

Questions are put in the order they are received.

The Reverend Anthony Everett, Reculver Deanery

With the objective of growing the number of young people and children in our churches in mind, please can the application to SMMIB, in which there is a CYP strand focusing on resourcing churches in children and youth work, with resources such as youth workers, be moved earlier in 2026 so that the parishes have the possibility of appointing high quality youth workers for September 2026?

Colin Evans replies:

Thank you for the question.

As we have indicated previously, SMMIB are requesting the funding request represents the whole diocesan strategy and within that, the component projects that we are asking them to fund. This will need to include those matters the Diocese is seeking funding for in the next triennium (2026 to 2028) and how this will flow into the following triennium (2029 to 2031).

Any funding request will aim to demonstrate how parishes are at the forefront of delivery. Completion of Mission Action Plans ("Three Things") by the end of the year will enable us to consolidate proposed activities and reflect on how these can best be supported within the funding request.

We are working towards submitting our request by 20th April and will know the outcome around 10th June. Specific projects will need to be based around that timing.

Early indications, from our NCI appointed consultant, is that the children and young people element of the funding request will be finalised by March 2026 which fits in with this timetable.

When considering resourcing churches in children and youth work, with resources such as youth workers in the application to SMMIB, what salary level is envisaged to make sure we can attract people to move to East Kent.

Iain Blythe replies:

We are not at the stage of detailed planning at the present time. Potential roles and salaries will be considered as the shape of the funding request becomes clearer in the first quarter of 2026. Appropriate salary levels for any proposed additional roles are envisaged.

Canterbury DBF operates a banded salary scheme, also known as a pay band or salary band. This offers a structured approach to employee compensation that groups similar roles into defined salary ranges based on job responsibilities, experience, and skills.

This system allows for flexibility in pay progression based on seniority and performance, ensuring that employees within the same grade receive similar pay.

Schemes typically include the following key components:

Band group: The subset of employees whose salaries are grouped together.

Band location: The working location of the employees being grouped.

Range: The minimum and maximum salaries that an employee can be paid at that role, level, and location.

Salary bands are regularly reviewed to ensure they reflect the market rate for the role and a company's position, helping to maintain competitiveness and fairness in compensation. They also provide clear guidelines for salary increases, promoting employee retention and satisfaction.

A few parishes pay, out of their own funds, for the role of associate vicar (and other similar titles), with the increase in clergy pay envisaged next year is there likely to be any transitional financial support available for these parishes?

Iain Blythe replies

I am grateful you have raised this question as the significant stipend increase will have an impact on finances. The Board recognises this is an issue and will hold a meeting with the relevant parishes as soon as possible.

The Reverend Barney de Berry, Canterbury Deanery

The Ministry Statistics for 2025 show that nationally 47.5% of stipendiary clergy are over 55 and so will retire within the next 15 years while in Canterbury diocese a third of our clergy are over 60. There are currently just under 7000 stipendiary clergy in the Church of England down from over 8000 in 2015 and with the upcoming retirements and if current training rates continue the prediction is that there will be around 5000 by 2035. With this in mind and the filling of vacancies becoming more competitive can I ask; how many vacancies for stipended roles are there currently in the Diocese? What has been the average length of time of an interregnum in the diocese in the last 5 years? And what steps are being made in a 'competitive market' by the diocese to make ministering and living in Canterbury diocese as attractive as possible for clergy from all traditions?

Neville Emslie writes:

Thank you for your question concerning clergy numbers, vacancies, and recruitment within the Diocese of Canterbury. Like the wider Church of England, we are navigating significant demographic and vocational challenges as we seek to sustain and grow ordained ministry in a changing context.

Current Situation

As of November 2025, the Diocese of Canterbury has 20.8 vacant stipendiary posts (equivalent to 25 priests) out of a total of 93.8 stipendiary posts (101 priests). This represents a vacancy rate of approximately 22%, about the same as Rochester. Over the past five years, the average length of an interregnum has been around 10 months. This figure includes some longer vacancies in multi-parish rural benefices, where discernment about future patterns of ministry has been necessary, and shorter vacancies in single-parish settings or where local clergy deployment is more straightforward.

