

Sir James Burnell-Nugent (Woodleigh Deanery) to ask the Diocesan Secretary:

To ask the Diocesan Secretary, recognising that the Synodical Government Measure 1969 No 2, Section 4(3) states that 'It shall be the duty of the bishop to consult with the diocesan synod on matters of general concern and importance to the diocese.', whether in preparing the agenda for future diocesan synods, greater consideration could be given to allocating time to debate such matters, rather than to receive so many structured presentations in which most of the material can be taken as read?

Answer from Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary

The agenda for diocesan synod is agreed by the Bishop's Council and a small group led by the Diocesan Bishop agrees the order of items, timings etc. We recognise the importance of consultation and participation, therefore in recent years we have made full use of contingency dates held to enable diocesan synod to meet three times per annum, rather than the previously established two meetings per annum so that we can work together on our post-pandemic challenges and opportunities. We have also moved the March and June diocesan synod meetings to an alternative venue (Westpoint Arena) to provide a better environment for consultation and debate, as has happened this year with the June meeting of Diocesan Synod working together on budget strategy.

When members of the Agenda Setting Group and Bishops Council are setting the agenda for our March Synod they will continue to make full use of the venue style to maximise our time together for consultation, discussion and debate. The nature of our governance cycle and order of business will mean that some meetings have a different mix of agenda items, however the desire for time to consult and debate is noted.

Mrs. Ann Pangbourne (Ottery Deanery) to ask the Director of Finance:

“Re Paper 19, p2: Conclusion.

In his statement to the Church Times, published on 7 June, Bishop Mike was reported as saying that he was committed to “sustain as far as possible stipendiary numbers” in his new diocese.

The budget for 2025, we are being asked to approve today, assumes a reduction in Mission Community stipendiary post holders from 165 to 160, with further reductions in 2026 and 2027. Is it possible to temper that assumption until Bishop Mike is with us?”

Answer from Mr. Neil Williams, Director of Finance

The current financial plan is the result of a significant period of reflection and consultation with both the Bishop’s Diocesan Council and Diocesan Synod. Bishop Mike has been kept fully informed around the emerging plans and the need to review the number of stipendiary clergy that can be afforded within the finance plan. There is a very close link between the number of stipendiary clergy and the number of people in our worshipping communities. Prior to the pandemic we were seeing an annual reduction of 1.5% per annum; we then saw a 14.5% reduction in the period 2019 to 2022, with only modest increases in the last two years. If we see consistent increases in the number of people in our worshipping communities, the need to reduce stipendiary clergy posts will be less necessary. The 2025 budget should be seen as a ‘stepping stone’ towards a sustainable budget, and the Bishop’s Diocesan Council will continue to be engaged in this conversation once Bishop Mike joins us in November, as we shape the budget strategy for 2026 and 2027.

Supplementary Question from Mr Luke Appleton, General Synod

‘In light of the fact that this years budget had more opposition than last years budget, and a lot of that centred around stipendiary numbers, is this something that you might keep in mind going forward?’

Answer from Mr Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance

Yes

Mrs. Ann Pangbourne (Ottery Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Crediton:

“Re Paper 21: General Synod Paper GS 2357A: Rest Period for Office Holders

Given the amount of support for this motion at General Synod, what measures are being taken to enable parish priests to take this extra time?”

Answer from the Right Revd. Jackie Searle, Bishop of Crediton

The Church of England report on the July synod states: ‘Members of the Synod meeting in York voted in favour of plans to amend church regulations to introduce a statutory right to a minimum of 36 hours rest - a day and a half a week – for clergy office holders, covering most clergy. The new right would include an uninterrupted rest period of 24 hours.

The Synod heard that as office holders, rather than employees, clergy already have the right to arrange their work to take time off to rest without seeking permission. In addition, the current regulations for most clergy specify a minimum of 24 hours uninterrupted rest a week.

But in practice they are not taking enough rest, Canon Alison Coulter, from the Diocese of Winchester, told the Synod. Introducing the General Synod debate, she said the proposals represented a ‘modest increase’ to 36 hours as the minimum amount of rest clergy should take each week.

“Clergy could take a day and a half or even two days rest each week without this proposed change to the Terms of Service Regulations. But we all know that they don’t,” she said.

"By voting for this motion we will not actually be changing the right of clergy to have more rest – they already have that.

"But we are clarifying and raising awareness in the church that in order to care for our clergy, we need to ensure they feel able to take long enough periods of uninterrupted rest each week."

Addressing clergy, she said: "You are a precious resource and have given up much to serve us, so our priority needs to be to care for you."

Under the plans backed by the Synod, draft regulations to enact the changes will be brought before the General Synod for approval at a later date.

Notes

The amended General Synod motion, as shown below, was carried with votes recorded as follows:

- In favour: 336
- Against: 3
- Abstained: 6

Rest periods for office holders

‘That this Synod recognising that:

- 1. Sabbath, as a time to cease and to delight, is part of God’s plan for humankind and for all creation and is modelled by God in Genesis 2.1-3*
- 2. A weekly Sabbath rest is a life-giving gift of God and important for the wellbeing of all people*
- 3. A day off spent catching up on necessary tasks is not a Sabbath day, Request that the Archbishops’ Council lay before it for approval draft Regulations amending the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 so that an office holder is entitled to not less than 36 hours (a day and a half) of rest in any period of seven days, to include an uninterrupted Sabbath rest period of not less than 24 hours, but so that the statement of particulars of office may continue to specify that any rest period may not be taken on or include a Sunday or any or all of the principal Feasts of the Church of England or Ash Wednesday or Good Friday.’*

To summarise: The next step is that the current regulation be amended and then brought to the General Synod for approval. In anticipation of this change, and in support of the proposal, we will revisit the Diocesan clergy handbook. Meanwhile, clergy continue to have the ability under current regulations to take a 36-hour rest period, and to arrange their work and time off without seeking further permission.

Supplementary question from Mrs Ann Pangbourne, Ottery Deanery

‘How are we going to support clergy to take adequate time off, particularly when we are looking at reducing clergy numbers and therefore asking clergy to look after more churches?’

Answer from the Bishop of Crediton

I’d just like to be clear that when we talk about reducing clergy numbers, we are talking about reducing the number of stipends. We are doing all that we can to help and support lay ministry and self-supporting ordained ministry for which we have representatives here, and with the foundations course, just increasing the use of the gifts of lay people upon which we all depend and appreciate. The Diocesan Well-Being panel looks at these matters all the time, and I will continue to raise your concerns with them about clergy well-being, but that is the remit of the group, to look at clergy and diocesan wellbeing. We give very clearly the message that clergy do need to have at least one day off a week and actually I

would say that's is a commandment of the Lord to do so and we utterly support that and also at the moment make very clear about having two days off in any month so that is all in the handbook. As I said in the response clergy can take more than that, but I fully appreciate that the workload is never-ending and that is what part of ministry is and I always want to say if any clergy are struggling, we want to do what we can to help. That goes for me, the bishops, the archdeacons but also for anybody who is involved in any way in clergy care such as rural deans, deanery lay chairs. This is part of the responsibility of all of us. We are open and would want to hear so that we could look together at what could be done. Janet's situation is a very particular one and I hope Janet knows that she is completely loved and supported. We are doing what we can to find a new person and new people in your particular situation.