

**Corff Llywodraethol Yr Eglwys yng Nghymru
The Governing Body of The Church in Wales**

Bench of Bishops report

Agendum 10

Corff Llywodraethol, 9-10 Medi 2026
Governing Body, 9-10 September 2026

Bench of Bishops report

Since the report made to the Governing Body in April, the Bench has met in May and July – it also met in April the day before the Governing Body meeting. This report outlines the matters discussed at those meetings. The dates of the Bench's meeting in June were used for the Bangor Electoral College.

As part of its meeting in May the Bench undertook the latest in its series of training sessions - the next training session will be in September. The next Bench meeting will take place on 14 September which will be followed by another day of training.

In July the Archbishop invited the Dean of Bangor, the Very Reverend Dr Manon James, to attend the Bench meeting following her election as the next Bishop of Bangor; at the meeting on 14 September Dr James will be present as a member of the Bench.

Same-sex relationships

The Governing Body is aware that in November last year the Bench made a pastoral statement which set out an intended course of action for the introduction to the Governing Body of two Bills: the first which considered making permanent the liturgy for the blessing of those in same-sex marriages or civil partnerships (in April 2026); and a further Bill in April 2027 which proposed that the law of the land and the law of the Church changed to permit marriages of couples of the same sex in the Church in Wales. The first of these Bills was of course passed by the Governing Body at its meeting in April this year.

As bishops we are very grateful for the respectful and generous tone in which the debate in April was conducted. We see the relief of those who feel that the Church can now acknowledge the committed and loving relationships of same-sex couples; and we also acknowledge with gratitude the many gracious messages we have received from those for whom that decision was a painful one.

This significant decision has been reached following a period of positive but yet frank interaction and the bishops believe that a longer period of time is now needed to assess the best way forward in enabling Governing Body to consider equal marriage.

While the Bench remains committed to testing the Governing Body's mind on the introduction of equal marriage in the Church in Wales, the bishops have decided not to introduce final legislative proposals in April next year. Instead, the Bench believes that it is important to explore the doctrine of marriage from a theological perspective, allowing the Governing Body to reflect on marriage, and the nature of legislation which would be most appropriate to support such a change.

It is therefore the Bench's intention to ask the Standing Committee to use part of the Governing Body's meeting in April 2027 to host a facilitated conversation on the doctrine of marriage. It is envisaged that this would involve two experts from outside the province – one from a traditional viewpoint, one from a more progressive viewpoint – who would explore marriage theologically by way of a conversation. This

would be supported by a neutral doctrinal paper on the potential forms of any legislation which the Bench is asking the Standing Doctrinal Commission to prepare.

Clergy wellbeing survey

In July the Bench received the full data generated by the clergy wellbeing survey which was undertaken earlier this year. Interim data had been made available previously. The bishops are very grateful to the 267 stipendiary clergy (out of 381) who completed the survey.

The survey covered a wide range of topics including ministry and expectations of the role of a cleric; physical, mental and emotional health; culture, leadership, trust and communication; structures and administration; and housing and financial pressures. The data generated under all topics within the survey is rich and very informative. A full breakdown of the results is appended to this report, for the Governing Body's information.

The survey reveals a consistent narrative that clergy remain committed to their vocation and derive fulfilment from local ministry. Yet it is clear that sustained pressure is experienced which undermines wellbeing, morale and individuals' long-term sustainability in ministry. Many respondents referred to the long and unpredictable hours and frequent interruptions to time off due to pastoral demands. Administrative and governance work – and the effect this has on drawing clergy away from mission and ministry activities – was a common theme also.

The bishops also note concerns noted about culture and leadership and the effect this has on morale and therefore wellbeing.

The Bench takes very seriously the results of the survey and has asked the Representative Body's Human Resources Committee to form a working group to advise the Bench on a wellbeing improvement plan.

A further wellbeing survey is being prepared for non-stipendiary ministers and an NSM from each diocese is working with the Director of Human Resources to frame the survey – which will be run along similar lines to the survey of stipendiary ministers.

The Bench is very grateful to Bec Murphy, Director of Human Resources, for her work in overseeing these processes.

Ministry development

In April and July the bishops discussed and agreed some protocols in relation to the provincial discernment process, including how bishops proceed following reports from the Provincial Discernment Panel that advise a candidate should not proceed to training and age limits for ordination to stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry. The Bench also agreed a wider range of categories of outcome from the provincial discernment process. This wider range of categories will allow greater nuance for candidates and the routes available to them.

The Bench will meet with the Chair of the Provincial Discernment Panel and the Director of Ministry Development in September for a general meeting on the new discernment process and how it is working.

Finance

In May the Bench met with the Chair of the Representative Body for a detailed discussion about the work being undertaken to respond to the private members' motion passed by the Governing Body in September 2025. This discussion followed the update on the current position provided to the Governing Body in April.

