

QUESTION TIME

1. *The Revd Neil Robbie (General Synod) has asked:*

Diocesan Synod standing orders Section D4.3 states:

The Agenda Planning Committee and the Chair shall give priority to items:

(c) tabled by a private member or by a Deanery Synod in the diocese and accepted by the Agenda Planning group.

I am aware of a few recent Deanery Synod motions which have not yet been brought to the attention of Diocesan Synod, including one from the West Bromwich Deanery Synod. In the interest of openness, transparency and synodical cooperation, and following the good example of Generals Synod, can:

(1) all Deanery Synod and Private members Motions which the Diocese has received in the past 24 months please be distributed to Diocesan Synod members?

(2) all future Deanery Synod motions be distributed or made public at the time they are received by the diocesan secretary?

(3) If the Agenda Planning Group chooses not to give priority to a Deanery Synod Motion for the Diocesan Synod following the receipt of that motion, can the Agenda Planning Group publish their reasons, with the order papers for that Diocesan Synod, for excluding the motion from the agenda?

The Diocesan Secretary has answered:

Thank you for the question. The process for receiving and progressing motions for diocesan synod is owned by the Agenda Planning Committee. Many things are taken into account when deciding how to prioritise or act on a proposed motion including its readiness to be discussed in a meaningful way and the context against which the Motion should be judged, i.e. what additional information does Synod need to make a good judgement on this issue? Put simply, some Motions require a little more work in order to make the best use of Synod's time in discussing them. The Committee undertakes to carefully consider your suggestions to change the process in the interest of transparency at its next meeting and will revert to Synod in June with a considered response.

2.. *The Revd Neil Robbie (General Synod) has asked:*

Our Diocesan website states that there are over 70 chaplains in our diocese who serve in schools, colleges and universities, business and workplace, hospitals and hospices, prisons and young offenders institutions and the armed forces and emergency services. How many of our chaplains are self-supporting ministers, how many are paid by the institution they serve and how many are DBF employees? What is the total cost of chaplaincy to the DBF, what is the source of those funds and how is this cost and funding shown in the budget?

The Finance Director has replied:

As most chaplains are with third parties, we do not know what proportion are SSM or are paid by the institution. Within the DBF budget, there is the equivalent of 2.50 FTE. Four chaplains have contracts as employed with the DBF, these being at Stafford, Keele and Wolverhampton University and Harper Adams College. The remaining 0.50 is on an ad hoc

basis, where services are bought in. This is covered on page 12 of the Budget document, shown under Area Costs within the Deployment costs in the budget, and under Area Costs in the Cost of Deployment (page 22).

3. The Revd Ray Gaston (Wolverhampton) has asked:

There is increasing anecdotal evidence that there is a rise in some of our parishes of people who may have been baptised as children, but never having an active faith, coming to renewed faith in later life. Given this encouraging phenomenon what advice and resources are available from bishops and appropriate diocesan officers on how to respond creatively and sensitively in such situations - where often people feel the need for a spiritual affirmation of their renewed/new faith - that supports this need whilst maintaining the integrity of the sacrament of baptism as understood in the historic formularies of the Church of England and also encourages the person to see for themselves the significance of their original baptism.

The Mission Team Leader has replied:

Thank you for your question about this positive development! A person newly naming their Christian faith can feel a profound and even overwhelming desire for baptism. For those previously baptised but who do not recall their baptism, it can feel natural to wish that baptism was available to them at that moment as a powerful personal and public statement of their new life. At the same time, it is part of the power of baptism that it simply cannot be repeated – it is by nature a unique moment of God’s power and does not need repeating whatever our human experience.

The Church of England’s confirmation service uses much of the language and many of the symbolic aspects of baptism. Confirmation can be framed as an affirmation of the person’s previous baptism, and perhaps a reminder that God has been present in a person’s life for many years, even if unnoticed. Some aspects of confirmation liturgy, such as the laying on of hands by the bishop, and the sprinkling or self-signing with water, differ from baptism, are special in themselves, and carry their own distinct power: these can be presented positively to the candidates.

