



DIOCESAN SYNOD SYNOD QUESTIONS NOTICE PAPER

Question 1

Q Fr Martin Hislop [Kingston Deanery]

How many Benefices¹ are suspended², on what grounds and for how long?

A The Diocesan Secretary

The Diocese of Southwark has 32 benefices that are currently suspended. Of these, 23 are suspended for the reason of possible pastoral re-organisation, 7 for parsonage reason (where there is not currently a parsonage or there are plans to replace an unsuitable parsonage) and 2 for both reasons. Of the 32 suspensions, 5 are due to end in 2023, 2 in 2024, 6 in 2025, 12 in 2026 and 6 in 2027.

In the Diocese of Southwark, any proposal to suspend a benefice is first brought to the relevant Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee (AMPC) for discussion and consultation before making representations to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC). This ensures local discussion on matters concerning pastoral re-organisation. The list of current suspensions is circulated at each DMPC meeting for noting when queries can be raised and answered by the relevant Archdeacon or the DMPC Secretary.

Question 2

Q Fr Martin Hislop [Kingston Deanery]

How many Parsonages are currently occupied by persons other than Incumbents?

A The Diocesan Secretary

As of 6 March 2023, there are 40 parsonages not occupied by incumbent status clergy (Incumbent, Rector, Vicar Priest-in-Charge & Team Vicar). 30 of these are under active management due to refurbishment and/or the parish is in vacancy and the situation changes on a weekly basis depending on the vacancy process concerned. The others vary in use, for example 6 are occupied by either curates, non incumbent status clergy or refugees.

¹ A benefice is an ecclesiastical office carrying certain duties. An incumbent's benefice is therefore not a geographical area but the office to which (s)he is appointed and may comprise of one or more parishes.

² A priest is 'presented' to the bishop as a candidate for a living by the patron. However, the bishop can initiate a period of suspension of presentation with consent of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (the DMPC) and after local consultation. Periods of suspension may not exceed five years but are capable of being renewed for further periods of five years.

The vast majority are parishes in vacancy, some of those in a longer vacancy may have a paying tenant (AST), some may have a caretaker, others are empty and managed by parish churchwardens whilst work is undertaken.

Use of parsonages and other Diocesan properties is aligned with the Property Strategy approved by Diocesan Synod. Data correct as of 6th March.

Question 3

Q April Alexander [Tandridge Deanery]

What percentage of parishes in the Southwark Diocese seek alternative oversight from Fulham or Ebbsfleet?

A The Bishop of Southwark

The Bishop of Southwark extends pastoral care at his express invitation to the Bishops of Ebbsfleet and Fulham to fourteen parishes and one proprietary chapel that have passed the necessary resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (GS Misc 1076). The Bishop of Ebbsfleet is invited by the Bishop of Southwark to care for five parishes (i.e. 1.69% of parishes in the Diocese) and one proprietary chapel. The Bishop of Fulham similarly extends the Bishop of Southwark's care to nine parishes (i.e. 3.05% of the parishes in the Diocese). The total percentage of parishes having made the necessary declaration is 4.75%.

Question 4

Q April Alexander [Tandridge Deanery]

Over a year has passed since the somewhat flawed election for General Synod during which lay electors could not ask questions of candidates although very few of us knew them. The result was that half of the successful candidates do not reflect the overwhelmingly liberal views of the Southwark Diocese. The next election will be upon us soon enough.

What progress has been made in designing an arrangement for face-to-face or online hustings where questions can be asked directly regardless of the number of candidates?

A The Diocesan Secretary

The elections to the General Synod were ongoing through and emerging from the Pandemic. Online hustings were conducted via Zoom with the intention of making them as fair and accessible to as many of the electorate as possible. The process was agreed and endorsed by the Diocesan Registrar, in his capacity as presiding officer for General Synod elections and followed many other dioceses in its approach.

There is no requirement in law for any hustings to be held at all, and some dioceses relied only upon the circulation of candidates' written statements. There is therefore no basis for thinking the election itself was flawed. Nevertheless, the diocese and presiding officer considered that hustings were a useful tool to allow voters to get to know the candidates. The national election guidance for the last election made clear that hustings

should only be held if they could be managed fairly, and expressly provided that every question from the floor must be asked to every candidate.

With an overwhelming number of candidates, it was considered impossible to ask individual questions of each of them in a fair way. Each meeting was 90 minutes in length allowing only a three-minute statement by each candidate. To have allowed multiple questions would have resulted in a Zoom meeting of unmanageable length, and it was felt that there was a high risk that voters would not feel able to remain logged in for the whole evening session. This would significantly disadvantage those candidates who (by random selection) were placed towards the end of the agenda. Similarly, allowing only one question would, in the presiding officer's view, not have been appropriate given the diversity of interests and priorities among the candidates.

However, to seek to ensure that candidates were able to tailor their presentations to priority issues in the diocese, the electorate were encouraged to send in topics and questions in advance of the meeting. The presiding officer independently grouped the questions by volume and informed candidates prior to the hustings which topics were of most interest to the electorate (which included topics relating to inclusivity), and also chaired the events to provide the greatest fairness to all. Ultimately, it was for each candidate to decide if and how to respond to those priority areas and for each voter to decide on the importance of receiving clarity on those issues.

A review of the whole election process has been undertaken at a national level, to which we contributed. It has already been agreed that we will seek to hold in person hustings at the next set of General Synod elections but will also have the opportunity for them to be held online too.

Question 5

Q The Revd David Ruddick [Merton Deanery]

Given that the decision taken by the General Synod to work towards the commendation of the Prayers of Love and Faith has caused widespread unease to clergy and laity (noted by the Bishop of Coventry in his recent article on the 'Covenant' website) why has so little time been afforded in the agenda for March's Diocesan Synod meeting for members to express opinions on these matters?

A The Bishop of Southwark

The recent motion approved at General Synod spoke of 'desiring with God's help to journey together while acknowledging the different deeply-held convictions within the Church' and endorsed 'the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage'. It also was clear that there would be 'further refining' of the suite of liturgical resources before commendation. All of this is a work in progress. It will be more profitable for this Synod to review the matter once the liturgical materials have been published and the new pastoral guidance has been drafted.

Question 6

Q The Revd David Ruddick [Merton Deanery]

Roughly how many clergy and laity in the Diocese has the senior staff team heard from who think the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith go too far, not far enough, and exactly the right distance?

A The Bishop of Southwark

No formal review has been undertaken. The Bishop's Office has received a number of comments, the great majority of which have been gracious and courteous.

Question 7

Q Revd Rob Powell (Tooting Deanery)

What assessment does the Diocesan Board of Finance plan to undertake to assess the impact on the Diocese of the implementation of the Bishops' Response to Living in Love and Faith in relation to: (a) numbers of clergy; (b) numbers of ordinands; (c) church attendance; (d) financial contributions from congregation members to parishes; (e) financial contributions from parishes to the parish support fund?

A The Bishop of Southwark

The Diocesan Board of Finance considers and evaluates the potential impact of a range of situations (including economic, pandemic, and Church of England Policy changes) through financial modelling, but more importantly through ongoing connectedness and communication with Archdeacons, Area Deans, Lay Chairs, and parishes.