

General Synod – House of Clergy Questions and Responses – Revd Isaac Lawrence

Q1. Are you familiar with the recently published Equalities and Human Rights Commission guidance that single-sex spaces such as changing rooms and toilets must be used on the basis of biological sex and do you intend to respect, uphold and follow it, or if not why not?

Yes. I am familiar with the current EHRC guidance and the legal position following the Supreme Court judgment. I believe the Church of England, like every other institution, should respect and comply with the law and take proper account of applicable statutory guidance. Where single-sex provision is lawful and appropriate, I accept that the Equality Act uses sex in the sense established by the Supreme Court.

At the same time, the way in which the Church responds matters greatly. Every person who enters our churches should be treated with dignity, respect and pastoral sensitivity, including those who are transgender. Respecting the law and offering compassionate Christian care should never be presented as opposing principles.

The Church therefore needs clear and practical policies which take proper account of safeguarding, privacy, dignity and the legal rights of everyone concerned. Clergy and parishes also need appropriate guidance so that they are not left to navigate complex and sensitive situations without support.

If elected, I would want the Church to approach these questions responsibly and clearly, avoiding both ambiguity and unnecessary hostility. We should be able to uphold the law while demonstrating the grace, compassion and respect for every person that should characterise our Christian witness.

Q2. Parish ministry is becoming increasingly difficult to fund locally. What do you believe the Church of England should do to ensure that the cost of stipendiary ministry does not fall disproportionately on small, rural and ageing congregations?

I believe the Church of England needs a fairer and more sustainable approach to funding stipendiary ministry. Small, rural and ageing congregations often serve communities considerably larger than their regular Sunday attendance and maintain a Christian presence in places where there may be few other institutions. They should not be disadvantaged simply because their local financial capacity is limited.

We need greater sharing of resources across the Church, with national and diocesan funding directed towards sustaining ministry where congregations cannot reasonably meet the full cost themselves. Decisions about funding should take account not only of attendance and giving but also of rurality, deprivation, demographics, geography and the wider pastoral and missional responsibility carried by the parish church.

I strongly support developing lay ministry, encouraging local vocations and valuing self-supporting ministry. However, these should complement rather than become substitutes for stipendiary clergy simply because finances are under pressure. Priests continue to exercise a distinctive sacramental, pastoral and missional ministry within our communities.

If elected, I would advocate for national structures and resources to serve rather than burden local mission. A genuinely national Church must share responsibility for ensuring that smaller and rural

communities continue to have access to sustainable ordained ministry rather than allowing provision to depend principally upon a parish's ability to pay.

Q3. There are churches with urgent needs for roofs, heating, accessibility, structural repairs and other capital works, but grants can be extremely difficult to access and often require significant match funding. What would you do to release more Church of England resources for capital investment in parish churches?

Our church buildings are first and foremost places of Christian worship and mission, but many are also important community assets. Yet parishes, particularly small and rural ones, can find themselves responsible for historic buildings requiring substantial expenditure while having very limited financial resources.

I would support increasing the Church of England resources available directly for essential capital works, particularly roofs, heating, accessibility and structural repairs. Grant processes should also be simpler and more proportionate. We should reconsider match-funding requirements where they effectively prevent smaller or less affluent parishes from accessing the very funding intended to help them.

I would also like to see stronger coordination between national Church funds, dioceses, charitable trusts and external funding bodies. Parishes should not be expected to navigate complicated funding systems without appropriate professional support. Greater access to specialist advice could also help churches identify suitable grants and develop realistic plans for maintaining their buildings.

The Church has significant resources nationally, and stewarding them wisely must include investment in the places from which local worship, mission and pastoral care actually happen. If we believe in the continuing importance of the parish church, maintaining its buildings cannot fall principally upon congregations that may number only a few dozen people. Investment in church buildings is also an investment in the Church's future presence and mission within our communities.