



10. Cost of Living Crisis – Discussion Paper for Synod

Introduction

As we are all aware, Parishes, Benefices and families across the Diocese are in the midst of a significant cost of living crisis. Energy costs, food prices and mortgages are all increasing - some at an alarming rate – and this clearly is having an impact on the Diocese – at all levels.

This paper seeks to articulate some of the key issues associated with the cost of living, in order to engender Synod debate, and to elicit ideas, exchange of best practice, and questions, in open discussion.

National Church Grants

The National Church granted £239k to the Diocese of Bristol, the distribution of which is already underway. The National Church recognises this is a starting point and will be a partial assistance in a tough landscape for parishes. We are thankful that they have made these monies available.

Net Zero

It is clear that the medium and long term solution to many of our concerns about energy costs will be resolved as we progress towards Net Zero. The Diocese will be investing heavily in Net Zero over the next 2 years, and beyond that with National Church funding. Early activities will include Diocesan funded Net Zero audits (and production of local plans), and a number of material upgrades and improvements. But this is not a solution in the short term.

Warm Spaces

At the same time, a number of churches are planning to offer warm welcome/spaces over the winter. The long term meteorological forecast is that the early part of the winter will be cold, the latter a bit warmer.

There are a number of area contacts who are overseeing the work:

- Swindon – Rev Mark Tidey, MTidey@swindon.gov.uk
- Wiltshire – Karen Linaker, Karen.Linaker@wiltshire.gov.uk
- South Gloucestershire – Barbara Sullivan, Barbara.Sullivan@southglos.gov.uk
- Bristol – Andy Street, astreet@slrconsulting.com

Richard Leaman, Diocesan Secretary

Email: richard.leaman@bristoldiocese.org

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And some useful resources can be found here:

1. Sign up to www.warmwelcome.uk and register your space with them
2. Asda Foundation grants - https://www.asdafoundation.org/documents/cost-of-living/Cost_of_Living_Grant_Round_3_Group_Guidance.pdf
3. Bristol / South Gloucestershire Quartet Funding [Apply for Grants - Give to your Community - Quartet CF](#)
4. Wiltshire apply for Local Board Funding
5. Link for efficient room heaters from Simon Pugh, see attached for details and discount codes: <https://www.herschel-infrared.co.uk/warm-welcome-church-heating/>

Chris Dobson has produced some questions for us to ask ourselves before embarking on this, and they are included at Annex A.

Temporary Closure of Churches

The National Church have just issued guidance on the temporary closure of our churches, which is seen as an absolute last resort, and can only be undertaken with Episcopal approval. The guidance is at Annex B. It is clear that this approach would come with a number of challenges, and several disadvantages.

Parish Share

In amongst all these challenges, we have to balance the need to continue effective worship and outreach projects, with the need to support one another through Parish Share. PCCs will be aware we have just introduced a new system of calculating the requested amounts which, after consultation and discernment, is designed to be more transparent, fairer and much more simple. It is recognised that this element of a PCC's budget is under severe pressure at the moment, but there is – arguably - no more important time to sustain local giving, which in turn supports the wider Diocese – and particularly those in dire need.

The Diocese is building a fundraising capability this Autumn which aims to generate new streams of income at a Diocesan and local level. Part of this capability seeks to support Parishes in local fundraising efforts, particularly in areas which we know will have 'community' appeal; outreach, community centres, food banks, and so on. Success in these areas may well counterbalance some of the other pressures on PCC budgets and allow pledges to be fulfilled.

Discussion

Synod is asked to discuss these issues on their tables, and to generate some solutions and questions to raise in open forum. The key questions we are asking are:

- **what is your parish doing that other parishes can learn from?**
- **What else can we do to alleviate the short-term pressure on PCC budgets?**

ANNEX A TO DISCUSSION PAPER – WARM SPACES/WELCOMES

Here are some questions we could ask ourselves:

- Are there other local partners who would provide funding / food / coffee, etc.
- Are there other churches / community buildings providing warm places that you could collaborate with to ensure wider coverage?
- Could people who have received the £400 rebate but don't need it be encouraged to donate it fund warm spaces – either in their own community or in other areas of need?
- Could you use your church office as a Warm Space? It may be smaller than the church, but cheaper to heat.
- If the church is being heated already, for a service or meeting, could you then use it afterwards as a Warm Space?
- Herschell have also agreed further discounts via codes which can be added at 'checkout' for orders coming from churches or others seeking to serve the community in this way.
- Offer prices and Voucher codes:
 - Colorado and stand combo; £478, special price £378 Discount code to be entered at checkout: wwhc100 (For this model, there are 3 options on display. This offer relates to model: COLOR-R-MSTAND (priced at £478))
 - o Florida; £299, special price £245 Discount code to be entered at checkout: wwdf54
 - o Malibu; £379, special price £279 Discount code to be entered at checkout: wwmm100
 - o Havana £149, special price £99 Discount code to be entered at checkout: wwmm50
- In terms of running costs, at current electricity rates, the Colorado, Florida and Malibu will all cost about 50p per hour if on full power.
- Please keep the diocese in touch with what you are doing, if you find any sources of funding, or ideas that might help others by emailing: chris.dobson@bristoldiocese.org or Christopher Bryan and Neil Warwick.