National Context

Nationally, 47.5% of stipendiary clergy are now over 55 and likely to retire within the next 15 years. Canterbury's own age profile reflects this challenge, with approximately a third of stipendiary clergy aged over 60. National stipendiary clergy numbers have fallen from over 8,000 in 2015 to just under 7,000 in 2025, with projections suggesting a potential drop to around 5,000 by 2035 if current training and retirement trends continue. This creates a markedly more competitive environment for the recruitment of stipendiary clergy across the Church.

Regarding the numbers of ordinands entering training post-COVID, the picture is of very slow recovery. It is estimated that we need 600 ordinands entering training each year to meet future demand, provisional figures suggest that this year's intake will be in the high 300s, an increase from last year. Having noted this, Canterbury should still be able to recruit curates from outside the diocese to fill curacies, with some dioceses (notably London and Oxford) exporting larger numbers of ordinands than in previous years.

Strategic and Pastoral Response

In Canterbury, we have been proactive in shaping a sustainable and attractive culture of ministry that values wellbeing, vocational development, and community. This includes:

- Developing pathways from curacy to incumbency.
We have worked intentionally to match curates with suitable local posts, ensuring continuity and belonging. Curates formed within Canterbury's IME1 and IME2 pathways often remain, already well-connected to diocesan networks and resources.
- Investing in high-quality formation and ongoing support.
Through *The Canterbury Diet* and our Mission and Ministry Framework, the diocese offers:
 - Pastoral supervision (taken up by 95% of incumbents)
 - Spiritual direction and mentoring

- Leadership training through three residential courses over 18 months
 - Support in working with change and conflict
 - Free counselling for clergy and families
 - Action learning sets and reflective practice opportunities
- These provisions are nationally recognised as key to clergy wellbeing and ministerial effectiveness.
- **Expanding the curacy pipeline.**
The diocesan budget currently allows for four stipendiary curacies per year. Our forthcoming Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) funding bid seeks to increase this by two additional curacies in 2027 and one in both 2028 and 2029, alongside developing focal and lay ministries to strengthen local leadership capacity.
 - **Strategic deployment and contextual experience.**
Curacies are being designed to provide experience in contexts where future leadership is most needed – multi-church rural ministry, areas of deprivation, and resourcing churches developing new worshipping communities.

Making Canterbury an Attractive Place to Minister

While we acknowledge that wealthier dioceses may offer higher stipends or newer housing, we believe Canterbury offers a distinctive and compelling environment for ministry, shaped by vocation and community rather than competition alone.

Our diocese combines:

- A deep heritage of Christian witness – from Augustine, Eanswythe, and Anselm to our vibrant present-day parishes
- Strong networks of collegial support among clergy and laity
- The beauty of coastline and countryside, diverse communities, and a collaborative culture rooted in prayer and mission

As one incumbent recently described it: *“This is a diocese where people still know and care for one another.”* That sense of belonging, alongside our structured support for wellbeing and growth, is perhaps our most persuasive invitation to those discerning a call to serve here.

With the finances of the diocese under continuing strain what steps have been taken to explore sharing some diocesan roles and functions with other dioceses in order to spread the costs of such posts and free up resources for other areas of need?

Iain Blythe writes

Thank you for raising this issue. I did explore this with my counterparts in other dioceses before taking up my post and continue to be open to any idea that removes pressure on the congregations of this diocese.

The Board of Finance is currently engaged in partnerships with Rochester on net zero carbon and education. The work around net zero carbon has been extended to include Guildford, Portsmouth and Chichester diocese in the hope that pooling resources will allow greater access to funding and opportunities for parishes and benefices.

I continue to engage with colleagues in the South-Eastern region and where opportunities arise will pursue them with vigour.

