

The Definition of an Archdeacon: Legal, Pastoral or Neither?

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Previous articles in this Journal on the subject of the role of archdeacons have created a dichotomy, between an archdeacon's role as being primarily legal or their role being primarily pastoral. This article examines the development of the role of an archdeacon and explores what was and is actually stated about them in legislation. It becomes clear that a legal definition is insufficient, so various non-statutory roles are then explored to ascertain whether it is, instead, pastoral. This, too, is found to be unconvincing, leading to a conclusion that the function of the archdeacon in the Church of England does not have a legal definition at all, but is rather a people-facing role which has attracted legal functions to it. What is more, even the pastoral aspect of the role is ill-defined without the legally stated relationships found in other offices, leaving an archdeacon's overall function, essential as it may be, subjective and open to challenge or interpretation. The article concludes that the role is primarily defined by nothing more than a blend of both national and local customs, a feature that could potentially be a vital source of strength.

WHAT IS AN ARCHDEACON?

Archdeacons have many facets to their role and a variety of duties to perform,² and to discuss the definition and function of an archdeacon is effectively to ask ‘what does an archdeacon do?’. In order to ask that we must first ask what an archdeacon actually is and how the position developed. The term archdeacon is a composite of two Greek words literally meaning ‘the first among the helpers’ or ‘the chief deacon’, and can therefore trace its etymological roots back to the church in the Acts of the Apostles when Stephen and others are described as *diaconia*.³ The actual term archdeacon is, itself, very old, the first recorded use being by Anastasias during the tenure of Pope Sixtus II when referring to someone called Laurentius, Archdeacon of Rome, who suffered in the year 260, and the term also being used by Pope

- 1 As an associate archdeacon I am often asked what it is I do, and to answer I find I sometimes need to clarify first what an Archdeacon does and then explain which parts are delegated to me. This article is based on research undertaken into this matter as a part of the LLM (Canon Law) at Cardiff University. I am particularly grateful to Professor Norman Doe for his guidance and wisdom on this subject.
- 2 The Diocese of Exeter, *Bishop's Guidelines for the Ordained Ministry* (2020), § 7 – Bishops, Archdeacons and Rural Deans, see <<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Bishops-Guidelines-1-3-June-2020.pdf>> accessed 14 April 2022.
- 3 J Cannon and R Crowcroft, ‘Archdeacons’ in *A Dictionary of British History* (Oxford, 2015).

Damasus I in the following century who referred to Stephen, the first deacon and first martyr, as an archdeacon.⁴

By the fourth century the term *archidiaconus* began to be used to refer to a particular office in the Church when Caecilianus, who was the chief administrative assistant of the bishop in his diocese, was referred to as Archdeacon of Carthage.⁵ The administrative office seems to have developed over the centuries, but there is some dispute as to when archdeacons first accrued a jurisdiction of their own in English law. Some historians attribute its establishment to Archbishop Lanfranc during the reign of William the Conqueror, although William's own writ which reads '*Nullus Episcopus vel Archidiaconus de legibus Episcopalibus amplius in hundredo placita teneat*'⁶ suggests that archdeacons already had jurisdiction here in England.⁷ Either way, it is apparent that the archdeacon had a wide and varied jurisdiction from this time onwards and that the archdeacon's role developed into that of being an intermediary between the bishop and the parochial clergy and their parishioners.⁸ For example, *Licet iuxta apostolum* (x 5.37.3), a decretal of Pope Alexander III (Pope from 1159 to 1181) to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, relates to a case whereby the archdeacon of Coventry was exacting financial penalties for spiritual crimes, the Pope henceforth forbidding such practice,⁹ and by the second half of the twelfth century archdeacons were not only ensuring that their bishop's instructions were enacted and their revenue collected, they were also acting with quite a substantial degree of autonomy: they investigated new churches prior to consecration, visited existing ones to maintain order, oversaw the transfers of patronage rights, and examined the qualities of new priests prior to ordination. They also exercised authority over the laity with regard to morality and began to adjudicate matters in the Archdeacon's Courts such as adultery, excommunication and oaths.¹⁰ Following the third Lateran Council they accrued responsibility for ensuring that church buildings and other church property within their archdeaconry were kept in good repair.¹¹

