

# REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON ECCLESIASTICAL VISITATIONS

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## 1. AIMS OF THE REPORT

In submitting this Report to the Ecclesiastical Law Society<sup>1</sup> the Working Party has sought to identify, clarify and discuss the role of the visitation in the Church of England today.

It is perhaps timely to inquire whether the visitation now shorn of its disciplinary functions serves any practical purpose, and if so, whether there are changes which might usefully be made either in form or in content. There also appears to be some uncertainty among both clergy and laity as to the nature and purpose of the modern visitation and of the legal obligations associated with it. This has manifested itself in a considerable variation in practice around the country.

The first aim of the Working Party, therefore, was to ascertain what is the current manner of conducting visitations, both archidiaconal and episcopal. It also considered it essential to seek the views of those who are actively involved in visitations as to what they see as the future of the visitation and the problems associated with the present practice. To these ends all archdeacons and bishops were asked to answer a Questionnaire prepared by the Working Party.<sup>2</sup> The response was most gratifying! Replies were received from thirty-five out of forty-three diocesan bishops and ninety out of one hundred and two archdeacons.

Secondly, in the light of the information received, the Working Party examined the purpose of the visitation as required by law and as currently perceived by the visitors themselves, together with some of the practical problems associated with visitations today. In particular it considered:

- i. whether visitations as a whole should be abandoned;
- ii. what, if any, improvements in practice might be suggested within the present legal framework so as not to involve any reform of the law governing visitations; and
- iii. if the modern practice was seen not to comply with existing ecclesiastical law, whether changes in the law were thought desirable.

In addition the Working Party has analysed the current practices revealed by the replies to the Questionnaire in the hope that this may be of some assistance to others involved in conducting visitations.

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1. Delivered at the annual conference of the Society at Cardiff, April 1991. For a more detailed history of ecclesiastical visitations and discussion of the law surrounding them, see Smith, "Points of Law and Practice Concerning Ecclesiastical Visitations", (1991) 2 *Ecc.L.J.*, 189.

2. See Appendix.

The Working Party, however, has not concerned itself with *ad hoc* visitations undertaken for a special purpose, or with the special visitatorial jurisdiction of a bishop within his cathedral foundation in the exercise of those visitatorial powers which are derived not from the general ecclesiastical law but from the statutes of the particular foundation of which he is visitor, or with the visitatorial jurisdiction of the Crown.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The ecclesiastical visitation is of very long standing and over the centuries a considerable body of law has evolved concerning its content and the manner of its exercise. The visitation includes a power of inquiry and correction. The uniqueness of the visitation lies in the circuit or tour undertaken by an ordinary by which he might better maintain a personal oversight and control of those places and persons within his spiritual care.<sup>3</sup> It may be exercised in person or it may be delegated to one or more suitably qualified persons. In the early thirteenth century the visitation was developed as a principal agent of criminal discipline within the Church. It came to be used as a general inquisition by which the ordinary might initiate inquiries to detect crimes,<sup>4</sup> and as a means whereby any public rumour or suspicion of crime might be denounced to the ordinary by juries of local witnesses, the *testes synodales*, assembled from the parishes. Visitations were also on occasion employed as the means whereby an ordinary might test and assert his rights and jurisdiction, sometimes resorting to the use of physical force in order to do so. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the visitation was less than popular with many of those visited!

It should be noted that the ordinary in the course of his visitation exercises a jurisdiction, and the visitation may properly be described as a court.<sup>5</sup> It is characterized by the ability of the visitor to compel attendance, to determine questions judicially, and to make binding orders.<sup>6</sup>

The criminal jurisdiction of the visitor over the clergy was apparently abolished in 1840 by the Clergy Discipline Act.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. PURPOSE OF VISITATION

The criminal jurisdiction of the visitor, however, was only one part of his visitation and many of the other purposes of visitation remain. Visitations have continued because there has been a need to perform those legal acts which form the residue of the jurisdiction, but little thought appears to have been given to the relationship between the visitation and the changing life of the Church. In the

