

# CHURCH TIMES

Home UK World Comment Features Faith Books & Arts  
Regulars Audio & Video Archive **Jobs** Events

## Letters to the Editor

21 OCTOBER 2022

ISTOCK

### Provision of parsons through ordained local ministry

*From Professor R. G. Faulkner*

Sir, — The article by Bishop Richard Llewellyn ([Comment, 14 October](#))

highlights the most important issue facing the Church of England. To stem

the decline in traditional parish-church attendance, we desperately need to maintain the presence of the local, dedicated, spiritual, and emotionally supportive parish priest.

The fact is that there is a drive to replace this system with super-parishes, or minsters, so that already sustainable parishes — i.e. those that are large enough to provide for their parish priest through their parish share — are being expected to lose their traditional parson. This is already happening in Leicester, Wigan, Winchester, Truro, and Wales.

Bishop Llewellyn suggests that this loss can be made up by the ministry of volunteers as ordained local ministers. I venture to suggest that this is unrealistic. What other professional organisation would propose that its most important front-line workers be drawn from a voluntary workforce?



The Church of England has more than enough resources to provide the necessary parish priests in the traditional manner. The problem is that dioceses are putting all of their available excess [Strategic Development Fund](#) (SDF) expenditure into resource churches, like church-plants, inter-generational church, and initiatives of Holy Trinity, Brompton. This money, £176 million since 2014, could equally well have been spent on traditional parish priests.

Additionally, the Chote report ([News, 11 March](#)) has shown that all of this money spent on resource churches has been largely ineffective: only 12074 new disciples as opposed to the predicted 89375.

Furthermore, the [Archbishops' Council](#) has promised to provide an extra £100 million per annum to the dioceses for the period 2023-25. Informal discussions that I have had with bishops indicate that it will be spent solely on more resource churches.

So, the problem lies with the dioceses, which seem intent on destroying the parish system, even though it provides them with more than half their income, if we neglect the strategic development funding coming from the Archbishop's Council. They then go on to encourage new kinds of church, all of which have been shown to be unsuccessful.

R. G. FAULKNER  
General Synod member  
51 Tynedale Road  
Loughborough  
Leicestershire LE11 3TA

*From Canon Christopher Irvine*

Sir, — I welcomed Bishop Richard Llewelin's emphasis on pastoral [ministry](#). Alas, it is an aspect of public ministry which has been partially eclipsed in recent years by the prevalent rhetoric of leadership in discussions of ministry, and he gives us a timely reminder of its central place. But I am not quite sure that "local ministry" has been abandoned in the way that my friend suggests.

There are various recognised pathways to ordination in our theological-education institutions, and some of these are effectively local and often referred to as being contextual pathways. But alongside this proper honouring of the local is the need, in our predominantly agnostic society, for ministers of the gospel to speak intelligently, persuasively, and convincingly about God and the things of God. And it is precisely why, in the variety of the provision of ministerial training, we need our residential theological colleges.

Excellent teaching and learning is certainly found in our non-residential courses, but what the residential college can provide is more *time*, not only to engage with scripture and Christian tradition, but also for the student to become habituated to the practices of prayer, silence, and corporate worship. This is the immersive opportunity in which a deep theological sensibility can be nurtured, and it is this sensibility that enables us both to speak of God and to bring that same God to expression in the exercise of pastoral care and social engagement.

Offering, as they do, such an immersive opportunity is a good reason for our bishops and DDOs to redress the balance, and to promote our residential colleges and the part that they can play in our mixed economy of theological education and training for the sake of the whole Church.

CHRISTOPHER IRVINE

The Rectory

Ewhurst Green

Robertsbridge

East Sussex TN32 5TB

*From Mr Paul A. Chubb*

Sir, — Bishop Llewellyn makes a compelling case for ordained local ministry. It brought to mind the advocacy from the former Bishop of Carlisle, the Rt Revd Graham Dow, of “a shepherd for every village”.

As a licensed lay minister of more than 20 years’ standing, how I wish “as a national strategy” (as advocated by Bishop Llewellyn) a geographically limited licensed

ordained local ministry was instituted throughout our land.

This would unlock talents currently constrained and, arguably, inspire many to accept the Holy Spirit's call to serve as an OLM.

PAUL A. CHUBB

The Boundary, 4 South View  
Thrintoft, Northallerton  
North Yorkshire DL7 0PP

*From Emma Robarts*

Sir, — Bishop Richard Llewelin is right that amalgamating parishes into mega-parishes is a disastrous strategy that, as the Church's own research tells us, drives decline in church attendance and giving. There is now plenty of evidence that shrinking the C of E is the obvious outcome of choosing to de-fund and asset-strip the parish system. It seems an astonishing dereliction of duty that some of the dioceses, charities all, are nevertheless pursuing the mega-parish model.

I organised my beloved father's funeral at a rural parish church in Winchester diocese this month. That parish has recently been swallowed into a bigger group. The ruin of the parish system and its pastoral care, and the strain on the clergy still remaining, in Winchester is visible in plain sight.

Why, despite the removal of the former diocesan Bishop, is Winchester diocese continuing to amalgamate parishes and sell parsonages — with the result that those parishes can never have an incumbent again?

Bishop Llewelin's proposed "solution" of unpaid volunteers disregards the research finding that clearly links attendance and giving to the presence of a stipendiary priest.

EMMA ROBARTS

Address supplied

**Time for a choral revival, but with less conducting**

*From the Director of the Royal School of Church Music*

Sir, — The Revd Tom Mumford's article on [choirs](#) as a missional tool ([Comment, 14 October](#)) struck a deep chord. I have long advocated the power of music not only to enhance worship, but to grow and develop the life of the church itself.

