



BIRMINGHAM DIOCESAN SYNOD (DS)

Saturday 25 March 2023 at 9.30am

St Philip's Church Centre, Manor Road, Dorridge, Solihull, B93 8DX

MINUTES

1. Prayers and Welcome

Prayers and worship were led by the Revd Canon Duncan Hill-Brown, Vicar at St Philip's, Dorridge and St James', Bentley Heath.

2. Welcome to New People, Apologies and Previous Minutes

Bishop Anne was delighted to announce the following appointments: Bishop James Langstaff, Honorary Assistant Bishop; the Revd Toby Crowe, Chair of the House of Clergy; Mr Andy Winmill, Director Mission Support; the Revd Stephen Fletcher, Interim Priest in Charge All Saints Gravelly Hill, St Chad's Erdington and St Mark's Stockland Green; the Revd Dominic Melville, Priest in Charge Handsworth St Michael & the Benefice of Birmingham Bishop Latimer with All Saints. The Ven Gordon Steele, Auxiliary Archdeacon, was held in prayer following recent surgery.

Bishop Anne noted the apologies given before the meeting. No further amendments to the Minutes of DS 221112 had been received so they stand as agreed by Bishop's Council.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS 221112

3. Bishop's Presidential Briefing

Bishop Anne gave her Presidential Briefing, a copy of which is attached the Minutes.

4. Report of the Proceedings of General Synod – February 2023

Mrs Dawn Brathwaite (General Synod Representative) reported on the February 2023 session of the General Synod. A copy of her report is attached to the Minutes.

The Revd Dr Al Barrett (Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery) reminded members of the long journey with those who were against the ordination of women, and he asked for clarification on what is being proposed nationally for the journey in Living in Love and Faith. Dawn responded that a meeting has been proposed in July 2023 to which Diocesan Synod members will be invited. General Synod representatives will be at the meeting at it will be an opportunity for them to hear the views of Synod members. She hoped that everyone would take up the opportunity of taking part in this listening exercise.

Mr Adam North (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) stated that he had attended Synod and had felt that he had been referred to as an outsider. He thanked Bishop Anne for her pastoral letter but felt he was unable to accept Archbishop Justin's apologies. He asked for reassurance that he and his LGBTQI+ colleagues would be safe to be who they are in the Church of England Birmingham. Bishop Anne advised that pastoral guidance is currently being worked on and gave her assurance that the Bishops are committed in seeking to offer confidence to those who have been wounded.

The Revd Katie Stock (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) asked how we can pray and journey alongside. Dawn asked for prayers to be ongoing and to pray for the Bishops for the important work that they have. She asked for prayers that she and the other General Synod representatives may listen well before going to General Synod in July.

5. Written Questions

5.1 Question from the Revd Chris Hobbs (Kings Norton, Mosley & Shirley Deanery)

Can you explain how the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith which may be used for couples in a sexually active relationship other than marriage between one man and one woman do not therefore constitute a change to the Church of England's doctrine of marriage?

Response from Bishop Anne

Questions similar to the above in synodical terms were asked in written form to the meeting of the General Synod in February 2023. Given that many members of our Diocesan Synod may not have seen the responses to these, it may be helpful to give opportunity to read these in full rather than repeating them here at length. The most relevant answers can be found in the Bishop of London's replies to General Synod questions 147 – 153 contained within the GS questions paper circulated alongside this Diocesan Synod paper. Two of these responses are reproduced below for convenience. Also being circulated is GS 2289, the Response from the Bishops of the Church of England, and GS Misc 1339 from the Church of England's legal office. This gives the legal view on the distinction which has opened up since 2012 between an understanding of Civil Marriage and Holy Matrimony.

The Bishop of London's response to General Synod question Q147

While not explicitly stated in the Church's Canons, for many years the Church has taught that the only rightful place for sexual activity is Holy Matrimony. The House of Bishops has not repudiated this but acknowledges that there is disagreement in the Church about how this applies today. As part of developing the Pastoral Guidance bishops will need to clarify this situation and any procedural implications that may or may not follow.