It is notable that at this time archdeacons were quite explicitly of the order of deacon with the *Canons of Westminster* (1102) emphasising that archdeacons are

4 W Hook, *A Church Dictionary* (London, Oxford and Leeds, 1842), 53.

5 J Guy, 'Archdeacons' in *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford, 2015), 41.

6 This translates as 'No bishop or archdeacon shall hold pleas in the hundred concerning episcopal laws'.

7 Hook (note 4), 54.

8 Guy (note 5).

9 R Helmholz, *The Spirit of Classical Canon Law* (Georgia, 1996), 349.

10 S Marritt, "All this I say against the rage of archdeacons against my poor fellow citizens": Archdeacons' Authority and Identity in Twelfth-Century England' (2017) 102 *History* 914–932.

11 Guy (note 5).

not priests.¹² It is also apparent that their authority could not be found purely in their administrative functions, nor could it be explained solely in terms of being directly transmitted from their bishop. There was some sort of spiritual dimension that belonged to the office in its own right,¹³ and the relationship with episcopal authority was complex. Although their jurisdiction derived from the bishop who was the one to collate them, they were inducted by the dean as a canon of the cathedral and so maintained a degree of independence and were themselves described as having an ordinary jurisdiction which, by custom, might be independent of the bishop even if its historical origin lay with him.¹⁴ We shall examine what the 'ordinary jurisdiction' of an archdeacon might be in more depth later in this article.

Interestingly, by the time of the *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical* of 1603 there are frequent mentions of archdeacons and their jurisdiction, but no mention of their qualities or what they actually are. For example, the heading before Canon 109 states 'Ecclesiastical courts belonging to the jurisdiction of bishops and archdeacons, and the proceedings in them' without any previous mention of what an archdeacon is. Canons 121 and 122 deal with the distinction between an archdeacon's jurisdiction and that of their bishop, and while Canon 127 lays out the qualities and oaths required of the other office with ordinary jurisdiction within a diocese, the chancellor, and Canon 128 lays out the qualities of such as may be deputised to by the archdeacon, no corresponding canon exists that relates directly to the archdeacon.¹⁵ They are also absent from the preface to the ordinal found in the *Book of Common Prayer* which lays out the qualities of bishops, priests and deacons,¹⁶ and, despite repeated and regular mention in the *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* regarding their various functions and responsibilities, there is no description or definition of what an archdeacon is or how one becomes one.¹⁷ It is not until 1840 that the qualities of archdeacons are mentioned in statute when, in a development of the ancient custom and seemingly in recognition of the issues of the time, it is decreed that archdeacons must have completed six years in priest's orders prior to appointment.¹⁸

Changes in the jurisprudence of England as a whole had a dramatic impact on the various functions of archdeacons. Since the days of William the Conqueror in 1072 there had been two jurisdictions, one temporal and one spiritual, and until the mid-nineteenth century ecclesiastical courts acted on such matters as

12 G Evans, 'Lanfranc, Anselm and a new consciousness of canon law in England' in N Doe (ed), *English Canon Law* (Cardiff, 1998), 8.

13 Marritt (note 10), 926.

14 Hook (note 4), 54.

15 *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical 1603* (London, 1665).

16 *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge, 2004), 554.

17 E Gibson and R Grey, *Codex juris ecclesiastici anglicani*, 4th edn (London, 1743).

18 Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act 1840 c. 113, s 27.

marriage, testaments and defamation before they were removed to the temporal courts. The two primary spiritual tribunals in any diocese were the archdeacon's court and the consistory court for many centuries, but the ongoing reforms of the nineteenth century meant that the archdeacon's court fell out of favour given that the right of appeal only went one way, from archdeacon's court to consistory court, so the higher authority tended to be sought as a matter of course, and by 1963 the archdeacon's court disappeared altogether.¹⁹

It is already clear from this overview that the role of the archdeacon has been poorly defined in the past despite its existence being recognised in the literature and canons, the reader being required to extrapolate what it is from a plethora of functions. But what of the present day? Are we any closer to knowing what it is?

