



Harrogate Deanery Synod

26th March 2025

All Saints, Kirkby Overblow, Harrogate, HG3 1HH

GUEST SPEAKER:

The Revd Canon Sean Robertshaw, Diocesan Director of Vocations

Vocations within the Church of England

The Area Dean introduced Sean by extending him a warm welcome to the Synod.

Sean began his presentation by posing the question, ***'What does the Vocations department do?'***

Sean explained that:

- They run a Nationally Determined Process that focuses on the Qualities Framework. They collaborate with the National Team and liaise with other Diocesan Directors of Ordinands and Vocations, and they spell out how to operate that process here in the Dioceses of Leeds.
- This involves:
 - The recruitment and retention of all the voluntary Assistants who support the Vocations department.
 - Providing events to discuss vocational opportunities, spiritual opportunities, pilgrimages, and retreats.
 - Providing training for the Assistant Diocesan Directors of Ordinands and candidates at Stage 1 and 2.
 - Supporting candidates through the process including pastorally.
 - Supporting people in theological education.
 - Matching curates to parishes.
 - Planning and hosting the Ordination retreat.
 - Presenting the Ordinand to the Bishop at the Ordination service.
- The process of Ordination usually takes 18 months to 2 years. It is a process of discernment which involves a substantial number of people helping those offering themselves to ministry to decide if this is the right path for them. It also addresses the question, is this person suitable to become a priest, lay minister, occasional preacher, or pastoral carer in the Church of England? Not everyone is suitable.

The introduction was followed by a small group discussion: ***'What does vocation mean to you?'***

Answers included:

- We all have vocations.
- Vocation is what other people see/discern in you.
- People want to know what their purpose is in life and how can they make the most of their own individual uniqueness. Vocation is when they discover what this might be.

- Vocation is broader than the roles we are called to in the Church, e.g. being a teacher, a medic, a lawyer, these are all vocations. Vocation is something within you; that which you are called to.
- You need good people around you to encourage you and help shape your journey.
- Vocations can change at different stages in your life; they don't necessarily stay the same. We need to be open to the fact that things change, and that we need to move in a different direction to fulfil our vocation.
- People may have two or three vocations in their life.

Sean summarised the discussion by making these points:

- Vocation means understanding what God calls you to be and do.
- Vocation means living out this calling faithfully in your daily life.
- Everyone has a vocation. For some people it is a specific calling to ministry. For others, it could mean serving God through faithful discipleship in everyday life.
- The Church of England's mission is to be a Christian presence in every community.

Sean showed a slide headed '**Meet the Team.**' He talked through the various roles of the people who contribute to the journey of an Ordinand.

He followed this by sharing slides showing the different **Ministry Pathways offered in the Anglican Diocese of Leeds** i.e. the different opportunities and levels available for people to participate in Church of England vocations:

- Lay Pastoral Worker
- Children's Worker
- Youth Worker
- Lay Worship Leader
- Occasional Preacher
- Eco Mission Enabler
- Licensed Lay Minister (LLM/Reader)
- Anglican Religious Life (belonging to a religious order)
- Intern/Mission Apprentice/Ministerial Experience Scheme
- Ordained Ministry

The Challenges. The slide shows the number of Ordinands over an 8-year period. Sean explained that in 2014 the Church of England put a lot of energy and effort into recruiting new vocations. This resulted in an increase in the number of vocations in ordained ministry. Then in 2021 /22 numbers started to tail off. This is in part due to the Pandemic in 2020/21. The slide also showed that Residential training has decreased in popularity, whereas the numbers of Ordinands opting for Full-Time Non-Residential training and Part-Time Training have remained rather more constant.

The Challenges

Ordinand Numbers

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	In the last year	
Residential	526	499	477	460	463	405	320	262	-58	-18%
FTNR	179	227	293	339	363	336	273	252	-21	-8%
Part-time	470	515	572	565	557	544	509	413	-96	-19%
Total	1175	1241	1342	1364	1383	1285	1102	927	-175	-16%



Sean moved onto sharing ***Some Factors influencing the in-flow of Clergy into the Church of England.*** These included:

- Clergy wellbeing (including finance but also wider e.g. pensions).
- A long tail from the pandemic.
- Diminished diocesan investment in vocational development in some places.
- Reduced trust in the institutional Church.
- Living in Love and Faith (LLF).