The Bishop of London's response to General Synod question Q151

The draft Prayers of Love and Faith do not change the Church's teaching on Holy Matrimony, and they are silent on the question of sexual intimacy. The Church is divided on the question of same-sex sexual intimacy. The biblical and theological arguments for both sides can be found in the LLF Book and in an excellent and detailed dialogue between Walter Moberly and Chris Wright, which can be found in the LLF Online Library. Furthermore, an extended essay on the biblical understanding of 'blessing' which expands what is offered on page 6 of the Bishops' Response can also be found in the LLF Online Library. The Pastoral Guidance will need to offer clarity about the Church's teaching on these matters and the theological and biblical underpinning for any recommendations that may be made.

To note:

The extended period of learning that the C of E has been engaged with using the Living in Love and Faith resources has been the place for exploration of theological, scriptural, historical and doctrinal questions around identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. Those who have not yet engaged with this learning and the LLF materials are encouraged to do so. A summary of the essays available via the LLF online library and a link to the main LLF volume and other resources are included in this mailing.

The CofE's doctrinal statement on Holy Matrimony is found in Canon B30.1 which states that "marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity."

The Revd Chris Hobbs thanked Bishop Anne for her response but had not been swayed by the answer. He asked for an explanation on why the proposed prayers are silent on intimacy when that is the issue for debate. Bishop Anne responded that there has to be further clarity and that guidance will be worked on and the prayers refined.

5.2 Question from Mr Paul Martin (Lay Chair, Warley & Edgbaston Deanery)

We acknowledge and are grateful for the modest funding to be available for revitalisation projects within five Anglo-Catholic parishes in this Diocese. However, it seems the case that until now church planting within the Diocese has focussed on places that are almost exclusively from the charismatic/evangelical tradition of the church and are either conservative or intentionally silent on the issue of affirmation of our LGBTQI+ sisters and brothers. Could the Bishop confirm that plans will be made to encourage and so make more likely the planting of churches and communities which are actively affirming of our LGBTQI+ sisters and brothers?

Responses from Bishop Anne, Mr Steve Cook (Strategic Transformation Director), Mr Andy Winmill (Director Mission Support) and the Revd Dr Jon Turner (Missioner for New Christian Communities)

Within the Church of England Birmingham there is welcome and encouragement for the planting of churches and new Christian communities across all traditions. I am delighted that we have won significant Church Commissioner strategic funding to enable the Anglo-Catholic Missioner Project to go forward. This project is to enable catholic missional vision, praxis and capacity to be built up within our catholic parishes. The hoped for growth will then in turn lead to the possibility of new church plants within the catholic tradition. Our current mixture of church plants is fairly consistent with the wider Church of England picture across all dioceses. There is a desire amongst those leading church planting at national level as well as within C of E B to actively encourage greater diversity.

As this question came addressed to “Bishop Anne and team”, and as this area of mission is being led and shaped by the above, they have been invited to respond further to this question. **+Anne**

Team Response

We want to encourage church planting across all traditions within CofEB. Our church planting strategy is constantly evolving as we seek to grow churches at the heart of each community. For a successful church plant, or revitalisation, a suitable building, experienced leader in church planting or missional growth and a planting team are needed. Recently our planting has been somewhat opportunistic as we have been working with the churches that can provide leaders, teams and seed funding to plant new churches and revitalise existing parishes. Going forward we are becoming more strategic:

- The formation of Oversight Areas and creation of their missional plans will enable us to understand the need and opportunity for planting in every context and enable us to work with each parish to see if they have the capacity for planting.

- We are focussing on areas that we traditionally have not focussed on from a planting perspective, our outer estates, multi-cultural and rural areas. We shall carry out specific learning projects into what planting in these contexts could look like over the next ten years.

