

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

11 October 2025

QUESTIONS – FIRST NOTICE PAPER (with answers)

- 1) The Revd Edward Keene (Stevenage Deanery) to ask the Diocesan Secretary:

“The diocese provides a very useful annual 'one-to-one' HR audit with a specialist from Redway. Has consideration been given to offering parishes similar annual personalised audits of other practical technical aspects of their work (with either internal or contracted specialists), for example on safeguarding, finances, health & safety, security, fabric & heating, and churchyard maintenance?”

The Diocesan Secretary will respond:

I am grateful for the recognition in the question of the value of the parish HR audits and would encourage parishes who have not accessed an audit to consider doing so. The diocese has made these audits available to parishes recognising the difficulties that can arise if parishes engage with staff or contractors without diligent attention to employment law and good practice.

Without formal audits specialist technical advice is available to parishes in the other areas identified in the question. This is consistently available in response to questions raised by parishes and is also offered through training and engagement sessions typically offered online by diocesan staff. In addition, a first resource for parishes is provided by Archdeacons who can either respond directly or signpost to diocesan staff.

There is a practical resource limitation on the advice and support that can be offered in these and other areas. The diocesan office staffing in this diocese is relatively lean. Comparison with other dioceses in 2024 identified that St Albans has lower staffing than the majority of dioceses and significantly lower staffing than dioceses of similar size. Provision of an enhanced support or audit programme for parishes, whether achieved through additional staff resources or outsourcing, could only be achieved through addition to the diocesan budget.

- 2) Ms Emma Roberts (Buntingford Deanery) to ask the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance:

“This budget, and its associated parish share request are being presented to synod for approval. However, the budget appears to achieve a balance between common fund income and expenditure simply by leaving out about £2m of property expenditure. Selective disclosure is not good governance. Can the Chair assure synod that, in future, the budget presented to synod will include all expenditure and how it is going to be funded?”

Dr Tim Coulson, DBF Chair, will respond:

The DBF has responsibility for the overall financial management of diocesan funds, including bringing to Synod a proposed Common Fund budget. It is not proposed to change this established practice. Accordingly, the motion that I will propose at Synod asks for approval of the maximum expenditure for 2026 of the Diocesan Common Fund.

Whilst it is the Common Fund budget that is set out in the budget presentation and papers, these also refer to the expenditure outside of the Common Fund which the DBF has agreed to make available for additional expenditure on improvements to clergy housing. The DBF is committed to openness and transparency in financial matters reported to the diocese and to Synod.

- 3) Ms Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) to ask the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance:

“Following the welcome inclusion of money transferred to Designated Funds in the 2026 budget, and the restatement of the 2025 budget to include some missing Endowment Income (which should properly be drawn to synod’s attention with an explanation), could the Chair please provide a breakdown of the total value of the DBF’s Designated Funds and specific purposes for which they are reserved?”

Dr Tim Coulson, DBF Chair, will respond:

Designated Funds are detailed within the statutory accounts approved by the Board of Finance in May and received by Synod in June. The table below shows designated funds at 31 December 2024 grouped by purpose:

Sum (£k)	Purpose
706	Allocated by Bishop’s Council for parish mission and net zero carbon projects from budget surplus in 2022 and budget grant sums in 2023 and 2024, (being expended over time as allocated funds are paid to approved projects and new grants awarded).
581	Held for quinquennial-related improvements to parsonages and corporate houses, to be used in 2026 as outlined in budget presentation.
507	Held from interest from loan to St Albans Diocesan Property Company and used to support common fund deficits in 2020 and 2021; this is effectively an operational reserve against common fund deficit.
323	Historic funds understood to have been accumulated for development and PCC projects, but which require further investigation in order to be released a task to be addressed as a priority.
218	Barbara Mary Garner Bequest, a long-standing fund the interest on which has been used to support clergy stipends.
70	National Church Institution contributions to staff positions and specific project activity resulting from diocesan applications for national funds,
2,404	

- 4) Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) to ask the Diocesan Secretary:

“Following the June 2024 Synod and question in March 2025 about the provision of appropriate and well-maintained clergy housing, please could you provide a comprehensive update on the progress made since March?”

The Diocesan Secretary will respond:

The DBF recognises the need to reverse the under-investment in improvements to housing stock from previous years. We are at a critical juncture where many of our houses would struggle to meet new minimum regulatory standards being introduced next year for private rental housing and would continue to fall behind. To keep up with steady state improvements

work, the property budget for 2026 and immediate out-years will be significantly supplemented by other unrestricted and designated funds set aside for property purposes, increasing our activity on improvements, to avoid pressure on parish share via the Common Fund. These funds will be replenished from turnover in housing stock to support modernisation of the portfolio.