Personal experience of running choirs has shown that “ordinary” children (whatever that means) can achieve extraordinary things, while imbibing the worshipping life of the Church for a far longer period than a passing encounter with Sunday school — valid as that, of course, is. A whole family followed their new chorister to church; in time, all of them were baptised and confirmed. What an example of music as outreach for the church!

RSCM's Voice for Life programme, which Fr Mumford mentions, includes exploring why one is in church at all: our motto is “I will sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also.” Yes, such musical provision can be expensive — but, joy of joys, it can reach out to so many, with no barriers of class, race, gender, or any other measure of potential divide. A voice and a cassock are a great source of unity.

The challenge, however, one that we at RSCM are alert to and doing something about, is that there is a great need to train, urgently, a new generation of music leaders with the right skills to make this possible at the scale that the potential return justifies. There is much to be done.

HUGH MORRIS

Royal School of Church Music

19 The Close, Salisbury

Wiltshire SP1 2EB

*From the Revd Rowland Crook*

Sir, — I would certainly agree with the Revd Tom Mumford's sentiments on the power of the choral tradition in our cathedrals and larger churches. But I would want to widen that mission to lesser professional expressions of our musical heritage. Our hymn books are full of valuable material that in large measure has

become little-known to many churchgoers.

After the onset of Covid, when most congregations were prevented from singing — or, at least, hindered by masks — we need to re-educate them in our glorious musical heritage. Last Sunday, at our parish church, our regular organist was ill and unable to play, and no CDs were available for the prepared scripted service. So an invitation was given for volunteers to come forward to lead in the singing: six ladies and one gentleman, and the result was a real triumph, much appreciated by the congregation. Listening to a hymn or song can be very uplifting and should be encouraged again today. Singing requires a degree of self-confidence.

We have, I believe, the best of lyrics in our hymn books, and we need to see that they are well used.

ROWLAND CROOK  
14 Bollington Avenue  
Northwich  
Cheshire CW9 8SB

*From Mr John R. Turner*

Sir, — The Cathedral Music Trust ([News, Leader comment](#), 7 October) proposes some radical and constructive measures to reduce the financial stress of music provision. Would it also be helpful to reduce the role of conductors?

It seems that two or even more people are now employed where formerly one (with a little assistance) sufficed. Apparently, even the hymns now have to be conducted, and I recently witnessed a conductor flapping both arms throughout a lengthy bass solo (though the singer had more sense than to watch).

It will be said that times and methods move on and that standards have never been higher; but it is salutary to recall that David Willcocks obtained superlative results at King's College, Cambridge, while leaving the responses, the psalms, and numerous more elaborate items uncondacted. A well-trained choir will develop a mutual empathy. And I have recordings of several routine choral services at Lichfield Cathedral in 1959 which show excellent ensemble and balance — no

conductor.

JOHN R. TURNER  
1 Cathkin Road, Rutherglen  
Glasgow G73 4SE

### **When doctors go wrong**

*From Mr C. D. C. Armstrong*

Sir, — I must confess that I am amazed by Professor Robin Gill's confident statement that "Things go badly wrong when patients do not trust their doctors" ([Books, 23 September](#)).

Those of us who have direct experience of medical malpractice and error know very well that confidence in doctors can be misplaced. Has Professor Gill never heard of Harold Shipman (to name only the most obvious example of all too many)?

C. D. C. ARMSTRONG  
Flat 2a, Ulidia House  
34 Donegall Road  
Belfast BT125JN

### **Coronation in a crisis?**

*From the Revd Andrew McLuskey*

Sir, — With no disrespect to the Monarch, I wonder if there is an argument for postponing the Coronation ([News, 14 October](#))? We are in the midst of a serious government-inflicted economic crisis. No one, I guess, knows what state the country will be in next May.

Surely we should get the current problems sorted out before we embark on this important new step.

ANDREW McLUSKEY

70 Stanley Road, Ashford  
Middlesex TW15 2LQ

### **Iranian Christians' tears**

*From the Revd David Tomlinson*

Sir, — After the killing of Mahsa Amini and the brutal suppression of the ensuing demonstrations ([Letters, 14 October](#)), the Iranian Christians in two churches here in Birmingham, gathered for prayer and reflection. Tears were shed, and their anguish was palpable. Far from home, there is little that they can do to influence events apart from intercede. Their plea is that we stand in solidarity with them, and draw the world's attention to their people's quest for freedom from oppression. Now is a time to "weep with those who weep", to cry out to God, and to add our voice to their protests.

DAVID TOMLINSON  
23 Carisbrooke Road  
Birmingham B17 8NN

### **The twain shall meet**

*From Mr Rupert Shortt*

Sir, — I am pleased to say that my agreement with the Revd Dr Tom Ambrose ([Letters, 14 October](#)) is in some ways stronger than he realises. One of the first things that I learnt as a theological student is that the Church has no doctrine of the atonement, only theories. It also became clear that the penal substitutionary beliefs rightly deplored by the Revd Steve Chalke and others have no solid anchoring in the first millennium of Christian thought.

But such an awareness in no way undermines the orthodox view, both Eastern and Western, that humanity's spiritual fortunes were transformed by Christ's Passion and resurrection. This is the tenet that I was seeking to expound as sensitively as possible in my book *The Hardest Problem: God, evil and suffering*. It draws on the

theological resources of East and West alike.

RUPERT SHORTT

St Edmund's College

Cambridge CB3 0BN

© Church Times 2022. All rights reserved.