21/08 Administrative burden on parishes
25/08 Business managers for churches

(A report from the Policy 4 Committee.)

Introduction

1.   By resolution 21/08 the Synod requested, in light of Policy 4 of the Diocesan Mission, that the Diocesan Registry and the Sydney Diocesan Secretariat ("SDS") provide a report to the Standing Committee with concrete recommendations about how they, or other organisations, can alleviate some of the administrative burden from parishes. These reports should include, but not be limited to, the areas of accounting, staff employment or appointment, safe ministry requirements, property and insurance matters. Synod further requested that the Standing Committee seriously consider these recommendations and the resources and/or funding necessary for their implementation in the allocation made for the next triennium under the Synod Appropriations and Allocations Ordinance 2009.

2.   By resolution 25/08 the Synod requested, to accelerate the quality and quantity of interchange regarding solving the complexity of administration in our parishes, that the Ordinance Reform Group and SDS –

(a)   investigate any business manager employment arrangements that presently exist within the Diocese with the aim of preparing guidelines of suitable qualifications and work practices for use by other parishes considering such employees, and

(b)   consider a pilot program of appointing, training, monitoring and supporting a church (or churches) to pioneer the task of employment of a business manager with the aim of establishing guidelines of suitable qualifications and work practices for use by all parishes in the future and to allocate sufficient Synod funds to accomplish this purpose.

3.   This report has been prepared by the Policy 4 Committee (the "Committee") in response to the requests made by Synod in resolutions 21/08 and 25/08.

Administrative burden on parishes

Introduction

4.   There is an increasing awareness of the main factors which inhibit parishes undertaking the "core business" of the Diocesan Mission. In 2007, the former Reform Strategy Group chaired by Mr Andrew Mitchell summarised the situation as follows –

… parishes are time poor, administratively burdened, resource constrained and lacking leadership in may areas of parish life critical to the mission. There is an urgent need to share resources through technology, centralised resourcing and training … there are many examples of effective support by diocesan entities but there is an enormous potential for the improvement of the partnerships.

5.   The Mitchell report identified a range of factors which inhibit parishes undertaking mission. This report focuses on one factor, namely the administrative burden on parishes.

Sources of administrative burden

6.   Most of a parish's administrative burdens have their ultimate source in an ever increasing range of external regulatory obligations, for example in the areas of child protection, heritage, fire safety, privacy law, taxation, occupational health and safety and employment law. In previous years, many of these regulatory areas either did not exist or, if they did, churches and other religious organisations were exempt from their general application.

7.   In many cases, therefore, removing the need for parishes to comply with those obligations is not an option. Rather, the challenge is to better manage compliance with these obligations.

8.   The Synod and other diocesan agencies have put in place a number of processes which seek to assist parishes in meeting their obligations in an effective and relevant way. For example –

- the Synod requires churches and parishes to have their annual financial statements audited and to submit them to the Diocesan Secretary shortly after the applicable annual general meeting of parishioners,

- the Synod requires persons to undertake a safe ministry course before undertaking children's ministry,

- the Property Trust requires most contractual arrangements involving parish property to be signed by it as the legal owner of the property,

- the Property Trust requires parishes to submit annual insurance returns,

- SDS requests that parishes submit annual risk management returns.

It is appropriate that such diocesan processes are reviewed from time to time to ensure they are both necessary and effective.

Structural aspects giving rise to administrative challenges

9.   In considering how to address the administrative challenges faced by parishes, the Committee noted the highly decentralised model of parish ministry which exists in this Diocese. For example, under this model, each parish is regarded as a separate entity for tax and employment purposes.   The decentralised ministry model at a diocesan level is reinforced at a local level by the fundamental aim of the Mission to "multiply Bible-based Christian fellowships, congregations and churches".

