The Revd Dr David Goodhew (Middlesbrough Deanery) asked:

I would like to thank the vocations team for all their work and ask:

(1) Could the vocations team say (a) how many people are currently in training for ordained ministry in York diocese in total and (b) how many are training for stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry, respectively?

(2) Could the vocations team give an age-breakdown of people currently training for ordained ministry, indicating how many of them are (a) aged under 30; (b) aged between 30 and 50?

Diocesan Director of Mission and Ministry the Revd Canon Dr Ian McIntosh replied:

During the academic year 2024-25, the Diocese of York has 9 ordinands in training, with 6 incumbent level (and seeking stipends) and 3 assistant (and anticipating SSM).

In terms of the age split, 3 are under 30; 5 are between 30 and 50 and 1 over 50.
Numbers tend to ebb and flow for a number of reasons. It might be relevant to note that 15 ordinands were ordained deacon in summer 2024. We anticipate that the numbers entering training (IME 1) this coming September may be around 10.

Sue Pascoe (New Ainsty Deanery) asked:

I am aware that synod addresses contentious issues from time to time and am concerned how members be confident that these issues are dealt with fairly. Do Chairs of meetings recuse themselves when they have previously declared open strong vocal positions on topics covered, as is normal governance practice in other organisations?

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell replied:

As the President of Synod, the default position under the Church Representation Rules, is that I am the Chair of Diocesan Synod. During the last triennium I shared that responsibility with the Chairs of the Houses of Laity and Clergy as the vice-presidents of Synod. This will continue. In fact under the new arrangements following Bishop Flora's appointment, I expect to be doing a little more though still sharing this with the vice-presidents.

Our practice is that if any of the three of us who take the chair wish to participate in a particular debate (or an item being discussed in plenary), or are personally conflicted, we will vacate the chair for that item. But since we will all have views on most of the subjects discussed, I hope that members will trust the integrity of those who have taken on these roles to carry them out impartially, whether or not those views are known and particularly where the matters being discussed are pastorally sensitive or contentious.

The Revd Jonathan Hill (Hull Deanery) asked:

Given the hiatus in finalising the detail of 'Prayers of Love and Faith' regarding protections for clergy who in good conscience are not able to support or perform same sex blessings, and the current absence of similar provisions in relation to the use of 'Pastoral Guidance for use in conjunction with the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith in the context of gender transition', but in the light of requests for services including these prayers now being made to clergy who find themselves having to graciously decline:

Question 1:

What protections, support and safeguards will the Diocese implement until such time as formal guidance under Prayers of Love and faith are issued, to support clergy who in good conscience are not able to support or perform Same Sex Blessings?

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell replied:

Prayers of Love and Faith are not services of same sex blessing and no clergy or lay minister is required or obligated to lead these prayers. Moreover, the prayers themselves can only be offered within existing liturgies. As has been made clear at General Synod, the introduction of bespoke services for PLF will only be alongside pastoral provision for those who in good conscience cannot lead such a service. In the meantime, if clergy and lay ministers are asked to lead PLF in existing services and cannot in good conscience do this, they should consult their senior clergy. We strongly encourage you to collaborate within your chapters in order to signpost people as appropriate within your local areas.

Question 2:

Similarly what protections, support and safeguards will the Diocese implement with regards to 'Pastoral Guidance for use in conjunction with the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith in the context of gender transition' to support clergy who in good conscience are not able to support or perform these services?

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell replied:

The pastoral guidance referred to here begins with this statement: 'The Church of England welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the body of Christ, and rejoices in the diversity of that body into which all Christians have been baptized by one Spirit.' We acknowledge that there is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. Our core identity is as a beloved child of God whatever life changes we experience, and we come to baptism, confirmation or re-affirmation of vows when affirming the primacy of our faith, not any other aspect of identity. Therefore, to answer this question, I would need to know the theological, pastoral and liturgical reasons for not wishing to use such a service, recognising that this may vary from person to person. However, recognising the sensitivity of these issues for all concerned, I would encourage all clergy and lay ministers, if they are unsure about how to respond to a specific request, to speak with and consult their relevant suffragan bishop who will provide support.

