

Questions to Canterbury Diocesan Synod

Reverend Andrew Brown writes: 'I am writing to enquire if we can find out for the Synod, how much the Minister as Learner course is costing the diocese as part of the budget? My reason for asking is that it currently takes priests out of their parishes for a period of three full weeks of the year for compulsory sessions, and covers a great deal of what many clergy already have covered in both their working lives and residential theological college. As the synod is looking at the budget for the coming year, and given the hard financial climate that we as a church and a diocese find ourselves in, could we not consider alternative ways of offering the course, perhaps as part of a series of optional day courses open to all clergy and licenced lay ministers rather than a compulsory residential?

Canon Dr Neville Emslie responds: The Canterbury Leadership Programme (CLP) is a constituent part of the *Canterbury Diet*, a formation and development programme for clergy that is designed to equip priests for their ministerial and personal development. Clergy new to incumbency and to licensed ministry in the diocese are invited to attend three five-day residentials over a period of 18 months, the first is called Minister as Learner, the second Minister as Leader, the third Minister as Missioner. This and early versions of the programme have been delivered in our diocese for over 20 years and have been replicated from here in dioceses throughout the country. The Minister as Learner programme addresses Spiritual Renewal in Ministry; Conversion of Life; Emotional Intelligence for Effective Ministry; Motivation and Authenticity in Ministry; Embracing Renewal for Transformative Ministry, and incorporates Action Learning models to attend to real-life ministry issues. The Minister as Leader programme addresses Core Task of Leadership; Church Dynamics and Leadership; Mobilising the People of God; Conflict; Taking up the Role of Leader, plus case study work in action learning sets. The Minister as Missioner programme addresses the Minister as Leader in Mission; Cultivating the System and Mission; Open Systems, Boundaries and Mission; Missional Leadership in Practice, plus action learning through case studies that participants bring. Additionally, participants worship together, study the Scriptures appropriate to the residential theme, and engage in small group discussion. The average venue and travel cost over the last three residentials was £5,393, which averages out at £300 per person. The weeks offer rich opportunities for friendship, collegiality and mutual learning across deanery, ecclesiological, and personal boundaries. Feedback over two decades has been overwhelmingly positive, and we seek to improve the programme year on year.

Julian Hills writes: "At the November 2024 Diocesan Synod I asked a members question about elected Diocesan Synod representation on the Finance and Assets Committee. In the answer I was told about an ongoing governance review which would include the point that I had raised and was assured that Diocesan Synod would see the output of that review. I am not aware of anything further being reported to Synod on this matter other than an invitation for Synod members to participate in a financial awayday in May this year. Could I ask what progress has been made with this review, who is conducting it and when it is likely to report to Synod?"

David Kemp writes "I understand that there is to be a review of the governance of Diocesan activities and processes. If so, what are the Terms of Reference of the review, how will it proceed and what will be the timetable?"

Iain Blythe, Diocesan Secretary replies: I am grateful to my predecessors for their interest in this matter – and for the support and friendship they have shown me since my appointment. Their insight has proven invaluable.

The review is in the process of being finalised with an initial mapping stage currently underway. This will include questionnaires to Committee members and Synod which are being finalised during June and July.

The Diocese of Canterbury appointed a new DBF Chair, director of finance and diocesan secretary in 2024 and had new NCI-funded projects awarded amongst other changes.

As is common to many dioceses, governance groups have grown and changed over time, and there is now a feeling that the whole could work better, with clearer remit and authority for each group within the structure, to aid timely decision making and confidence as to which issues are taken to which groups for what level of decisions.

It is felt that reviewing the current groups and structure as a whole, establishing what currently works well and what could be improved will allow a refreshed structure and groups that will best serve the purposes of the diocese in the 2020s and beyond.

The Diocese of Canterbury is looking to develop a governance structure and operation that:

- Provides clarity over reporting lines, roles and responsibilities of all groups,
- Minimises duplication and streamlines decision making at appropriate levels,
- Provides effective oversight over, and supports and enables good practice in delivery of diocesan functions and projects
- Is transparent to all stakeholders,
- Allows statutory bodies to provide appropriate oversight whilst delegating appropriate responsibility and authority to deliver to individual groups,
- Fulfils the requirements of funding partners in the national church with regards to nationally funded projects.