In the Church of England, the primary definition of an archdeacon is to be found in the canons. Canon C22 '*Of archdeacons*' consists of five clauses, one about qualification, two about authority, and two about function. Discussion about authority and function will take place in the following section, but it is appropriate to discuss the issue of qualification here as it pertains to what an archdeacon is, not what one does. The canon states that an archdeacon must have 'six years in holy orders and being in priests' orders at the time of appointment',²⁰ a retreat from the 1840 stipulation that they must have at least six years in priest's orders yet not quite a return to the older, diaconal, nature of the role.

As priests, archdeacons are required to make the declaration of assent and take the oaths of canonical obedience and allegiance as set out in canons C13, C14 and C15, but despite this requirement to be in priest's orders and under episcopal authority there is no mention in the canons of any function usually associated with the priesthood, no liturgical or sacramental ministry, no cure of souls and no requirement to reside within their area of jurisdiction (in contrast to both parish priests and bishops).²¹ It would seem, in this regard at the very least, that there is a lack of clarity around the legal definition of the role. While not mentioned in the canons as a part of what an archdeacon is, they are, along with others, part of the cathedral college of canons in their diocese.²²

19 T Briden, *Moore's Introduction to Canon Law*, 4th edn (London, 2013), 159.

20 Canon C22 (1).

21 Canons C18 (8) and C25 (1).

22 Briden (note 19), 5.

THE LEGAL FUNCTIONS OF ARCHDEACONS

Given that canon C22 makes specific reference to the requirements and functions of archdeacons one might assume, therefore, that their role is clearly defined. We have already discovered that the requirement to be in priest's orders as stated in canon C22(1) is not without difficulty. The next two clauses of the canon relate to the authority of an archdeacon, how it is that they can do whatever it is that they do:

2. Every archdeacon within his archdeaconry exercises the jurisdiction which he has therein as an ordinary jurisdiction.
3. Such jurisdiction is exercised either by the archdeacon in person or by an official or commissary to whom authority in that behalf shall have been formally committed by the archdeacon concerned.²³

It is unproblematic to accept that a bishop has jurisdiction within their diocese seeing as their principal function and their relationships with others require a power of governance, and canon C18 makes this explicit although it is also evident throughout the canons.²⁴ To call governance such as this an 'ordinary' jurisdiction requires it to be both immediate and *ex officio* as distinguished from *delegated* authority, which needs to be specifically given by the Ordinary to the one who will use it and which reverts back to the Ordinary if the delegate cannot use it.²⁵ It is, therefore, obvious to think of a bishop as being an Ordinary: this power of governance, as distinguished from the bishop's pastoral and ministerial functions, while it may commonly be delegated to a suffragan²⁶ and rarely to others, remains implicitly and explicitly with the bishop. In fact, aside from the chancellor (and, in relation to the affairs of the cathedral, the dean and chapter of the cathedral) it is only the archdeacons who share the bishop's ordinary authority,²⁷ and even then, in only limited circumstances.

So, in what sense is an archdeacon an Ordinary? While all their authority is ultimately derived from their bishop, some of it does then belong fully to them and is not delegated: canon B20 (*Of the musicians and music of the Church*) outlines a particular area of jurisdiction of the archdeacon and only invites the bishop to exercise authority if the archdeacon cannot do so in

23 Canon C22 (2) and (3).

24 See Canons B2, B3, B4, B5, B8, B12, B14A, B15A, B16, B18, B22, B24, B27, B28, B34, B38, B40, B41, B42, B43, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C13, C14, C15, C21, C23, C24, C25, C28, C30, E1, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8, G1, G2, G4, G5 and G6.

25 P Jones, 'The Bishop: Pastor, Minister and Ordinary', available at <<https://ecclesiasticallaw.wordpress.com/2012/11/17/the-bishop-pastor-minister-and-ordinary/>>, accessed 21 April 2022.