3. Ayliffe, *Parergon Juris Canonici Anglicani* (London, 1734), p. 514.

4. *Extra*, 3, 12, 1; *ibid.*, 5, 34, 10; *ibid.*, 5, 3, 31; *ibid.*, 5, 1, 17 & 21, confirmed by the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, c. 8, Mansi, *Sacr. Conc.*, XXII, cols. 994-5 (*Extra*, 5, 1, 24); Athon, *Constit. Othoboni*, c. 8, *Quam indecorum*, gl. ad verb. *inquisitionem*, p. 93; Lyndwood, *Provinciale seu Constitutiones Angliae* (Oxford, 1679), lib. 1, tit. 3, c. 1, gl. ad verb. *inquirant*, p. 17; *ibid.*, lib. 1, tit. 6, c. 1, gl. ad verb. *inquirat* p. 34; *ibid.*, lib. 1, tit. 8, c. 12, gl. ad verb. *inquirant*, p. 46. (The citation of the *Corpus Juris Canonici* is in accordance with Bryson, ed., *Dictionary of Sigla and Abbreviations to and in Law Books before 1607* (Univ of Virginia, 1975), pp. 19-20; e.g. the first reference above to *Extra* is to the Decretals of Gregory IX, lib. 3, tit. 12, c. 1)

5. *Dean of York's Case* (1841), 2 Q.B. 1 at 39; *The Reconciliation Sentence & Service in St. Paul's* (1891), 7 T.L.R. 276 at 277; Phillimore, *Ecclesiastical Law of the Church of England* (2nd ed., London, 1895), II, 1046, 1050.

6. *Phillipotts v Boyd* (1875), L.R. 6 P.C. 435 at p. 450; *Att.-Gen. v. Dean & Chapter of Ripon Cathedral* [1945] Ch. 239 at p. 248; Phillimore, *Eccl. Law*, I, 169. See: Ayliffe, *Parergon*, p. 514; Halsbury, *Laws*, XIV, para. 490, p. 236.

7. 3 & 4 Vict. c. 86, s. 23.

future it may be thought desirable to place a renewed emphasis on some of these elements while consigning others to the archives of history. Or, it may be deemed wiser to retain all these elements but place them in a recognized order of priority and conduct visitations in such a way as to leave no doubt in anyone's mind as to which elements are most important. These outstanding elements of the jurisdiction as interpreted by present-day needs may be summarized as follows:

1. The visitation has always involved an inquiry concerning the care of church property. This includes the fabric of the church, its ancillary buildings, and the state of the furnishings and ornaments necessary for divine service to ensure that they are adequately provided and maintained in good repair.<sup>8</sup> As well as the more practical need for such an inquiry, in a real sense this is an expression of Christian stewardship, for by replying to articles, presenting terriers for inspection, etc., the parishes, through their representatives, may be seen to be rendering a periodic account of their stewardship to the greater Church.

2. It has been a time for the exercise of supervision not only over individuals, particularly the clergy, but also over the life and activities of parishes as a whole.<sup>9</sup> The visitation was designed to bring to light any practice which was contrary to ecclesiastical law and, even in the absence of a criminal jurisdiction, the visitation may still have some role to play as a vehicle by means of which specific problems or matters in need of correction may be brought to the attention of the ordinary.<sup>10</sup> It also provides a check on the practical administration of a parish.

3. It may be seen as a time for two-way learning: the ordinary learns about the state of the church life of his clergy and people;<sup>11</sup> the parishes, through those attending, are taught by means of a charge and sermon. Stimulus might be provided to PCCs on particular issues.

4. It affords an opportunity for making, or renewing, personal relationships; bishops, archdeacons, and registrars may get to know the clergy and the churchwardens, especially the newly elected; the laity have a chance to see, hear, and talk to their spiritual leaders, as well as the chance to meet clergy and laity from neighbouring parishes.

5. As clergy and laity from neighbouring parishes have met together, often including a social gathering after the proceedings of the visitation court had ended, it has become an occasion for 'making the Church visible'; for remembering its corporate nature and reaffirming the importance and status of its officers, especially the churchwardens.

