[103]

Some churches report having no priest at all.[104]

A vocation in decline

Adding to the problem is the growing shortage of ordinands in recent years. Since 2020, the number of people training for ordained ministry has fallen by 38 per cent.[105] This may, to some extent, be attributed to wider cultural factors such as secularisation and the fact that the spiritual vocation no longer comes with the social recognition it once did. As Revd. Justin Lewis-Anthony writes, 'the skill-set possessed by clergy is not valued by society. Precedence and tradition and transcendence are worthless currencies in our measured, democratic age'.[106] However, those who do feel called to the priesthood may be dissuaded by the unprecedented demands on clergy that have come with parish mergers, in addition to worsening work conditions and financial insecurity – all of which are consequences of the Church's increasingly managerial structure.

While it has long been the case that clergy receive a modest stipend rather than a salary, and are 'post-holders' rather than employees, parish ministry used to come with certain

benefits which have since been revoked. Historically, every parish priest would have had freehold of the church, giving them a certain degree of autonomy over its governance. The parson's freehold also meant that they could directly benefit from any additional income the church received, including from glebe land and stole fees (charges for weddings and funerals). This could go towards initiatives of the vicar's choosing or the maintenance of the building. In 2005, however, the freehold system was abolished, and much of the income that priests receive – including stole fees and donations for regular services – now goes to the diocese as part of the parish share. Moreover, many advertised vacancies today are not for an incumbent but a 'priest in charge'; a role which is typically short-term and comes with even less independence. Though the current model has the benefit of providing all clergy with equal and regular pay, it means that they are now subject to unprecedented institutional regulation and control.

The result is a hierarchical dynamic which bears little resemblance to the historic ideal. 'The Church is becoming a corporate structure in which archdeacons have become line managers', says one vicar who wishes to remain anonymous. Another laments that:

> '…we have moved from the vision of bishops being pastors to the pastors, to them being master chess players. Clergy feel like pawns, being picked up and put down as part of a greater game, with no consideration of the impact on them or [their] families'.[107]

Despite becoming more like a corporate structure, clergy are in a financially worse position than ever. The trade union Unite recently found that, of 923 surveyed faith workers (673 belonging to the Church of England), 23 per cent struggled

to pay bills, seven per cent missed meals, and 21 per cent relied on friends and family for support. 'By the time you calculate hours worked', says the Union officer Sarah Cook, 'most of these faith workers are in reality receiving less than minimum wage.'[108]

The Church has responded to Union's findings by increasing clergy pay by seven per cent.[109] Evidently, however, there are deeper institutional problems which the Church must address if it wishes to attract new ordinands. When dioceses cut clergy and merge parishes, further strain is put on new ministers who are expected to fulfil their duties of pastoral care to congregations spread across large areas. For a new ordinand with no prior experience of rural ministry, being expected to serve up to seven or eight parishes at once is overwhelming if not impossible, and makes the role far less rewarding than they might have hoped. The issue is not that fewer people feel called to become priests, Emma Thompson suggests, but rather that 'people do not feel called to become managers.'[110]

All the while the Church continues to reduce its existing clergy, it sends the message that it does not value parochial ministry; something which only further dissuades prospective ordinands from pursuing the vocation. We might conclude that this can only be explained by financial necessity; indeed, parishes facing clergy cuts are often told that 'there is no alternative'.[111] Yet, there would not appear to be a shortage of funding for personnel within the Church. While numbers of paid priests have halved,[112] the number of diocesan and suffragan bishops has remained the same and even increased slightly since 1959.[113] In addition, hundreds of new, non-clerical roles have been created in each of the 42 dioceses, including some with salaries of up to £90,000.[114] At the same time that it was reducing clergy posts, the

Diocese of Chelmsford had 48 job vacancies in head office.[115] Evidently, there are financial resources within the Church, which could presumably be used to support parish ministry where evidence shows it would lead to growth. Where, then, is all the money going?

5.

Where is all the money going?

The Church Commissioners are the custodians of endowments worth around £10 billion. When they were formed out of the earlier Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1948, they inherited the combined assets of the Queen Anne's Bounty. This was money that had been centralised by parishes in 1704 with the sole purpose of providing clergy for poorer churches. It did so by purchasing glebe, the income from which would augment the living in deprived areas. As of the Endowments and Glebe Measure of 1976, most of the glebe is now owned by the dioceses, while the bounty belongs to the Church Commissioners, who have increased its value through investments.

Until recently, the distribution of the proceeds was determined by the Church Commissioners, bishops and parishes themselves. But in 1999, a new executive body was introduced called the Archbishops' Council. The Council prioritises long-term mission projects, 'vision and strategy', and improving the state (and reputation) of the national Church. After discovering that money from Queen Anne's Bounty had at one point been invested in the South Sea Company, it allocated £100 million to be spent on addressing historic links with slavery; a figure which they have now pledged to increase to £1 billion by attracting 'co-investors' as of March 2024.[116]

The changing priorities of the Archbishops' Council have come at the expense of parish churches. Overall, an increasingly small proportion of the endowments is going

towards parishes and the payment of clerical stipends, despite this being their primary charitable object. As of July 2024, the Church is now proposing to shift its focus even further away from the parish by bringing forward a new draft National Church Governance Measure which drastically expands the application of funds to other national institutions and 'charities with a Church ethos'. If the Measure goes ahead, it is likely that these provisions will be interpreted as excluding parish churches from receiving funds distributed by the Church Commissioners altogether.[117]

The withdrawal of central funding from the parish, however, is a trend that has been ongoing for the past 20 years. In 1990, 85 per cent of the Church Commissioners' income stream was channelled directly into funding parish ministry; in 2022, it was just 25 per cent.[118] There are two principal reasons for this. The first is organisational, pertaining to expanding bureaucracies within each of the 42 dioceses. The second is ideological and theological, pertaining to the use of the money on new models of Christian mission which, some believe, undermine the parish system.

Bloated bureaucracies

A significant proportion of the Church's endowments go to England's 42 dioceses. In 2022, the dioceses were estimated to have £6 billion worth of funds in aggregate, accumulated through their own investments and glebe income.[119] These should in turn go to support parishes, but increasingly remain stuck at the administrative level. This is because dioceses now employ large numbers of staff, having remodelled themselves from small offices existing to support bishops into large professional organisations or, as Emma Thompson describes them 'bloated, costly and duplicative bureaucracies'.[120]

Safeguarding, human resources, media and communications officers are just some of the roles which have proliferated in recent years. The Diocese of Oxford has six communications and seven safeguarding officers. Bristol has nine members of staff in external relations and six in human resources. Dioceses across the country now employ so many people that, on average, there is one administrator to every three and a half priests.[121] In extreme cases such as Truro, there are as many as 39 diocesan officers to 41 clerics.[122] Responding to criticism from campaigners, the Archbishop of York has defended expanding administration as necessary for running a church in the 21st Century.[123] He argues that bishops today have more legal and administrative responsibilities than they historically would have done, thus requiring a much larger team. Safeguarding, for example, is now a statutory requirement, and external relations officers play a critical role in an age of social media.

That may be so (though whether it justifies a diocese employing half a dozen of those officers is debatable). Yet it does not account for another trend, namely the rise of politicised roles in the dioceses, as investigated in Civitas' previous report, *Radical Progressive Activism and the Church of England*.[124] On top of its many administrators, the Diocese of Oxford has two racial and social justice advisors.[125] Chichester has one LGBTQI+ officer and two NetZero officers.[126] These have received pushback from parishioners, whose own donations go towards funding the diocese as part of the parish share. Some are even withholding from donating in protest of what they believe to be an ideological capture of the Church.[127] In seeming to prioritise bureaucrats over shepherds, and politics over spirituality, a feeling of distrust towards dioceses has become widespread.

A stale parish?

Just as troubling are concerns that senior Church leaders no longer regard the parish as central to its identity. The Church of England is, famously, a 'broad church', accommodating a variety of different ideas about what it means to be Anglican. For some, the rootedness in a particular place and sacramental worship provided by the parish is theologically essential. For others, these are conventions that could – and should – be replaced by more contemporary forms of faith. Those of this view often blame the Church's failure to modernise for the decline in parish attendance. Among them is the theologian Ian Paul, who implores that:

> '…the church in its present form will have to die. It is dying. It's slow and drawn out because we don't have the nerve, or the structures, to make clear and painful decisions'.[128]

While this is not exactly the Church's official line, the sentiment that Anglicanism needs an update for the 21st Century has been expressed by several senior leaders. In 2004, the Church published a report calling for a 'mission-shaped church' focused on outreach to younger and more diverse communities; communities less likely to encounter Christianity in the traditional parish setting.[129] Out of this report came a new initiative called 'fresh expressions', which aimed to spread the faith by bringing it to youth clubs, hobby groups, sporting events and other non-parochial contexts.

