

# Bangor Cathedral Visitation

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## Background

In October 2024 an approach was made to the Ven. Mike Komor and the Very Revd Chris Potter via the Archbishop's Chaplain, enquiring as to whether we would be willing to be Commissaries as part of a Visitation team to Bangor Cathedral. Follow-up meetings were then held via Teams with the Archbishop and representatives from Thirtyone:eight, and also with Archbishop on his own or with his Chaplain.

Once a date for the Visitation had been agreed, the Chapter was informed, Terms of Reference drawn up, and the Cathedral community notified.

The Terms of Reference were framed in slightly different terminology to the letter to Chapter, with that part of the Visitation being our responsibility being described thus:

*"The visitation will focus on specific areas of concern:*

*The culture, language and behaviours exhibited by clergy, employees, officers and volunteers.*

*The quality of Christian faith and holiness in the Cathedral.*

*The integrity of professional and personal boundaries between colleagues*

*The robustness of supervisory arrangements and the clarity of delegated authority from the Chapter to the senior leadership team."*

- *The culture, language and behaviours exhibited by clergy, employees, officers and volunteers.*
- *The quality of Christian faith and holiness in the Cathedral.*
- *The integrity of professional and personal boundaries between colleagues*
- *The robustness of supervisory arrangements and the clarity of delegated authority from the Chapter to the senior leadership team."*

Specifically, we are asked to focus on the period 2022-2024.

We were provided with a list of names and email addresses of members of the Cathedral staff (paid and voluntary), the Chapter, adult choir members and parents of child choir members. CP & MK agreed to divide the list up equally and arrange our own interviews for the week beginning 11 November.

***We were clear from the outset that we weren't conducting an investigation, but rather we would be listening to some of the people who had a close connection with St Deiniol's. We would not seek to verify statements made to us, nor did we ask to see any documentation or other kinds of evidence (although some was shown to us).***

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## Preamble

Our approach to our task was informed by our understanding of the nature and purpose of Cathedrals within Anglicanism, which itself draws on our personal experience of these institutions.

What follows may appear to be a rather idealised view of what a Cathedral should look like, and we recognise that it is unlikely that any institution would consistently match it. Nevertheless, setting a high bar is an encouragement to attain excellence, where support and resources allow.

We consider that a Cathedral should be a living expression of the Christian ethos and culture that has shaped and continues to shape our denomination. Its culture should be deeply rooted in biblical principles and reflect the values, beliefs, and practices central to the Christian faith.

Cathedrals should be places where the presence of God can be felt in a profound way. This is reflected in the architecture, which often aims to inspire awe and reverence.

Primary among its roles is that of offering high quality worship, frequently enhanced by music of the highest quality (cf Ps 100.2). The daily offices and the celebration of the Eucharist are central activities. These liturgies are not just acts of individual piety but are also communal activities that reflect the Cathedral's role as a gathering place for the faithful. The sense of the divine presence can be further amplified in worship through the use of incense and other sensory elements that elevate the experience.

Beyond the offering of worship, at their best Cathedrals also have a pivotal role in teaching and mission. This involves both catechesis and evangelism.

The presence in the Cathedral of the Bishop's chair signifies the unity of the diocese and the continuity of the Church's apostolic tradition. Cathedrals often serve as the venue for diocesan events, such as ordinations and synods, reinforcing the Bishop's pastoral and administrative role.

Historically, Cathedrals have been places of refuge and sanctuary. This principle is deeply embedded in the Anglican understanding of hospitality and justice. The Cathedral is a place where all people, regardless of their background, should be able to find solace, acceptance, welcome, support, and a sense of belonging. This principle extends to social justice initiatives, where Cathedrals often take the lead in addressing issues such as homelessness, poverty, and inequality, (cf Mt 25.35) and promoting inclusivity (cf Gal 3.28).