6. The visitor also customarily performs the ministerial duty of admitting churchwardens to their office.

#### 4. METROPOLITICAL VISITATION

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have the right to visit their provinces *jure metropolitico*. This is a power of visiting all bishops, as well as all

8. *Decretum Grat.*, C. 10, q. 1, cc. 10, 11; Council of London, 1200, c. 5, *Cum inter ea* (Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* (London, 1737), I, 505-6); Council of Oxford, 1222, c. 16 [11] (Powicke & Cheney, *Councils and Synods, with other Documents relating to the English Church* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 110-1); Stats. for an Eng. dioc., 1222 X 1225?, c. 52 (*ibid.*, p. 148); Consits. Reynold, c. 4, *Sint rectores* (Wilkins, *Concilia*, II, 512-3).

9. See Canons of the Church of England, canon G 5, para. 1 (quoted below).

10. See Canons of the Church of England, canon G 5, para. 1.

11. See Canons Ecclesiastical (1603), c. 137.

other clergy. However, synodical government and the Anglican Communion place such heavy demands on the time and energy of both archbishops that it is most unlikely that either of them will feel able to conduct a full metropolitan visitation in person. In more recent times, where the archbishops have sought to conduct a visitation, it has been confined to their dioceses as diocesan bishop *jure ordinario*.<sup>12</sup> As metropolitan visitations were last held in England or Wales towards the end of the seventeenth century, we do not feel that we can say more about the way one might be conducted in the future.

## 5. EPISCOPAL VISITATION

A diocesan bishop may visit all or part of his diocese including the cathedral.

The replies from the bishops show that they are almost equally divided in their opinions as to whether the visitation has any practical utility in modern conditions. Opinions ranged from “immense value” to “don’t believe in them.” Despite the fact that twenty-three bishops admitted that they had not conducted a visitation, eleven of these saw the value in doing so if the major problems preventing regular episcopal visitations could be overcome. Some bishops clearly did not like the legalistic formality of the traditional episcopal visitation and preferred the more informal parish visit as an alternative. Fourteen bishops singled out the lack of time or workload as a major constraint on their undertaking a visitation, and two drew attention to the sheer size of their dioceses as a reason for not visiting.

Nevertheless, it should be remarked that in English canon law, visitation has been seen as a principal duty of any bishop,<sup>13</sup> and inherent in his office.<sup>14</sup> The bishops are reminded of their right to hold a visitation by the Canons of the Church of England, G 5, para. 1, though the canon makes no reference to the *duty* of visitation:

‘Every archbishop, bishop and archdeacon has the right to visit, at times and places limited by law or custom, the province, diocese, or archdeaconry committed to his charge, in a more solemn manner, and in such visitation to perform all such acts as by law or custom are assigned to his charge in that behalf for the edifying and governing of Christ’s flock, that means may be taken thereby for the supply of such things as are lacking and the correction of such things as are amiss.’

The disciplinary element of the office of bishop in the Church of England is reflected in the Ordinal bound with the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 in the fourth vow which a bishop takes at his consecration:

‘. . . and such as be unquiet, disobedient and criminous within your Diocese, [will you] correct and punish, according to such authority as ye have by God’s Word, and as to you shall be committed by the Ordinance of this Realm?’

12. e.g. the Archbishop of York’s visitation of his diocese in 1969.

13. Stephens, *An Historical Discourse, Briefly setting forth the nature of Procurations* (London, 1661), p. 5; Godolphin, *Repertorium Canonicum* (3rd ed., London, 1687), pp. 34-5; Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (14th ed., London, 1803), I, 382. Grosseteste was emphatic that a bishop could not be a pastor to his flock without visiting it: *Roberti Grosseteste Episcopi quondam Lincolnensis Epistolae*, ed. H.R. Luard (Rolls Series, 25), ep. cxxvii, pp. 373-5.

14. Legatine Council of London, 1237, c. 22 (Powicke & Cheney, *Councils*, p. 255); Stillingfleet, *Ecclesiastical Cases* (London, 1698), pt. i, p. 76; Stephens, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6. See Canons Ecclesiastical (1603), c. 60.

The fourth declaration in the Ordination or Consecration of a Bishop in the Alternative Service Book 1980 appears to echo the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer. It reads:

‘Will you accept the discipline of the Church, and faithfully exercise authority within it?’.

