



QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDERS

Diocesan Synod March 2024

Each questioner is entitled to ask two supplementary questions at the meeting. These will all be recorded and shared with Synod members.

Gwilym Stone, Southampton Deanery

1. To the Bishop of Winchester

The recent audit of maternity policies "Clergy Babies" found that the policy in this Diocese does not meet the suggested national guidelines, as provision of maternity pay is dependent on time served, and wording on "Keeping In Touch" days was outdated, and it lacked information on NSMs and Ordinands.

Can the Bishop inform Synod about what actions he is taking to ensure that Diocesan policies, and practice, on parental leave reflect current best practice at the earliest opportunity?

Can he also inform Synod with any actions he is taking to ensure that male clergy are enabled, and encouraged, to take parental leave?

My commitment to clergy wellbeing, of which maternity and paternity leave is undoubtedly a part, is unswerving. Indeed, Synod will be aware that it was one of my stated priorities in my last presidential address. This is a subject on which we can never be complacent, and to that extent we welcome appropriate scrutiny, especially through questions such as this one, and for which I'm grateful.

The diocese observes the Archbishops' Council's Directions in this area and offers 12 months at full stipend to those on maternity leave. Just as importantly we offer good support to clergy going on or even considering maternity leave through personalised direct engagement with our HR Team. Of course, this kind of desktop review will sadly never be able to capture such nuance, although we do need to ensure that our website accurately reflects our current practice.

Michael Minton, Christchurch Deanery

2. To the Diocesan Secretary

At the meeting in June last year Synod was informed work was in hand on this to allow for a separate meeting perhaps on Zoom to consider the Annual Report and Accounts in detail to be approved by Synod by a change to the structure of WDBF. It is a disappointment that Synod still receives this for information. Are you able to indicate when this will change?

I apologise to Diocesan Synod that I have not been able to finalise the changes to the Memorandum & Articles of Association yet. This change, when implemented will make Synod the Company Members of the WDBF and therefore responsible for formally adopting the Annual Reports & Accounts.

Workloads this year have been exceptional whilst resource levels in the Diocesan team have been reduced – this has meant capacity for important but not urgent work has been limited.

It is my intention to ensure this work is completed with our legal advisers before the next AGM of the WDBF. This will ensure that the newly elected Diocesan Synod will act as Company Members.

3. To the Diocesan Secretary

As far as I can remember there has been no information on the budget for 2025 at the March Synod and none on the agenda for the June one. Last year there was a special Zoom meeting in September. What is happening this year for discussion and approval by synod of this budget?

In September 2023, Diocesan Synod overwhelmingly approved the Diocesan Three Year Financial plan for 2024 to 2026. Members will recall this was the result of 9 months of consultation and discussion. As the background paper made clear (DS23/12) there is a tension between ensuring Synod has a detailed and genuine role in setting budgets, whilst not allowing financial matters to dominate all other business. As such, the Synod also agreed to adopt the ‘budget tests and aspirations’ asking for an annual report to Synod setting out whether these have been met or not.

This report is scheduled to be brought to the November meeting of Diocesan Synod, when we will be far enough through the year to give an indication of progress against these aspirations. As things currently stand, the only aspiration we are in genuine danger of missing is the hope for a 95% CMF collection rate by the end of 2024. At the end of May the rate was only 86%. The Bishop’s Council and the Diocesan Finance Committee have scheduled time at their next meetings to review options for responding to this unsustainable shortfall in income and will update Synod in November.

Papers from previous Diocesan Synod meetings are readily available on the Diocesan website if members wish to refresh their memories of former decisions.

Richard Wise, Eastleigh Deanery

4. To the Diocesan Secretary

In the Diocesan Newsletter of 25 April, a warm tribute was paid to the work of [REDACTED] in the Diocese since 2015, including words from Bishop Philip. Was it not possible to have informed members of the Diocese of [REDACTED] departure until two days after his final working day?

Synod will note that I have redacted the name of the former employee referenced in this question. These written questions are shared with Synod, made available on the

Diocesan website and enter the formal record of our proceedings. I am uncomfortable at setting a precedent that allows individual current or former employees of the WDBF to have personal details of their employment history discussed in such a public forum. I recognise that this question comes from a position of pastoral care and kindness and therefore wish to respond in a positive and transparent manner but feel it would be unkind and inappropriate to reference any specific individual.