The Chair of the Representative Body also met with the Bench in July to continue these discussions and explored various options for savings within the provincial budget.

Pioneer and Evangelism Network

In April the Bishop of Swansea & Brecon briefed the Bench on recent work of the Pioneer and Evangelism Network (PEN), including on its recent residential meeting. The meeting had discussed the meaning and understanding of the term 'growth', and the various forms it could take, and how training and support could be facilitated. What appropriate governance for new worshipping communities that sat alongside or within existing MA structures should look like had also been explored by the PEN.

The PEN will make a contribution to the Governing Body elsewhere on the agenda at this meeting.

Celtic Bishops 2026

During the last week of April the bishops hosted their Scottish and Irish colleagues in St. Davids for the biennial Celtic Bishops meeting. The programme included contributions from the Very Reverend Dr Sarah Rowland Jones on the work of the Anglican Communion, Dr Cynan Llwyd on the work of Cytûn and the Archbishop of Cardiff who talked about the direction of the Roman Catholic Church under Pope Leo XIV.

Also, the Right Reverend Dr Jo Bailey Wells, Bishop for Episcopal Ministry in the Anglican Communion, attended part of the meeting and spoke about her work in the wider Communion; and the Reverend Dr Rosa Hunt and the Reverend Dr Ed Kaneen led a theological and pastoral exploration of the growth of far-right movements and the use of Christian language and symbolism within them.

Each of the provinces led a session which explored life in the province and the challenges and opportunities it faces.

The Reverend Dr Jordan Hillebert, Director of Formation for Ministry at St. Padarn's, led a daily Bible study exploring the four marks of the Church within the Nicene Creed.

The bishops participated in the daily pattern of worship at St. Davids Cathedral, which included a celebration of the Eucharist each morning and choral evensong each evening. Each of the three Primates presided at a celebration of the Eucharist, with each using the communion rite of their respective provinces.

As always, the Celtic Bishops gathering was a convivial and constructive time for friendships and working relationships to be reaffirmed and St. Davids proved to be a very popular venue for the meeting. The Bench's thanks go to all those who contributed to the meeting and to the Dean and Chapter of St. Davids Cathedral for hosting the occasion.

An [article](#) about the meeting was provided by the Anglican Communion News Service.

Faith, order and unity

In July, the Bishop of St. Asaph discussed with the Bench a number of matters within his faith, order and unity portfolio - which includes the Church in Wales's advisory bodies in liturgical and doctrinal matters, the Anglican Communion, ecumenical relations as well as interreligious relations.

As part of this discussion, the Bench commissioned the Standing Liturgical Advisory Commission (SLAC) to undertake two new pieces of work – to consider and, where appropriate, revise the 2027 guidelines for Holy Communion; and to engage with and prepare advice for the bishops on emerging trends in funerary practices, for some of which no specific guidance is currently provided. The Bench also began to give thought to making additional appointments to the membership of SLAC.

The Four Nations' Faith and Order consultation will take place in Dublin in April 2027 – the theme of which will be the spiritual and theological formation of all the people of God – and the Bench gave thought to who could be invited to represent the Church in Wales at this gathering.

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Officers' Network (EION) will meet for its annual residential meeting on 11 September and will explore the new face of politics in Wales and consider the ecumenical and interreligious implications.

One matter of significance is the work being done by the Commission of the Covenanted Churches. The Covenant is now over fifty years old, and substantial steps towards the creation of one Uniting Church in Wales still eludes the partnership of Churches from five Christian traditions which make up the Covenant. Indeed, it would be fair to say that enthusiasm for schemes of organic union in Wales is not high in any of the denominations, and recent proposals have not found favour. The Commission is therefore moving towards recommending a sabbath or suspension of the Covenant for seven years, in order to enable reflection, at the end of which a clearer decision may be possible on whether the goal of the Covenant is a realistic proposition in the new ecumenical context in Wales.

Statement on the publication of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) draft code of practice

In July the Bench agreed a [statement](#) following the publication by the EHRC of a draft code of practice, which follows the Supreme Court's ruling in April 2025 regarding the legal definition of a woman. The new legal requirement to bar trans persons from toilet facilities designated for persons of a single birth gender creates problems both for trans people and for those on whom the duty in law is laid. In addition to facilities for each of the birth genders, spaces are needed to make provision for trans people, lest they be denied any facilities at all. This will be an onerous provision for church buildings and facilities, and our MAs may have to consider the provision of gender neutral facilities only. Further advice is being sought.

