



## MEMORANDUM

From : Bishop of St Asaph  
To: Standing Committee  
Subject: Future Archdeaconry Arrangements  
Date: 9 March 2022

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1. The Diocese of St Asaph has functioned for some considerable time as three archdeaconries. A decade and a half ago, these archdeaconries were headed by three part-time Archdeacons, each of whom were also responsible for a parish in their appropriate archdeaconry, although the boundaries were sometimes adapted to make the system work (Llandegla was placed in Wrexham Archdeaconry to facilitate housing the Archdeacon there for example).
2. In the early part of the last decade, prior to the Harries Report, the diocesan leadership consulted on whether this pattern was sustainable for the future. Two alternative models were proposed:
  - i. to increase the responsibility of Archdeacon as a line manager for a specific section of the clergy, and to re-organise the diocese into a family of five-seven archdeaconries,
  - ii. to empower Area Deaneries to become the main pastoral structure for diocesan life, and to see the role of archdeacon associated more with the episcopal ministry of the bishop, sharing in his or her oversight, and taking increasing responsibility for the pastoral care of the clergy, and energising mission and ministry in a specific number of deaneries.
3. Then came the Harries Report, which steered the diocese into the second of these alternatives, transforming deaneries into mission areas. At the same time, a review noted that while Montgomery Archdeaconry already covered a geographically wider area of the diocese, it increasingly had a much smaller proportion of both population, churches, regular worshippers and clergy. At the time of reorganisation into mission areas therefore, the new mission areas of Penederyn and Valle Crucis were transferred into the archdeaconry of Montgomery, so that each Archdeacon would be responsible for seven mission areas in total.
4. Archdeacons also recorded an increase in responsibility with the new arrangements. They were expected to be the drivers of change, and yet were tied to specific communities and churches, whose pastoral care required their presence on a Sunday and during the week, precluding their involvement elsewhere, and the holders of the office often felt that they were doing two jobs badly, with competing responsibilities often pulling them in different directions. A number of archdeacons experienced high levels of stress and ill health as a result of the pressure placed on them.
5. On the last round of appointments to the role of archdeacons therefore, Standing Committee approved a change in the role to free archdeacons from parochial responsibility, and make the posts full-time. At the same time, the job description of the archdeacons was re-oriented around mission, and equipping the mission areas to function effectively. Archdeacons were to be empowerers of the shared ministry teams, and

energisers of mission. No specific extra provision was made, however, for the historical duties attached to the role of archdeacon, although 100% of their time could now be devoted to the newly configured post, compared to the 75% expected before this change.

6. A new team of archdeacons faced the challenge of implementing this new vision, and reported several things. They found the discipline and affirmation of the clergy challenging, and time consuming. MDR had been renewed, and this proves to be an exceptional drain on their time and effort – although arguably one of the most important features of their work. They report missing front line mission. All the archdeacons in post in 2021 grew their congregations when in parochial ministry, and yet this part of their ministry was not now immediately available to them. The traditional duties of archdeacons impeded their ability to make mission and the support of the mission areas the priority hoped for. Partly to mitigate this, a scheme whereby the archdeacons would mentor specific Mission Hub Churches and their mission outreach gave them specific arenas for mission engagement with a hand picked team.
7. 2020 therefore saw the archdeacons each fielding a heavy schedule of duties, and then came Covid. This changed the expectations of diocesan life entirely. All parts and members of the diocese found themselves doing worship, discipleship, and Church life differently, including the archdeacons. Lockdown and the subsequent aftershocks of Covid have undoubtedly placed huge challenges for the future of the diocese, and our archdeacons will need to play a key role in helping us move forward. At the same time, our resources and the scale of work ahead of us have become more uncertain.
8. 2022 sees a vacancy in the Archdeaconry of Wrexham. This seems a good opportunity to review the role of archdeacons and the requirements of the diocese. A temporary structure has been put in place, whereby the Archdeacon of St Asaph has assumed responsibility for two of the mission areas of the archdeaconry, and the Archdeacon of Montgomery has assumed responsibility for four mission areas.
9. There are a number of options available to the diocese:
  - a. We could appoint a new archdeacon with identifiable strengths who could contribute in a period of uncertainty and change. If so, we shall need to be clear about what those strengths might be, and how they would be employed across the diocese.
  - b. We could make the current temporary division of archidiaconal responsibility permanent. If so, we would need to monitor the effect of the increased workload on both the archdeacons and the mission areas they support.
  - c. We could maintain the interim pattern until towards the end of the year, and discern the appropriate course of action at the November Standing Committee. This would give us time to evaluate the short to medium term impact of the pandemic and to assess the sustainability and effectiveness of the temporary measures.
10. There are a number of major factors to bring to bear in considering this option:
  - a. **Cost to the diocese.** At a time when savings are going to have to be sought in all areas of the diocesan budget, should savings be considered in the senior leadership of the diocese?

- b. **Sustaining the pastoral care of the clergy.** Following the review mentioned in paragraph 2(ii), each archdeacon has pastoral oversight about approximately a third of the clergy, including undertaking their annual *Clergy Development Review*. This is an intensive process, shared with the bishop by one archdeacon each year, and demanding considerable time. If savings are to be made, can the diocese develop new ways of working to enable the two archdeacons to maintain the current level of pastoral care to the clergy, including this annual MDR process?
  - c. **Reconstructing the mission life of the diocese.** Paragraph 4 of this paper speaks of the importance of the role of archdeacons in ensuring the health and dynamism of the mission areas. Three archdeacons have responsibility for roughly seven mission areas each, two would have responsibility for ten mission areas each. Are our mission areas now sufficiently established to allow two archdeacons to enable this to happen?
  - d. **Effectiveness and workload.** The amount asked of archdeacons has been steadily increasing in recent years. Four archdeacons in recent history have retired earlier than they might partly because of the impact that their duties were having on their mental and physical health. Can we agree appropriate safeguards and working patterns to ensure that the mental and physical health of our archdeacons is not detrimentally affected by any changes that might be asked of them?
  - e. **Diversity in the diocesan leadership.** The diocese benefits from a leadership which represents as broad a range of the diversity of the diocese as possible. Are there aspects of our diverse yet common life which could be boosted by a reconfiguration of the team?
11. When the bishop's staff discussed the matter, they were inclined towards the third option of maintaining the interim pattern for the present to enable a proper assessment of its gains and disadvantages. However, it would be good to know the insights, preferences and perspectives of the Standing Committee as we plan for the future.