Some accused this move towards a more 'liquid' church of giving into the trends of secular modernity, and especially the dissolution of local and traditional ties in pursuit of quantitative growth. At the time, the *Mission-Shaped Church* report received criticism from traditional Anglo-Catholics, who argued that fresh expressions were theologically problematic – since they tended to sideline sacraments,

including baptism and holy communion[130] – and unfaithful to the history of the English Church, which has always been rooted in the parish system. The phrase 'fresh expressions', Alison Milbank and Andrew Davidson wrote, implies that the parish is 'stale'; a view which they believed to be shaping the financial decisions of the Church.[131]

The vast amount of Church Commissioners' money that has since been spent on non-parochial mission would seem to confirm their suspicions. In 2014, the Archbishops' Council launched a £198 million Strategic Development Fund (SDF) for 'fresh expressions', many of these occurring outside of the parish or involving a radical transformation of the parish system. The first SDF project was implemented by the Diocese of Liverpool, who were given £1.2 million to 'transform' the area of Wigan. This involved reducing clergy by 25 per cent and reorganising the churches into seven 'hubs' accompanied by mission-focused 'worship communities' in unconventional settings.

Not only was this a huge investment which went against the wishes of locals – there were over 100 objections[132] – but it failed catastrophically. The diocese commissioned an independent review into the project which found that, since its implementation, Wigan lost 30 per cent of its regular churchgoers and a third of its parish revenue.[133] Several other strategic development projects also failed to live up to expectations. A 2022 report by Sir Robert Chote revealed that, of the 89,375 new disciples that the Strategic Development Fund had promised to bring into the Church, only 12,705 had been 'witnessed'.[134] In sum, the Church Commissioners spent nearly £2 million on projects which, in some cases, caused irreversible damage to existing Anglican communities.

Another mission strategy generously funded by SDF is

'church planting'. This is where a group of missionaries set up a worship community in a new or an existing but underused church. In theory, plant churches can revitalise a parish by bringing in new blood and attracting younger and more diverse communities. However, they can also pose problems. One is that plant churches can disrupt existing church ecology by drawing people away from their original place of worship.[135] In Portsmouth, for example, the Harbour Church plant took over two existing parishes in 2016 and, according to the Diocese's own report, ended up losing the congregations that had worshipped there.[136] In such cases, church planting 'chokes what life remained' in the parish.[137]

Another concern is that plant churches tend to import a radically different style of worship to that of the original Anglican congregation. Many of them derive from the mission-endeavour of Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB),[138] a popular evangelical church in West London of which the outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby is a member.[139] In place of the traditional pattern of liturgy, prayer and sacrament that one would usually find in a parish church (including historical 'low church' Anglicanism), their services involve live music – usually in a rock or pop style – and a long sermon which may make little reference to scripture.[140] Because of this, some have accused HTB church plants of colonising parishes, using Anglican spaces but replacing their traditions with a hyper-modern form of evangelical Protestantism. The Church Commissioners money, Milbank claims, is 'thus being spent on a form of church that has no links with Anglican liturgy and practice or even, arguably, belief'.[141]

This is a complex theological issue, and the question of what counts as 'traditional' in the Anglican context is complicated by the fact that the religion has undergone so

many iterations both during and after the Reformation. Yet aside from this, there are other reasons to be sceptical of church plants. For one, they may give a new lease of life to a church, but this tends to be contingent upon the presence of one charismatic individual and funding which could easily dry up. There are also concerns about the longevity of converts gained from church planting: the HTB model may attract young and diverse communities, but it is not clear what their level of commitment is or for how long they remain. It is true that there have been positive cases where plant churches have successfully revitalised parishes. But there are also cases, like Portsmouth, where church planting works against them, being instead a cause of uprooting.

In 2016, the Strategic Development Fund was replaced by a new Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) Board. SMMI, like SDF, gives grants for mission projects such as fresh expressions or, as is now the more fashionable term, 'new things'.[142] In their latest Vision and Strategy statement, the Church says that it hopes to see the formation of 10,000 'new worshipping communities' in the next decade. While the parish is 'good for serving more settled geographic communities', they say, 'it is less effective in the networks of contemporary life.'[143] They describe their ideal for the 2020s as a 'mixed ecology' in which these non-parochial forms of worship can co-exist with the parish system. However, if the case studies of the 2010s are anything to go by, this may be too optimistic. Far more likely is that these two forms of church will become in competition with each other, with the 'new things' depriving clergy and resources from the parish.[144]

Concerns for poorest and those in need

With the introduction of SMMI in 2016 came another significant change in the Church's distribution of central

funding. From 2001 to 2015, a certain amount of the Church Commissioners' money was given directly to poor parishes using the Darlow Formula, a method of identifying low-income congregations. But in 2015, the then-finance director of the Archbishop's' Council John Spence claimed the Darlow Formula was subsidising decline by giving money to inactive churches rather than those making an effort to bring in new worshippers.[145] This was part of the motivation for introducing an entirely grant-based model in which dioceses, not parishes, can apply for funding for specific projects.[146]

The move from the Darlow formula to SMMI funding has meant, effectively, that parishes have to be engaged in mission activity to be deemed worthy of Church Commissioners' money. On the one hand, the new model can be effective when dioceses use it to fund focused initiatives with a high chance of success. If, for example, they identify a church in a wealthier area which is popular but has few children attending, an SMMI grant might be used to boost its outreach to schools so that it can realise its full potential. However, a major disadvantage of the model is that it creates what Save the Parish campaigner Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent calls an 'economy of grant writing'. Pitching ideas and applying for grants is a time-consuming process that requires an entrepreneurial personality. Not all priests will have the skills or time to think up big projects; they just want to support their congregations on the ground. As a result, funding is less likely to go to poorer parishes than ever.[147]

Indeed, one independent report found that the shift had been 'traumatic' for poor churches in the dioceses of Newcastle and Chelmsford.[148] The charity Church Action on Poverty also found that low-income communities have

become disproportionately affected by church closures,[149] since many had relied on Darlow funding which they now no longer receive. It should be noted that the SMMI model does include a provision of £50 million per year as part of a new scheme called the Lower Income Communities Fund (LICF). However, this uses a different and arguably inadequate method of identifying which parishes are in need of support, being distributed through dioceses and local councils rather than directly to parishes themselves. The latest annual report of the SMMI board admits that only 61 per cent of its LICF funding made it to parishes in the most deprived areas.[150]

The SMMI funding model seems to implicitly undermine the many other functions of the parish discussed in Chapter Four. By giving money primarily to mission-focused churches, support is withdrawn from those who need it just to keep their doors open. When parishes centralised their money into Queen Anne's Bounty in 1704, this is precisely what it was for: churches did not have to be busying themselves with 'mission and growth' to receive aid, but were given it out of charity and compassion. Today, this money should ideally go to deprived parishes in order to maintain clergy and buildings so that they may be a 'House of Good', providing food banks, warm spaces, and other vital services. But all the while Church leaders are fixated on high-level schemes, they overlook the poorest and those in need, in doing so betraying the very imperative on which their funding is premised.[151]

A need for change

Both the expanding diocesan bureaucracies and new funding models are part of a managerial turn within the Church of England which has led ambitious new projects

to be prioritised over support for existing congregations. This apparent disregard for the local and parochial, Bishop Andrew Rumsey observes, is typical of modern capitalistic thinking: just as commerce abhors geographical boundaries, those advocating for radical change within the Church see the burden of parish buildings and clergy as a 'key limiting factor' that must be overcome in pursuit of mission and growth.[152] Yet, 10 years after the launch of SDF, that growth has largely failed to materialise. Churches are closing at record rate, parishioners fear for their future, and some clergy feel betrayed by their bishops.[153] To make matters worse, many of the dioceses themselves now report being in serious financial deficit.[154] There is a pressing need to reform the system so that the Church becomes a viable economy in which parishes are able to flourish. So, what is to be done?

6.