- Over the last few years, we have created, and been awarded funding, for the Anglo-Catholic Missioner project. This project will help us build up missional models, stronger parishes, and lots of learning to enable Anglo-Catholic parishes to participate more fully in church planting in the future. If this proves fruitful we could follow this process with other traditions within CofEB to build further capacity for church planting.

We are encouraging dialogue around church planting at Oversight Area level and through Area Deans and look forward to collaborating with different models and expressions of church planting in the years ahead.

Mr Paul Martin thanked Bishop Anne for her generous remarks at the start of the meeting and for her comprehensive answer to his question. However, he asked that Synod might be better informed regarding the nature of church plants. Bishop Anne confirmed that pro-diversity would be welcomed in church plants. Dr Rachel Jepson (General Synod Representative) stated that it was helpful to know if the CofEB was affirming of the LGBTQI+ community within church planting.

5.3 Question from the Revd Ben Green (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery)

What steps have been (or will be) taken to determine the impact of GS2289 (LLF response from the bishops) on our relationships with our link dioceses?

Response from Bishop Anne

Birmingham has had a partnership with the Anglican Church in Malawi for now over 50 years and maintains warm relationships with all four Anglican dioceses within Malawi. Our other partnership is a link with the still relatively new diocese of Bolivia.

All diocesan links across the Communion are built primarily on relationship, friendship, mutual learning and support. In regards to the partnership with Malawi, there are no current signs of any change to the above. The Malawian bishops all made it clear when we last met in person during the Lambeth conference and against the backdrop of the C of E's LLF process, that the relationship continues to be highly valued by them. Having been generously hosted by the bishops when I visited Malawi, I continue to maintain good personal relationships, in addition to the multitude of other diocesan and parish relationships that Birmingham has. The Chair of our Malawi Task Group confirms that LLF is not part of any conversations currently that he regularly has with a range of contacts in Malawi, including the bishops and other senior clergy / officers. (NB He and I have also both recently sent messages of prayer and support in light of the cyclone damage and loss of life in Southern Malawi, and we are looking to financially support the ensuing aid effort).

In regards to Bolivia, there are plans for a group from Birmingham to visit again this summer and to collaborate on a programme encouraging intentional discipleship. Bolivia being a new diocese with few clergy and resources, we in Birmingham are keen to offer what we can to support the work and vision of the new bishop there, whom I have also had the pleasure of meeting. A significant conference is being planned at the end of this visit which I have also been asked to find funding support for. There has been no indication of any changes to these plans.

In regards to conversations happening beyond our own diocese at the level of the Anglican Consultative Council, the impact of any Church of England development is of course being discussed. Following a meeting in February of the ACC in Ghana where 39 of the 42 member churches of the Anglican Communion were gathered, (encompassing Malawi and Bolivia), the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, the Right Reverend Anthony Poggo, said in his statement - The 110 members of the ACC present discussed together the effect of the Church of England's decision. At that meeting, the ACC affirmed "the importance of seeking to walk together to the highest degree possible, and learning from our ecumenical conversations how to accommodate differentiation patiently and respectfully".

If any clergy, lay leaders or parishes would like to demonstrate their own care and concern for the wider Anglican Communion at this time and for our own link dioceses, might I encourage you to take the step of forging a relationship with a parish in Malawi or Bolivia, building friendship and seeking other ways to offer support as well as be enriched yourselves.

6. Environmental Update

6.1 Net Zero Route Map Recommendation

Mr Dan Mayes, Property Director, reported that good progress had been made on the Net Zero Route Map and he thanked those members of Diocesan Synod who attended the debate on 30 January 2023. Referring to the Route Map Diocesan Milestones, it was noted that the first three points had been completed.

Thanks were given to Ms Jenny Thurston, Communications Director, and her team for issuing monthly communications and to those on the Net Zero Environment Group for their contributions to the reports.

