

Shaped by God Together – Update on work of the Finance Planning Group

Purpose and work so far:

The Finance Planning Group (set up as part of SBGT) was tasked with looking at data related to various aspects of the finance of parishes and the diocese, and modelling different approaches to finance our ministry for the future. The work so far has been focused on:

- Examining possible changes and adaptations to our Parish Contribution system, including the feasibility and use of calculating a benefice figure for the cost of ministry (ordained and lay).
- Using available data to identify the financial health of parishes and what the overall diocesan picture is. Putting this data into a dashboard so that it can be used to help church communities be better informed and take decisions about their own finances.
- Exploring ways in which diocesan assets could be more effectively used to support the priorities that have been identified in the SbGT process.

SBGT Finance Conversations:

Between January and March, the workstream group shared some of this thinking in: 6 conversation sessions; 2 groups at diocesan synod; and 1 session with representatives from church communities in areas of deprivation. In total these conversations were attended by over 50 clergy, church officers and church members who had responded to the open invitation to participate.

The main themes from these conversations have been summarised below:

- A general desire for greater transparency regarding the income and expenditure of the diocese, and specifically understanding the impact of the contribution that parishes make through their Contribution.
- A commitment to the value of generosity that underpins our current Parish Contribution system, and a desire that this should stimulate a growing sense of shared mission and belonging to each other.
- A desire for more information, and a simple benchmark figure, to guide decisions regarding the level of Parish Contribution offers.
- A recognition of the particular issues affecting church communities operating in a context of deprivation, and a desire that diocesan spending should reflect God's preference for the poor.

A full summary of the conversations can be found on the diocesan website where you can see not only the common themes but also some of the divergences in opinion.

The Diocesan Synod in May will be asked to establish some key principles around diocesan finances and parish contributions to guide further planning.

Work in the coming months:

In the coming months the work of the Finance Planning Group will be focused on:

- Creating the budget for 2022, and exploring the ways in which this budget can support the transition in ministry that will occur during 2022 as various parts of SbGT are implemented.
- Testing out how our Parish Contribution system could be adapted to the three ministry models currently being explored.
- Creating a simple and clear calculation to communicate the cost of ministry in benefices. Exploring with a working group the ways in which transparency and information sharing could be improved with regard to diocesan finance.