This is now seen as a diocese that does engage with colleagues in the region, nationally and with the National Church Institutions and I hope we are able to announce further, positive news around funding shortly.

A prime example of this is the continued and increased funding this diocese receives from the Diocese of Oxford.

This does remain a lightly staffed diocese in comparison with others of similar size and geography does not afford us the luxury of numerous adjoining neighbours. For that reason, and while continuing to push for shared opportunities, there has been a focus on obtaining funding for existing roles as the diocese aims for missional and financial sustainability by 2030.

David Kemp, Reculver Deanery

Looking at today's agenda and the draft agenda for the March 2026 Synod it appears that the Synod will have less than 9 hours in a year (3 hours in November and March, and less than 2.5 in July) to discuss and seek solutions to the serious challenges facing the Diocese including the continuing lack of clarity over strategy, the absence of children and young people, the financial position etc. What is the thinking of the senior leadership and the Archbishop's Council about the role which the Synod is being asked/allowed to play in the governance of the Diocese?

Iain Blythe replies:

Many thanks for the question.

The Diocesan Synod I inherited allocated one and a half hours to the business of Synod and, as far as I can tell, this has been the position for a long time. It seemed odd to me and others that the “Open Synod” element of your gatherings as a group was allocated more time and prominence than the business you are here to conduct.

In the March Synod, some minor changes were announced, recommended by a consultation group (which included the Bishop of Dover and the chairs of the Houses of Laity and Clergy and other Committees). These changes included more microphones, an exploration as to how voting might be more transparent and a recognition of the need to give the business element of your work greater prominence.

The Open Synod element of the meeting has been paused for several reasons, including:

- to allow the changes the chance to become embedded
- to allow the provision of more stand-alone events

In addition to this there has been increased consultation with Synod members, particularly over the budget and finances and we anticipate increasing this in future years. Additional meetings will be held in 2026 around finances and other important topics with the hope this allows for fuller and more informed discussions.

Feedback from the Diocesan Synod survey in the summer highlighted a need for more focused discussion and a streamlined agenda.

Overall, the time spent on the matters the question refers to has increased by fifty per cent from November 2025 at the Synod meetings. That is far more time than has been allocated in the recent or more remote past.

I hope that people will recognise the work being done to engage with the whole diocese in as open and transparent way as possible and while that remains a work in progress it does, I hope, demonstrate a direction of travel.

There are significant issues that will require serious and detailed discussion by Synod in the coming years, and time will be devoted to these issues to allow for full and frank discussions.

(In preparing my response I thought it would be fun to dig into the archives to see how Synod business was dealt with “back in the day”. In the first decade of this millennium, approval of the accounts was allocated twenty minutes and the budget for the following year was given thirty minutes for presentation and discussion.)

Question 2 – to the Bishop of Dover

Following the recent decision of the House of Bishops to pause and effectively stop the progress of the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith, together with any reconsideration of the place of clergy in same-sex marriages, are there any plans to

address the deep disappointment, and in some cases despair, felt by LGBTQ+ laity and clergy, inclusive churches, and many others who long for progress in these matters in this diocese?

The Bishop of Dover writes:

At its residential meeting in October, bishops reviewed the issues around Prayers of Love and Faith. While no final decision was taken, the bishops agreed in principle that both bespoke services and clergy same-sex marriage would need formal synodical and legislative processes to be completed before they could be permitted.

I am very much aware that this news will have been very hard for many to receive, especially those directly affected. I continue to lament the hurt and pain that has been and continues to be felt by the Church's inability to embrace all of God's children. As your bishop I will continue to support and care for all in our diocese because I believe we are all made in the image of God and have equal worth in God's sight.

I was able to discuss some of these issues at an Open Table service last Sunday and will be happy to continue to be available to those who wish to speak to me.