Yet it has to be acknowledged that many bishops today are reluctant to include visitation in any interpretation of that fourth vow or declaration. Oversight of the Church with a power of correction is no longer regarded as an expression of pastoral care. What seemed obviously pastoral to a paternal, authoritarian society, is viewed differently today. The inquisitorial and enforcement elements of visitation are looked upon in some quarters as “legalistic”, repugnant to a voluntary association of believers and inimical to pastoral concern. A number of diocesan bishops are definitely of this opinion; some would much prefer to inspect parishes and deaneries by invitation from parochial church councils or deanery synods. One cannot but have a certain sympathy with those bishops who declared a distaste for, if not a positive antagonism towards, the very idea of episcopal visitation. The physical effort of meeting and remembering so many people and facts, and further inroads into time already largely absorbed by other episcopal duties are daunting enough, without mentioning the understandable aversion of bishops at being forced to play the part of the lordly prelate, a role wholly out of touch with the reality of the Church in the modern world.

Over against this attitude three things may be said. First, we are bound to point to the important place given to episcopal visitation in English canon law, as is illustrated by canon G 5 (1), and that this may have implications concerning the nature of the episcopal office. Moreover, it may be unwise to jettison an element regarded as valuable for many centuries on the grounds that if it is not needed at present it will never be needed in the future. Despite all the channels of communication which exist today between the parish and the ecclesiastical authorities which it might be thought would have rendered the visitation in this respect obsolete, it is interesting (and not a little surprising) that, if the replies made by some of the archdeacons are a guide, then discipline problems do still emerge occasionally at visitations.

Secondly, no bishop wishes to be thought of as a senior bureaucrat; he is a father in God to his clergy and people. It is healthier for the Church as a whole if the leaders who make the decisions meet the people who are affected by them, and several bishops do see the visitation as a way of avoiding the danger of becoming remote from the people.

Thirdly, there seems to be misunderstanding concerning the manner in which an episcopal visitation may be conducted. If time is a major constraint to a bishop carrying out a visitation, there is no reason why he should not visit his diocese a part at a time over a period, perhaps over a number of years. This possibility was clearly envisaged by the early canon law.<sup>15</sup> Such a visitation could run parallel with that of the archdeacon and be conducted in a different way, thus avoiding any of the ‘legalistic’ undertones which might get attached to the visitation court of the archdeacon. An extended visitation would help to meet that most intractable problem: a full working diary. Nor should the bishop be unduly concerned that the inhibition of inferior ordinaries induced by his extended visitation might create difficulties, for it has always been possible for the inhibition to be relaxed.<sup>16</sup> If the visitation is planned as a major event in the diocese, then it is fully

15. *Decretum Grat.*, C. 10, q. 1, c. 10.

16. *Lunne v Dodson* (1661), 3 Salk. 201, approved *R. v Sowler* [1901] 1 K.B. 396; Gibson, *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* (2nd ed. Oxford, 1761), II, 958; Phillimore, *Eccl. Law*, II, 1050.

within the power of the diocesan to use his suffragan bishops or others as commissaries to share the task; the ability to visit by means of a duly appointed deputy is fully established by law and custom. Another option open to a bishop is to restrict his visitation to inquiring only concerning certain matters which he feels merit particular attention. It is also very much for each individual bishop to determine the level of formality of his proceedings as, subject only to the basic legal requirements of visitation,<sup>17</sup> he may conduct himself as he wishes commensurate with the aims of the visitation as he sees them. This need not involve the admission of churchwardens, for canon E 1, para. 2 does not require the admission to be in the course of a visitation, and this could therefore be left to the archdeacons. It might nevertheless make a very beneficial change for churchwardens to be admitted by the bishop in their own church in front of their own congregation. The comments which we make later concerning the different forms of archidiaconal visitation may also be appropriate here.

