

June 2024 Diocesan Synod

Questions and answers: Agenda item No 6:

1 Question from Chris Hicks, Bradford Deanery:

As a result of submission of my summary report on the Diocesan Synod held on 17th February to Bradford Deanery Synod held on 4th June 2024 , a question arose from a member of laity concerning the intended widening of the role of Churchwardens responsibilities to embrace mission and outreach. Given that there were still many vacant positions (some 90) for the role of Churchwarden within the diocese, the intended increase of responsibilities will surely make the recruitment even more difficult?

What change has there been since February to the recruitment status?

Response, Archdeacon of Sherborne:

It may be helpful to be reminded of the duties of a Churchwarden as articulated by The registrar at the annual Visitation Service:

"Churchwardens are officers of the Bishop and lay leaders of the parish. Your role, by Canon Law, is to be foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating with the incumbent; by example and precept to encourage parishioners in the practice of true religion; and to promote peace and unity among them.

As senior lay leaders within the Parochial Church Council you will lead them in their responsibilities for the fabric and furnishings of your parish church and, where there is a churchyard, see that it is properly maintained. You must ensure that alterations and repairs are only done by authorisation through Faculty. You should ensure that the records of the church's land and property are kept up to date.

With the help of God, and along with all the baptised, you are called to holiness of life, and to be persons of integrity, recognising your responsibility for the tasks entrusted to you."

Mission is a task of all who are baptised and therefore central to the life of Christian disciples. There are some very practical tasks undertaken by Churchwardens, but underpinning these is the concept of the Churchwarden as Bishop's officers and the wise elders in their congregations. For some that will continue to be exercised mainly through ensuring that the fabric of the building is maintained, and that due order is kept in church. For others the focus may be more on the mission of the church, particularly when others

are prepared to take on responsibilities for the maintenance of church buildings. The suggestion that the role of Churchwardens could be widened is permission giving, not prescriptive. It recognises that many Churchwardens already take an active role on mission and celebrates that. A wider scope may be attractive to a wider range of people and aid recruitment. We continue to be grateful to all those who take on the task of Churchwarden, and are currently celebrating and thanking them for all their hard work at the annual Visitation Services.

Current Vacancy rate is 378 which represents 39% of all churchwarden places available.

2 Question from Richard Jackman Heytesbury Deanery, St John's Church, Sutton Veny - Churchwarden, Treasurer & Lay Pastoral Assistant

According to the Salisbury Diocese website, at the moment there are only 4 clergy vacancies in the whole diocese. I believe this is as a result of a policy to display only positions that have recently been advertised and for which a timetable for sifting and interview has been set. This seems crazy. Presumably it is based on an outdated idea that there must be/will always be competition for available posts. It may also be that listing all vacant clergy posts would be rather alarming!

We have had two formal rounds of advertising etc and to date we have had only one expression of interest that did not subsequently translate into interview. Just repeating the same process again and again expecting a different outcome could be seen as akin to a sign of madness. Could this approach not be changed so that all vacancies that exist are made public and approaches from interested clergy could be considered at any time? I appreciate that the requirement to convene ad hoc interviews could theoretically be perceived to be very labour intensive, but in practice I doubt if this approach would result in a plethora of applications. It might however, result in a few more and offer the potential for us to find a rector before the likely timescale of this time next year after a vacancy of approximately 2 ½ years.

Response, Bishop Andrew:

Richard makes an important point about vacancies that have been through more than one round of advertisement, and it can indeed be wearying for churches to join the end of a long waiting list. All 'live' vacant clergy posts are currently advertised on the diocesan website - and some of our 'ongoing' vacancies, if there is no intention to alter the profile or job specification.

Where no appointment has been possible, posts are always reviewed – and may be withheld from advertisement if changes are expected. We currently have a high level of clergy vacancies which is also part of the wider national pattern. Timelines are reviewed on

a weekly basis, adapting to need wherever possible. The Sherborne and Ramsbury teams will endeavour to ensure that longstanding vacancies remain on the website wherever appropriate.