26 Canon C20.

27 Jones (note 25).

specific circumstances. Canon C7 requires the involvement of an archdeacon although it is noteworthy that even then they are ‘called to the assistance’ of the Bishop and may delegate their involvement. Canon C11 requires an archdeacon to induct but, again, they can delegate, and at canons G5 and G6 archdeacons have the same rights as bishops with regard to visitations, where they may perform all such acts as by law and custom are assigned, and to presentments. These powers hardly constitute enough of a jurisdiction to allow us to define an archdeacon’s role in those terms alone as they are relatively minor and only play a small part in the role of an archdeacon.

Having established the limited extent to which an archdeacon shares the bishop’s ordinary jurisdiction and how few times they are mentioned throughout the canons it is to the last two clauses of canon C22 that we must look to try to discover their actual function. Canon C22(4) provides that all archdeacons do they do under the authority of the bishop and states that they ‘shall assist the bishop in his pastoral care and office’.²⁸ Given that archdeacons possess no share in the cure of souls and that the bishop cannot by definition exercise this by deputy,²⁹ it is unclear what such ‘pastoral care’ actually is and so we are none the wiser as to what it is that they are doing. Does it simply mean, as the canon continues, an extension of the bishop’s *episcopate*, or oversight, by ‘ensuring that duties attaching to all ecclesiastical offices in the archdeaconry are fulfilled diligently, and bringing to the attention of the bishop matters which require correction or deserve praise’?³⁰ Surely this reporting to the bishop, while it connects the archdeacon with every part of the diocese, is not all that is meant by pastoral care? And how is this assistance that they offer to the bishop any different from what a suffragan does? Or indeed anyone who is asked by the bishop to perform such a task such as an associate archdeacon, area/rural dean or a well-placed layperson?

Canon C22(5) does spell out some specific functions with regard to the buildings and other temporalities of the church, but again it appears to be such a small role that it would be naive to suggest that this is the archdeacon’s primary function. So closer examination of canon C22 reveals that it contains little substance regarding the function of the archdeacon. Yet it is clear that the duties and responsibilities of archdeacons are many and various. As only some of these are found in the canons it is necessary to look further to enable us to explore this question and, as shall be demonstrated later, also to the local expectations, customs and policies of specific bishops in their dioceses.³¹

28 Canon C22(4).

29 *Halsbury’s Laws of England, vol 34: Ecclesiastical Law*, 5th edn (London, 2011), para 452.

30 N Doe, *The Legal Framework of the Church of England* (Oxford, 1996), 206.

31 The Diocese of Exeter, *Bishop’s Guidelines for the Ordained Ministry*, (note 2).

According to the (somewhat out-of-date) Church of England publication ‘*The statutory duties of an archdeacon*’,³² there are five areas of responsibility found in church legislation. For each I shall now outline what the archdeacon’s function is and explore whether it is well defined in law.

Diocesan governance

It is fair to say that the various statutory requirements of archdeacons in relation to diocesan governance mean that they spend a lot of time in committees and other meetings.³³ The archdeacon is an *ex officio* member of several bodies related to diocesan governance.³⁴ They are members of Diocesan Synod by virtue of rule 31(1(b)) of the Church Representation Rules 2020,³⁵ where they engage in decisions about diocesan life and consider issues referred by General Synod,³⁶ and members of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (or DAC as it is commonly known)³⁷ at which they play a role in formulating the advice to chancellors and interested parties on the missional, pastoral, technical and aesthetic aspects of proposals to make changes to the fabric of churches or their contents.³⁸ They are also named as ‘relevant persons’ in section 37(2) of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018³⁹ in terms of seeking advice from the committee, members of the Diocesan Parsonages Board or its equivalent by section 1(4) of the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972.⁴⁰ They are also members of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee by virtue of Schedule 1(4) of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011⁴¹ – a committee that has far-ranging powers in relation to buildings, parsonages, property and ecclesiastical offices,⁴² all of which could be understood as falling under the remit of sub-paragraphs (4) and (5) of canon C22 and yet which require the involvement of the other, non-archdeacon, members of the committee.

While archdeacons play a wide-ranging statutory role in diocesan governance through membership of these committees, it is noteworthy that they do not assume any unique or individual responsibility for any of these areas and are

32 *The statutory duties of an Archdeacon*, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Statutory%20Duties%20of%20an%20Archdeacon.pdf>>, accessed 10 January 2022. Almost all of the legislation referred to in this document has been either revised or replaced and hence is inaccurate, but, for this study, the categorisation into five areas of church life remains helpful.