## 6. ARCHIDIACONAL VISITATION

The archdeacon's annual visitation is the form with which most are familiar.<sup>18</sup>

The actual legal requirements for the conduct of a visitation are fairly minimal. A citation must be directed to those bound to attend, and articles of inquiry sent to the minister and churchwardens of every parish upon which they are to ground their presentments.<sup>19</sup> It is suggested that there may be considerable advantage in requiring the replies to the articles to be returned well before the date of the actual visitation so that the charge may be based, in part, on the information they contain. In the course of the visitation, a sermon must be preached<sup>20</sup> either by the visitor himself or by a nominated clergyman on his behalf.<sup>21</sup> Customarily, the visitor also delivers a charge to those assembled at the visitation,<sup>22</sup> though the legal basis for this appears not to be well established except perhaps on the ground of custom. Likewise, the ordinary admits churchwardens to office in the course of his visitation, though it would seem that this too is on the basis of custom and may be performed on other occasions.<sup>23</sup>

An archdeacon who seeks to comply with the minimum requirements of the canon law might therefore be expected to conduct a visitation somewhat along the following lines. He may issue his citation and dispatch articles of enquiry to the churchwardens within his archdeaconry at a date reasonably in advance of the date of his visitation. The visitation itself might largely revolve around the admission of churchwardens, and in terms of worship, a short order of service may be used, such as the Order for Evening Prayer, in which a sermon is preached. In the course of the visitation the archdeacon may make himself available to be seen by particular churchwardens for the purpose of discussing matters arising from the presentments, but perhaps only where this has been particularly requested. Such discussions may also be reserved for another occasion. Any social interaction between churchwardens or between the churchwardens and the visitor will depend on whether the local parish has provided any hospitality.

17. See below.

18. An annual visitation is required by the Canons of the Church of England, canon C 22, para. 5.

19. Canons of the Church of England, canon G 6, para. 1.

20. Wake, *The Bishop of Lincoln's Charge to the Clergy in his Diocese in his Primary Visitation, Begun at Lincoln, May the 20th, 1706* (London, 1707), pp. 4, 17, 20. See *Decretum Grat.* C. 10, q. 1, cc. 9, 12; *Extra*, 1, 31, 15; *ibid.*, 3, 39, 23; *Sext*, 3, 20, 1, § 4.

21. *Huntley's Case* (1628), Palm. 521.

22. Ayliffe, *Parergon*, p. 515.

23. See Canons of the Church of England, canon E 1, para. 2.



Although legally such a visitation is perfectly correct, opportunities for exchanges between the archdeacon and the churchwardens are kept at a minimum, and the danger is that layfolk will see such a visitation as an irritant, yet another meeting to attend, founded this time on what may be seen by many to be an anachronism serving no useful purpose.

It is evident, however that many archdeacons have not been content with this minimal approach; it is the pastoral aspect of visitation which most would wish to see stressed today. From the returns supplied by the archdeacons two interesting alternative approaches emerged which take the visitation beyond the bare legal requirements, and these we outline below. Seldom will any archdeacon follow precisely either of these two approaches; each archdeacon includes variations of his own. The outline is there, nonetheless, and, although they presuppose an annual occurrence, they may also be thought to have some value when planning an episcopal visitation.

## 7. THE CONDUCT OF VISITATIONS

### *The Teaching Approach*

Bringing new churchwardens together in order to admit them to office becomes a means to an end. It is seen as an excellent teaching opportunity. Like every educational structure it has both an overt and a hidden curriculum.

The actual admission to office is quickly disposed of, usually en bloc before the more serious business begins. Replies to articles will be returned well before the date of the court, but the charge will have a teaching content of a more recognizably spiritual and theological nature. Indeed, the charge may be printed for distribution and a sermon take its place. Other diocesan officials may be invited to attend, to speak, and to answer questions. An audio-visual presentation may also be staged.

The 'hidden' curriculum here is that by putting churchwardens alongside the clergy and deanery synod representatives as recipients of information their status is greatly enhanced.

Here a special order of service, carefully thought out and constructed by the archdeacon would seem the most appropriate. It can reinforce the educational theme for that year. Inclusion of new hymns, or prayers, helps to introduce new ideas to the parishes.

This approach helps to raise the morale of individual churchwardens. It gives everyone present some sense of the part they play in the wider Church. On the other hand, the visitation court gets banished into a corner of the proceedings. It may be difficult to give due emphasis to the element of rendering an annual account of stewardship. Pastorally speaking, the churchwardens may get to know the archdeacon well but it will be much harder for him to get to know them. With so much of the time, usually an evening, taken up with teaching, any social interaction will be limited by the lateness of the hour.