Candidates can occasionally feel frustrated by the lead-in time to Confirmation, but that period can be an important period of discernment, preparation, discipleship, and relationship building, and sometimes an opportunity to meet other Christians from nearby churches. Confirmation offers the important recognition that a candidate is joining not just a local church but a much wider network of Christian life.

4. The Revd Ray Gaston (Wolverhampton) has asked:

The Diocesan Strategy for 2024 - 2030 proposes 34,000 new disciples by 2030. The strategy also says that the success of this will be measured using the worshipping community figures from statistics for mission. Is it possible to seek clarification from those leading on the strategy as to how discipleship is being understood, given that worshipping community figures were originally introduced as a more inclusive metric to ensure less committed and infrequent church attenders were represented in statistics.

The Strategy Programme Director has replied:

Thank you for this question, Ray, which highlights an important and longstanding challenge: *how do we meaningfully measure discipleship?*

1. The Worshipping Community metric

I would not fully accept the premise that worshipping community figures were introduced simply to include 'less committed' or 'infrequent attenders'. While the metric does reflect changing attendance patterns, this shift does not necessarily indicate lower commitment.

Worshipping Community is valuable precisely because it measures **people rather than averages**. This makes it especially helpful when thinking about *new* disciples:

- Someone attending fortnightly at the start of their discipleship journey will count as only **0.5** in Average Weekly Attendance.
- If they attend on a **weekday**, they will not appear at all on Sunday-based measures
- But they will be fully counted within **Worshipping Community**, which captures those who are genuinely part of the life of a church

This approach provides a more pastoral, missionally sensitive, and person-centred view of growth.

2. How we understand and measure discipleship

Your question rightly points to a deeper issue: *what does it mean to be a disciple, and how do we track that faithfully?*

Because of the leadership of **Helen Emery**, our Whole Life Discipleship Officer, the National Church has chosen to partner with Lichfield Diocese in developing the **Church Development Tool** for precisely this purpose. This tool aims to provide:

- A clearer, more nuanced picture of individual discipleship
- Measures that go beyond attendance alone
- Better insights to support people at each stage of their relationship with Jesus Christ

At the moment we are piloting the new tool in a few parishes that have chosen to take part. As this partnership and the tool develops, we hope to refine our metrics further so that they better reflect the lived reality of discipleship rather than relying solely on numerical frameworks designed to monitor attendance.

5. The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) has asked:

What is the policy for diocesan staff using social media in a personal capacity, signing petitions and commenting publicly on issues that are divisive in the diocese?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Guidelines for the use of Social Media are covered in the Staff Handbook, Section 31, which is available to view here: <https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/about-us/diocesan-secretariat/human-resources/diocesan-staff-handbook/section-31-social-media.php> In summary, we encourage staff to use social media (and other public fora) wisely, to be conscious of the boundaries between public and personal lives, and to be good ambassadors for the Diocese of Lichfield.

With regard to signing petitions and commenting publicly on any issues, divisive or otherwise, there is no specific guidance in the Staff Handbook but we would expect staff to apply the same wisdom as set out above for Social Media.

6. *The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) has asked:*

I believe money from the National Church is allocated to promoting and implementing our Diocesan Strategy. Could you itemise this for us please?

The Strategy Programme Director has replied:

Thank you for this question, Brian, which gives an opportunity to update Synod following my presentation in November.

