

Bishop Seeley tells Synod of short- and long-term financial pressures

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CENTRAL [funding](#) is being sought to overcome the discrepancy between the “ambitious aspirations” of [Vision and Strategy](#) — the national plan for the Church in the 2020s — and the financial situation driving dioceses to cut stipendiary posts ([Features, 10 September 2021](#)), [the Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich](#), the Rt Revd Martin Seeley, told the [General Synod](#) on Tuesday.

Bishop Seeley answered multiple questions as both the chairman of the Ministry Council and on behalf of the Presidents of the [Archbishops’ Council](#). In a written reply to Robin Lunn (Worcester) about whether the [Archbishops’ Council](#) had “a policy or a leaning regarding the reduction of stipendiary clergy numbers in individual dioceses”, Bishop Seeley said: “The availability of sufficient, equipped, and capable ministers — lay and ordained — will be critical if local worshipping communities are to fulfil the aspirations of the Vision and Strategy.”

Pressed by Mr Lunn about whether the Archbishops’ Council recognised that dioceses were not “trying to undermine the [mission](#) of the Church”, but had policies “dictated by their finance or lack thereof”, Bishop Seeley agreed: “One of the things that is going on here is we have got a long-term Vision and Strategy and short-term pressures around finance, and those two timetables don’t meet. . .

“We need to try to find a way to mitigate the current situation that is prompting dioceses to consider cutting posts . . . through some form of financial provision.” It remained unclear exactly how many posts dioceses were cutting, he said.

There was a need to “overcome this discrepancy between our ambitious aspirations that require stipendiary clergy and our current short-term situation in relation to finance.” In a written answer, he confirmed that Ministry Council was seeking funding provision with the Archbishops Council, “to ensure that no eligible stipendiary curate finishing in 2022 will be without the possibility of a post of further responsibility”.

Last year, a paper — *Perspectives on Money, People and Buildings* — circulated to bishops and diocesan secretaries, noted “concern that, with a reduction in stipendiary posts, it will be more difficult for curates successfully completing their curacies to move into a first incumbency” ([News, 5 February 2021](#)).

It went on to warn: “If in any year there are insufficient curacies or first incumbencies, there will be two significant consequences: firstly, funds invested by the Church in training additional ordinands and curates may be perceived to have been wasted; and, secondly, the messaging/mood generated [may] deter candidates and lead to a shock contraction in the pipeline of new clergy. Exacerbated by recruitment freezes, or policies to recruit only from within, in some dioceses there is a real risk that this could occur in 2021.”

Last year, it was reported that numbers of candidates recommended to train for stipendiary ministry were at their highest for 34 years, after a push in Renewal and Reform for a 50-per-cent increase in vocations to ordained [ministry](#) by 2020 ([News, 2 July 2021](#)). A written response from Bishop Seeley referred to the need for a “small but continued increase” over the next ten years.

Bishop Seeley was also challenged on [clergy well-being](#), as explored through the Living Ministry study ([News, 6 January](#)), by the Revd Jeremy Moodey (Oxford), currently serving his title as an SSM at Great Chesham.

Referring to an earlier written answer, in which it was revealed that among the Church’s 2151 multi-parish benefices there are 331 that contain more than five parishes, including one benefice of 29 parishes, Bishop Seeley said: “I think we are in serious danger of creating impossible jobs, and many jobs have become impossible, where the ministry for the cure of souls becomes the ministry of managing a team, and, while that is important, we need to ensure that the jobs are manageable and life-giving.

“God calls us to a vocation where we share and receive life, and I am really concerned about the shape of many incumbency jobs and other jobs.”