**How churches can support each other through financial twinning**

We all, I hope, believe in the biblical principle of supporting poorer churches. The principle goes as far back as the earliest days of the church. The apostle Paul took part in at least two collections where churches outside Judea made donations ‘for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem’ (Romans 15:26; Acts 11:29­30).

The difficulty comes for members of the Church of England when we are expected to support poorer churches which do not preach the biblical gospel of repentance and faith in a unique and saving Christ, but a false gospel of ‘God will bless you as you are’ (in your sin).

In our media age, members of the church are increasingly wising up to this. To quote two members of my own congregation: ‘I give more directly to mission societies than to church, because I have no confidence in what the diocese is doing with the money our church is giving to it’; and ‘Why should I give up my skiing holiday to fund heresy?!’

The answer to this dilemma historically has to been to ‘quota cap’ – to cap the voluntary (do please note the word ‘voluntary’!) parish contribution to the diocese in protest. The difficulty is that this is entirely a negative action. It does nothing to support poorer churches and over time it further impoverishes the diocese, which has to fund poorer churches, some of which are orthodox.

Some congregations have set up individual twinning arrangements to support poorer churches, but these have been piecemeal and in general have not been widely taken up.

This is how the idea of an inter­church trust germinated, as an alternative to the diocesan quota system. It is what some of us in Southwark Diocese are doing. Let me explain how it works.

A richer parish ‘pays its way’ to the diocese for clergy stipend, pension, housing contribution, national insurance and contribution for national and diocesan church costs. This is obviously a moral obligation: to pay for what we receive and to pay a fair share of central costs. In my own diocese, this ‘total clergy cost’ is currently stated to be £51,000 pa per member of the clergy, after other diocesan income is taken into account.

For a parish using an intra church trust, extra monies above the ‘total clergy cost’ are paid into the trust. The trust is basically a holding tank for monies until they are redistributed. Funds are put into the trust by a particular church’s PCC and are held within the trust in a restricted fund for that PCC. No one else can use the money except that PCC, which alone determines how it is spent.

The PCC decides which church they want to support from a collated list of churches. The list includes churches whose minister subscribes to an orthodox statement of faith, and which would like cross­subsidy. We encourage churches to ‘twin’ as broadly as possible within this definition.

So, for instance, a poorer church may currently have an annual parish contribution of say £31,000 per year. The richer church would put £20,000 into the trust. The trust would then write a cheque to the diocese for £20,000, which the poorer church would send into the diocese to be put against their account. Thus the diocese would receive not £31,000 for that poorer church, but the full cost of ministry, that is, £51,000.

The question is often asked: Why can a parish not do that direct? Why does it need the trust? The answer is that a parish could do that, but in practice they don’t. It just hasn’t been happening.

Using an inter church trust garners publicity and support for principled action. It also provides other benefits.

The purpose of the trust is not merely to subsidise orthodox Anglican ministry, but is also designed to create genuine fellowship among churches and mission partnerships. Diocesan quota systems should have achieved this, but they have not done so because there has been no agreement on what is the gospel.

The trust brings to birth a twinning relationship between churches which involves money, but also extend to prayer support, pulpit swaps, mission weeks, helping with holiday clubs, shared PCC days away, joint training – basically whatever those PCCs want it to be.

Using such a trust has two further benefits. First, it forms a strong moral case for protecting poorer churches against clergy cuts at a time when clergy numbers are being drastically cut. It does this because those clergy posts are now fully funded (or are nearer to being fully funded).

Secondly, knowledge of the very existence of a trust puts a brake on the revisionist mentality that is threatening to destroy our church from within. This is because the trust forms a coalition of churches, which individual parish trusts or action can never do. It is a coalition that says: ‘We do want to fund poorer churches, but we will not fund anything and everything any longer.’