Richard's question illustrates a genuine care for employees of the WDBF but highlights a tension that we all have to hold. On one hand we wish to breakdown the 'them and us' between parishes and the diocesan team, recognising that regardless of our roles, responsibilities or employment status we are all one team serving our diocesan community. Set against this is the reality of employment legislation, data protection and risk management that the WDBF is subject to.

When changes to employed roles are necessary for structural, strategic or financial reasons there is inevitably an impact on individuals. As Chief Operating Officer I attempt to respond to such changes with sensitivity, kindness and (where possible) generosity – whilst remaining compliant with all legislation throughout. This is not always easy or straightforward. We try wherever possible to give colleagues as much agency as we can in determining how changes are communicated and timed. Some wish for a large farewell event, others ask to quietly leave without any announcement. There is an operational necessity to ensure clergy and volunteers are aware of changes in key personnel, but beyond that we aim to respect individuals wishes.

Dan Clark, Southampton Deanery

1. To the Diocesan Secretary

I'm told that nationally, the number of ordinations to stipendiary ministry fell by nearly half in three years, 2020–23 (417 to 229). Self-supporting ordinand numbers have fallen by about a third. Stipendiaries tend to be younger and non-stipendiaries tend to be markedly older, so these figures mean a further aging of the clergy. There is little sign of any post-COVID rebound. The uncertainty over PLF may well mean the decline is worse in 2024. Without a rapid rebound, these figures mean far fewer curates from 2025–26 and far fewer incumbents from 2028 onward. What are the comparable figures for ordinations for Winchester Diocese (2020 - 2024) and the number of ordinands expected to be ordained in 2025 and 2026?

What plans are we making as a diocese to re-encourage vocations? What contingency plans are being made if the number of curates and then incumbents continue to drop?

I am grateful to Dan for raising this important question. The national trends in numbers coming forward for ordination is indeed a concern and one considerable thought is being given to nationally. Thankfully at the moment it is not a pattern we are seeing replicated in Winchester.

Ministry Council launched a work stream in 2023 to consider this issue and prepare proposals for encouraging and nurturing new vocations. We will engage in this work when opportunities allow. We do however believe that in general vocations must be viewed as a discipleship issue that starts at parish level. Diocesan and national initiatives may help build on these foundations, but they cannot encourage vocations in a vacuum.

Identifying the reason for the decline across the country is not easy. For some potential candidates, concerns that PLF goes too far or not far enough may be a contributing factor (although we have not seen evidence of this in Winchester). For others concerns over cost of living and the level of clergy stipend will be a block, and for others still the rising reports of low levels of clergy wellbeing, or clergy being treated poorly by parishioners will be a real concern.

We must however also recognise that the 60-year downward trend in Church attendance and upward trend in age profile of our worshipping communities will be having a considerable impact.

The table below summarises the number of new starters across a range of authorised and licensed roles in our diocese in recent years. These figures buck the national trend for 2023 to 2024, which is encouraging. With the exception of 2020 the number of candidates going forward to stage 2 of the selection process has remained between 19 and 22 each year. Some will defer each year, and some will not be recommended for training, but the numbers coming forward remains strong.

We believe that one of the reasons for this is the opportunities for authorised lay ministry in our diocese – Licensed Lay Ministers (or Workers), Bishop’s Permission to Preach and Bishop’s Commission for Mission. There is good evidence that shows that these shorter courses are helping more people explore their vocation, embrace theological study, and gain confidence in their own gifts. I am sure Synod would want to join me in recording their thanks to the DDO and whole Diocesan Mission & Ministry Team for all the hard work and dedication that rest behind these figures.

Academic Year	Winchester ordinands Starters	LLM starters	BPP starters	Total starters
2019-20	24	10	11	45
2020-21	13	4	13	30
2021-22	19	3	13	35
2022-23	7	5	9	21
2023-24 (est.)	25	6	12	43
Total	88	28	58	174

It is not possible to split ordinands between stipendiary and self-supporting as they are not selected for training on those categories. Instead, people are selected for Primary or Assistant clergy roles. An ordinand chosen for primary leadership may choose to opt for a self-supporting curacy and vice versa. Our current average age of SSM curates is probably lower than it ever has been.

It is worth noting that of the 840+ authorised ministries currently serving across our dioceses, our stipendiary clergy headcount (including externally funded posts) is only 123. We rejoice and give thanks for all those who serve and lead our worshipping communities and parishes in so many ways.