

June 2024

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD

WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED

Questions under Standing Order 71 received in respect of the Synod to be held on 24th June 2024

- I. *From Hugh Richards: Does the Diocese have a Maternity Policy? If so, does it accord with the National Ministry Team Guidelines 2020? Will Bishop's Council be asked to review the Policy in the light of the results of the recently published Clergy Babies Maternity Policy Audit to ensure that clergy parents enjoy generous provision?*

Response prepared by HR Team:

The recently published *Clergy Babies: Maternity Project Audit Report* analyses and compares the maternity provision across dioceses, highlighting disparities and hoping to be a catalyst for change and reform and equitable practice. Our Diocese has an established process that meets 2020 guidelines; we also already offer enhanced maternity pay for 39 weeks regardless of length of service (amounting to full stipend for those weeks), which exceeds by some way the Archbishops' Council recommendation of a minimum of 26 weeks at full stipend.

The report recommendations for our Diocese are: *to produce an easy to find, standalone policy and remove reference to the qualifying period of service to bring us in line with national guidelines. The policy should include up to date wording on KIT [Keeping in touch] days and notice period.*

We are fully confident that we have met and exceeded the recommendations of the report. With the valuable help of our Dean of Women's Ministry, we have agreed a new policy and other actions:

- As a minimum we have met the 2020 national guidelines within a new standalone policy and made the recommendations highlighted above
- We have produced a standalone policy [which received] Bishop's Council approval
- This will be published on our website
- We will clearly signpost the Dean of Women's Ministry on our website and family and maternity policy pages (Revd Rebecca Elliot) and the HR team details
- We will include the further signposting that is listed in the clergy babies report on our website and in communication to clergy
- This will be separately circulated to all clergy in a clear, direct communication

The paper for consideration submitted to Bishops Council alongside the new policy also outlined further suggestions/areas for consideration. In particular, we will review the commendations given to a few other dioceses in the report (Coventry and Birmingham being an example) so we can self-audit 'the art of the possible' within our own diocese. These include:

- Good pastoral language in policy and communications
- Maternity checklists to work through

- Possibility of cover – be clear whose responsibility it is and who can support with planning
- Fixed term cover as a provision (available in some other dioceses)
- Case studies – highlighting examples of what women bringing up their families contribute to the diocese and their ministry
- Returning to ministry after parental leave - processes for those returning including being open to part time ministry and phased returns for early years.

2. *From Revd Ben Somervell: Have parishes or Deaneries been consulted on the Worcester Diocesan Environmental Strategy?*

Response from the Diocesan Secretary:

The original Diocesan Environment Strategy was adopted by Diocesan Synod in 2008. Although I have not been able to confirm this from the records, my understanding is that this strategy was worked on by the then “Eco Group” led by Rev. Hugh Burton and approved by Bishop’s Council and then Diocesan Synod, both of which governance bodies are intended (among other things) to represent the perspectives of parishes and deaneries.

The Eco Group has been re-formed as the Climate Crisis Task Group (CCTG), which is composed of two strands – Net Zero and Eco. The requirements around Net Zero have been set by General Synod, with the Routemap to Net Zero stipulating various targets for Diocesan Synods – many of which were adopted in 2023. David Hewlett, as the new Chair of the CCTG has proposed some alterations to the 2008 Environment Strategy – both reflecting the passage of time and also new requirements. These proposals were put before Bishop’s Council in May 2024 and are expected to come to Diocesan Synod later this year.

Until now, there has been no paid resources in the diocesan office for Eco or Net Zero work. We are now in receipt of funding from the national Environment Programme and have a programme manager for Net Zero starting in July (as part of a regional collaboration with Gloucester and Hereford Dioceses). One of their priorities will be to work with deaneries and key parishes to devise and prepare proposals to support the journey towards Net Zero, including capital projects.

Carbon emissions tend to be concentrated in the larger, more frequently-used churches. There will need to be a skew towards concentrating on these places in order to make the most difference to our overall emission figures but, in line with our transformation strategy, there should be some support available for everyone.

3. *From Revd Ben Somervell: How does the theological formation of Auxiliary Pathway Ordinands compare with that of other Ordinands, and has an assessment of this been carried out?*

Response from Roger Latham, Director of Mission & Ministry:

A detailed review of the Auxiliary Pathway was carried out by Roger Latham, Director of Mission and Ministry, during the latter half of 2023, and a report presented to Bishop’s Staff in the Spring of 2024 (and subsequently to Diocesan Synod – see papers to be attached to the minutes of this Synod). The Auxiliary Pathway is designed for candidates who are ‘seasoned saints’, and who have already demonstrated mature Christian ministry as lay people. The

Pathway therefore assumes that substantial ministerial formation has already taken place before candidates present.

Candidates are pre-screened, during which this initial formation is assessed, and during the Pathway are put through national selection for ordained ministry training, supported by the DDO and his team. To date, all candidates have been recommended, which affirms both the previous formation of the candidates and the rigour of our discernment and preparation processes.

The initial training of two years with ordination occurring during the process is built upon through curacy, which is of the normal length and has the same expectations. Candidates trained via the Auxiliary Pathway will be assessed against the same qualities framework as their peers. The assumption of the Programme is that candidates are formed *in* ministry rather than *for* ministry, with a significant experiential component to the learning and formation process. The Pathway is clear that candidates are being formed for self-supporting assistant-level ministry in their home contexts, which shapes expectations and the emphasis of training.

We are currently less than halfway through the pathway with the first cohort. That said, the present cohort represents a very similar profile to similar groups training for SSM ministry in other existing ministerial training pathways, and the diocesan staff involved (who have extensive experience in discernment and theological education) have been impressed both with the prior formation of candidates and with the clear impact of the programme. The AP has demonstrated a highly robust and successful outcome as a process of discernment for locally-focussed self-supporting ministers.

The Revd Andy Todd
Diocesan Secretary
19th June 2024