33 J Steen, ‘Archdeacons and the law’ (2019) 21 Ecc LJ 2–18.

34 *The statutory duties of an Archdeacon* (note 32).

35 Church Representation Rules (2020), Part 4.

36 Steen (note 33), 6.

37 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, Schedule 2, para 2(1)(b).

38 Briden (note 19), 165.

39 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018.

40 Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972.

41 Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, Schedule 1.

42 Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, s 3.

only one voice among many. So, membership of these various committees alone cannot describe what an archdeacon does as they may have little influence on outcomes and decisions and could, technically, remain silent in every meeting.

Parochial governance

Archdeacons have three functions in parochial governance defined in legislation.⁴³ The first, as already stated, derives from Canon C22(5) and Canons G5 and G6, the duty to carry out annual visitations, at which they may assist the bishop by swearing in churchwardens, and to request annual Articles of Enquiry. These may appear to be an informal request for an update on how things are in the parish but are actually a legal document which facilitate the archdeacon monitoring compliance with all relevant legislation and policy, and which may be used to inform decisions taken at a diocesan level.⁴⁴

The second statutory function in relation to parishes is found in Rule M13 of Part 9 of Church Representation Rules 2020,⁴⁵ which requires an archdeacon to call an extraordinary parochial church meeting if validly requested and with sufficient cause, although they may delegate chairing it and may not vote at it.

Thirdly, at the direction of the bishop, the archdeacon inducts a priest who has been instituted to a benefice into the possession of its temporalities,⁴⁶ thereby performing a very public role in the practical management of the parish, although they can delegate this function.

As with diocesan governance, there is no cohesive picture of what the archdeacon is actually doing and why it needs to be them that is doing it rather than someone else.

Buildings and property

We have already mentioned that there are duties under Canon C22(5) relating to buildings and their contents. These require, in the first instance, that the archdeacon survey, in person or by deputy, all churches and churchyards and give direction for the amendment of all defects in the fabric, ornaments and furniture⁴⁷, but actually extend beyond that and further duties are outlined in the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 in section 3.3(1(a)) and Part 8,⁴⁸ which allow them to permit certain alterations without faculty and to bestow licences

43 *The statutory duties of an Archdeacon* (note 32).

44 The Diocese of Exeter (note 2).

45 Church Representation Rules 2020.

46 Canon C22(5).

47 Canon C22(5).

48 The Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 as amended by the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, Schedule 3, Part 2 and the Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules 2019, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/FJR%202015%20as%20amended%20by%20FJ%28A%29R%202019.pdf>>, accessed 23 April 2022.

for temporary works, and they also have authority under section 47 of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018 to ensure that a quinquennial inspection of a church is undertaken by a qualified person⁴⁹ and in section 74 to exercise the jurisdiction of the consistory court, including granting faculties, to such extent and in such manner as rules may specify.⁵⁰ They are normally involved with the consistory court of the diocese with their position being ‘analogous to that of the attorney general in proceedings concerning trusts in the chancery division’,⁵¹ and consequently it is through the archdeacon that a bishop may intervene.

In this area of church life we do find some genuine powers and duties of archdeacons, but the question remains: is this ‘buildings officer’ role significant enough to contain the definition of an archdeacon? I would suggest not.

Pastoral reorganisation

Along with several other named persons, the archdeacon is an ‘interested party’ under section 6(2)(e) and section 6(3)(c) of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 in relation to proposals affecting any aspect of their archdeaconry.⁵² While their voice is one that is mandated to be heard by the diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, of which we have already ascertained they are members, the lack of uniqueness of their role here suggests that it adds little to our quest for a definition of what it is they do.

Clergy: pastoral care and discipline

The canonical duty of archdeacons under Canon C22(4) to assist the bishop in their pastoral care and office has been considered briefly above, particularly in relation to the ecclesiastical duties of the clergy, bringing to the bishop’s attention what calls for correction or merits praise.⁵³ In reality this may be a pretty significant element of an archdeacon’s work, but as reflected earlier it is not necessarily a unique role; it is not one that clergy are bound to accept as they are accountable to, and in a legal relationship with, the bishop (not the archdeacon), and without any sharing of the bishop’s cure of souls of the clergy (and the rest of the people) it is not clear in what sense this relationship can be referred to as ‘pastoral’.

