

Communion and between the communions, that might operate outside the traditional geographical hierarchies, through communities with shared emphases.

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Your Church and the Law: a Simple Explanation and Guide

DAVID PARROTT

Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2008, viii + 242pp (£16.99) ISBN: 9781853119279

For the past few months, I've allowed David Parrott's book *Your Church and the Law* to loiter on my desk next to the phone. There's method in my madness, for these last few months are notoriously busy months for archdeacons, as the Annual General Meeting cycle comes to an end and visitations begin. So it is my experience that, at the strangest of times, the phone will ring and some distraught clergyperson or churchwarden will present me with a question that will test my knowledge of the church and the law: questions ranging from who is eligible to stand for election to how the process of election should take place, or even more obscure questions about churchyards and church finances. However well prepared one is, you can guarantee that the next question you are asked will always be the one that is about something with which you have not already dealt. Therefore my simple proposal when given David Parrott's book to look at was to see if it was exactly what it said it was: 'a simple explanation and guide'. Would I be able to find my way around it while dealing with the telephone caller and then be able to find the appropriate answer to their query? Would I be able to offer, confidently, simple advice? I also wanted to apply yet another test to this addition to the self-help books on Church law: could I equally confidently think that the confused telephone caller could have found their own way around the book and got the answer to their questions without resorting to phoning me late on a Saturday night?

Using the book this way I have been grateful for its clear and helpful format. Each chapter begins with a simple case study or possible scenario, which roots the subsequent details into everyday parish life. There then follows a section offering basic (but valuable) details on the subject under consideration, which I have found both comprehensive and accessible. This is followed by 'Frequently Asked Questions', a format to which many website users are becoming more and more accustomed. It is well employed throughout, providing straightforward answers to questions that are relevant and, in my

experience, often asked. The final two sections of each chapter avoid giving lots of detail but rather point the reader to resources that they should have at their fingertips and appropriate links such as resource books and websites, often useful in accessing further information or answers to questions that have not been covered.

The book's chapters cover all the areas one would expect to find in a help book of this kind, and a few others. Sections on employing staff and working with volunteers, as well as those on Health and Safety and data protection, are a valuable addition to the wealth of advice given in other similar books of this genre. Furthermore, the advice offered sometimes usefully goes beyond a lawyer's brief, giving hints, tips and good practice in day-to-day parish life – take, for example, the advice given on handling money in the chapter on finance.

I offer only three comments from a more negative perspective. First, as with all such books, this one only provides a snapshot of how life is and should be if we were to follow the frameworks that Church law provides; law inevitably changes, adapts and develops. Sadly, some major new pieces of law affecting church life, notably the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 and the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009, are not or cannot be fully taken into account. Therefore a purchase of this edition almost guarantees that you will need an update of information in the very near future. Second, there are one or two typographical errors that still need to be ironed out, for example confusing notes (such as 3 and 9 in Chapter 4) that do not seem to relate to the chapters of the book. Third, I am a little surprised that some resources are not mentioned, not least 'The Churchyards Handbook',³ which, for my money, is the one handbook necessary for all who have responsibility for a churchyard.

However, perhaps as a working archdeacon, the most important question should be: 'Would I recommend letting this book loiter near the phone of a churchwarden or parish priest?' or, more simply, 'Will this book do what it says on the cover?' The answer is a resounding yes. It is a simple (and by that I mean clear and easily accessible) guide to the essential aspects of law affecting the life of the Church, and as such I recommend it in the hope that some might well use it before they pick up the phone and disturb another one of my few nights in.

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3 4th edition (London, 2001).