1. National Church Funding Streams Supporting Our Strategy

In November, I outlined three core national funding streams that can support the delivery of our diocesan strategy. These are:

- a. Transitional Funding
 - Total allocation: £3.8 million over 9 years
 - Year 1 payment: £943,000
- b. Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP)
 - Up to £5 million available in the 2026 – 2028 triennium
 - Up to £7 million available in the 2029 – 2031 triennium
- c. Time-Limited Funding

Now clarified as:

- Up to £1.25 million in the 2026 – 2028 triennium
- Up to £1.75 million in the 2029 – 2031 triennium

In addition, we have already been awarded some strategic funding:

- a. £1.7 million for Telford Minster
- b. £5.9 million, now fully approved, for the Stoke Project

2. Other National Church Funding Streams

We also benefit from a number of more restricted funding streams:

- An uplift in Lowest Income Communities Funding (LInC)
- £600,000 per annum, index linked
- Funding for specific posts, including:
 - Church Buildings Support Officer
 - Diocesan Environmental Officer
 - Net Zero Carbon Manager
 - Strategy Programme Director

3. Updates Since the November Synod Report

Since my report to Synod in November there have been three developments.

- a. Transitional Funding 2024:

In November Synod voted to ring-fence the £943,000 received this year for delivering Seeking the Kingdom. A proposal for distributing these funds via an internal grants process will be taken to Bishop's Council in April.

b. DIP Bid Preparation:

We have started to think about the possible shape of our DIP bid, which we hope to submit early in 2027. As the bid develops, we will work alongside Bishop's Council (acting as the Strategy Programme Board) and will report back to Synod.

c. Time-Limited Funding Requirements:

We now have clarity from the National Church, which was not available in November: applications must accompany our DIP bid and will provide temporary support as we wait for strategic changes to take effect.

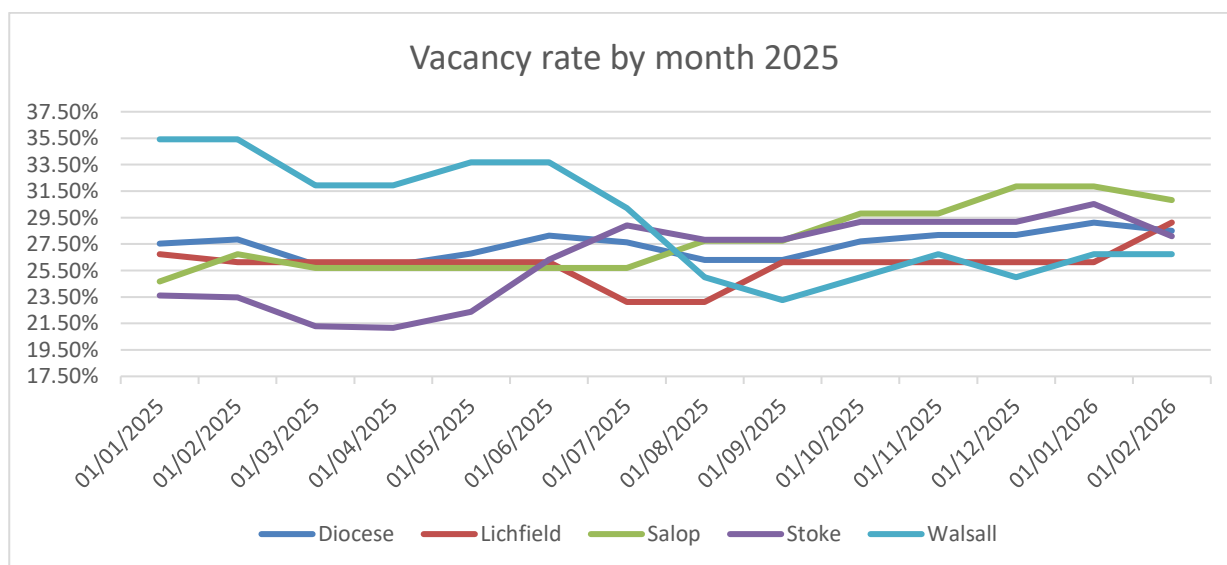
7. The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) has asked:

What is the latest overall vacancy rate for the whole diocese? What is the rate for each archdeaconry? How has this changed over the last 12 months?

The Finance Director has replied:

There is a quarterly report produced on deployment and vacancies and the budget impact., Below is the data from the December 2025 report, which covers the whole of last year. The next report is due mid-April for the first quarter of 2026.

