

The Online Parish Returns System *Briefing for parishes*

Introduction

In previous years, churches within Derby Diocese have submitted their statistics for mission returns on paper forms to the Parish Support Office in Derby. This information was then input onto a spreadsheet before being sent to the Research and Statistics Division of the Church of England in London, where it was entered again into the national system. This process was time consuming and prone to error, and also made it harder to provide information from the statistics quickly to those who needed it – particularly the churches who had submitted the data.

In 2015, the Diocese of Derby moved to the Church of England online Parish Returns system (<http://parishreturns.churchofengland.org/>), an web-based system that allows churches to submit their statistics for mission and financial returns online each year. That information can then be made directly available to all those who need it – in local churches, the diocese and nationally.

The system also provides clear and flexible reports, allowing users to view different sorts of data at different levels over the last ten years. Churches can be given access to view their own data, and higher level access can be given to deanery and diocesan officers and staff.

Why this is good for churches and the diocese?

Moving to the online system brings benefits to parishes and to the diocese as a whole:

- Direct entry for churches of their own data.
- Savings of printing and postage costs for both churches and the diocese.
- Flexible and easy to use reporting at church, parish, deanery, archdeaconry and diocesan level, with tailored access rights for church, deanery and diocesan staff.
- Automatic checking of information as it is entered, ensuring that the figures provided are more accurate and less time is spent chasing incomplete or inconsistent data.
- Information on the system is available much more quickly – as soon as the data is entered it is visible for reporting – rather than waiting 6-9 months for the published report.

Training and support

A full user guide is available that covers both input and reporting. All that is needed is a familiarity with computers and with the use of an internet browser. There's no special software to download, install or learn. Feedback links are given on every page of the data entry forms on the online system.

Choosing an administrator

In order to use the system, each parish must register and appoint a system administrator. This person is the contact point for the system. They have full access to read and edit the data for the church, and can grant other people access to either view or edit this data. Where there is more than one church in the parish, access can be granted for a single church or for all churches.

For many, the administrator would be the incumbent, another member of the clergy, a warden or a church administrator. However, it doesn't have to be. Here are some of the things to consider:

- **They need to have access to an internet enabled computer**
They need to be comfortable using the computer the web browser needs to be the latest – or at least a recent – version (we have had problems with some older browser versions).
- **They don't need to be the one who collects the data (or even enters it)**
The data can be collected by others and then passed to this person to enter it. Entering the data from a written form can take as little as five minutes. You can download a form from the parish returns homepage, which can then be printed, filled in by others and passed back for entering online. The administrator can also give access to others for the churches they administer so that more than one person can enter or view data.
- **They may be someone who isn't involved already**
Whilst the person does need to be trustworthy and dependable and some of the data may be sensitive, they don't need to be a leader in the church or know anything about the statistics. No data is identifiable to an individual, so there are no data protection issues to be concerned about.
- **They don't need to be in the parish (or even go to the same church)**
It may be that someone in a neighbouring parish or benefice, or in the deanery, would be willing to be an administrator for you.
- **Deanery administrators may be able to help**
We are including the online parish returns system in the induction training of all new deanery administrators, so if you are really struggling to find someone to enter your data online and you have an administrator in your deanery, they may be able to help.

Further information

If you would like to know more about what the online Parish Returns system can do for you, then please get in touch with your Deanery Administrator or:

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