### *The Pastoral Approach*

Here the aim is to strengthen the corporate life of the deanery and deepen pastoral contacts at an extended social gathering.

The visitatorial court is 'slotted in' to an act of worship and a social evening organised by the rural dean, or area dean. Replies to articles may, or may not, be returned on this occasion; the archdeacon will print a charge for

distribution but preach a full sermon. At the admission of churchwardens each one will be publicly introduced and presented to the archdeacon by the incumbent. In dioceses where such deans are changed every five years this is the occasion of their admission to office. All parochial church council members, indeed all congregations, are encouraged to attend and support their churchwardens. The service is followed by a big party!

Although the Order for Evening Prayer is suitable, a celebration of the Eucharist may often 'feel right'. Usually the rural or area dean is the celebrant and the archdeacon preaches. This also seems right given the aim stated.

The visitatorial court is given a place in the mainstream of the life of the Church because it becomes something which concerns everyone, not just a handful of officers. A great deal of unstructured learning will take place; there is a strong sense of occasion. Nevertheless, it is a difficult context in which to deal with serious problems. An archdeacon who uses this approach would need to supplement it with regular annual inspections of parishes together with meetings with parochial church councils.

It is important to stress that these two approaches are taken from current practice and the observations which follow consider the adoption of ideas with which some archdeacons are already familiar.

If the elements of education, personal relationships and the corporate life of the Family of God are to be accorded priority, then discussion must centre on how they may be seen to be the purpose of a visitation in the Church of England today. Visitations will need to reflect some of the important changes taking place in the life of the Church, changes such as those brought about by synodical government and the growing emphasis on the ministry of all the baptized. Here are three examples of the way this might be done.

Many of the administrative powers formerly exercised by churchwardens alone have been transferred to parochial church councils.<sup>24</sup> It would seem reasonable, therefore, that articles of enquiry should be sent to churchwardens to be answered not by them alone but by the parochial church council. How a parochial church council tackles the questions would be for it to decide; one may call a special meeting, another may delegate the task to its standing committee.

More people could be cited to attend a visitation. It is legally correct to cite all those persons who hold any form of episcopal licence; this means not only the clergy but readers and others. In former times, parish clerks and schoolmasters were included in the citation as well as midwives and surgeons, and all for this same reason.<sup>25</sup>

Deanery and parochial church council secretaries and treasurers could be invited to attend a visitation; the importance of every one who holds some kind of office in the local parish church could be reaffirmed by including their invitation with the citation using some appropriate wording. Certainly there is a good case to be made out for acknowledging, in this way, the growing status of the lay chairmen of deanery synods. The inclusion of more people than just churchwardens and sidesmen would give regular form to an informal practice adopted

24. Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure, 1956 (4 & 5 Eliz. 2, No. 3), s. 4 (1) (ii).

25. See Canons Ecclesiastical (1603), c. 137.



already by a number of archdeacons. The returns show that some of them regularly extend an invitation to each parochial church council as a body. One desirable consequence of today's growing lay involvement in the Church's ministry has been the diffusion of leadership. Today others stand alongside the churchwardens as leaders in the local worshipping community. It is right that the wording of the citation/invitation should accord formal acknowledgement of this trend.

The returns sent in response to the working party's questions show a clear preference for the pastoral nature of a visitation. Of the six purposes of visitation discussed earlier,<sup>26</sup> numbers (3), (4) and (5) are evidently regarded as most important. If the conduct of visitations is to reflect these aims, as well as to take into account the changes that have taken place in the life of the Church, then greater demands will be made on the skill and imagination of every archdeacon. In some dioceses archdeacons plan their visitation strategy together. If this is not yet the practice everywhere, it would seem a good one to adopt. A charge worth writing is a charge worth reading so the printing and distribution of the annual charge, as well as an attractively presented summary, would seem to be worthwhile. Archdeacons may need more professional advice and help in presenting the material in their charges and sermons. The framing of articles of enquiry is a particularly demanding task to which many archdeacons devote a great deal of care yet, here too, the advice of those who spend much time studying the taxonomy of questions should not be despised.