Constructive reforms for restoring the value of parishes

At the heart of the problem is the fact that parishes have become disempowered within the Church of England. For centuries they were financially autonomous, generating income not only from their congregations but also from the land they owned. When the Endowments and Glebe Measure was passed in 1976, people rightly feared that transferring parish assets to the dioceses would increase their power over clergy and disincentivise locals from bequeathing money to them. In a parliamentary debate that year, the late Lord Cormack warned that the Measure would be 'the beginning of the end of the parson's freehold and the parochial system.'[155]

What we are seeing today is thus a consequence of organisational decisions made in the last century. Revd. Dr. Colin Herber-Percy, author of *Tales of a Country Parson*, describes the current situation as one in which the organisation of the Church has become 'centripetal'. Whereas historically it was more 'centrifugal' – with parishes having their own power and assets which were centralised only to support other parishes – parishes are now subject to the diocese and the executive power of the Archbishops' Council. Reforming the system, Herber-Percy believes, means restoring the original dynamic:

> 'The parish system in this country is a deeply embedded capillary network of neighbourliness and personal relationships. But Church House and the dioceses no longer

> seem to view it as vigorous and life-sustaining. Swept up on a tide of "strategy", managerialism and corporate leadership programmes, the Church of England has adopted a centripetal model, choosing to cut away encumbrances like clergy and church buildings, drawing resources from the parishes, rather than pouring resources into the parishes. This profoundly un-conciliar, centripetal direction of travel needs to be completely reversed. The Church of England must become centrifugal, recognising its roots in the parishes.'[156]

Getting back to a centrifugal model involves changing priorities at the national Church and diocesan level as well as innovation from parishes and local communities. The following reforms, taken together, could help to restore their value.

Church level

1.1: Invest in Parish-Based Mission

When the Queen Anne's Bounty was created in 1704, no one could have foreseen a future in which less than half of the population were Christian. Had they done so, they might well have willed the money to be invested in revitalising the faith through national mission. It is not, therefore, unreasonable for senior leaders to have made this a priority. However, the Church must remain faithful to the original intention of the endowments by ensuring that mission projects work in support of parishes rather than against them, as in Wigan and Portsmouth where SDF projects led directly to the destruction of parish congregations.

The Church justifies its current approach by claiming that the parish is 'less effective in the networks of contemporary life'.[157] Yet they also admit that attempts to adapt to those modern networks have not been successful, and that they are still not sure 'what works'.[158] The reality is that the

parish is a long-established and familiar unit of Christian worship that was able to survive centuries of religious and cultural transformation. Perhaps for this reason, some of the most successful 'fresh expressions' have been ones which occur within it. For example, Messy Church – a creative form of worship aimed at families – typically takes place in parish churches, and has proved highly popular. This should empower Church leaders to prioritise investing in the parish, not in spite of, but in aid of mission. In practical terms, this would entail rethinking the current aspiration to create '10,000 new worshipping communities' and instead use the majority of strategic funding on initiatives which work either within or in direct collaboration with the parish.

1.2: Fund parish ministry

To the same effect, the Church Commissioners should give more money directly to funding parish ministry based on the Church's own evidence that more clergy leads to increased attendance. When a priest is able to focus on one area, he or she can take the initiative to get to know new residents and personally invite them to be part of the parish community. As the former Bishop of Carlisle Right Revd James Newcome says from years of experience, 'it is relationships, not bright ideas, that will bring about growth'.[159] The Church has, laudably, committed to giving £94 million to fund additional stipendiary curate posts as of August 2023.[160] However, this should be given as a regular contribution, and a certain amount should be reserved for the poorest parishes to mitigate the negative impacts of the SMMI funding model.

1.3: Fund church buildings

The Church Commissioners should also contribute to the maintenance of parish buildings. If they are to be allowed to

spend money on external 'charities with a church ethos',[161] they should at the very least support the bare infrastructure of the Church itself. Major contributions have been made by charities including English Heritage and the National Churches Trust, who have so far given over £14 million in grants for conservation and repairs. However, the NCT are only able to help one in every four churches that apply,[162] and demand has increased after the National Lottery withdrew their designated funding stream for religious buildings. Supplementing the contributions of charities is therefore now a responsibility of the Church Commissioners. These buildings are what sustain the House of God, the 'House of Good', and the religious heritage of our nation, the protection of which should be paramount for the Church. As Emma Thompson says, 'if our church buildings close, they will be a symbol of Christianity's failure in this country'.

1.4: Build for the future

As well as protecting its existing infrastructure, the Church could also think creatively about building for the future. The political economist James Vitali proposes that the Church Commissioners could use the acres of land that they own to build almshouses;[163] charitable homes for local people of the kind that were built in large numbers during the Georgian and Victorian periods. Charitable housing has the advantage of being exempt from certain planning regulations and can be reserved exclusively for people with a connection to the area or the parish church, making it an effective solution to the housing crisis. This would be a far more focused and direct form of charitable contribution than giving money away to external organisations. What's more, the almshouses could also have a subtly evangelical dimension inasmuch as they would be run on behalf of the local church and could overlap with their community events

and services. This is a way for the Church to use its assets in a way that responds to current economic challenges whilst publicly promoting its values and mission. Vitali's proposal could also be implemented by dioceses which have glebe land at their disposal. Though they would not profit from the rents as such, any income could be hypothecated to the parish church, providing an additional revenue stream for clergy and maintenance.

Diocesan level

2.1: Cut admin down to size

The most effective way for dioceses to help parishes would be to reduce numbers of administrative staff. Charities of a comparable size and scope spend around 11 per cent of their annual budget on office costs.[164] The Church currently spends nearly twice this amount, at around 20 per cent.[165] It is estimated that reducing the current number of diocesan staff by even a quarter could pay for a thousand new stipendiary priests in parishes. Since many of the roles are duplicative, little would be lost by doing so. As Martyn Percy points out:

> '…the Church of England survived more than adequately for many centuries without the substantial national, regional and diocesan resources it presently enjoys. For many parishioners, their primary experience of the Church of England is a local one, occasionally tempered with a visit from the bishop... parishes need bishops, but a diocese seldom.'[166]

Radical though diocesan reform may sound, making use of modern technology could easily allow for reductions in staff without sacrificing the services they provide. Instead of having 42 sets of officers for each diocese, for example, certain functions could be carried out via a central, digital portal with a core team of staff who support the national

Church. Some roles could also be carried out regionally by grouping offices together by area rather than by individual diocese, similar to how the police operate between counties. The Church says that its vision for the 2020s is to be 'simpler, humbler, bolder'.[167] Reducing duplicative and unnecessary diocesan posts would be an ideal place to start.

2.2: Improve investment strategies

While some dioceses manage their investments well, others do not, and are missing out on additional revenue as a result. Save the Parish recommends that all dioceses employ total return accounting (TRA) to invest their Diocesan Stipends Funds (DSF), (the income from parish glebe which is used to fund clergy). They calculate that:

> '…if all dioceses adopted TRA and invested DSF effectively, a further £62 million could be generated to pay clergy stipends, which would pay for 1,000 more clergy'.[168]

The Church Commissioners have, for the most part, been highly effective in increasing the value of their endowments. If the same expertise were employed by all of the dioceses, they too could increase their funds and, in turn, their capacity for stipendiary clergy. For significantly improved effectiveness this could be achieved by handing over the fund management (but not the funds themselves) of all of the Diocesan Stipends Funds to the Church Commissioners' investment arm. The enhanced income would then be distributed back to dioceses in proportion to the value of their DSF.[169]

2.3: Rethink parish share

Each parish church is expected to give the diocese a proportion of its income in the form of the parish share. This money should be used to fund the provision of clergy, but is now being spent on things of little value to parishes –

including 'pastoral reorganisation' schemes which deprive them of clergy. During the pandemic, parishes all over the country were struggling to pay, but dioceses made few concessions. The Diocese of Oxford, for example, transferred £5.7 million into its 'Common Vision Fund' in 2020, but still expected the usual amount of parish share to be paid even though this meant depleting parish reserves.[170] For parishes to pay dioceses large amounts of money – up to £88,000 each year[171] – seems unjust in such contexts, and creates a case for reducing or rethinking parish share altogether. If incumbents did not have to pay this parish share, the money could instead go towards running costs and building maintenance. This reform could follow from point 2.1, since reducing diocesan office costs would also reduce the need for share.

Parish and local level

3.1: Quick fixes?