By Month	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26
Diocese	27.53%	27.85%	25.93%	25.89%	26.78%	28.14%	27.62%	26.31%	26.31%	27.71%	28.18%	28.18%	29.12%	28.51%
Lichfield	26.73%	26.13%	26.13%	26.13%	26.13%	26.13%	23.12%	23.12%	26.13%	26.13%	26.13%	26.13%	26.13%	29.13%
Salop	24.67%	26.72%	25.70%	25.70%	25.70%	25.70%	25.70%	27.75%	27.75%	29.80%	29.80%	31.86%	31.86%	30.83%
Stoke	23.61%	23.47%	21.30%	21.17%	22.39%	26.32%	28.90%	27.82%	27.82%	29.17%	29.17%	29.17%	30.53%	28.09%
Walsall	35.42%	35.42%	31.94%	31.94%	33.68%	33.68%	30.21%	25.00%	23.26%	25.00%	26.74%	25.00%	26.74%	26.74%



8. *The Revd David Sims (Walsall) has asked:*

Are there plans in place to appoint an LGBTQI+ chaplain to support those LGBTQI+ Christians who have an "orthodox perspective" on sexuality and marriage, following the departure of James Gandon?

The Bishop of Lichfield has replied:

This question is very timely as it gives me the opportunity to explain the current situation of our LGBT+ Chaplaincy. Mr Matt Edwards, who served as LGBT+ chaplain in this diocese, has recently resigned from that post, and I would like to record my appreciation for his work. Following Matt's and James' departures, I have invited The Revd Prebendary Pat Hawkins to undertake a review of our chaplaincy provision in this area, which she has kindly agreed to do. This review will seek to identify ways of simplifying, focusing and strengthening the work by addressing questions such as:

- What are the key issues or situations in the lives of LGBT+ Christians in the diocese for which support could realistically be provided by a chaplaincy?
- What learning can be gained from chaplaincies operating in other dioceses?
- Would chaplaincy best be delivered through a network model, and individual chaplain, or some combination of these?
- What provision, if any, would it be realistic to make for chaplaincy to Christians identifying as same-sex attracted Christians who wish to adhere to a traditional view of same sex relationships and marriage?
- What arrangements should be made for authorisation and oversight of the LGBT+ Chaplaincy?

I anticipate that the review will result in some recommendations being brought for my consideration by July 2026.

9. *The Revd Kate Watson (Wolverhampton) has asked:*

What recent work has been done in the Diocese on Clergy Wellbeing? How is the Diocesan Strategy mindful of clergy wellbeing and how will it be monitored going forward? Will measures, for example, any proposed merging of parishes, be evaluated against the impact on clergy wellbeing as part of the discernment? Has the diocese signed up to the National Hub for Wellbeing leads?

The Director of Ministry has replied:

Wellbeing is identified as a specific project within the Supporting our Ministry Board, its key aim to seek to ensure that all those who hold the Bishop's Licence, and especially those in stipendiary ministry, are able to manage their spiritual, physical, mental and financial wellbeing. The development of the wellbeing strategy will therefore be overseen by the Shaping our Ministry Board.

As a key element of the project, a wellbeing group has been established; membership consists of Charles Ruxton (Diocesan adviser for spirituality), Ursula Pencavel (Pastoral Supervision and Listening Ear), Craig Newton (Director of Shallowford), Gillian Strain (Director, GoHealth) and Jeanette Hartwell (Director of Ministry). The group has met for an initial meeting and identified, at this stage, three key priorities:

- To develop a theological underpinning for wellbeing which creates a proactive, preventative rather than reactive, crisis-based approach to wellbeing.
- To review the current provision for wellbeing, celebrate what is good and identify potential gaps;
- To identify potential fellow members to participate in the group and future consultations.

