

# The Minister for Faith went on a tour of Anglican cathedrals and all we got was a lousy report

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*Stephen Evans questions the point of a Minister for Faith and says his recent tour of all 42 of England's Anglican cathedrals was a waste of ministerial time and taxpayers' money.*

I've often wondered what the point of a Minister for Faith is. What do they actually do? Well, now we know.

In a report published over the Christmas period, the current incumbent of this non-job, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, explained that when he became Minister for Faith he decided to set out on a [tour of all 42 Anglican cathedrals](#) "to celebrate their great work and better understand their role in today's society".

Lord Bourne set off on his road trip in October 2016 and finished it almost a year later in September 2017. The [subsequent report](#), which reads like a school's pupil's 'what I did on my school holidays' homework assignment, tells us nothing that we didn't already know.

You don't need to embark on a tour of all 42 Anglican cathedrals to recognise that in addition to being centres of worship, prayer and spirituality, cathedrals are often majestic buildings, thriving tourist attractions and play an important role in the civil, economic and communal life of the cities and regions in which they're situated. We already know that. The whole endeavour strikes me as a colossal waste of ministerial time and taxpayers money, intended to make people of faith feel good about themselves.

Or maybe the tour was seen as a way of justifying the government's recent [£40 million handout to English cathedrals](#) to assist with repairs – and perhaps as a pretext for further funding. Few would question the need to preserve these historic and architecturally significant buildings. But given that the raison d'être of churches and cathedrals is faith and worship, shouldn't this responsibility sit primarily with the [incredibly wealthy Church of England](#), rather than the hard pressed taxpayer?

The Minister for Faith makes much of the worthy work cathedrals do in their communities, but businesses, social enterprises and not-for-profits up and down the country tirelessly carry out social action without the reward of a ministerial visit. For example, most of the UK's football clubs, from the Premier League giants down to the lowliest of non-league minnows, carry out excellent work in their communities to promote social inclusion and cohesion, educating children and often transforming the lives of young people, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour as a result. Will a communities minister be setting off on a tour of football clubs to "celebrate their great work"? I doubt it.

The position of a Minister for Faith privileges faith. Within Government, I'm sure the tour was seen as a way of massaging the ego of Anglican voters who are feeling 'marginalised' by the nation's indifference to Christianity. Note the Minister only visited Anglican cathedrals and in his report describes Britain as a "Christian country". Given that Lord Bourne's [ministerial brief](#) also includes

community cohesion, why did he not use the opportunity to also visit the country's mosques and temples to see what they're doing to improve community cohesion? Even if he did, there's no guarantee he would make an honest and objective assessment. The role of the Minister of Faith has always been to champion faith rather than treat it with any sense of neutrality.

Lord Bourne concludes the foreword to his report by suggesting that we all set off on a nationwide cathedral tour of our own. Many people around the UK would probably enjoy that, but some of us have jobs to do and, unlike the minister for faith, can't rely on the government to subsidise our hobbies.

## Stephen Evans

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