ANNEX B - NATIONAL CHURCH GUIDANCE ON THE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF CHURCHES

The cost of living crisis, the rise in the cost of energy to heat church buildings, and environmental concerns, have led to some congregations seeking permission to worship elsewhere in the coldest winter months.

The Church of England Environment programme and ChurchCare have produced guidance with practical suggestions to help parishes save energy and money. See '*Practical Suggestions to help Parishes save Energy and Money*' before any decision to move worship elsewhere is contemplated, the advice in this document should be followed.

Moving non-worship activities outside the church building to a venue easier or less costly to heat can be decided locally by a parish, but is subject to the law on parish worship, and may require the agreement of the bishop (see below). There are legal, pastoral, missional and reputational issues to moving worship elsewhere so it is a decision that requires careful consideration. Depending on the local situation these may be weighted differently but, whatever the decision, it will have an impact on the perception of the church and its mission in its community.

If there is a smaller area of the church, that can be heated, that would serve the purpose, consider using this as a first option. The next option is livestreaming worship, so more vulnerable congregants can join from elsewhere. Moving either some or all worship to another building should be a last option *after others are considered*. This may be justified by the pastoral and missional, as well as stewardship, benefits of such a move. Any permission to relocate worship will ideally have a timescale for a return to the church, with some monitoring and support over the return to church. A building not used for worship can still be left open to visitors and should be visited regularly – say weekly – to check all is well.

The response to churches being closed during Covid has reminded us of the pastoral benefit of the church being open.

If an occasional office, major festival or regular well-attended event that normally happens in the church falls when worship is taking place elsewhere, it is almost certainly appropriate to go to church for it as usual (e.g. Advent and Christmas).

The Law

You need to consider the requirements of **Canon B11**, which requires morning and evening prayer to be said or sung in at least one church in each benefice on all Sundays and other principal Feast Days. Those requirements can be dispensed with only in accordance with the provisions of **Canon B14A**, which authorises such dispensation on an occasional basis as authorised by the minister who has the cure of souls and the PCC of each parish in the benefice acting jointly.

Dispensation on a regular basis requires the authorisation of the bishop. If you are considering this, you should seek advice from the Diocesan Office (Emma Bakewell), who will advise whether formal dispensation is required in your case. If an application is made, it should be to the Bishop directly, copied to the Archdeacons.

Holy Communion must be celebrated in at least one church in each benefice, or, where benefices are held in plurality, in at least one church in at least one of those benefices at least on all Sundays and on principal feast days (**Canon 14**), although this can also be dispensed with under **Canon B14**. No minister may celebrate Holy Communion elsewhere than in a consecrated building within their cure or other licensed building, unless they have

permission from the bishop of the diocese, or in the case of administering at home to a person who is sick or dying.

Communicating your decision

The community should be kept up to date with where to attend worship, in person, online or both. The information should be available where it is easy found and in more than one format, for example a notice at the church as well as online. Also, if worship is not taking place in the church to make clear whether the building will still be open for independent visits.

Maintaining your building when it is closed

If you do make the difficult decision to close your church during winter, please ensure the following practical steps are taken:

- That you have consulted your insurer, and are following any requirements they have.
- Check that your plans do not put you in breach of any grant requirements which specify the building must be open a certain amount; you may be able to discuss your plans with the funder and gain their permission.
- Some churches can be left unheated; they were built before a time of central heating and will do fine. This is generally true for electrically heated churches, with no water pipes.
- Most churches will need to be left in 'frost protection mode' when empty. Take care that thermostats have the frost setting turned on and correctly set. (See our guidance on frost protection, *Managing the Frost Protection of your Church During Closure*.)
- That someone will enter the building at least weekly to check for any break-ins, leaks, or other issues. Could this visit be combined with an act of worship?
- Consider if any items normally kept in the building need to be temporarily kept elsewhere.
- If there is an organ to confirm with the organ tuner how regularly it should be played while the church is closed.