10.   There are sound theological and missiological reasons for continuing with a model of parish ministry which operates with a high degree of local autonomy from the administrative centre of the Diocese.   Similarly there are sound reasons to encourage the multiplication of Bible-based Christian fellowships as opposed to seeking to create a smaller number of "mega-churches" across the Diocese.   However the Committee considers it is important to recognise that our commitment to structuring parish ministry in this way gives rise to some inherent challenges in minimising the administrative burden on parishes. What works to achieve administrative efficiencies may, at least to some extent, run counter to the best model for undertaking ministry and, in particular, for providing meaningful opportunities for people to connect with and be nurtured within personal and distinct Christian communities.

11.   While the Committee believes there are strategies that can be adopted to address the administrative challenges faced by parishes, it wishes to introduce a degree of realism into the discussion by suggesting that administration is likely always to be a challenge for most parishes.

Existing services provided to parishes

12.   There is already a range of services provided by central diocesan agencies to assist parishes in meeting their obligations and better administering their activities. These include –

- Legal services (SDS)
- Sydney Anglican Parishes Accounting System (or SAPAS) (SDS)
- Clergy stipend continuance, long service leave, superannuation, and sickness and accident payments (SDS)
- Website hosting (SDS)
- Parish risk management program (SDS/Property Trust)
- Parish asbestos management program (SDS/Property Trust)
- Central diocesan insurance program (SDS/Property Trust)

- Procurement (SDS/Angliconnect)
- Parish Activity Manager (or PAM) (SDS)
- Diocesan Wide Network (or DAWN) (SDS)
- Glebe Income Accounts (or GIA) (GAB)
- Planned giving (GAB)
- Loans (GAB and Finance & Loans Board)
- Superannuation and financial planning advice (Sydney Diocesan Superannuation Board/AMP)
- Safe ministry training (Anglican Youthworks)
- Church discipline (Professional Standards Unit)

13.   One of the challenges in providing central services to parishes is that unless one solution fits all parishes or is mandated for all parishes (or a substantial proportion of parishes), it becomes difficult to provide the solution in a cost effective manner for the parishes wanting to take advantage of it. There are a number of things that can be (and are being) done effectively but these are generally needed, used by or mandated for all or a substantial proportion of parishes. The challenge is particularly significant at this time for organisations such as SDS which is seeking to manage the tension between cost reductions and the maintenance of its core services.

14.   In addition to the services provided by central diocesan agencies, diocesan organisations such as Moore Theological College, Anglicare, Anglicare Retirement Villages, Evangelism Ministries and Anglican Youthworks provide services and undertake activities that usually cannot be provided or undertaken by individual parishes.

Review of centrally provided services

15.   In order to ensure that central services are being provided effectively and to identify other useful services that are capable of being provided to parishes in a sustainable way, the Committee intends to convene a series of focus groups comprising clergy and lay persons from parishes to discuss these matters in a structured manner. An important part of this process will be to ask relevant diocesan agencies to comment on feedback received from these focus groups and to consider opportunities for increased collaboration in the delivery of services across different diocesan agencies and organisations. Particular areas of interest might be –

- occupational health and safety
- employment relations
- procurement
- ordinance preparation, property development and dealings
- reporting requirements

- financial statements
- architectural panels
- accounting requirements
- technology support

16.   The parish focus groups would include participants from a range of different parish types from varying locations across the Diocese.

17.   The Committee intends to provide a further report to the Synod on the outcome of its focus group sessions together with some specific recommendations for enhancing the provision of central services by diocesan agencies. It is hoped that such a report can be provided to the Synod in 2010.

Orientation program

18.   The Committee suggests that service providers situated in St Andrew's House consider running an orientation program for wardens, treasurers, parish business managers and others involved in parish administration.   The main purpose of such an orientation program would be to give those involved in parish administration an opportunity to meet key diocesan staff, to receive information, to ask questions and to make comments and suggestions about the services provided.

19.   An orientation program would aim to complement initiatives already being undertaken by diocesan organisations such as SDS which, for example, has organised a number of seminars/conferences over recent years for parish administrators. SDS also has a significant amount of information about its services on its website www.sds.asn.au.