Parish churches across the country have shown great ingenuity and innovation when it comes to fundraising. Particularly unconventional examples include 'champing' (hiring out the church for campers) and heavy metal gigs.[172] There are, however, mixed feelings towards these. On the one hand, there *is* historical precedent for using church naves to hold activities other than religious services. However, some of the recent examples seem to betray outright the Church's history as a sacred space, including Canterbury Cathedral's so-called 'rave in the nave' silent discos.[173] While these attempts to appeal to popular culture might raise money in the short term, they only weaken the Church's public legitimacy by showing disregard for the wishes of their forebears and what they would have regarded as sacrilegious. There is thus a need to find means

of fundraising which are faithful to the history of the parish and embrace its original purpose, including the following.

3.2: Embrace the wedding market

While secular marriages are now more common than ever, many people still dream of a traditional church wedding in a country parish. Unfortunately, this can be inaccessible for couples who do not have a residential or familial attachment to a parish, as is increasingly common in a mobile age. There is thus an opportunity for churches to loosen current regulations so that couples can pay to get married and hold wedding receptions in their grounds. Considering current market rates for weddings, this could be lucrative. It could also be an opportunity for underused parishes to save themselves where they are at risk of closure. Instead of closing, they have the option to become registered as a 'festival church', which means they can stay open for weddings on the condition that they hold at least six services a year. Where there is no other option, becoming a festival church means that they can at least raise funds to protect their infrastructure and heritage. For active parish churches too, this is a way to increase income whilst staying faithful to their original purpose.

3.3: Give parishes a 'new lease of death'[174]

The same applies to burial. Around 80 per cent of people in this country are now cremated rather than buried when they die,[175] but not always out of choice. Land in cemeteries and burial grounds across the UK is scarce, meaning plots are either unavailable or unaffordable. Yet a 'green burial' is still the ideal for many people, and parish churches could easily fill this market – all it would require is the collaboration of local landowners or farmers. If they could be persuaded to donate or sell a parcel of land to the parish church, this

could be used as a burial plot to provide additional income. If burial plots were sold at £1,000 each, two acres could generate up to a million pounds of revenue. This scheme, Rupert Sheldrake proposes, could give a 'new lease of death for the parish church', providing a stream of income that would last for years. Since there are currently few planning permission regulations for burial grounds, it 'could be rolled out nationally and transform the fortunes of parishes, providing something that would be widely welcomed, namely a chance to be buried in a village church'.[176]

3.4: Celebrate heritage[177]

Parishes could also revitalise themselves by organising community events around their religious heritage. Most Anglican churches in this country are named after a saint, and every saint has a feast day in the liturgical calendar. Parishes could use this day as an opportunity to hold a patronal festival, with talks from local historians and authors, an evensong service with a cathedral choir, a drinks reception, or a traditional village fête. Recent examples where this has been successful include St. Peter's Church in Folkington, Sussex, which recently held a St. Peter's Day event involving a plant sale, locally brewed ale, and a special choral evensong service. St. Mary Magdalene's in Newark, Nottinghamshire, celebrated the festival of St. Mary Magdalene this summer with a festival eucharist service, a pilgrimage from a nearby village and tours of the church, including a rare opportunity to climb up to the parapets. They also had an evensong with a drinks reception which received around six times the usual number of attendees. They also combined the event with the Festival of Local Traditions, which saw a Morris dancing parade take place around the church. In addition to holding patronal festivals,

churches could also hold special services on All Souls' Day each November to commemorate those who are buried there. This would be an opportunity for families far and wide to visit the parish, and could also bring in new donations and benefactors. All of these, it should be emphasised, require a parish priest who is able to devote his or her time to the church: this kind of community-based regeneration cannot be effectively managed from a distant central office.

3.5: Unlock the doors!

Finally, there is a problem in this country – especially after the pandemic – of churches locking their doors throughout most of the week. This is a missed opportunity, considering that thousands of people each year choose to visit churches outside of services,[178] and also wanted churches to stay open during the pandemic.[179] Being open would send a welcoming message to local residents and tourists alike. There are, understandably, security concerns. However, using modern technology, churches could easily be kept open without putting them at risk. They could, for example, install a key safe with a digitally accessible password, or a buzzer which notifies nearby church volunteers who can open the building on request. Taking small steps such as these could help to improve the public presence of the Church, and inspire people's sense of belonging within the parish even when the building is empty.

The role of Parliament

Ultimately, the efforts of parishes will only be effective within the context of wider institutional reform. A few words should be said here about the role of Parliament. The Church of England is, after all, a state Church, and elected officials have the power to hold its leaders to account if they are

failing to fulfil their historic duties, including those towards parish congregations. This is the function of the Ecclesiastical Committee, which today consists of 15 members of the House of Commons and 15 from the House of Lords. They have been appointed to scrutinise all draft Measures issued by the Church of England's General Synod and determine whether or not they should be approved by Parliament. If the Church continues to disempower parishes – as it appears to do in the July 2024 draft of the New Governance Measure – the Ecclesiastical Committee can and should challenge them.[180] By taking advantage of this parliamentary mechanism, the Church's implementation of policies which negatively impact the parish system could be prevented.

Conclusion

This report has considered the state of parish churches and proposals for restoring their value. This restoration, above all, requires both the Church and the nation to renew their confidence in the parish as an irreplaceable cultural and spiritual institution. It may be that, precisely by virtue of being at odds with contemporary culture, the parish is uniquely placed to provide a refuge from the challenges of modern life. As the need for belonging is felt more than ever, the same cultural conditions which led to the decline of the parish could now pose opportunities for its revival.

It is true that there has been a decline in organised religion, and that belief in Christianity is at an all-time low. However, there is also evidence to suggest that younger generations are now becoming more open to the possibility of the supernatural, and are seeking 're-enchantment' in a secular age. Compared to Gen-Xers and millennials, Gen-Zs are more likely to be drawn to alternative spiritualities and to believe in religious doctrines such as life after death.[181] As the think tank Theos has found, many of those who identify as 'nones' ('no religion') in the census in fact have a loose spiritual affiliation of this kind, and may even be sympathetic towards aspects of traditional religion.[182] The commentator Justin Brierly has gone so far as to suggest that we are witnessing a 'surprising rebirth of God' in popular culture.[183] The parish could be in an ideal position to nurture and direct this renewed receptivity to the sacred, being a site not only of Christian faith but also the pre-Christian heritage of ancient yew trees and holy wells. If the Church

wants to be more 'relevant', it should stop trying to reinvent itself – most recently, as a 'new thing' rather than a church[184] – and rather embrace its role as a bastion of sacred tradition in a postmodern world.

It is also true that multiculturalism has weakened our confidence to assert Christianity in public life. References to the Bible, for example, are no longer ubiquitous in education and the media, out of a fear that they are not sufficiently inclusive. It is this that explains why young people no longer feel at home in the parish; not because the Church has failed to modernise, but because as a society we have lost touch with the cultural and liturgical rhythms of Christianity. But it need not be this way: pluralism does not have to mean renouncing our own traditions. In fact, there are many religious minorities who would welcome scripture being taught in schools, and a society that upholds Christian morals. It is perfectly possible to defend our faith in the presence of others, as evidenced by the coronation of King Charles III, which gave an active role to representatives of Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism whilst following a thoroughly traditional Anglican service. The example of the monarch should inspire us to reassert Christianity and the centrality of the parish church in each community, even where pluralism prevails.

Finally, there is huge potential to embrace the parish as something which is deeply rooted in its local environment. In the context of a global consumer culture where distinct local and regional identities are fast disappearing, the parish is one of the last institutions to embody the particularities of place. The parish can appeal especially to those belonging to an ecologically conscious generation, as well as those who seek to reconnect with their surroundings in an age dominated by technology. Also, by virtue of its localism,

the parish can be a centre of community solidarity in a time where both the young and the elderly report record levels of loneliness and alienation. Parishes, Bishop Andrew Rumsey says, have the potential to integrate 'soul, soil and society',[185] creating a bond between people and place as well as between the members of communities.

The fact that parishes are physically rooted in their surroundings also gives them considerable advantage when it comes to welfare. The new Labour government especially should take advantage of this service that is free to the taxpayer. More than just one amongst many 'third sector' organisations, the parish is an institution that is present in every part of the nation, including the most deprived. As such, it can be a highly effective source of social intelligence, care and organisation – so long as it has the clergy to support and sustain it. At a time when the public sector is diminished and invisible in many communities, the parish can be an ideal starting point for the renewal of civic life.

