

## Church in decline

SIR – The Bishop of Leicester (Letters, October 20) defends his and Leicester diocese's decision to implement parish clergy cuts and a "minster" model (clustering 20-25 parishes into huge groups served by a "ministry team" with at least one ordained person).

He writes that "parishes have long worked in benefices and teams" with "the cure of souls shared by priests, bishops and the whole people of God". However, amalgamating parishes into benefices or large groups is to ignore the Church of England's own report, *From Anecdote to Evidence*. This clearly states that "the larger the number of churches in the amalgamation, the more likely they are to decline".

Where are the figures? All charities are struggling with donor behaviour after the pandemic (report, October 14). In any corporate or charity context – especially one like the Church of England, backed by a £9 billion investment portfolio – one would do serious cost-benefit analysis, study different economic and financial options and make risk assessments of projections and assumptions.

From this analysis, options would emerge, into which other factors could then be drawn ("customer" behaviour, changes in the market, macro-economic factors, fashion, human behaviour, technology advance, digitisation and so on) – before deducing the optimum course of action. This should have been undertaken, on behalf of all the Church's 42 dioceses, before Leicester's Diocesan Synod even considered its current plan.

This is beyond managed decline. It is driven decline. The Church's own studies show a clear link between ordained clergy, church attendance and parish giving. Driving down clergy numbers will drive down congregations, which will drive down giving, which will drive down the affordability of clergy – which will drive down clergy numbers.

This is a death spiral that needs to be arrested urgently. Parishioners, it is time to rise up to stop this madness.  
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*Modbury, Devon*