Twenty bishops and sixty-eight archdeacons said that they would appreciate guidance in the practical conduct of visitations. As well as suggesting support for continuing the practice of visitation, it shows that there is a need to clarify the legal position and the manner in which visitations may most usefully be conducted. It is hoped that this report may have gone a small way to provide such guidance.

This report could not have been written without the ready co-operation of so many diocesan bishops and archdeacons. The convenors have been delighted with the very high percentage of returns received and all members of the Working Party wish to record their thanks to those who replied.

## 8. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Traditionally in canon law, visitations have played an important part in the life of the Church, and a high percentage of the returns to the questionnaire indicate that, among more than half the bishops and virtually all the archdeacons, there is a large measure of agreement that the visitation still has a value and that it should continue. The one fact which emerges strongly as a result of this inquiry is the very high value placed by visitors on the pastoral aspect of a visitation today, and that they welcome the opportunity a visitation gives to meet people and establish a personal relationship, particularly with churchwardens. The working party feels justified, therefore, in making the following suggestions.

1. That the visitation still has a part to play in the life of the Church of England and should not be abandoned.

2. That the visitation may be used to achieve a number of aims which may be realised within the framework of the existing law. Radical changes in the

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26. At page 349.

law are not thought necessary. If changes in visitations are thought desirable, they may best be accomplished by ordinaries looking carefully at what they want to achieve in their visitations and adopting a manner of proceeding by which this may best be attained. The approaches outlined above may suggest a fruitful way forward.

3. That in the Church of England it should still be possible for bishops to include visitation as a part of their office, and that they should be encouraged to do so.

4. That it would be useful to consider the use of commissaries in the conduct of some aspects of visitation.

5. Other lay leaders in parish and deanery should be included at a visitation as well as the clergy, churchwardens, and sidesmen.

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#### APPENDIX

##### Summary of the Questions and Replies in the Questionnaires<sup>1</sup>

##### QUESTIONNAIRE ADDRESSED TO THE BISHOPS<sup>2</sup>

1. When was the last formal episcopal visitation of the diocese conducted?  
Earliest c. 1945. 13 within last 10 years.
2. Have you conducted a visitation of your diocese?  
Yes: 12 No: 23
3. If the answer to question 2 is 'No', have you held a visitation of your cathedral or other capitular body?  
Yes: 7 No: 16
4. Have you conducted pastoral visits to parishes which you have styled parish visitations?  
Yes: 12 No: 21
5. Have there been special visitations of particular churches in recent times in person or by the commissary?  
Yes: 4
6. If "Yes", for what reason (broadly) was the visitation conducted?  
Complaints against incumbent (1); pastoral problems/reorganisation (3)
7. In the recent past, has the visitation revealed matters which might loosely be called disciplinary?  
Yes: 2
8. Do you see any pastoral or teaching opportunities in a formal episcopal visitation of your diocese?  
Yes: 24 (but 2 thought there were better alternatives)
9. What do you regard as the major problems preventing regular episcopal visitations?  
Lack of time (14); cost (1); diocese too large (2); too formal and legalistic (2); uncertainty as to purpose (1); better done in other ways (6); no useful purpose (1); must not disturb relationship with archdeacons (4); must not be over frequent (3); no major problems (4).

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1. In some cases the original questions have been slightly shortened for reproduction here, and supplementary questions which did not yield further information omitted.  
2. 35 replies were received, but the total for each question may be less than this where not answered by some.

10. If these could be overcome, can you see any value in the diocesan visitation?  
Yes: 20 No: 6
11. If the answer to question 10 is "Yes", with what sort of frequency should such a visitation be conducted?  
Every 2 years (1); 3 years (1); 4 years (1); 5 years (10) 5-6 years (1); 5-10 years (1); 7 years (1); 8 years (1); 10 years (1).
12. Would you appreciate any guidance on the practical conduct of visitations?  
Yes: 20 No: 10