While Canon C7 provides for the archdeacon to assist the bishop in the examination of candidates for ordination, it also mentions other ministers appointed for the purpose. Therefore, again, this is not a unique role and may

49 *The statutory duties of an Archdeacon* (note 32).

50 Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, s 74.

51 Briden (note 19), 164.

52 Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, s 6.

53 Canon C22(4).

potentially be almost perfunctory given that the notes to the ordination service in *Common Worship* suggest that it is the Director of Ordinands, not the archdeacon, who is questioned about examination of candidates.⁵⁴

Part 1(2) of the Incumbents (Vacation of Benefices) Measure 1977 states that, on receipt of a request for an enquiry into pastoral breakdown, a bishop should first instruct the archdeacon to ‘take such steps as he considers appropriate to promote better relations between the incumbent and his parishioners and to remove the causes of their estrangement’ and to report back to the bishop in not more than six weeks,⁵⁵ a part of the role requiring not only interpersonal skill and sensitivity but also an element of detachment as the archdeacon prepares to report back to the bishop on whose behalf they are operating.

Paragraph 4.1 of the Capability Procedure Code of Practice of the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 reminds us that the responsibility for the competence of ecclesiastical ministry lies with the bishop, but that in order to *investigate* it they may appoint someone else for that role. It goes on to state that the appointed person for such an investigation ‘should normally be the archdeacon’,⁵⁶ meaning that this is not a statutory function of the archdeacon but something a bishop can choose to delegate to them.

Likewise, while the archdeacon is also usually responsible for overseeing the formal stages of the grievance procedure under the same regulations there is no requirement that they, and not someone else, must do so.⁵⁷

Having thus reviewed the statutory requirements of archdeacons in search of an answer to what it is they do, it seems that it has not been possible to establish any meaningful definition or function that goes beyond a variety of disparate legal roles that *may* be attached to the archdeacon by virtue of the fact that they are involved at every level in the diocese. There is very little that necessarily requires the specific office of archdeacon to carry it out, which rather begs the question, what else is it that they do? I turn now to consider whether the archdeacon’s other, non-statutory, functions assist in this analysis.

WHAT DO ARCHDEACONS REALLY DO?

Archdeacons are involved in all sorts of people-facing roles, the areas of work that could most properly be understood as ‘pastoral’ and hence it is necessary to assess whether and how these might assist the bishop in their pastoral care

54 *Common Worship Ordination Services*, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/common-worship-ordination-o->>, accessed 23 April 2022.

55 Incumbents (Vacation of Benefices) Measure 1977.

56 *Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 Capability Procedure Code of Practice* made under Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms Of Service) Measure 2009, s 8.

57 *Ibid.*

and office as Canon C22 states. It is often stated that no two archdeacons' roles are the same, and while it is true that there are variations from diocese to diocese,⁵⁸ there seem to be five primary areas that archdeacons operate in beyond their statutory requirements with the precise nature of the role being somewhat varied and locally determined.

Informal support and advice to bishops

The Bishop's Council is established as the standing committee of the diocesan synod⁵⁹ and, while not required to be, the archdeacons are members of it (or its equivalent) in all 41 mainland dioceses of the Church of England.⁶⁰ Furthermore, as both diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committees and/or Bishop's Councils may be coterminous with being the directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance it follows that archdeacons participate in discussions and decisions on every aspect of the life of the diocese beyond those they are obliged to by law. With regard to safeguarding, archdeacons will have a vital role to play in the handling of allegations against clergy and other church officers and to advise their bishops.⁶¹ What is more, they are members of their bishop's senior leadership team and given that over half the diocesan bishops have one senior staff meeting a month, with the rest holding them more often,⁶² the archdeacon's voice is one that the bishop hears most regularly and this aspect of the role is hugely significant in terms of diocesan strategy and decision-making.