The Property Committee is continuing to work on establishing the assessment criteria for the 5-year strategic review cycle, covering 1) suitability to vocation, 2) liveability for occupiers, and 3) maintainability by the DBF. The Property Committee have agreed the suitability criteria and assessment will be incorporated into the quinquennial inspection cycle, informing any recommendations about the houses. Applying learning from net zero carbon retrofit demonstrator projects, we have refined our approach to retrofit assessment to focus on insulation and EPCs under the new standard and are currently procuring this work for the whole portfolio. This data will inform assessment criteria for 2) and 3).

The property team is also progressing with restructuring to improve our capacity to manage the clergy housing portfolio and deliver improvements, including bringing management of the quinquennial inspection and works programme in-house to improve the quality of service to occupiers, and realising value from property development to support improvements expenditure.

The DBF receives minutes and appropriate update from the Property Committee at each of its meetings. It is planned that there will be an annual property update to Synod.

5) Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) to ask the Diocesan Secretary:

"The March questions paper refers to the commencement of a housing stock review. How many properties have been reviewed under this new strategic review cycle? From that, what has been learned about the state of the current stock and the implications for future improvements, disposals and acquisitions?"

The Diocesan Secretary will respond:

The strategic review cycle is a change in approach to how we assess our properties and manage the portfolio, involving regular review with a strategic lens rather than just inspecting physical condition. It is not a one-off review. There is considerable upfront work required to collect better data on our houses, improve our data management and reporting, and establish appropriate assessment criteria based on the data.

The Property Committee is well underway with data collection and designing assessment criteria, but there is further work to do. The assessment criteria will be iteratively incorporated into our quinquennial inspection cycle, so we expect the first round of housing assessments to take a full five-year cycle. To date, the suitability criteria have been completed and we are in progress with collecting data for the liveability and maintainability assessments. Changes to quinquennial inspections will commence in the second quarter of 2026 following the transition of bringing the quinquennial programme in-house with new staff.

As stated in the previous answer, the DBF receives minutes and appropriate update from the Property Committee at each of its meetings. It is planned that there will be an annual property update to Synod.

6) Ms Bethanie Tranter (Hitchin Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Hertford:

"I would like to know what the current Diocesan position is on those within the LGBTQ+ minority who feel a vocation to serve God, and how that will affect the ongoing discernment process for a new bishop?"

Despite the fact that we are part of the LGBTQ+ minority, my wife and I both believe in the sanctity of a committed, monogamous relationship, and so were eager to change our Civil Partnership to a Registered Marriage. However, we were then dismayed to be told that this barred us from becoming Licensed Lay Readers within the Diocese of St Albans.

I understand the traditionalist view that homosexuality is a sin as it is stated in Leviticus 18:22 but I would counter that with the words of Jesus Himself, who said "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). We reaffirm this sentence during Holy Communion every week and yet, it seems to me, that only lip service is being paid to the concept of inclusive love for all. Jesus loved unconditionally and broke many of the traditional, societal rules the Jews lived by in the Gospels. Therefore, why can His church not follow the most basic commandment that Jesus gave us, to love unconditionally, for everybody who comes through its doors?"

The Bishop of Hertford, will respond:

I would like to thank Beth for her question and for her openness to sharing her own particular situation.

There are different types of recognized lay ministry to which a whole range of people are called. In this diocese we have Lay Leaders of Worship and Pastoral, Discipleship and Pioneer Enablers. These are commissioned ministries which need to be supported by the local PCC and are not transferable to other places. These sit alongside many other ways in which people can serve God such as being a Church Warden, leading intercessions etc. There is no restriction on those within the LGBTQ+ minority from exercising these ministries as long as the PCC are supportive.

To address the specific point regarding Reader ministry, this is a licensed ministry, as is the ministry of priests and deacons, i.e. this ministry can only be exercised following a license being granted by a Diocesan Bishop. It is the only nationally recognized lay ministry and therefore, transferable, meaning that when someone is licensed as a Reader they can serve in any diocese within the Church of England under the license of the relevant Diocesan Bishop. Decisions regarding requirements for being licensed as a Reader are made in accordance with the Readers Regulations.

The current Reader Regulations do not contain a national position on or guidance on whether someone who is in a same sex marriage can be licensed as a Reader. The proposed new regulations, which are currently going through the consultation stage, equally do not contain a definitive statement on this matter in light on the on-going LLF discussions.