The second group discussion explored the question, ***Considering the challenges faced by local congregations, what can we do vocationally to ensure the Church of England continues to have a missional presence in every community?***

Answers included:

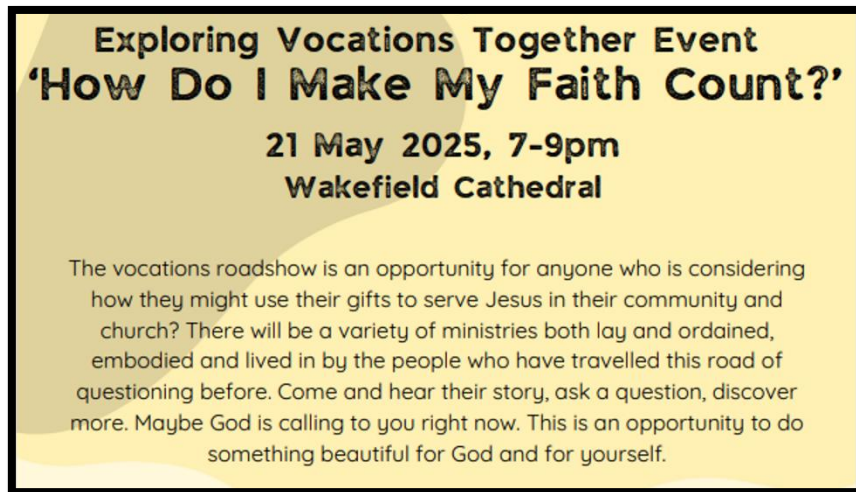
- Ask people to join in or take on a role. Often people want to join in but like to be asked.
- Be alert to people's skills and what they do for a living and spot opportunities to use these skills and talents within the Church.
- Encourage people to participate. Have faith in people and be discerning about what people can do and how they can use their skills and knowledge to contribute to the life of the Church.
- Let people know what opportunities are available.
- Be proactive in inviting people to join in and encourage them to see the part they can play in the life of their Church.

Sean talked about ***Exploring Vocations Together.*** These include:

- Anglicanism Course – for those faithful disciples who do not understand Anglicanism. Part of the discernment process is exploring, 'How are you called specifically to be a priest within the Church of England?'
- Preparation for Stage 1 carousel and Stage 2 panel.

- Introduction to Theology (ITT) – a four one-day course over a period of 3 months. The Revd Helen Collings, the Diocesan Lay Training Team Leader, will talk more about this at the next Synod on 3rd July 2025.

Sean informed about the vocation’s roadshow on 21st May at Wakefield Cathedral.



Towards the end of the presentation, Sean asked the question:

- What would be most helpful to your church communities in identifying and supporting potential vocations?

He urged Synod members to let him know what he can do to facilitate this and how can he help support parishes with the right kind of resources. Please do email him with your requests and ideas.

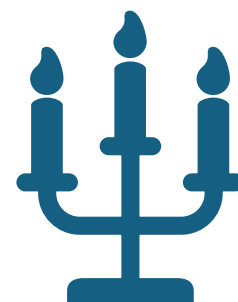
Sean’s penultimate slide showed a passage from scripture which our Treasurer read aloud. This was followed by Synod members joining together to say the Prayer. Afterwards Sean pointed out that Peter would not have been in a position to initiate church growth at the point of his calling, but Jesus spotted the potential that lay within him.

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Prayer

*Lord help us to believe that we are all ordinary people made extraordinary through your vision and your power. Take our insecurities and feelings of inadequacy and give us the courage to see ourselves and others as you see us, with gifts and potential to transform your world and build your Kingdom. **Amen***



Sean finished by sharing his details and encouraged members to contact him should they have any feedback or questions or a desire to know more.

If you would like to know more about Lay or Ordained Ministry, please call us.

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The Area Dean thanked Sean for joining the Synod and sharing this valuable information.