### QUESTIONNAIRE ADDRESSED TO THE ARCHDEACONS<sup>3</sup>

1. Do you hold a visitation every year?  
Yes: 90
2. Are new articles of inquiry drawn up each year?  
Yes: 77 No: 12
3. What sort of matters might be raised in these articles of inquiry?  
Many different, both spiritual and practical. Include finance, insurance, archives, safety of valuables, as well as spiritual life of parish.
4. Are the articles framed with regard to any particular policy?  
Yes: 61 No: 20
5. To whom are the articles of inquiry sent?  
Churchwardens alone (58); churchwardens and incumbent (14); churchwardens and PCC (3); incumbent alone (10)
6. By whom are the replies (the "presentments") made in response to the articles of inquiry?  
Outgoing churchwardens (57); new churchwardens alone (6); outgoing and new churchwardens (5); incumbent involved (14); old and new churchwardens and incumbent (5); PCC (5).
7. Is the incumbent the only person in the parish able to furnish some of the information required in the articles of inquiry?  
Yes: 36 No: 47
8. Do the outgoing churchwardens attend the visitation?  
Yes: 23 No: 62
9. Are the presentments delivered and discussed, the new churchwardens admitted, and the charge delivered on one occasion?  
Yes: 67 (including return by post before the visitation); No: 28 where two occasions (presentments dealt with separately).
10. Who meets the archdeacon to make the presentments?  
Outgoing churchwardens alone (5); new churchwardens alone (40); outgoing churchwardens with others (10); new churchwardens with others (23); incumbent involved (22); churchwardens having no meeting with the archdeacon (10).
11. What practical arrangements are made for the above to meet the archdeacon? Who is responsible for making these arrangements? Is there an appointments system?  
Structured appointments system (9); appointments if necessary or request (8); opportunity for discussion ("ear bending") (18); informal question session (1).

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3. 90 replies were received.

12. Are any of the following invited to the visitation?  
In addition to incumbent and churchwardens: all or some of PCCs (39); synod lay chairperson (3); nobody (21).
13. Where do visitations within your archdeaconry take place? Are the centres at which the visitation is held varied at all from year to year?  
One centre in archdeaconry (5); one centre for a number of deaneries (28); one centre in each deanery (42); other groupings (9). (7) do not vary the centres.
14. Does the visitation take place in the context of an act of worship?  
No act of worship (4). Special order of service (41); Holy Communion exclusively (5) and occasionally (14); Evening Prayer (30); Compline (2).
15. Is there an opportunity before or after the visitation proper for the churchwardens from other parishes to meet each other informally?  
Yes: 80 No: 6 Sometimes: 3
16. Is the presence of the registrar useful?  
Yes: 62 No: 25
17. In the recent past, has the visitation revealed matters which might loosely be called disciplinary?  
Yes: 40
18. Where these have involved the clergy, did any formal disciplinary proceedings result?  
Yes: 2
19. Is any parish statistical information usually required?  
Common requirements: electoral roll numbers; average congregation; number of baptisms; communicants at Christmas and Easter; weddings; burials; parochial finances. Some references to: analysis of congregation; covenants; Sunday school children; acreage of churchyard; unemployment in area. Specific references to inventory (10); log-book (5); No references to the terrier.
20. What sort of matters are dealt with in the charge?  
Very variable, often picking up theme of visitation. May be very statistical or about spiritual challenges facing congregations in the coming year. The charge and the sermon are sometimes merged.
21. Is the charge ever printed and distributed?  
Charge printed in full (39); summary (16); full for some and summary for others (5); nothing produced (22).
22. How often does a physical inspection of the churches and their contents either by the archdeacon or rural dean take place?  
Every year (17); 2 years (1); 2ce in 3 years (3); 3 years (35); 4 years (5); 5 years (13); 7 years (1); irregularly (6)
23. Are there any peculiarities of practice in your archdeaconry?  
No significant replies, except that in one clergy discouraged from attending.
24. Do you see any pastoral opportunities in the visitation?  
Yes: 90
25. Do you think visitations should be conducted either a) annually as at present, b) less frequently, c) not at all?  
All believed should be conducted annually.
26. Would your answer to q. 25 be the same if churchwardens were not admitted to office at the visitation?  
No: 24
27. Would you appreciate any guidance on the practical conduct of visitations?  
Yes: 68 No: 18