Route Map Diocesan Milestones

Milestone	Date									
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	
4.1 Dioceses										
4.1.1. Dioceses: All dioceses to convene a Net Zero Carbon working group, with senior representatives.	2022									
4.1.2. Dioceses: All dioceses provide an annual carbon emissions report to Diocesan Synod using the results provided by the national Carbon Emissions report from Research and Statistics.	2022									
4.1.3. Dioceses: All dioceses develop a communication strategy to churches and schools - focus on the 'why', the theology, and make it positive.	2022									
4.1.4. Dioceses: All dioceses provide an outline of their decarbonisation plans to Diocesan Synod as a Net Zero Carbon Action Plan, to include estimates of costs for different options, as well as the policy changes and levers for change required. To be reviewed annually by senior staff. The plan should make reference to the Practical Path to Net Zero and actively consider implementation of 'quick wins', how to decarbonise heat, how to reduce energy consumption and how to encourage behaviour change.		2023								
4.1.5. Dioceses: All dioceses audit clergy property (where possible) by 2023 and develop a property retrofitting plan by 2024 (see Section 4.4 of the Routemap).		2023	2024							
4.1.6. Dioceses: All dioceses audit their landholdings and develop a land management plan.					2026					

Points 4.1.4, 4.1.5 and 4.1.6 were noted along with their timescales.

As a member of the Environment Board, the Revd Canon Catherine Grylls reminded members of the Five Marks of Mission and how they link evangelism and environmentalism and make them essential to each other.

Catherine quoted the following excerpt from *Practical Theology Vol 15 No 5 Oct 2022 (pp479-490) 'Environmentalism and evangelism, essential companions in Christian creation care'* by Steve Hollinghurst:

- *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- *To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- *To respond to human need by loving service*
- *To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*
- *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

Marks two to five are seen as flowing out from the first mark, so that the 'good news of the Kingdom' is a call to become disciples of Christ who will care for those in need, seek justice, peace and reconciliation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Equally, without the evangelistic call to be such disciples and the work of the Spirit in those disciples, marks three to five will not be achieved.

Catherine urged members to approve the motion and asked for prayers that action is taken urgently and wisely towards the goal of carbon net zero by 2030.

The Revd Dr Al Barrett (Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery) gave his full support to the motion and asked that as well as focusing on practical matters, we still need to find ways of nourishing spirituality.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod adopted the following motion put forward by the Revd Canon Catherine Grylls:

This Synod agrees that an outline of the Church of England Birmingham's decarbonisation plan will be presented at the November 2023 synod meeting. Such plans to be supplemented and amended as appropriate during 2024, including further clarification of the resources required to deliver net zero carbon across the diocese.

Bishop Anne gave her thanks to Dan and his team for all their work on this subject.

6.2 Update on Divestment in Fossil Fuels

Ms Karen Preece, Finance Director, reported that, following a review by independent advisors to review the strategy and performance of investment managers, Bishop's Council had approved an updated Investment Policy Statement which included the wish of the trustees to be entirely divested from fossil fuels by 31 December 2023 and an ethical banking policy. There will also be a tightening of the process around collectives.

This Investment Policy Statement provides a framework for the management of BDBF's investment portfolios and will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it continues to be appropriate.

Synod members noted the following Private Members Motion which is currently seeking support from sufficient General Synod members in order for it to be put on a future General Synod agenda.

The proposed motion, from Dr Cathy Rhodes in Sheffield, is asking General Synod, among other things, to call on the National Investing Bodies to:

- (i) disinvest by the end of 2023 from any oil and gas companies that are planning to explore for and/or develop new fossil fuel resources and/or reserves;*
- and;*
- (ii) scale up investment in renewable energy and other climate solutions year-on-year to at least 10% of assets under management by 2030.*

We don't know whether or not this will gain sufficient support from General Synod members to go forward for debate at General Synod.

Mr John Heywood (Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery and member of Birmingham Anglican Climate Action (BACA)) urged the General Synod Representatives to consider this motion.

The Revd Catherine Grylls reminded members that Dr Cathy Rhodes had formerly resided in Birmingham.

Bishop Anne gave her thanks to Karen and her team for their ongoing work.