All of this should empower our confidence in the parish, and with it our confidence in Christianity and our national heritage. Like the seeds in Christ's parable of the sower in the Gospel of Matthew,[186] parishes have been scattered across the land in the hopes they will spread the word of God and become germs of civilisation. We may now be facing a time where they are dormant, and show little sign of life. But to kill them now would be fatally mistimed; for, if properly nurtured and resourced, they could soon flower again.

Notes

1 LBC (2024) *Famous atheist Richard Dawkins says he's a 'cultural' Christian | LBC*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RpxY7bA8ew (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

2 ONS (2022) *Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

3 ONS (2015) *How religion has changed in England and Wales*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/howreligionhaschangedinenglandandwales/2015-06-04 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

4 Church of England (2021) *Church of England Mission in Review: A review of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. GS 222*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/gs-2222-mission-in-revision-a-review-of-the-mission-and-pastoral-measure-2011.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

5 Ibid.

6 Dioceses are the organisational divisions of the Church attached to a cathedral – for example, the Diocese of London is attached to St Paul's Cathedral, and covers much of London and the surrounding area. The Church of England has 42 dioceses.

7 Based on the predictions of each individual diocese in Church of England (2021) *Church of England Mission in Review: A review of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. GS 222*, 27.2.

8 Butcher, B. and Swerling, G. (2023) 'Church of England parishes close at record rate', *The Telegraph*, 2 September. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/02/church-of-england-parishes-close-at-record-rate/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

9 Sherwood, H. (2024) 'Crumbling churches are 'UK's biggest heritage challenge'', *The Guardian*, 24 January. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/24/thousands-churches-risk-closure-uk-heritage (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

10 Ibid.

11 Particularly since the National Lottery removed its dedicated stream of funding for religious buildings in 2017.
12 Rumsey, A. (2017) *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place*. SCM Press, p.97.
13 National Churches Trust (2021) *Annual social value of the UK's church buildings is over £55 billion*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/annual-social-value-uks-church-buildings-over-%25C2%25A355-billion (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
14 Davie, G. (1994) *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*. John Wiley & Sons.
15 Heelas, P. (1994) 'Detraditionalization and its Rivals' in Heelas, P. et al (Eds) (1994) *Detraditionalization*. Blackwell, p.4.
16 Hill, A. (2008) 'How our villages are fighting to stay alive', *The Guardian*, 14 September. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/sep/14/ruralaffairs.britishidentity (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
17 Goodhart, D. (2017) *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*. Hurst.
18 Based on the Diocese of Sheffield, which had 155 stipendiary incumbents in 1999, 100 in 2021, and will make a further reduction down to 83 by 2025. See Davies, M. (2021) ''Focal'. 'Oversight'. The C of E of the future', *Church Times*, 10 September. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/10-september/features/features/focal-oversight-the-c-of-e-of-the-future (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
19 Thompson, E. (2024) 'Save our parish priests!', *The Spectator*, 31 March. Available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/save-our-parish-priests/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
20 Davies, M. (2023) 'Bishop of Truro outlines guiding principles for ministry changes in the diocese', *Church Times*, 2 June. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/2-june/news/uk/bishop-of-truro-outlines-guiding-principles-for-ministry-changes-in-the-diocese (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
21 Save the Parish (2024) *The Church of England Finances*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/church-of-england-finances/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
22 See Dr Piggot, A. (2022) *Parish Finance Statistics 2022*. Church of England Data Services. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/parish-finance-statistics-2022.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

23 General Synod (2024) *Diocesan Finances Review Update*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/gs-misc-1384-diocesan-finance-review-july-2024-updated-today.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024) p.2.
24 See Chapters 1 and 6.
25 Sheldrake, R. Interview with report author.
26 Larkin, P. (1954) *Church Going*. Available at: https://www.thepoetryhour.com/poems/church-going (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
27 Pounds, N.J.G. (2000) *A History of the English Parish*. Cambridge University Press, p.3.
28 Rumsey, A. (2017) *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place*. SCM Press, p.67.
29 Coleridge, S.T. (2008) *On the Constitution of Church and State According to the Idea of Each*. Brouwer Press, p.78.
30 Turner, S. (2006) *Making a Christian Landscape: How Christianity Shaped the Countryside in Early Medieval Cornwall, Devon and Wessex*. University of Exeter Press, p167.
31 Professor Orme, N. (2022) Who owns our *Churches and Parishes?* Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/2022/03/04/who-owns-our-churches-and-parishes-prof-nicholas-orme-exeter/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
32 Davison, A. and Milbank, A. (2010) *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press, p.148.
33 Rumsey, A. (2017) *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place*. SCM Press, p.99.
34 French, K. (1997) *The Parish in English Life*, 1400-1640, Manchester University Press.
35 Snell, K.D.M. (2006) *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950*. Cambridge University Press, p.87.
36 Morris, J. (2022) *A People's Church: A History of the Church of England*. Profile, p.230.
37 According to the Compton Census of 1676.
38 Rumsey, A. (2017) *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place*. SCM Press, p.134.
39 Ibid, p.132.
40 Ibid, p.135.
41 Morris, J. (2022) A *People's Church: A History of the Church of England*. Profile, p.228.
42 Ibid.

43 Ibid, p.301.
44 The Church of England. *General Synod*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
45 The parish share is a proportion of money that parishes give to the diocese to support their work, including mission and ministry. As discussed in Chapter 6, however, diocesan funds are increasingly being spent on bureaucracy and initiatives arguably of little value to parishes.
46 Morris, J. (2022) *A People's Church: A History of the Church of England*. Profile, p.356.
47 National Churches Trust (2022) *Churches in demand, despite growth of digital worship*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/churches-demand-despite-growth-digital-worship (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
48 Savanta ComRes polling found that Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and non-religious participants agreed with the statement that church buildings were a key part of local history and identity. See: National Churches Trust. *Our research*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/our-research (Accessed: 30 October 2024). See 'Attitudes to church buildings (2023-2024)' section and polling.
49 Walker, M. (2023) 'Treasure-houses of the nation', *The Critic*, March. Available at: https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/march-2023/treasure-houses-of-the-nation/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
50 The Latin term for parishes.
51 Pope Gregory's letter (601 AD).
52 National Churches Trust. *Ancient yew trees*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/explore/story/yew-trees (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
53 Pounds, N.J.G. (2008) *A History of the English Parish*. Cambridge University Press, p.339.
54 Ibid, p.341.
55 Ibid, p.486.
56 The wooden engravings on church seats.
57 Ibid, p.71.
58 National Churches Trust (2022) *Churches in demand, despite growth of digital worship*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/churches-demand-despite-growth-digital-worship (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

59 Fraser, G. (2017) 'After the Grenfell fire, the church got it right where the council failed', *The Guardian*, 23 June. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2017/jun/22/after-the-grenfell-fire-the-church-got-it-right-where-the-council-failed (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
60 National Churches Trust (2024) *The House of Good: The economic and social value of church buildings to the UK*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/House%20of%20Good-Summary%20-%20Final%20Doc%20AW-digital.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024) p.5.
61 Noyes, J. and Blond, P. (2013) *Holistic Mission: Social Action and the Church of England*. ResPublica. Available at: https://www.respublica.org.uk/our-work/publications/holistic-mission-social-action-church-england/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
62 National Churches Trust (2021) *Annual social value of the UK's church buildings is over £55 billion*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/annual-social-value-uks-church-buildings-over-%25C2%25A355-billion (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
63 National Churches Trust (2024) *The House of Good: The economic and social value of church buildings to the UK*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/House%20of%20Good-Summary%20-%20Final%20Doc%20AW-digital.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024) p.9.
64 Trussell Trust. *End of year stats*. Available at: https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
65 National Churches Trust (2024) *The House of Good: The economic and social value of church buildings to the UK*. Available at: https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/House%20of%20Good-Summary%20-%20Final%20Doc%20AW-digital.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024) p.14.
66 Warm Welcome (2024) *Impact report 2023-24*. Available at: https://www.warmwelcome.uk/impact-report (Accessed: 30 October 2024) p.10.
67 Ibid.
68 With thanks to David Barclay for comment.
69 Warm Welcome (2024) *Impact report 2023-24*. Available at: https://www.warmwelcome.uk/impact-report (Accessed: 30 October 2024) p.8.
70 Milbank, A. Interview with report author.
71 McBain, S. (2019) 'How loneliness became an epidemic', *The New Statesman*, 11 December. Available at: https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/12/how-loneliness-became-an-epidemic (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