20.   The Committee considers that an orientation program would not only assist parishes to understand the support that already exists but may also provide an important source of information for ensuring that the matters covered in the focus groups are well-targetted and the persons invited to participate in the focus groups represent an appropriate sample of parish types.

Point of contact for centrally provided services

21.   It is likely that the role of regional archdeacon will be discontinued in the short to long-term.   Regional archdeacons have provided an important source of information to parishes about appropriate diocesan staff to contact about particular matters.

22.   The Committee intends to work with central diocesan service providers such as SDS to consider what steps might be taken to ensure that parishes continue to have helpful information about relevant diocesan staff.

23.   Again, this work would complement the contact details of key diocesan staff which is already available from SDS in hard copy format and on its website www.sds.asn.au.

Partnerships between parishes

24.   The Committee considers that, in addition to seeking to enhance the provision of central services, there should be a complementary strategy of facilitating partnerships between parishes in supporting one another within the diocesan network. There are a number of examples of well resourced parishes providing administrative support to other parishes, for example by releasing the parish accountant for a certain number of hours per week to provide assistance to a partnered parish.

25.   The Committee considers that these partnerships will only work in the context of personal relationships. However one means of facilitating such relationships would be to ask, say, regional councils to compile and periodically update a register of parishes in their region who may be willing to provide administrative assistance and a register of parishes who are seeking such assistance with a view to these being consolidated and circulated by the Standing Committee to all parishes. Beyond this the Committee considers that the process of partnering should be allowed to run its natural course, although brief guidelines on how to optimise such partnerships could be developed by the Standing Committee and circulated with the consolidated registers.

Christian principles underpinning our approach to administration

26.   The Committee considers it important to ensure that any initiative taken to assist parishes in administration should be underpinned by the following Christian principles –

- Seeking to keep building good relationships.
- Enabling good relationships by sharing resources, guarding shared reputation and protecting the vulnerable.
- Helping each other by sharing those who administer well.

Business managers for parishes

27.   In response to resolution 25/08, the Committee has identified all parishes in the Diocese who employ a business manager or similar position. It intends to contact a number of these parishes with a view to compiling and preparing material relevant to the employment of such persons including guidelines, suggested job descriptions and letters of appointment etc.

28.   Given the range of administrative needs between different parishes, it is unlikely that a "one-size fits all model" for business managers will be sufficient. For example, model documentation

suitable for a business manager employed by a larger parish in a executive role is likely to be very different to documentation suitable for a PA/administrator in a more clerical role.

29.   Any material prepared would be made available to all parishes, possibly as an update to SDS's *Employment Relations Guidelines for Parishes*.

30.   At this stage the Committee does not consider it necessary to undertake a separate pilot program to assess how a parish business manager can be used most effectively. Instead the Committee will seek to assess the effectiveness of such arrangements when contacting parishes about employment-related materials for business managers.

31.   The Committee is mindful that many parishes cannot afford to employ a business manager. One possibility which the Committee intends exploring is whether structures can be put in place to facilitate the employment of a business manager whose services can be shared by a number of parishes. Since alleviating administrative burden has important implications for freeing up time for ministry and engaging in mission, shared employment arrangements may be something that could be considered by the proposed Mission Leaders for their parish groups.

Response of the Standing Committee

32.   The Standing Committee has requested that the following motion be moved at Synod –

> "Synod receives the report on the Administrative Burden on Parishes and –
>
> (a)   encourages parishes, in the context of personal relationships within the diocesan network, to seek opportunities to provide administrative support to one another,
>
> (b)   requests the Standing Committee to consider facilitating such partnerships of support by compiling and disseminating information about parishes which may be willing to provide support and parishes which are seeking support, and
>
> (c)   requests that all submissions to government include, where appropriate, recommendations to reduce the administrative burden on parishes and diocesan organisations."

For and on behalf of the Committee

PETER KELL
Chair, Policy 4 Committee

2 September 2009