The Reverend Paul Worledge, Thanet Deanery

I note the increase in Lower Income Community Funding for 2026 and the statement in the budget narrative: "There is now a requirement to link LInC funding to strategy and this will be a consideration as more informed processes are developed." Can the DBF find a way to effectively involve those representing parishes who qualify for LInC funding in the discussions around the development of the 'more informed processes'?

Iain Blythe replies:

Thank you for this important question.

LInC funding is a critical part of the financial system both of the Church of England and of individual dioceses. It is distributed to dioceses as block funding, allocated based on the size and average income of their population, and modified to reflect the proportion of the population with the lowest incomes.

Only 28 dioceses receive this block funding with the aim of providing support for mission in low-income communities and estates.

LInC funding now represents a significant proportion of the diocesan budget and Tony, Natalia and I have spent eighteen months convincing the National Church Institutions of its importance to this diocese.

I wholly endorse the sentiment behind the question. Thirty-four benefices are supported by the funding currently and I am happy to meet with Paul to discuss how best we might achieve an effective way to involve those parishes in areas of deprivation.

I also referred the question to the Mission Resources Group and I will liaise with you directly, Paul, over what any consultation might look like. There is a desire to avoid any sense of the process becoming a bidding war, which does not work effectively in any diocesan context, but it is right that we learn as a group about the successes LInC has enabled and the significant challenges those living and working in areas of deprivation face.

It is, I think, worth noting that the new guidance on LInC funding was only issued this week, at the Inter-Diocesan Finance Forum. This follows, hot on the heels, on from the release of the updated deprivation indices which were announced on 30 October 2025 from which we are gathering data.

Currently, LInC funding requires minimal and while this will continue, greater transparency has been recommended by both the Independent Review of LInC and SDF and the Diocesan Finances Review.

Recommended good practice is to agree and communicate how LInC funds are used with parishes and this is expected to become required as part of LInC funding from 2026 onwards. We will also be required to confirm the diocesan “LInC strategy” at the start of each triennium and explain how the use of LInC aligns with local mission plans as part of wider strategic development and DIP bids.

There is an expectation that LInC funding will be used to support ministry costs (typically clergy stipends), but this is not a constraint.

Jacob Pradeep, Ashford Deanery

According to data from Mission 2020, 15.16% of Church of England worshipping community are from UKME. Some of our Churches are undergoing downsizing. and diocese is selling properties to ensure its sustainability. Overseas churches are increasingly filling the gap left by the Church of England.

What initiatives are in place to integrate and oversee the activities of international churches within the UK?

Iain Blythe writes

Jacob, I am seeking your forgiveness for not being in a position to fully answer this question. Absences from work of those better placed than me to provide some context around the international churches has prevented me from providing a fuller response. I will endeavour to provide an answer in the minutes. However, in the meantime I am informed by the Registrar that the Registry is working with a number of parishes to put in place new ecumenical arrangements, and to regularise existing arrangements, with designated international churches relating to the use of church premises for worship and mission. This can be complex as a faculty is often required, and sharing must be in line with the ecumenical provisions of the Canons.

Many churches, including my own parish, are facing financial hardships, and congregation attendance is in decline. What strategies can be implemented to promote and encourage young people's participation in the community?

Many thanks for this challenging question.

The Three Things was launched in September with a view to identifying those aspects of mission going on in this diocese. The strength of this diocese lies in the “local” – both at parish, benefice and deanery level. The aim is to highlight and support what is being done and to focus strategy at that local level. Support is available for any parish and all teams within the DBF are on standby to assist.

We should also recognise and celebrate the work being done at local level, including that around children and young people, schools, families and communities.

The inclusion of Mission Action Plans and the extension of this request to include diocesan support functions added to the work already being done in deaneries across the diocese will support the work to achieve a sustainable missional and financial future.

Any application for funding will be diocesan-wide and it is important that this application is strong, rather than being based on any timeframe. At this present time, we are working to July 2026 for a funding grant, but this may change. It is likely to include a Children and Young Persons officer and the workstreams around this are in development.