

Dioceses are the main geographical sub-divisions of the Church of England, consisting of a collection of parishes and are looked after by a diocesan bishop who is in charge of the diocese. Diocesan bishops are normally assisted by one or more suffragan bishops who are sometimes given specific sub-regions in the diocese to look after. A diocese marks out the geographical extent of the bishop's role. [Canon C18, paragraph 4](#) defines further the roles and responsibilities of the diocesan bishop.

There are 42 dioceses in the Church of England, many roughly equivalent in size to a county. Thirty dioceses are in the Province of Canterbury; 12 in the Province of York. A [report](#) was published in 2008 looking at the historical development of the Dioceses and Episcopal Sees in England.

## The Commission's role

Diocesan boundaries sometimes need to be reviewed if they no longer serve the mission of the Church, and/or if they become out of sync with civic life. Bishops' roles and/or workload may also change over time. The Commission exists to help resolve such issues in partnership with others, and to encourage shared working across boundaries. It can initiate proposals for change.

The 10 member Commission is made up of a representative cross-section of bishops, clergy and laity. Its role is set out in [Part II of the Dioceses, Pastoral & Mission Measure 2007](#). In summary, it considers proposals to:

- Change existing provincial or diocesan boundaries;
- Change the number of bishops within a diocese;
- Continue with a suffragan bishop's post after he/she moves on, or retires - its current advice on the filling of such posts can be found below in the Suffragan Bishops section.

The Commission's largest recent project involved the creation of the Diocese of Leeds in 2014 (see below) by the joining together of the former dioceses of Bradford, Ripon & Leeds and Wakefield.

**The scheduled meeting dates for the Commission in 2024 are: Thursday 14 March, Thursday 13 June, Monday 23 September and Wednesday 11 December.**

**Dioceses Commission Members**  
**From 1 May 2022**

**Chair**

Dame Caroline Spelman - served as Second Church Estates Commissioner from May 2015 until January 2020 (during which time she was an ex-officio members of the House of Laity), having decided to stand down as an MP at the end of 2019. Dame Caroline had a distinguished parliamentary career for over 20 years, and served as Secretary of State for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs in the Cameron administration from 2010-2012.

**Vice Chair**

The Ven Luke Irvine-Capel, Chichester Diocese (from June 2023)

**Elected members**

The Ven Stewart Fyfe, Carlisle Diocese (from 10 February 2023)

Canon Robert Hammond, Chelmsford Diocese

The Revd Neil Patterson, Hereford Diocese

Mr Clive Scowen, London Diocese

**Appointed members**

The Ven Karen Lund, Manchester Diocese

Mrs Ruth Martin, Southwark Diocese

Mrs Sue Slater, Lincoln Docese

The Rt Revd Paul Williams, Southwell and Nottingham Diocese

**Secretary**

Ms Jenny Axtell

**Secretary Assistant**

Marija McKean

**Diocese of Leeds documents**

- [Leeds Diocese Report 2010](#) (4.08 MB)
- [Moving towards a new Diocese for West Yorkshire and the Dales](#) (1.05 MB)
- [The Dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds and Wakefield Reorganisation Scheme 2013](#) (238.72 KB)
- [Dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds and Wakefield Reorganisation Scheme Evaluation](#) (288.92 KB)
- [Diocesan Reorganisation: Lessons learned from the creation of the Diocese of Leeds](#) (447.18 KB)

## Boundary Reviews

Diocesan boundaries can sometimes require updating to reflect changes to local communities or secular authorities that the Church seeks to serve. Small changes involving just a few parishes can be resolved locally and dealt with under a *Pastoral Scheme*; the Commission helps facilitate more wide-ranging reviews, and propose ways in which the boundaries can be re-drawn. Such proposals involve local consultation and require consideration by diocesan synods and the consent of the General Synod. The Commission has to have regard for the boundaries used by ecumenical partners, secular and civic authorities to create identifiable local communities which serve the mission of the Church.

In 2009-2014, the Commission was involved with the joining together of the former dioceses of Bradford, Ripon & Leeds, and Wakefield to create the new **Diocese of Leeds**. This was the first time since the 16th Century that any existing diocese had been dissolved, as opposed to the creation of new ones. Documents relating to this scheme can be found above.

The Commission retains a watching brief for boundary reviews and is engaged from time to time with local discussions, but currently has no proposals for a major boundary exercise.

## Suffragan Bishops

Bishops have a dual role as leaders in mission: within their dioceses and collectively in the wider Church. The Commission considers the number of *suffragan bishops* and how they function within the diocese.

In the event of a suffragan retiring or moving on, diocesan bishops need to

1. Obtain the consent of their *diocesan synod* or *bishop's council* to fill the post; and
2. Make a submission to the Commission.

### Read the Commission's advice.

Further resources regarding senior leadership and suffragan bishops that have been produced by other bodies:

- Faith & Order Commission (FAOC) report on Senior Leadership (2015)
- GS Misc 733 House of Bishop occasional paper on Suffragan Bishops (2004)

# Diocesan administration – working together across boundaries

The Commission provides advice, support and encouragement for the development of joint administration schemes which involve working together across boundaries.

Many examples exist of shared administrative functions. [Read the Commission's 2018 survey.](#)

## Reports

- [Dioceses Commission Annual Report 2016](#) (369.71 KB)
- [Dioceses Commission Annual Report 2017](#) (279.17 KB)
- [Dioceses Commission Annual Report 2018](#) (136.22 KB)
- [Review of the Sees of Beverley, Ebbsfleet, Maidstone and Richborough](#) (939.46 KB)
- [Dioceses Commission Annual Report 2019](#) (81.57 KB)
- [Dioceses Commission Annual Report 2020](#) (147.58 KB)
- [Dioceses Commission-Annual Report 2021 .pdf](#) (183.14 KB)
- [Dioceses Commission Annual Report 2022](#) (184.82 KB)

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