72 Butler, P. (2024) 'Teachers and GPs 'staggering' under extra demands caused by poverty in Great Britain', *The Guardian*, 17 June. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/17/teachers-gps-staggering-extra-demands-poverty-great-britain (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

73 Milbank, A. (2023) *The Once and Future Parish*. SCM Press, p.36.

74 Dr Piggot, A. (2022) *Parish Finance Statistics 2022*. Church of England Data Services. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/parish-finance-statistics-2022.pdf (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

75 Hellen, N. and Wheeler, C. (2021) 'Church to cut paid clergy as a fifth of flock wanders off', *The Times*, 31 January. Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/article/church-to-cut-paid-clergy-as-a-fifth-of-flock-wanders-off-3l80qk2mb (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

76 The Church of England (2021) *Response to article in Spectator*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/response-article-spectator (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

77 Davies, M. (2021) ''Focal'. 'Oversight'. The C of E of the future', *Church Times*, 10 September. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/10-september/features/features/focal-oversight-the-c-of-e-of-the-future (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

78 Paul, L. (1964) *The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy*. Church Information Office, pp. 81-8.

79 Diocese of Bath & Wells (2022) *Diocesan Synod approves a five year projection*. Available at: https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/news/diocesan-synod-approves-a-five-year-projection-.php (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

80 Ibid.

81 Save the Parish (2022) *A lively parish, well financed, but another cut to our priests | Bath & Wells Diocese*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/2022/08/26/a-lively-parish-well-financed-but-another-cut-to-our-priests-parish-story/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

82 Ashworth, P. (2019) 'Birmingham diocese seeks to undo parish system', *The Church Times*, 1 March. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/1-march/news/uk/birmingham-diocese-seeks-to-undo-parish-system (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

83 CofE Pathways. *People & Places*. Available at: https://www.cofepathways.org/members/modules/jobV2/fdownload.php?j=f04f951ae36575c1&f=b04641eadd6d6999 (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

84 Williams, H. (2020) 'Chelmsford diocese set to cut 60 stipendiary posts in the next 18 months', *Church Times*, 9 June. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/12-june/news/uk/chelmsford-diocese-set-to-cut-60-stipendiary-posts-in-the-next-18-months (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

85 Davies, M. (2023) 'Questions remain as Launde Minster Community is launched in Leicester', *Church Times*, 26 May. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/26-may/news/uk/questions-remain-as-launde-minster-community-is-launched-in-leicester (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

86 Plus, one administrator and one 'pioneer'.

87 Diocese of Leicester (2021) *Some Frequently Asked Questions about Minster Communities and the Shaped By God Together (SBGT) process – autumn 2021*. Available at: https://leicester.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/autumn-faqs-updated-jan-2022.docx (Accessed: 31 October 2024) p.2.

88 Baker, D. (2021) *Leicester Diocese: doomsday or new dawn?* Available at: https://www.christiantoday.com/article/leicester.diocese.doomsday.or.new.dawn/137550.htm (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

89 Johnston, N. (2023) 'Anger over plan for 'mega' parish with just three priests', *The Telegraph*, 19 May. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/05/19/church-england-backlash-23-parish-merger-leicestershire/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

90 Carr, B. (2023) 'Leicestershire villagers 'not going down without a fight' after 'doom loop' claims for churches', *Leicester Mercury*, 27 December. Available at: https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/leicestershire-parish-churches-doom-loop-8986676 (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

91 Truro Diocese (2021) *On the way: Kerrier Deanery Plan*. Available at: https://trurodiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/OTW-Kerrier-Deanery-Plan-and-appendices-V1.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

92 Save the Parish Cornwall (2023) *Don't turn off the lights, Bishops*, p.1.

93 Ibid, p.4.

94 Davies, M. (2024) 'Clergy posts are a priority, says Truro bishop', *Church Times*, 15 March. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/15-march/news/uk/clergy-posts-are-a-priority-says-truro-bishop (Accessed: 31 October 2024). More recently, the Diocese of Truro has written that 'there are no simple solutions to the challenges we face – if there were, they would have already happened.' Diocese of Truro (2024) *A Diocesan Response: Save the Parish Document*, 24 July. Available at: https://trurodiocese.org.uk/2024/07/a-diocesan-response-save-the-parish-document/ (Accessed: 21st November 2024).

95 Diocese of Liverpool (2024) *Fit for Mission: Scoping Document v04 [May 2024]*. Available at: https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/603eb0893e402/content/pages/documents/ffm-scoping-doc-v04-pdf.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
96 Church Growth Research Programme (2014) *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013*, p.29.
97 Tweedie, F. (2016) *Going Deeper: Church Attendance statistics and clergy deployment*.
98 Milbank, A. (2023) *The Once and Future Parish*. SCM Press, p.36.
99 Pepinster, C. (2021) *CofE's 'transformation' with 10,000 lay-led communities angers clergy fearing the end of the parish*. Available at: https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/cofes-transformation-with-10000-lay-led-communities-angers-clergy-fearing-the-end-of-the-parish/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
100 Save The Parish Network (2022) *A Conversation with the Archbishop of York (Full Recording)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4AHyckbzGI (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
101 Quoted in Pepinster, C. (2021) *CofE's 'transformation' with 10,000 lay-led communities angers clergy fearing the end of the parish*. Available at: https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/cofes-transformation-with-10000-lay-led-communities-angers-clergy-fearing-the-end-of-the-parish/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
102 Thompson, E. (2024) 'Save our parish priests!', *The Spectator*, 31 March. Available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/save-our-parish-priests/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
103 Milbank, A. (2023) *The Once and Future Parish*. SCM Press, p.38.
104 Sweeney, J. (2024) 'Concerns over parish church without vicar for three years', *Birmingham Mail*, 8 January. Available at: https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/concerns-over-parish-church-without-28408968 (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
105 Davies, M. (2024) 'Number of ordinands plummets, Synod hears', *Church Times*, 12 July. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/12-july/news/uk/number-of-ordinands-plummets-synod-hears (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
106 Lewis-Anthony, J. (2009) *If you meet George Herbert on the road, kill him: Radically Re-Thinking Priestly Ministry*. Mowbray, p.36.
107 Anglican Futures (2024) *Clergy mental health is at breaking point*. Available at: https://www.anglicanfutures.org/post/clergy-mental-health-is-at-breaking-point (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

108 Unite (2023) *Faith workers bearing the brunt of cost-of-living crisis*. Available at: https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/october/faith-workers-bearing-the-brunt-of-cost-of-living-crisis (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

109 Davies, M. (2024) 'Clergy minimum stipends to grow by seven per cent from April', *Church Times*, 7 February. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/9-february/news/uk/clergy-stipends-to-grow-by-seven-per-cent-from-april (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

110 Thompson, E. Interview with report author.

111 Thompson, E. (2023) 'Church needs more vicars if it wants to reverse decline', *The Times*, 10 April. Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/article/church-needs-more-vicars-if-it-wants-to-reverse-decline-9xlb3n50t (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

112 Milbank, A. (2023) *The Once and Future Parish*. SCM Press, p.36.

113 Data provided by the Church of England in response to Question 13 by Roy Faulkner at General Synod, November 2021. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/report-of-proceedings-november-2021.pdf, p.46 (Accessed: 31 October 2024)

114 Swerling, G. (2021) 'Church fury as Archbishop of York seeks £90k-a-year chief of staff while 'dismantling' parishes', *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 April. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/04/04/church-fury-archbishop-york-seeks-90k-a-year-chief-staff-dismantlingparishes/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

115 Williams, H. (2020) 'Chelmsford diocese set to cut 60 stipendiary posts in the next 18 months', *Church Times*, 9 June. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/12-june/news/uk/chelmsford-diocese-set-to-cut-60-stipendiary-posts-in-the-next-18-months (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

116 Sherwood, H. (2024) 'C of E hoping to create £1bn fund to address legacy of slavery', *The Guardian*, 4 March. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/04/church-of-england-told-to-boost-size-of-fund-to-address-legacy-of-slavery (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

117 Based on clauses 3.3b and 3.7c, which exclude parochial church councils from the definition of a 'charity with a Church Ethos'. See: Church of England (2024) *National Church Governance Measure*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/gs-2360-national-church-governance-first-consideration-july-2024.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024). See 'Draft of a Measure of the General Synod of the Church of England to make provision about the governance of the Church' section.