7. Racial Justice**7.1 Board Report**

The Revd Canon Bamidele Sotonwa (Chair of the Racial Justice Group) gave an update from the Reference Group for Racial Justice. A copy of his report is attached to the Minutes.

7.2 Regional Collaboration

Dr Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary, thanked Bamidele and the Racial Justice Board for the breadth of work undertaken. She reported that the Diocesan Secretaries and Bishops in five dioceses in the West Midlands region are working in collaboration to move forward on the implementation of the recommendations of From Lament to Action. Each diocese has contributed a small amount of money to fund a consultancy project to understand where we are and what is needed to move forward. This work will be used to support a Racial Justice funding application to the National Church and we understand that a regional approach to bid for funding will be favourably considered. Each diocese is in a different place and sharing learning and best practice will give us the best use of resources.

As an elected member of General Synod and Archbishops' Council, Dr Rachel Jepson urged members to do as much as we can, and that funding is available to encourage this.

The Revd Dr Al Barrett (Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery) noted that it was easy for those of us who are white to forget that we are, and he stressed the importance of pressing forward with From Lament to Action and working on diversity.

8. Cost of Living Crisis – The Church’s Response

Canon Fred Rattley, Director Community Regeneration reported that a third of Birmingham diocese is in poverty and he informed members that Birmingham City Council and partners are working to support and offer guidance to Birmingham residents during the cost of living crisis in the UK including:

- Benefits and money advice
- Warm Welcome Spaces
- Energy efficiency
- Food support

Through the Thrive Together Birmingham team, Church of England Birmingham have been collaborating with voluntary, community and faith sector partners across the city and with Birmingham City Council to develop responses to the Cost of Living Crisis and in particular the response to rising energy costs.

Birmingham Warm Welcome partners recognise that there is already a wealth of existing assets and activity within the city, and we want to help connect the people of Birmingham to this. For those who already provide this type of space, we are asking that they register for Birmingham Warm Welcome so that they can be included in our Warm Welcome directory. This will enable our communities to find how to access a Warm Welcome near to them. Further information can be found at the following link [Warm Welcome briefing for churches](#).

Following the presentation, members were divided into breakout groups and were asked to discuss the following question:

- How are churches you know responding to the Cost of Living Crisis

Responses were gathered and passed to Fred for consideration.

Bishop Anne thanked Fred for his presentation and also for his wisdom and insight on community issues.

9. 2021 Census Data Relating to Faith

Canon Dr Andrew Smith, Director of Interfaith Relations reported on the 2021 Census and how the data related to faith. A copy of his presentation is attached to the Minutes.

The Revd Patrick Gerard (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) noted that all organised groups are suffering the same as the church with attracting volunteers etc and this extends across other religions. How do we respond to this challenge?

The Revd Geoff Lanham (Yardley & Solihull Deanery) stated that we need to engage and respond to a changing Christian community. Churches are now stronger with engagement than years ago.

The Revd Bamidele Sotonwa (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) asked what data is available in relation to students coming into the country and settling? Andrew Smith responded that this level of data was not currently available.

Mr Andy Winmill (Director Mission Support) reported that there was still work to do in relation to behaviour in schools etc as many young people are expressing an interest in the occult. We need to acknowledge this and equip our churches accordingly.

The Revd Canon Becky Stephens (Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery and Bishop’s Adviser in Women’s Ministry) raised a concern that with the rising number of other faiths in Birmingham, the visibility of faith leaders who are women will naturally decrease. How can we ensure the voice of female clergy in interfaith circles? Andrew Smith responded that amplifying the voices of women would be a challenge, however, he was encouraged by the number of women doing work in interfaith areas. He was aware of many influential Muslim women and an increasing number of Mosques which have women on their committees.

Andrew Smith noted that further analysis of the data will be taking place to give a deeper insight.

Bishop Anne thanked Andrew for his presentation, which had given Synod much food for thought.

