

Ad Clerum 1.6

THE DEANERY CHAPTER

The bishops consider the deanery chapter to have a vital pastoral and educational role to play in the care of the church's ministers, even though it has no statutory existence in the synodical government of the church.

Membership of the chapter includes all stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy, men and women, accredited lay ministers and retired clergy. By agreement it may include Readers. Alternatively occasional meetings may include Readers, diocesan lay ministers and other key lay people, such as the lay chairman of the deanery. Please remember to include those who are outside parochial ministry such as hospital, school and other chaplains, and those with permission to officiate.

In order to facilitate this wider fellowship, meetings should be arranged at a variety of times during the day and in the evening so that all members can attend on at least some occasions in the year. Chapters should normally meet monthly or bi-monthly. In areas where there are strong ecumenical ministerial gatherings, or group or team meetings, thought needs to be given to the care of those less involved: while it may be wise to hold the chapter less frequently to avoid proliferating meetings, it may be that alternative arrangements should be made for those who minister on their own. In other areas a monthly meeting should be the norm. Dates should be fixed a year ahead and circulated in writing to all members.

It is our wish that all members of the chapter should give a high priority to attendance, and should not normally accept funerals or other engagements at the time of chapter meetings. The bishops regard attendance as vital for the mutual support and benefit of ministers, to maintain good communication and to combat isolation.

The programme of the chapter needs to be planned well in advance, preferably a year ahead, and should include opportunities for study, prayer and the sharing of experiences, opportunities and problems. Many deaneries value an annual Quiet Day and some arrange an occasional social event (to which the bishops and archdeacons are always glad to be invited). Many chapters appoint a clerk from among their number to help the rural dean organise the chapter programme.

Chapter meetings can play an important role in the continuing education of the Church's ministers. It is for each chapter to decide their own approach: some chapters have a regular programme of biblical or theological study, while others arrange for visiting speakers or for discussions led by the member who is hosting the meeting. The Ministerial Development Officer is always willing to advise on this aspect of the chapter's life. The organisation of chapter studies should not necessarily fall on the rural dean.

The chapter is an important channel of communication between the diocese and the clergy, and there will usually be matters of business which the rural dean has to report, as well as concerns which the clergy may wish the rural dean to convey back to the diocese. The arrangement of cover for services in holidays and vacancies should be made well in advance. The suffragan bishop and archdeacon welcome invitations to meet with the chapter from time to time.

The chapter must recognise the limits of its authority, and in exchanging information and expressing opinions, members must be careful not to make or pre-empt decisions which belong to the Deanery Synod.

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