

## Changing Churches: A Practical Guide to the Faculty System

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Just occasionally it is possible to read a book and wish that it had been available before now. This is such a book. Charles Mynors offers us a thorough, well-written and comprehensive survey of the functions of churches and the permissions needed to make them suitable for mission in the current age. This is a work which should find its way onto the easy reference shelves of everyone engaged in this task – clergy, churchwardens, architects, conservation bodies, members of diocesan advisory committees (DACs) and archdeacons. A diocesan chancellor who has also been a chartered surveyor, Charles Mynors shows us the wealth of his experience and understanding in a clear and accessible way.

Despite its subtitle, this book is much more than a guide to the faculty system. The author is clear that church buildings exist for the purpose of worship, mission and service and, while they are an important part of our heritage, they are always much more than that. For him, our buildings are not to be seen as just a hindrance soaking up time, effort and money, nor as just an unfortunate encumbrance, but as a huge opportunity. He describes change as part of the natural process of progress and renewal which happens in every generation, to which the only alternative is decline. Because so many of our churches are part of our heritage (about 13,000 of the 16,151 are listed) and because changes must be right for the context and of the highest quality possible, Mynors argues that it is vitally important to take time and have the fullest possible consultation before implementing works. While some parishioners may regard this as an annoyance, and moan about others interfering in ‘their’ building, proper consultation has many advantages. It makes it more likely that the changes will meet with greater agreement and acceptance; it also ensures that the experience and specialist knowledge of others can contribute to the project and produce a better result. This latter role often belongs to architects and professional advisers, as well as to DACs and heritage bodies. But Mynors is clear that their role is to engage and advise, and not to dictate what parishes should do (p 36).

The book is very well laid out and is particularly helpful in the way in which clearly headed chapters describe different parts of the process, the factors to be considered and the role which other bodies and agencies may have. The various parts of each process are carefully and clearly explained, providing useful practical guidance for clergy, wardens, parochial church councils and others as they propose changes or works. Comprehensively, Mynors covers repairs, maintenance and re-ordering, bells and noticeboards, audio-visual equipment, safes,

re-decoration, lightening conductors, broken slates or tiles and every other possible aspect of the use and repair of the church building. There are effective descriptions of how to present the paperwork, the importance of plans and photographs, and what needs to be included in a Statement of Significance and a Statement of Needs. I am sure that many a chancellor and DAC would be delighted if those responsible for projects would take the words of this book to heart before they begin to formulate their plans.

The section on the way that the Consistory Court works will be very useful for those who have never had any experience of one and would feel daunted by the prospect. Mynors makes the whole process transparent and offers an excellent description and explanation. Throughout the book, he illustrates his points with relevant examples, which at times are highly amusing and also demonstrate how best to proceed if you wish for a favourable outcome. His style is easily readable and is designed to make the book useful for those who wish to use it as a work of reference as well as reading it as a book.

Unfortunately, this review is not without reservations, and sadly the book does not achieve the authority which a work of this nature deserves. This is for several reasons. First, because the author is clearly trying to ensure that the fullest information possible is available to those who may use it as a work of reference, the volume is quite repetitive at times for anyone reading it as a book. There are places where it could have been made more concise without losing readability or vital information. Secondly, it is clear that much of the work was written before the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 were agreed. While the main section on these rules has been very competently updated, the book as a whole has not been. In consequence, there are sentences throughout the text which are now out of date, such as several references to archdeacons granting faculties (pp 44, 113, 127, 129, 130, 135), though in other places it is clear that this is no longer possible (pp 149, 152).

Thirdly, the author does not seem fully to have understood the new list B requirements. Many times he writes that vicars and churchwardens have to 'notify' the archdeacon about works to be carried out under list B (eg pp 71, 79, 80, 84, 87, 88, 94, 356), when in fact the 2015 Rules require more than this. They are clear that permission must be obtained from the archdeacon before any such works are started or contracts placed, and the archdeacon may impose conditions on how those works are executed (Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 3(3)). Fourthly, the decision consistently to use the word 'vicar' to describe rectors, vicars and priests-in-charge is wholly understandable and saves much unnecessary repetition. Unfortunately, there are times when it is unhelpful. There are differences between incumbents and priests-in-charge, and simply writing about 'vicars' in relation to the ownership of benefice houses could mislead the reader to assume that a priest-in-charge also owns the benefice house (p 29).

Overall, even with these caveats, this is a most useful piece of work and Charles Mynors is to be congratulated on the way in which he has marshalled so much

relevant and insightful material. Reading it, or referring to sections of it, will be of enormous help and benefit to all involved in the care, use and development of our church buildings. Part III of the book in particular, with its survey of 'Issues arising in particular cases', offers much advice, guidance and inspiration for those dealing with these matters, and enables more creative and imaginative thinking. This book will have a definite place on my shelves and I have already added it to the recommended reading list for new archdeacons. I trust that a second edition will in due course remedy the unfortunate limitations in some parts of this one.

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