10. Meeting Dates 2023 followed by The Blessing

The next meetings of Diocesan Synod are:

Thursday 13 July 2023 at 7pm

Saturday 18 November 2023 at 9.30am

Synod adjourned at 1pm with prayers led by Bishop Anne followed by the Blessing.

Summary of Resolutions

Agenda Item	Resolution
2.	The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS 221112
6.1	<p>The Diocesan Synod adopted the following motion put forward by the Revd Canon Catherine Grylls:</p> <p>This Synod agrees that an outline of the Church of England Birmingham’s decarbonisation plan will be presented at the November 2023 synod meeting. Such plans to be supplemented and amended as appropriate during 2024, including further clarification of the resources required to deliver net zero carbon across the diocese.</p>

Bishop's Presidential Briefing

At the last Diocesan Synod I offered at the start some "Bishop's reflections" and received feedback that this was appreciated. It's normal practice in most Diocesan Synods to have some form of Bishop's briefing. In the midst of so much going on in the world and the church it seems a helpful thing to offer. Indeed I was going to begin by reflecting on some of the challenging situations we face currently in the world and church, then I received a communication from Bishop Alinafe in one of our link dioceses in Malawi which rather set my thoughts in perspective. With permission I share with you.

My dear Bishop Anne

Greetings from Southern Malawi. The situation here [following the cyclone] remains very difficult. So far 499 people are reported dead, 427 still missing, 918 injured and hospitalized, over 500,000 are displaced and are currently being kept in camps - schools, churches, tents and anywhere where there is space. Lives, property, houses, crops, livestock and road infrastructure have been either washed away, damaged or destroyed. People have been traumatized and left with questions. Where was God when this was happening?

Diocesan-wise we have mobilized our members to take care of their neighbour. We have made an appeal in our parishes to collect whatever we can in terms of food, utensils, clothes, blankets and support those in camps. We have made appeals to other dioceses, both in Malawi and at Provincial level, and lastly to our mission partners, local and international. From our international partners, assistance will be channelled to us through our Anglican Council in Malawi.

Soon those in the camps will need to relocate and rebuild. What will be required are farm inputs: seeds and fertilizer, plastic sheets for temporary housing, food to support them to the next crop harvest, and all other materials to re-establish themselves again in the communities.

Thank you again for reaching out to us during this difficult time. Your prayers and your friendship are our life and our strength. Peace to you and every blessing.

The Right Reverend Alinafe Kalemba, Anglican Diocese of Southern Malawi, Chichiri, Blantyre

We will be revisiting the important subject of the environmental crisis again this morning, recognising the challenge to us of the targets we have set. Hearing of how climate change is impacting countries like Malawi is a salutary reminder of how stark a challenge we face. Cyclones and flooding such as that being experienced especially in Malawi are becoming much more frequent. We pray for our sisters and brothers in Malawi at this time and we will send financial aid. We must also take seriously our role as developed western nations in either adding to or limiting the effects of climate change on the world's poorest.

Meanwhile we do have plenty to be concerned about closer to home. This morning we will also be looking at the challenges of the cost of living crisis and our response as a church to that, remembering also the poorest in our own society. We will be seeking to understand more the changes and challenges in our local context for mission as Andrew steers us through some of the recent census data.

In the wider Church of England, there is also a mixture of challenges and possibilities as we continue to develop our shared vision around discipleship, children and young people, and being a mixed ecology church. There is also of course the Living in Love and Faith process – and it is to that I now turn.

We also have on our agenda this morning our usual report from General Synod, aware that on this occasion the report may be listened to with a heightened attention as Dawn will reflect on the Synod's response to the Bishops' proposals. We have accordingly given a little more time than usual on the agenda for questions of clarification of the Synod's discussion and of the process from here. As the only written questions received this time referenced the LLF process or matters relating to the welcome in the church of LGBT+ sisters and brothers, these will be taken immediately following the General Synod report and questions.

