

Ad Clerum 1.1

EPISCOPAL PARTNERSHIP

The bishop of the diocese has ultimate responsibility in the exercise of episcopal authority and pastoral care throughout the diocese. However, as diocesan bishop, I would be in an impossible position if I were not able to share my responsibilities with others and particularly with the two suffragan bishops, the archdeacons and other members of the Bishop's Staff. It may be helpful to the clergy to set out how we try to share out the episcopal duties between myself and the Bishops of Bedford and Hertford.

For the exercise of pastoral care of clergy and parishes the suffragan bishops work mainly in their respective archdeaconries; that is, the Bishop of Bedford with the Archdeaconry of Bedford, and the Bishop of Hertford with the Archdeaconries of Hertford and St Albans. The clergy turn most naturally to their own suffragan bishop for most day to day matters in connection with their own ministry. This will not only be a response to a request at a particular point of need, but also will enable me as diocesan bishop to exercise an essential element of my episcopal office. I particularly value the opportunity of hearing from you at the time your name comes up on the diocesan calendar of prayer and feeling in this way a close link in prayer and ministry with all the clergy in the diocese. It is not possible for any one of us to be in very close touch with everyone all of the time, but we all want to be easily accessible to you, either for a phone call or an appointment when you need us. We operate as a close team and, at the Bishop's Staff meeting, we share information and concerns in the context of worship and prayer together. Needless to say, the confidential nature of any conversation is always respected.

In addition to archdeaconry responsibilities the suffragan bishops have responsibility for specific areas of diocesan life and are involved in the chairmanship of some of the boards and committees.

Confirmations are shared by all three bishops approximately equally. All of us find them immensely moving and special occasions. I undertake them throughout the diocese; the suffragan bishops take confirmation services substantially in their own archdeaconries, though to keep the work load equitable, the Bishop of Bedford does more in Hertfordshire than the Bishop of Hertford does in Bedfordshire.

For institutions and licensings, the general policy is that I institute or license those coming into the diocese, while the suffragans will institute or license in the case of internal moves. Clearly there will be exceptions to this policy from time to time due to pressure on the diary.

While I retain certain legal responsibilities, the practicalities of a vacancy, and of the appointment process, are left in the hands of the suffragan bishops and the respective archdeacon. They make the arrangements with the Patron and the parish(es) for interviews etc., and issue the announcements of vacancy and appointment. All appointments are fully discussed regularly at the Bishop's Staff meeting.

We have developed a regular pattern of meetings between the suffragan bishop, the archdeacon and the rural deans in the three archdeaconries. There is also a meeting annually for me to meet with the rural deans and the deanery lay chairs. I also ask my senior staff to be present on that occasion.

The suffragan bishops take part with me in the ordination services at the Cathedral.

As we seek to pray for *you*, may I say how much I am strengthened by the knowledge that I am regularly prayed for throughout the diocese. I would ask that the suffragan bishops are similarly remembered and their archdeacons with them.

Below is a list of matters which should normally be referred directly to your suffragan bishop.

Appendix

The suffragan bishops will deal directly with matters of:

- Baptismal discipline
- Marriage of unbaptised persons
- Permission for lay people to administer the bread and wine at Holy Communion
- Permission for lay people to take the reserved sacrament to the sick and housebound
- Consecration of burial grounds
- Requests to receive into communion members of other Churches
- Interviews of candidates for selection for ordained or accredited ministry
- Interviews of prospective deacons for titles

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