**The Bench of Bishops
August 2026**

Clergy wellbeing survey: aggregate data review

This paper presents a structured overview of feedback provided by stipendiary clergy in the clergy wellbeing survey, conducted in February and March 2026. It draws on open-ended responses from the aggregate raw data provided by Great Places to Work, which was commissioned to undertake the survey. The summary has been devised to:

- Provide a broad overview of clergy wellbeing responses
- Highlight the feedback areas of perceived pressures which clergy identify as impacting flourishing ministries
- Identify ministry sustainability and potential risk areas
- Support the Bench of Bishops in setting potential actions by way of response.

Results

Overall response rate

- 381 stipendiary clergy were invited to participate
- 267 full responses were provided and results analysed
- 28 surveys were started but not completed
- 15 surveys were opened but not started
- 71 surveys were not accessed.

Engagement by diocese

- Monmouth – 42
- Bangor – 27
- Llandaff – 69
- St Asaph – 54
- St Davids – 46
- Swansea & Brecon – 29.

Overall picture of clergy wellbeing

The overall data set of commentary presents a consistent narrative: clergy remain committed to their vocation and derive fulfilment from local ministry yet communicate experiences of a perceived sustained structural pressure that is undermining wellbeing, morale and long-term sustainability.

A central tension emerges across the themes:

- Clerics flourishing locally through relational and pastoral ministry.
- Clerics reporting systemic struggles of workload, structural issues and culture differences.

Analysis of the feedback suggests that the primary risks to wellbeing are within the organisational structure of the Church rather than individual vocational commitments.

Key thematic findings

Commitment to ministry and role expectations

A consistent reported theme is chronic overwork/over commitment, described as an 'always on' culture:

Clergy communicated:

- Long and unpredictable hours
- Regular interruptions to rest days and holiday periods
- Emotional and pastoral demands extending beyond reasonable boundaries
- Lack of clarity about what constitutes a 'reasonable workload' or commitment to reasonable ministerial/missional activities.

Many clergy report committing 60-plus hours per week to their ministry, undertaking duties which can be physically, mentally and emotionally consuming.

The narrative within the feedback suggests that clergy are:

- Feel guilt associated with rest and periods of allocated rest
- Dealing with unrealistic external expectations from congregations
- External expectation of task completion directed by diocesan/provincial structures
- Lack of shared understanding about clerical roles and what ministry really encompasses.

The feedback suggests that over committing within ministerial life is a systemic issue.

Physical, mental and emotional health impacts

Commitment to ministerial life and the feeling of stress are reported as directly affecting clergy wellbeing through:

- Irregular or minimal exercise participation
- Poor diet
- Disrupted sleep
- High levels of stress, anxiety and in some cases emotional exhaustion/burn out.

Many clergy report:

- Difficulty 'switching off'
- Caring responsibilities of dependants alongside ministry
- Experiences of illness, chronic conditions or burnout.

Some clergy report use of therapeutic services; others seek support through spiritual direction. The limited support systems clergy access is fed back as self-initiated coping mechanisms, especially when accessing spiritual directions rather than embedded diocesan/provincial support structures.

The results indicate that current support systems rely heavily on individual cleric resilience rather than organisational preventative actions and support mechanisms.

Culture, leadership and trust

Experiences of diocesan culture are mixed, but several themes emerged:

- Perceptions of top-down leadership and limited consultation on diocesan/provincial matters
- Opaque decision-making processes
- Concerns about favouritism and inconsistency
- Variable quality of pastoral leadership.

Feedback suggests that trust in some areas appears fragile where communication is unclear or where leadership is described as distant or unilateral.

In some responses, clergy report:

- Fear of speaking openly
- Lack of psychological safety
- Negative or dismissive responses to challenge.

There was positive feedback, some clergy expressed they felt leadership in their diocese is experienced as pastoral, visible and transparent. In the pockets of positive feedback, the expectation would be that wellbeing outcomes are experienced as positive.

The results imply that leadership culture can be a determinant of individual clergy wellbeing and in some cases, can affect trust across the Church structure. Each diocese recorded a range of varying results regarding culture, leadership and trust. Culture is set by individual leadership style and expectations.

Communication and change management

Communication was identified as a problematic aspect of the clergy experience. Clergy reported:

- Information often arrives late or indirectly
- Decisions are perceived as already made before consultation activities begin
- Heavy reliance on email communication and response leads to overload and confusion
- Excessive dependence on perceived intermediaries creates inconsistency in communication, the perception is clarity is lacking from source.

Clergy express a desire for:

- Earlier notification and engagement in change processes
- Clarity on rationale for decisions (where possible)
- Increased relational and dialogical communication directly with clergy from senior leadership

Communication weaknesses can be perceived by clergy as eroding trust. They report the implications as increasing personal anxiety during change periods.