118 Thompson, E. (2024) 'Save our parish priests!', *The Spectator*, 31 March. Available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/save-our-parish-priests/ (Accessed: 30 October 2024). The 85% and 25% figures were calculated using the Church Commissioners spending as reported in the judgement of Harries V Church Commissioners (1992) and the percentage as calculated using published accounts from 2022.

119 Save the Parish. *The Church of England Finances*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/church-of-england-finances/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

120 Thompson, E. (2023) 'Church parishes are on the verge of being lost for good', *The Telegraph*, 20 July. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/20/church-parishes-are-on-the-verge-of-being-lost-for-good/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

121 Everett, C. (2023) *Save the parish*. Available at: https://www.ryenews.org.uk/opinions/letters/save-the-parish (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

122 Save the Parish – Cornwall (2024) *Save The Parish Cornwall responds to Diocese of Truro statement*. Available at: https://savetheparish.blogspot.com/2024/03/save-parish-cornwall-responds-to.html (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

123 Save The Parish Network (2022) A *Conversation with the Archbishop of York (Full Recording)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4AHyckbzGI (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

124 McConalogue, J. et al (2021) *Radical progressive activism and the Church of England*. Civitas. Available at: https://www.civitas.org.uk/publications/rotting-from-the-head/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

125 See staff directory of the Diocese of Oxford. Available at: https://www.oxford.anglican.org/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

126 See staff directory of the Diocese of Chichester. Available at: https://www.chichester.anglican.org/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

127 Henderson, C. (2024) 'Parishioners stop donations to churches in protest at £100m slavery fund', *The Telegraph*, 4 July. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/04/parishioners-stop-donations-church-protest-reparations/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

128 Paul, I. (2020) *What is happening to Church of England attendance?* Available at: https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/what-is-happening-to-church-of-england-attendance/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

129 Cray, G. (2004) *Mission-Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context.* Church House Publishing.

130 George Lings' study on Fresh Expressions found that only 37 per cent held baptisms and 43 per cent held a communion service, often on an occasional rather than regular basis. See Lings, G. (2016) *The Day of Small Things*. Church Army's Research Unit, p.11.
131 Davison, A. and Milbank, A. (2010) *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press, p.105.
132 Save the Parish. *Transforming Wigan*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/transforming-wigan-an-independent-evaluation-sept-2023/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
133 Hutton, K. (2023) *Evaluation of Transforming Wigan*. Available at: https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/603eb0893e402/content/pages/documents/transforming-wigan-evaluation.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
134 Church of England (2022) *Independent Review of Lowest Income Communities funding and Strategic Development Funding*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/irls-final-report-2.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
135 Ibid.
136 Church Army's Research Unit (2021) *Pioneering in Portsmouth*. Available at: https://churcharmy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/portsmouth-pioneer-evaluation-report---final.pdf?x42066 (Accessed: 31 October 2024) p.21.
137 Milbank, A. (2023) *The Once and Future Parish*. SCM Press, p 71.
138 Ibid, p.72.
139 Stanford, P. (2012) 'Holy Trinity Brompton, the evangelical HQ that claims the new primate as one of its own', *The Guardian*, 10 November. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/nov/10/justin-welby-archbishop-canterbury-holy-trinity-brompton (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
140 Landau, C. (2023) 'Can Gen Z save a C of E it barely knows?', *Church Times*, 19 May. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/19-may/comment/opinion/can-gen-z-save-a-c-of-e-it-barely-knows (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
141 Milbank, A. (2023) *The Once and Future Parish*. SCM Press, p.75.
142 Foulger, W. (2024) *New Things: A theological investigation into the work of starting new churches across 11 dioceses in the Church of England*. Cranmer Hall. Available at: https://www.cranmerhall.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/New-Things-Final-1.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

143 Church of England General Synod (2021) *Simpler, Humbler, Bolder: A Church for the whole nation which is Christ centred and shaped by the Five Marks of Mission*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/gs-2223-vision-and-strategy.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

144 Alan Billings notes that the Church is making the same mistake here as the police attempting to run two operating systems. See Save the Parish (2021) *What the C of E can learn from the police*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/2021/09/25/what-the-c-of-e-can-learn-from-the-police/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

145 Church Times (2015) 'Use central funds to subsidise growth, not decline, says task group', 16 January. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/16-january/news/uk/use-central-funds-to-subsidise-growth-not-decline-says-task-group (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

146 Church of England General Synod (2017) *Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Future of the Church of England*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/gs-1978-report-of-the-task-force-on-resourcing-the-future-of-the-church-of-england.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

147 See Figure One on p.12 of the Chote Review which shows that, though some dioceses now receive more funding through the new model, many low-income communities receive significantly less. Church of England (2022) *Independent Review of Lowest Income Communities funding and Strategic Development Funding*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/irls-final-report-2.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

148 SLDP Project (Group 7) *To review the dioceses' allocation of the Lowest Income Communities Fund (LICF) as a way of exploring how lowest income communities are engaged in the decision-making structures and resourcing of the Church*. Available at: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/05fwvf1zk90iju82dvlob/SLDP-Project-7-LICF-Community-Engagement.pdf?rlkey=f5vuof1dfkp46oi2zjf918tfa&e=2&dl=0 (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

149 Brower Latz, D. et al (2023) *Church on the Margins: What does it mean to be a church on the margins?* Church Action on Poverty. Available at: https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/What-does-it-mean-to-be-a-church-on-the-margins.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

150 Church of England (2024) *Seeking the Vision: stories of the church's mission and ministry*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/gs-misc-1383-the-strategic-mission-and-ministry-investment-boards-annual-report-for-2023.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024) p.17.

151 Walker, M. (2023) 'The Church of England's death knell is ringing', *The Telegraph*, 2 September. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/02/church-of-england-death-knell-is-ringing/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

152 Canon John McGinley, speaking about the church's hopes to establish 10,000 new worshipping communities by 2030, described parish clergy and buildings as a 'key limiting factors' to mission.

153 Save the Parish Cornwall (2023) *Don't turn off the lights, Bishops*.

154 Church of England General Synod (2024) *Diocesan Finances Review Update*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/gs-misc-1384-diocesan-finance-review-july-2024-updated-today.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

155 Hansard (1976) *Church of England (Endowments and Glebe Measure)*. HC Deb 15 November 1976 vol 919 cc940-1036. Available at: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1976/nov/15/church-of-england-endow-ments-and-glebe (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

156 Rev'd Heber-Percy, C. (2022) *A Centrifugal Church*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/2022/07/04/a-centrifugal-church-the-revd-colin-heber-percy/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

157 Church of England General Synod (2021) *Simpler, Humbler, Bolder: A Church for the whole nation which is Christ centred and shaped by the Five Marks of Mission*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/gs-2223-vision-and-strategy.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

158 Davies, M. (2024) 'Millions spent on diocesan projects. Now strategy board seeks to find out what works', *Church Times*, 21 May. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/24-may/news/uk/millions-spent-on-diocesan-projects-now-strategy-board-seeks-to-find-out-what-works (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

159 With thanks to the Very Revd. James Newcome for comment.

160 Church of England (2023) *£9.4 million approved for additional curate posts*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/ps94-million-approved-additional-curate-posts (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

161 Church of England (2024) *Enabling Christ's Thriving Church: The Church Commissioners for England Annual Report 2023*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/24-05-30-church-commissioners-annual-report-2023.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

162 Patrick, L. (2020) *The House of Good*. Available at: https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/the-house-of-good/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

163 Vitali, J. (2024) 'The Church of England can help solve the housing crisis', *The Times*, 24 April. Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/life-style/property-home/article/how-the-church-of-england-can-help-solve-the-housing-crisis-j7c2mpbbd (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

164 Oxfam, for example, spends 12 per cent of its budget on office costs. See: Oxfam. *How we spend your money*. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/donate/how-we-spend-your-money/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024). The Royal National Lifeboat Institute spends 10 per cent. See: RNLI. *Annual Report and Accounts*. Available at: https://rnli.org/about-us/how-the-rnli-is-run/annual-report-and-accounts (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

165 Based on the combined expenditure figures of the 42 dioceses, 21 per cent goes towards 'Diocesan Support, Training and Admin'. See data provided by Save the Parish. *Church of England Finance – by Diocese*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/church-of-england-finance-by-diocese/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