Carolyn Kay (Hull Deanery) asked:

As part of our commitment to safeguarding, the PCC of each local congregation includes safeguarding as a standing item on their agendas every time they meet. This is part of the assurance process for each church to ensure that -

- Safer recruitment has been carried,
- training is Up-to-Date,
- whether any concerns have been raised
- and whether there are issues affecting the practice and life of the church.

As this is not only mandatory but helpful for each local congregation, please can we ask why this is not a standing item for all Diocesan Synods as well?

Diocesan Secretary Canon Peter Warry replied:

As well as it being good practice, PCCs do this as part of ensuring that their responsibilities under charity and ecclesiastical law are being met. A number of named individuals and diocesan bodies do have duties under safeguarding legislation – but at the diocesan level, the Archbishop's Council & DBF, as the legal charity entity, are analogous to the PCC. The assurance process, under the Safeguarding Regulations, is overseen by the independently chaired Diocesan Safeguarding Assurance Panel (DSAP) which meets at least quarterly and the arrangements in each diocese are subject to external audit (in our case very recently by INEQUE).

The Independent Chair of DSAP attends one Archbishop's Council meeting a year and the other meetings now receive a written report from the Head of Safeguarding with the opportunity for questions. By making this part of the meeting of Council (rather than that part which is technically the DBF) it will mean that going forwards members of Synod will see any minutes associated with that standing item.

To date, the Diocesan Synod has received a substantial report at one of its three meetings each year. This year's report will be presented in July. We will ask Archbishop's Council to consider whether Safeguarding should be added as a standing Synod item or whether, it would be more appropriate, for example, to share the reports that they receive by way of intermediate updates between the substantive in-person annual reports.

The Revd Ash Carter (Hull Deanery) asked:

Regarding Carbon Net Zero impacts on church and diocesan budgets

Question 1:

What work has been done to quantify the wider cost impacts associated with the implementation of the government's Net Zero policies, and their impact on the wider economy which may, for example, increase energy costs (thus reducing disposable income of congregations as well as increasing operating costs for churches), lead to increased unemployment and increased demand for church based social action initiatives? And to what degree have they already been factored into budgets and forecasts for the diocese and individual parishes?

Diocesan Secretary Canon Peter Warry replied:

The honest answer is not a huge amount to date specifically around Net Zero, although the work that we have been doing on modelling the likely flow of Free Will Offer does seek to be realistic about wider economic impacts including that of inflation (which will include energy) both on expenditure but also on parochial contributions to the Common Fund (which tends to be lower in times of higher inflation). We are not aware of the extent to which this has been formally modelled nationally or indeed locally in parishes, but we note the concerns which lie behind the question and will be mindful of them as the Finance Team and Finance Sub-Committee embark on the significant challenge of setting the budgets for 2026 and beyond.

Question 2:

Given the diocese's commitment to Net Zero, what work has been done to quantify the cost this is likely to impose on individual churches as heating systems need replacing/updating, building works need modification etc? Who is going to bear such costs and, if parishes, what impact will this have on diocesan incomes?

Diocesan Secretary Canon Peter Warry replied:

The draft Net Zero plan which is still being finalised currently suggests that the costs associated with churches and church halls would lie on quite a broad spectrum from c. £15k for small to medium churches to in excess of £1m for our cathedral sized churches.

Specific areas of activity have been identified for initial prioritisation, subject to resource capacity, which begin with trying to encourage 100% engagement with the Energy Footprint Tool in order to establish the 20% highest carbon emitters and promoting the transition to LED lighting and green energy tariffs as soon as practicable. That data gathering exercise is a prerequisite to a more granular modelling of costs and a prioritisation of projects.

Ultimately the responsibility for meeting the costs of the repair, maintenance and upkeep of Church Buildings lies with PCCs. Like every other diocese, we recognise that in most cases churches will be dependent on external funding for projects that involve a switch in heating type, and each PCC will need to consider this alongside their other priorities. Current evidence suggests that for small rural churches reliant on oil, the overall cost of moving to infra-red electric heating may not be significantly different, and, more generally, that there are very few economically viable alternatives for many parishes to the existing technology at the present time and so many heating projects continue to be like for like replacements. The high-cost Net Zero projects are generally part of much larger schemes or repair or reconfiguration. We also recognise that any significant capital projects in parishes can inevitably have an impact on Free Will Offer, which is why the national church is providing funding to help dioceses support parishes with advice on both appropriate scoping of projects and the development of bids for external grant applications in effort partially to mitigate that risk.