Ministry structures and administrative burden

A critical theme was the narrative surrounding the impact of the introduction of MA structures and the reported increase of an administrative load:

- Increased governance responsibilities for clergy to undertake
- Complex systems and processes
- Lack of training in systems and processes
- Significant time spent on compliance and building faculty exercises.

Clergy consistently report:

- Being pulled away from core missional activities to complete governance and administration tasks
- Impact upon prayer life, periods of reflection and mission
- Frustration at the mismatch between vocation and the realities of the clerical role.

Clergy record experiencing the change into MAs as diluting clergy effectiveness and increasing burnout risk.

Housing and financial pressures

Housing and financial wellbeing emerge as significant issues. Feedback indicates:

- Wide variability in parsonage quality across the province
- Concerns around damp, heating costs and long-term suitability of parsonage
- High living costs relative to stipend despite the annual increase
- Inability to save or plan for retirement – pension and housing
- Poor understanding of the Clergy Pension Scheme.

Many clergy reported experiencing:

- Financial stress about the future affecting wellbeing now
- Anxiety about retirement housing
- Dependence on external financial factors, for example – inheritance.

These are not isolated issues but features of clergy life.

Long-term financial insecurity in the survey has been directly linked to current wellbeing issues and individual thoughts of long-term clerical sustainability, which could impact clergy retention.

Support systems and development

Some clergy report that that formal support mechanisms are inconsistent across the province:

- The conduct of MDRs is perceived as inconsistent – sometimes are absent – and are often regarded as procedural rather than developmental and supportive.
- Lack of psychologically safe spaces for reflection of mission or feeling able to ask for support.
- Variable pastoral care from senior clerics across the province
- Limited use or awareness of occupational health services.

Where support is effective, it is typically:

- Relationally based
- Pastoral rather than procedural
- Locally provided with a consistent approach of senior clerics.

Clergy indicate support systems currently lack consistency, clarity and credibility across the Church in Wales structure.

Strengths and areas of development

Despite reporting pressures, clergy speak positively and important strengths are written about:

- Strong vocational commitment to ministry
- High levels of relational engagement with communities and congregations
- Growth in discipleship, pastoral ministry and local initiatives
- Positive experiences where teams and leadership function well.

Clergy have added the additional feedback:

- Faithfulness rather than metrics
- Relationships rather than outputs
- Presence rather than productivity.

The commentary indicates there is a strong foundation of missional commitment and relational ministry on which to build.

Systemic risks

The themes indicate several strategic risks:

Sustainability

High levels of ministerial commitment and burnout threaten retention of clerics and long-term ministry viability.

Trust and culture

Perceived poor communication and uneven leadership undermine confidence in governance and governance activities.

Vocational erosion

Administrative and diocesan structural pressures risk disconnecting clergy from core vocational/missional duties.

Inequality and variation

Experiences vary by diocese, role of the cleric and how they individually perceive leadership.

Health and wellbeing

Mental, emotional and physical health strain has been reported as widespread amongst the clergy.

Strategic implications

The findings indicate clergy would benefit from a full strategy rather than isolated diocesan initiatives. Feedback indicates they are seeking:

- To establish a clear, shared understanding of clergy role scope and sustainable ministerial/missional expectations
- Attempt to reduce clergy administrative burdens by freeing clergy time, allowing for pastoral and missional work
- Consider increased administrative support at Ministry Area level
- Embed consistent expectations of pastoral and transparent leadership
- Allow (where possible) consultative leadership
- Move from broadcast communications to relational engagement
- Where possible, provide rationale, timing and feedback mechanisms on decision-making
- Strengthen Ministerial Development Reviews as a developmental process undertaken in a trusted way
- Provide a consistent approach to clergy identifying individual wellbeing needs with the ability to seek support
- Expand access to therapies and occupational health services
- Support in planning and managing housing and financial insecurities.

Conclusion

The clergy wellbeing survey presents a varied picture of ministry, and its demands across the province.

Feedback indicates that clergy remain committed to their calling and demonstrate some limited resilience, faithfulness and creativity in local ministry. However, they report pressures around commitment to ministerial activities, administration, structures, communication, culture and general wellbeing. These factors undermine general wellbeing and sustainability within ministry.

The feedback suggests that improving clergy wellbeing will require:

- Education in financial planning and access to advisory services for life after ministry from ordination and throughout ministry
- Accessible information surrounding accessible health and wellbeing services which are equitable across the province
- An MDR process which is meaningful and uniform across the province
- Provision of strategic clarity of the future structure of the Church in Wales, with a narrative of structural reform
- A review of the reported administrative burden directly affecting ministry areas, impacting ability in ministry
- Strategies of cultural leadership with a lean towards consultation and relational communication.

The Bench has reviewed the survey results and has asked the Human Resources Committee to form a working group to advise it on a wellbeing improvement plan.