166 Percy, M. (2017) *The Future Shapes of Anglicanism: Currents, contours, charts*. Routledge, p.76.

167 Church of England General Synod (2021) *Simpler, Humbler, Bolder: A Church for the whole nation which is Christ centred and shaped by the Five Marks of Mission*. Available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/gs-2223-vision-and-strategy.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

168 Save the Parish. *Diocesan Stipends Funds*. Available at: https://www.savetheparish.com/diocesan-stipends-funds/ (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

169 As proposed by Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent (interview with report author).

170 Billyeald, S. (2022) 'Letters to the Editor', *Church Times*, 17 June. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/17-june/comment/letters-to-the-editor/letters-to-the-editor (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

171 Victor, M. (2023) 'What do you get for an £88k parish share?', *Church Times*, 8 December. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/8-december/comment/opinion/what-do-you-get-for-an-88k-parish-share (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

172 BBC News (2024) *Champing: Watlington church opens doors to paying holiday guests*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68817429 (Accessed: 31 October 2024). And Tapper, J. (2024) 'UK churches keen to host heavy metal bands after duet with organist is a hit', *The Guardian*, 6 April. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2024/apr/06/uk-churches-keen-to-host-heavy-metal-bands-after-duet-with-organist-is-a-hit (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

173 Ofori, M. (2024) ''Profane' or 'innocent'? Row over Canterbury Cathedral silent disco', *The Guardian*, 9 February. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/09/row-over-canterbury-cathedral-silent-disco-profane-innocent (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

174 Goodwin, J. (2023) 'Plotting to save the parish church', *Country Life*, 22 February. Available at: https://www.countrylife.co.uk/news/plotting-to-save-the-parish-church-252610 (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

175 The Cremation Society. *Progress of Cremation in the British Islands, 1885-2023*. Available at: https://www.cremation.org.uk/progress-of-cremation-united-kingdom (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

176 Sheldrake, R. Interview with report author.

177 With special thanks to Dr Rupert Sheldrake for providing examples.

178 Paveley, R. (2019) 'Digital counters in church doorways reveal high footfall', *Church Times*, 11 October. Available at: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/11-october/news/uk/digital-counters-in-church-doorways-reveal-high-footfall (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

179 The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture (2021) *Churches, Covid-19 and Communities: Experiences, Needs, and Supporting Recovery*. University of York.

180 So argued Stephen Trott at the Save the Parish launch on 3 August 2021. See: St Bartholomew the Great (2021) *Save the Parish*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZSmNuVKRXY (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

181 King's College London (2023) *Belief, faith and religion: shifting attitudes in the UK*. Available at: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/lost-faith-the-uk's-changing-attitudes-to-religion.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

182 Waite, H. (2022) *The Nones: Who are they are what do they believe?* Theos Think Tank.
183 Brierly, J. (2023) *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers are Considering Christianity Again*. Tyndale House.
184 Foulger, W. (2024) *New Things: A theological investigation into the work of starting new churches across 11 dioceses in the Church of England*. Cranmer Hall. Available at: https://www.cranmerhall.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/New-Things-Final-1.pdf (Accessed: 31 October 2024).
185 Rumsey, A. (2024) Panel discussion on "Place", The Public Legitimacy of the Church of England, Annual Pusey House Conference (in partnership with the Centre for Cultural Witness).
186 Matthew 13:123.

CIVITAS

Chief Executive Officer: Dr Jim McConalogue

Trustees

- Dr David Green, Chairman
- Dr David Costain, Treasurer
- Sir Alan Rudge
- Tom Harris
- The Hon. Justin Shaw
- Peter Lloyd

Our Aims and Programmes

- We facilitate informed public debate by providing accurate factual information on the social issues of the day, publishing informed comment and analysis, and bringing together leading protagonists in open discussion. Civitas never takes a corporate view on any of the issues tackled during the course of this work. Our current focus is on issues such as education, health, crime, social security, manufacturing, the abuse of human rights law, and the European Union.

- We ensure that there is strong evidence for all our conclusions and present the evidence in a balanced and objective way. Our publications are usually refereed by independent commentators, who may be academics or experts in their field.

- We strive to benefit public debate through independent research, reasoned argument, lucid explanation and open discussion. We stand apart from party politics and transitory intellectual fashions.

- Uniquely among think tanks, we play an active, practical part in rebuilding civil society by running schools on Saturdays and after-school hours so that children who are falling behind at school can achieve their full potential.

Subscriptions and Membership (UK only)

If you would like to stay abreast of Civitas' latest work, you can have all of our books delivered to your door as soon as they are published. New subscribers receive a free copy of Roger Bootle's book, *The AI Economy: Work, Wealth and Welfare in the Robot Age* and Daniel Bentley's book, *The Land Question* on fixing the dysfunction at the root of the housing crisis. For those who would like to support our work further and get involved in our Westminster events, we have a variety of Subscription and Membership options available:
https://www.civitasonline.org.uk/product-category/subscriptions/

We regret that we are unable to post items to non-UK residents, although all of our publications are individually available via our Civitas Book Store (https://www.civitasonline.org.uk) and in most cases on Amazon.

Renewals for Existing Members
If you are an existing member wishing to renew with ease and convenience, please do select one of the subscription or membership options that most closely meets your requirements.

Make a Donation
If you like our work and would like to help see it continue, please consider making a donation. A contribution of any amount, big or small, will help us advance our research and educational activities. You can make a donation by getting in touch (020 7799 6677) or sending a simple email to info@civitas.org.uk so that we can come back to you.

Supporters of Civitas
Because we want to reach as wide an audience as possible, our subscription and membership fees are set as low as possible and barely meet printing and postage expenses. To meet the costs of producing our research and conducting our educational projects, we rely entirely on the goodwill and generosity of people who value our work.

If you would like to support our work on a rolling basis, there is a variety of advanced membership levels on offer. Supporters of Civitas have the opportunity to become more deeply engaged with the work their philanthropy makes possible.

You can pay by selecting a membership or subscription option and we will be in contact.

Alternatively, just call us on +44 (0)20 7799 6677
or email info@civitas.org.uk and we can discuss your options.

If it is your preference, please make cheques payable to Civitas.

Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society
First Floor
55 Tufton Street
Westminster
London
SW1P 3QL

Email: subs@civitas.org.uk

CIVITAS
Institute for the Study of Civil Society
55 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL

Email: books@civitas.org.uk
Tel: 020 7799 6677
Web: www.civitas.org.uk

The parish church has been a foundational part of cultural life in England for hundreds of years. England's 12,500 parish churches are 'treasure houses' of national history, containing the memories of our ancestors as well as the rich architectural and musical heritage of Anglicanism. Parishes also bring together local communities, providing charitable services – including food banks, childcare and counselling – worth billions of pounds per year.

Yet parish churches across the country are now in crisis. Crumbling buildings, declining attendance, and sharp reductions in clergy all pose a considerable threat to their survival. In the past 50 years, over 2,000 churches have been made redundant, with some 300 of these closing between 2016 and 2021 alone. Congregations have been shrinking in size since the 1960s, but fell by a further 19 per cent following the pandemic. Meanwhile, the number of stipendiary clergy in the Church of England has almost halved since 1959, leaving many churches without a priest dedicated to the parish.

Though this decline can to some extent be attributed to lower levels of religiosity and community attachment in today's Britain, this report argues that management decisions made by the Church of England itself have also played a major role. These include moves to cut funding to local churches and ministers – in some cases merging up to 23 parishes into one 'mega-parish' served by a single team of clergy – and instead directing resources towards central bureaucracy: on average, the Church now employs one administrator for every three and a half priests. Hundreds of millions of pounds have also been funnelled into 'strategic development funding', intended to experiment with radical new ways of attracting people to the Church. These have mixed results and, according to some critics, often represent a departure from Anglican traditions and belief.

Restoring the Value of Parishes makes a thorough diagnosis of what has gone wrong with the Church of England in recent years, and makes the case for returning to what works: supporting local clergy to continue serving their communities via parish churches.

This will require Church management to restore its confidence in the parish as an institution that is uniquely placed to provide a refuge from the challenges of modernity. At a time when the public sector is diminished and invisible in many communities, the parish can be an ideal starting point for the renewal of civic life. If the Church wants to be more 'relevant', the author argues, it should stop trying to reinvent itself and instead embrace its unique position as a source of tradition, sanctity, and community solidarity in an uncertain world.

£8

ISBN 978-1-912581-61-0
978-1-912581-61-0