This means that the decision as to whether an individual in a same sex marriage can be licensed as a Reader lies with the Diocese and Diocesan Bishop. To date the position of this diocese has been to treat all license-holders in the same way, requiring the same of them in regard to expectations around relationships. This is in line with most dioceses in the Church of England.

Beth made reference in her question about the ongoing discernment of our new diocesan bishop. Readers are granted a license to minister by the Diocesan Bishop. Therefore, any review of the current diocesan position will need to wait until our new Diocesan Bishop is in post. The eventual outcome of the LLF may also inform the diocesan policy going forward.

In answering this question, I have sought to provide clarity around how the current position has been reached. In seeking to be factual in a response, I also want to acknowledge the pain this position causes for individuals in our diocese who feel they are called to a ministry they are not able to formally discern or exercise. I also want to acknowledge Beth's final question by saying that I would hope that all who walk through the doors of our churches would receive unconditional love, but I recognize that that has not always been the experience of those from the LGBTQ+ minority and for that I am truly sorry.

7) Revd Josias de Souza (Luton Deanery) to ask the Director of Mission and Ministry:

"The Church of England is facing a crisis in vocations, with the latest Ministry Statistics showing falling applications for ordination and high resignation rates.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/ministry-statistics-2020-report-final.pdf>.

*Historically, evangelical churches have been among the most **consistent** in sending candidates for ordained ministry. At the same time, many of us are deeply concerned about the wider theological direction of the Church. What is the Diocese of St Albans doing both to encourage vocations from our evangelical congregations—who have been the backbone of many vocations in the past—and to ensure a theologically balanced and faithful future for priestly ministry?"*

The Revd Canon Dr Tim Lomax, Director of Mission and Ministry, will respond:

Thank you very much for this important question. We share your concern for the flourishing of vocations across the Church of England and, in particular, the vital contribution that our evangelical congregations—and indeed all traditions—make to the life of our Diocese and the wider Church.

Encouragingly, on the national picture, the number of candidates proceeding to a Stage 2 discernment for ordained ministry has risen by 14% this year. Here in the Diocese of St Albans, we are also seeing signs of health and growth in vocations. In 2024, 21 people initially explored their vocation with a Diocesan Vocations Advisor (6 of these for ordained ministry). So far in 2025, that number has already risen to 27 (10 people exploring ordained ministry). In September 2024, 22 people were in conversation with a member of the Diocesan Director of Ordinands team regarding potential ordained ministry; in September 2025 that figure was 20. In terms of those entering training, 14 ordinands began training in September 2025, compared with 5 in 2024 and 15 in 2023. While the numbers naturally ebb and flow from year to year, the table below indicates that over the past seven years generally there has been a consistent and healthy pipeline of new ordinands. The number of people beginning training was lower in 2024 due to teething problems with the new national discernment process and also recovery coming out of the COVID pandemic.

Ordinands in training as at:	Sep-25
Started training 2025	14
Started training 2024	5
Started training 2023	15
Started training 2022	12 + three deferred from 2021
Started training 2021	15 + one deferred from 2020
Started training 2020	19 + one deferred from 2019
Started training 2019	19 + one deferred from 2018

It is important to note that, at diocesan and national level, we do not record the tradition of candidates as they explore vocation. What we can say is that our Vocations Advisors and

Assistant Diocesan Directors of Ordinands themselves represent a broad range of traditions and contexts and so are well placed to accompany candidates faithfully on their journey. We also know that candidates continue to come forward from all traditions of the Church of England, and throughout their vocations journey and training, their tradition is respected, valued, and nurtured. We are deeply grateful for the ongoing commitment of evangelical parishes in raising up future ministers and we long to see this continue alongside the contributions of other traditions, so that the rich diversity of the Church is reflected in its ordained leadership.

Whilst ordained ministry is the focus of this particular question, the overall health of lay and ordained vocations remains a priority for us as we seek to equip more leaders for mission and ministry in today's context. Reader ministry, for example, is showing encouraging signs of growth, with 11 people currently in training (compared with 8 in 2024 and 5 in 2023). Again, those in training represent a broad spectrum of tradition.

We recognise the concerns expressed about the wider theological direction of the Church, and we want to assure Synod that in our diocese we are committed to a theologically balanced and faithful future for priestly ministry. Our shared calling is to discern, nurture, and equip leaders who will serve Christ and his Church in a wide variety of contexts and traditions, and who will be rooted in scripture, sustained by prayer, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We give thanks to God for those who are exploring their vocation across our diocese at this time (which represents a huge amount of good work in parish and diocesan contexts), and we encourage every parish—across every tradition and context—to continue to pray for, encourage, and release those whom God may be calling into lay and ordained leadership.