Informal support and advice to parishes

An archdeacon's role will often require them to engage with the tension that can arise between legal obligation and moral judgement, sensitively representing the bishop and his diocese to the wider population and explaining apparent conflicts of interest to interested parties.⁶³ As the human face of the DAC seen by parishes they may need to interpret decisions that are received as frustrating and unhelpful, requiring them to, in effect, absorb some of the resentment so caused.⁶⁴ They may also take on roles created by law but not mandated to archdeacons such as chairing an annual parochial church meeting in the

58 The Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology, *Sustaining Leaders in Mission and Change: The Continuing Ministerial Development of Archdeacons in the Church of England* (2011), 10, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Sustaining%20Leaders%20in%20Mission%20and%20Change.pdf>>, accessed 10 August 2022.

59 Church Representation Rules 2020, r 44(2)(h).

60 Steen (note 33), 6.

61 *So you're going to be an Archdeacon... A booklet for new archdeacons in the Church of England* (2017), p 5, available at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Induction%20booklet%20for%20Archdeacons.pdf>>, accessed 21 April 2022.

62 R Ravenscroft, 'The role of the archdeacon today' (1995) 3 *Ecc LJ* 379–392, at 381.

63 M Bourke, 'The Archdeacon's Dilemma' (1989) XCII (747) *Theology* 198.

64 H Jones, 'Omnes gallia or The role of the archdeacon' (1991) 2 *Ecc LJ* 236–240, at 237.

absence of both an incumbent and a lay vice-chair⁶⁵ and invariably receive all sorts of enquiries in the period preceding annual meetings on various points of order.⁶⁶ Again, this is a significant and essential role as the most visible member of a bishop's senior staff team.

Conflict and discipline

Archdeacons are often called upon to navigate and mediate situations of conflict at any and every level within their archdeaconry, requiring high levels of training and good interpersonal skills,⁶⁷ a role that can take up a large proportion of an archdeacon's time. While not mentioned in the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003, the accompanying *Code of Practice* envisages circumstances when they might be involved as the complainant,⁶⁸ although there is no statutory requirement for them to undertake the role and there are other 'interested parties' under the Measure who could do so.

Appointments

Despite the archdeacon having no formal role under the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, in practice across the whole Church of England they are almost universally instrumental in guiding parishes through the appointments procedure at every stage.⁶⁹

Sacramental ministry at invitation of incumbent/area dean

One way of providing pastoral ministry to clergy and to their parishioners is to provide sacramental service cover, either to allow for a holiday or for the incumbent, while present, to have a break from sermon preparation, to underline any particular issue that may be pertinent to the life of the parish by offering a different voice from that of the incumbent, or during a time of parochial vacancy. This is indeed a vital and pastoral form of support that demonstrates that the clergy and people of the parish are valued and cared for, and it also provides the archdeacon with important information regarding any matters 'in need of attention or meriting praise'. But this is a ministry that cannot be *expected* of the archdeacon for the simple reason that, by virtue of Canon C8(4), they require an invitation in order to do it and are not there by any form of legal right. In the absence of even a share in the cure of souls, it is unclear whether this can actually be deemed to be 'pastoral' ministry in the truest sense of the word.⁷⁰ In fact, this part of their ministry, voluntary as it is,

65 Steen (note 33), 5.

66 Ravenscroft (note 62), 387.

67 The Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology (note 58), 16.

68 *Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 Code of Practice* (2006 revised: 2011, 2013 and 2016), §§ 10–12.

69 Ravenscroft (note 62), 382.

70 Jones (note 25).

is the only aspect that would seem to require them to be in priest's orders, further highlighting the insufficiency of Canon C22 in its description and definition of what an archdeacon is and does.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent from all that we have explored that much of what an archdeacon does, whether through obligation or by consent, if carried out diligently, has the effect of releasing their bishop and others into furthering the mission of the Church of England,⁷¹ and that to some extent this has been the case for much of the history of the church as the longevity of the role testifies. But we are no closer to finding a definition, a particular function or a specific role. It is clear that there are huge challenges faced as archdeacons attempt to fulfil an office which is more complicated in its constitution, in the nature of its authority, and in its clarity of definition and expectation than is sometimes recognised⁷² and it is not insignificant that a review of the governance structures of the Anglican Communion makes no mention at all of the function or jurisdiction of archdeacons⁷³ so unclear is the nature of their role.