Alongside the establishment of the Wellbeing group, the Vocations & Training Team has been reshaped to establish distinct areas of responsibility. Part of this has been to collate responsibility for Wellbeing, CMD and MDR within my brief as the Director of Ministry, the rationale being that these three things cannot be considered in isolation of one another. This joined up approach will build on and bring improvements to all three of these areas of ministerial life. As part of this brief, conversations have been taking place with Go Health, Shallowford House and across the region with fellow diocesan staff grappling with the same issues. We have also been in conversation with the Midlands Regional Adviser for Financial Wellbeing (part of the Church of England Pensions Board). As the wellbeing lead in the diocese I am signed up to the Clergy Wellbeing Leads Network on the Church Support Hub. While not complacent about the need to build on our current provision for wellbeing, we believe we have some good resources available. Moving forward we are trying to build a coherent approach to the flourishing of both clergy and lay ministers rather than introduce new piecemeal initiatives with no effective way to measure results.

10. Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) has asked:

In July 2025 a table was generated for General Synod showing that 12% of churches nationally had grown in Average Sunday Attendance, Average Weekly Attendance and Usual Sunday Attendance between 2019 and 2024. For Lichfield this figure was 10%, which was a total of 41 churches. Which churches are in this group and is anything being done to learn from these churches as we seek to implement our strategic vision?

The Strategy Programme Director has replied:

Thank you for this very helpful question, Amanda. It highlights the vital importance of receiving accurate and timely data from our churches. In short: yes, we are actively learning from our growing churches as we implement Seeking the Kingdom. There are, however, several important points to clarify.

1. Understanding the measures

You refer to three measures: Average Sunday Attendance, Average Weekly Attendance, and Usual Sunday Attendance. A fourth significant measure is Worshipping Community. Each measure captures something slightly different, and they do not always move together. For example, a church that launches a successful midweek service for young people may show strong growth in Average Weekly Attendance and Worshipping Community, but little or no change in Sunday-based measures.

2. Ensuring data accuracy

We also pay close attention to the reliability of submitted data. It appears that the figures you saw at Synod may have contained an error: the 41 churches referenced represent

around 10% of parishes, not 10% of churches in the Diocese of Lichfield. I only mention this because we are fortunate to have Richard Barrett on our team; he reviews every single church return so that we can have confidence in the accuracy of the figures – a substantial undertaking. It is worth noting that one of the most common reasons for a significant year-on-year change in a church’s reported size is a change in the person completing the return.

3. The time period matters

The 2019 – 2024 period is interesting because it reflects how churches navigated lockdown and the post-Covid recovery. We prefer, however, to use a slightly longer timeframe that includes the pandemic but also captures broader trends.

For the most recent analysis, we examined data from October 2014 to October 2024, using the 2024 returns (88% of which had been submitted when we completed the work in May 2025). We aim to balance waiting for enough data to be reliable with the desire to use the information promptly.

Over this ten-year period, 101 churches that submitted returns grew their Average Weekly Attendance – around 20% of the total. Eight of these churches grew by more than 50 people:

Church	Growth in AWA (2014 – 2024)
Telford Minster	268
West Bromwich St James and St Paul (combined)	100
Stafford St Mary	90
Chase Terrace and Boney Hay St John	83
Weston Rhyn St John	83
Pelsall St Michael and All Angels	62
Walsall St Matthew	62
West Bromwich St Francis of Assisi	62

Each growth story is distinctive. We are engaging with our growing churches to understand the factors contributing to their growth and to explore how these insights can inform our wider learning and strategic planning. I have met with – and am continuing to meet with or visit – six of the eight parishes listed above to discuss their growth and ensure that what we learn is fed into our work going forward. This learning is shaping our wider work in several areas, including the development of new worshipping communities, ministry with children and families, engagement with Christians from diverse backgrounds, and the strengthening of occasional offices. We also take account of risk factors as part of this process, and this is informing our work in areas such as supporting parishes during vacancies.

I hope this response demonstrates to Synod Members just how essential our Statistics for Mission are as we implement our Diocesan Strategy. I would also encourage Members to share this message with the parishes in their deaneries.