The objectives are:

- Develop a new governance structure that covers all functions of the DBF and document the new structure and operation
- Define suitable reporting required into and from each group to allow effective oversight of the work within their remit and where required, develop reporting templates and associated material with a recognition for transparency and proper oversight
- Document the function and operation of each group in Terms of Reference or similar
- Support the implementation of the new structure and practices by the diocese with advice and consultancy support

The aim is for a number of workshops to take place in July to establish what the requirements for the review and new governance might be. Reports will then be prepared for meetings (including Synod) in the autumn.

One of the main reasons I am keen to pursue this is to increase the representation by Synod members on the various committees and a key element of the review will be to understand what holds people back from that.

Stephen Carter writes "In the light of the anomalies and complexities thrown up by the recent changes at General Synod to both the election process for the Vacancy in See Committee and the elections from the Vacancy in See Committee to the Crown Nominations Commission, what representation will the diocese make to General Synod to amend the legislation?"

Iain Blythe replies: The Archdeacon of Canterbury has submitted a comprehensive paper which covers this question, at least in part.

I would add that it will be for Synod to make the representations referred to and the Bishop and I have held discussions around convening a small group from Synod to work on a report which will highlight the issues faced by this diocese. My expectation is this group will also review the DBF Standing Orders (many of which date from the 2000s) and bring recommendations to Synod for approval.

I would not wish to pre-empt the work of that group by responding in more detail but do recognise this is a shorter response than I would wish to give and apologise for that.

Ravi Holy writes: At recent Synod meetings the question of ensuring that our rural communities are represented in the Diocesan Strategy has been raised. I understand that a representative group has been working on this and would like to ask for an update on any progress that has been made?

Iain Blythe replies: Since summer 2024 there has been a renewed focus on the rural Church in the Diocese of Canterbury. Any strategy will need to demonstrate that rural ministry is a flourishing, faithful Christian presence that nurtures lives transformed by Christ and brings hope to its communities. Any rural strategy in this diocese will seek to ensure that Changed Lives – Changing Lives becomes a living reality across our countryside through sustainable, creative, and community-rooted ministry.

A Rural Strategy Group, chaired by Paula Jardine-Rose, has met regularly and from this, and in consultation with representatives from the NCIs and other dioceses, a Strategic Framework for Rural Mission and Ministry is evolving. Once ready for approval, this will be distributed widely and discussed at all relevant levels of governance, including by Synod. The aim is to incorporate this into any funding request that drives sustainable and ambitious mission in the Diocese of Canterbury.

Rural ministry in Canterbury Diocese:

- Over 70% of the diocese is rural, with many churches serving dispersed, ageing, and declining populations
- Attendance is falling, and morale is impacted by reduced stipendiary clergy presence, overextended benefices, and fewer volunteers
- CofE project funding can appear to have an urban focus
- Parishes often feel isolated
- Despite this, rural churches continue to serve faithfully, often at the heart of their communities—offering pastoral care, sacred space, and public witness

What Are We Aiming For?

We aim to create a culture where:

- Every rural church is seen as a valued, visible, and vital Christian presence in its community within its context
- Rural ministry is adaptive, collaborative, and creative – including flourishing focal and pioneer ministries
- Rural churches are better resourced and equipped to engage with schools, marginalised communities, and care for creation
- Our strategy enables Mission Action Planning that is missionally bold

Rachel Webbley writes:

What is the Health and Vitality Review? Answer to follow.

Colin Evans replies:

It is a quantitative assessment of missional & financial strength of each parish, based on key attendance and financial data at parish level. This includes:

- Missional Strength based on Adult Average Weekly Attendance (October count)
- U16 Average Weekly Attendance
- 5-year growth (i.e. 2019 to 2024 change)
- 1 year growth (i.e. 2023 to 2024)
- Financial Strength based on percentage of Parish Share paid – aka level of subsidy
- Other supporting information such as deprivation, urban/rural, population, attendance per capita etc.

The data is based on submissions by PCCs themselves and will, hopefully, allow the DBF to work alongside colleagues more effectively.

Will the successful adoption of our Diocesan Synod Motion about confirmation statistics at General Synod be captured in the Annual Report for 2025?

Iain Blythe replies: absolutely.

For those unaware, this is reported on the Church of England website as follows:

<https://www.canterburydiocese.org/our-life/news-events/news/confirmation-stats-recorded-nationally-thanks-to-canterbury-diocese.php> It is a testament to the work of Synod (and you and David Montieth in particular) here in Canterbury that the motion to 'Add Confirmation Numbers to Stats for Mission' passed and this important statistic is included.