We have seen that, while many of the archdeacon's functions individually are derived from a plethora of laws and quasi-legislation, the primary answer to the question 'what does an archdeacon do?' leads us not a legal definition at all, but rather to a complex and varied relational, pastoral role, one which may be argued as being ever more necessary in the life of the Church today, one which, if it did not exist, the Church would probably find it necessary to invent. And it is this vital and multi-faceted role that has attracted legal functions to it. Might it be that it is this lack of strict legal definition, this adaptability, that makes the role so important?

I have shown in his article that, although archdeacons are required to be in priest's orders, there is no clear presbyteral nature to the role, with no requirement to celebrate sacramental worship and no altar to call their own. Furthermore, although they have authority within a particular geographical area, they are not obliged to reside there (and hence may not be, strictly speaking, entitled to view their housing as 'essential' and hence tax-deductible) and that their authority is almost exclusively delegated to them by their bishop: very little of their function relates to their 'ordinary' jurisdiction.

Moreover, even their pastoral role—essential and significant as it is—is inhabited by consent rather than through a legally defined relationship, acting

71 Ravenscroft (note 62), 380.

72 Marritt (note 10), 931.

73 C Podmore, *The Governance of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion*, GS Misc 910 (2009).

effectively as a deputy or commissary of the bishop in their relationship to clergy, churchwardens and others,⁷⁴ yet without any cure of souls or privilege of access beyond their formal right of visitation which is almost exclusively now used to transact the bishop's business.

While there are many functions common to most if not all archdeacons, the lack of a clear definition in law of their role means that there is wide degree of variation from diocese to diocese. In fact, in one diocese, Coventry,⁷⁵ under the bishop's guidance and by his definition the archdeacons even inhabit entirely separate roles that extend beyond their archdeaconries.⁷⁶ For example, all statutory functions are vested in the Archdeacon Pastor⁷⁷ while, initially having been anticipated as being for a transitional period, the Archdeacon Missioner is tasked with growing leaders and releasing 'missional energy'.⁷⁸

Finally, then, where some in the past have argued that the archdeacon's role is primarily pastoral⁷⁹ or that their pastoral role is secondary to, and derived from, the legal functions that form the bulk of the office,⁸⁰ it seems that neither of these perspectives stand up to scrutiny. Such a dichotomy of potential definitions is insufficient if we are to truly understand what an archdeacon is. While it is clear that archdeacons relate to every aspect and part of a diocese as a senior cleric, enabling those parts to work together fruitfully by utilising both legally derived and people-orientated aspects, it is apparent that their definition remains subjective, varied and unstated; almost entirely defined locally by custom.⁸¹ Yet it seems possible that the nebulous nature of the definition of the archdeacon's role is not actually a weakness and does not detract at all from its utility. It may, rather, be a strength as each and every expression of this essential senior clerical role is found to be open to interpretation, modification and adaptation depending on local need.

74 N Boakes, 'Being an archdeacon: a coaching model' (2020) 22 *Ecc LJ* 314–327, at 318.

75 I have first hand experience of this, having served as Acting Archdeacon Pastor in the Diocese of Coventry from 2017 to 2018.

76 *Coventry Archdeacons*, available at <<https://www.coventry.anglican.org/about/archdeacons/>>, accessed 10 August 2022.

77 *A New Archdeacon for Coventry and Warwickshire*, available at <<https://archive.ph/20130112184154/http://www.coventry.anglican.org/news/stories/archdeaconpastor/>>, accessed 23 September 2022.

78 *Background notes to the appointment of an Archdeacon Missioner*, available at <<https://web.archive.org/web/20120425124513/http://www.coventrydiocese.org/upload/file/091008%20Background%20Notes%20to%20the%20Appointment%20of%20an%20Archdeacon%20Missioner%20Final%20Version.pdf#>>, accessed 23 September 2022.

79 Jones (note 64), 240.

80 Steen (note 33), 18.

81 The Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology (note 58), 11.