Many Cathedrals are also repositories of cultural heritage and centres of artistic excellence. Theological principles of beauty and creativity are evident in the art, music, and architecture of these sacred spaces. These can be seen as expressions of divine creativity and are integral to the Cathedral's mission to inspire and uplift the human spirit.

Depending on their location and history, Cathedrals may serve as destinations for pilgrims seeking spiritual renewal, providing a setting where people can connect with the divine, reflect on their spiritual journey, and find renewal and inspiration. (Ps 84.5)

At their best, Cathedrals are not just a building but a living community of faith. This principle is reflected in the various activities and events that bring people together, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. Whether through worship, social events, or community

service, Cathedrals nurture relationships and builds a strong, supportive community (cf Acts 2:42).

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## The Visitation

Over the course of 14 days, but mostly within the week 11-15 November, we conducted nearly 40 separate one-to-one meetings, and two joint ones. The Archbishop was included in the people that we met with as part of the Visitation.

No attempt was made to meet with members of the Cathedral community who didn't have a designated role within its ministry, though some of those we spoke with had first- or second-hand insights to offer on the congregation's perspective.

We wish to record that some people we met with expressed considerable regret that none of the Visitation team was able to conduct any of these meetings in the Welsh language. This is a concern with which we have sympathy.

We would also like to express our thanks to everyone who agreed to meet with us, and for sharing their thoughts and experiences. Particular thanks go to the people whose wisdom and insights have had a direct impact on our recommendations.

*Chris Potter & Mike Komor*

December 2024

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## Recommendations

Reflecting on what we had heard, we believe that everyone connected to the Cathedral has a genuine desire to see it flourish and succeed.

In the same spirit, we make the following recommendations.

1. Any future appointment to the role of Dean or Sub Dean should be exclusive of other responsibilities. Bangor's Cathedral may not have the size or complexity of some others, but leading it is still a full-time task.
2. Appoint strong leadership (temporary if necessary)  
Urgent consideration should be given to placing an 'Acting Sub Dean' (or whatever title may be necessary), a senior cleric who could be placed at the Cathedral to 'steady the ship' until such time as the Sub Dean returns or a successor arrives. Clear lines of command need to be in place and communicated, and the Cathedral staff would benefit greatly from appropriate support and supervision.
3. Chapter to elect a Lay Chair  
While there is undeniably a tradition in the church of the lead incumbent occupying the Chair in PCCs/MACs/Chapters, there is merit in considering whether a greater degree of accountability might be made possible through a different person taking the Chair. This could be analogous to the roles of Chair of Governors/Headteacher in the world of education.
3. Continue to strengthen the scrutiny of governance and finance matters by Chapter, and arrange appropriate trustee training for Chapter. (This might be done on a provincial level.)
4. Appoint a Chaplain to the Choir  
The choir contains people of different faith backgrounds, and none. Consideration should be given to providing a named person who could be responsible for an introduction/induction into Christian worship, including expectations regarding culture and behaviour within the Cathedral setting.  
Such a person would also be the 'go-to' individual for choir members who might find it difficult to take their suggestions or concerns to the Cathedral staff.  
A different person might be considered for the role of Chaplain to the junior members of choir.
5. Create a culture of respectful communications.  
Eliminating unkind and inappropriate private communications may be impossible to achieve or enforce, but the clergy team and Cathedral employees could be encouraged as part of their licences or contracts to commit to use only communication that embodies the principles of mutual respect. Office holders, employees and other individuals with authorised roles within the Cathedral could be asked to sign up to the Church in Wales's *Dignity Charter* as part of their commissioning.
7. Provide assistance for the clergy team  
We consider it vital that additional clergy resources are placed as soon as practically possible at St Deiniol's.

8. Explore ways to tap effectively and beneficially into the wisdom and experience of the College of Priests.
9. Embed the agreed strategy over an extended period of time and avoid the step-changes and sudden shifts that can result from the arrival of new people into the leadership team.
10. Clarify the role of Dean and Chapter in relation to Bro Deiniol and the satellite churches and the position of the Cathedral as Parish Church of the City of Bangor.