Having explained that today's agenda invites questions of clarification in relation to the report from General Synod, let me say more about my thinking as to how we travel the next stage of the LLF journey together. We have not been asked to bring a debate about LLF to Diocesan Synods. If you are interested in hearing the full debate in General Synod then you will find all 8 hours of it available via the C of E website. Having said that, this is a subject on which there is much strength of feeling and a range of views, which I also feel it is important for us to hear as a Diocesan Synod, even though we have no formal synodical role in the process. To that end I've started to consult with our General Synod representatives and am proposing that before the next meeting of the General Synod in July, we schedule in an extra opportunity for Diocesan Synod members to meet with them. This would be an extra gathering along similar lines to the extra meeting that was held to enable a fuller discussion of our environmental targets. It would enable us to give some reflective space to hearing from one another once we have before us the work that is now being undertaken on refining the Prayers of Love and Faith and the work on the new Pastoral Guidance and reassurance of freedom of conscience. That listening will be enabled in a context in which the same values will be asked of Synod as are asked of us as bishops when we meet to discuss difficult matters, values which remind us that we are people of GRACE. Values which include –

Gratitude ... to God, thankful for his call, for the church, and for one another.

Ephesians 1.16

Relationship .. we pray and worship together; relate to one another with generosity and respect; suspend judgement; maintain open dialogue; and are curious to understand different points of view.

John 15.9

Attentiveness .. We are attentive to God's voice in community; power and weakness; biases in us and our systems; our ongoing learning and growth; and to challenging unhelpful patterns and behaviours.

Galatians 5.22-23

Compassion .. We are motivated by love and compassion and will treat one another, and the church, with mercy and kindness.

Matthew 5.7

Encouragement .. We will seek to build one another up and to expand our capacity for trust, courage, truth and hope.

Ephesians 4.11-13

Within the framework of these values, this opportunity for Diocesan Synod members would be a valuable one, not only to enable our General Synod representatives to attend Synod mindful of the range of views held here in our Birmingham Synod, but might enable all of us to hear and understand a little bit more views different from our own, but held with integrity and deep love for the church. I believe that we can only discern God's way forward for us as a church when we are committed to this work of listening and learning. So I'd like to ask you a few questions.

Who has taken part in an LLF course? Who has read the main volume of LLF? Who has read this report following the conclusion of the LLF learning period that draws together over 6000 individual and group response from across the church? Who has spent time on the LLF online Learning Hub engaging with some of the video material there? Who has spent time delving into the online LLF library containing a rich collection of theological essays going deeper on some of the areas covered by the main LLF volume?

I ask because it's been my growing sense as I've received a number of letters and correspondence, that there remains a considerable gulf in understanding of the material that LLF has set before us and therefore little common ground for informed discussion. I'd like to remind you of the journey that we were invited on as a church. Living in Love and Faith began its life in the context of deep disagreement. Its aim was to help the church to become a learning community. In order to better understand our disagreements, we have been asked to explore the many aspects of sexuality and identity: theological, anthropological, scientific, historical and biblical. This has involved discovering that when we learn together we begin to understand each other's perspectives better and that God's people do not speak with one voice. Many have travelled this journey and it has brought new hope. You can read their responses in the Listening with Love and Faith report.

Until all of us have engaged to some degree with the same journey, it is difficult to have meaningful conversation because our starting points can be so different. We simply cannot just exchange soundbites on such an important subject but need to engage deeply. So between now and July, I encourage you as members of Diocesan Synod, to take up or continue your own learning journey, so that come July, we might have a genuine opportunity to hear and understand better something of one another – even if we ultimately find ourselves confirmed in our current views.

But of course this is all about so much more than simply "views" and it is not about abstract debate. This is about real people and their lives. There will be those present today whose lives and deepest instincts of love are impacted profoundly by how we as a church welcome or don't welcome them. There will be many present who have sons or daughters, family and friends who are gay – some seeking to live celibate lives, and some in committed and faithful same-sex partnerships. God calls us to tread lightly and lovingly in the challenging conversation we are seeking to have as a church.

God calls us above all to allow the mind of Christ to be formed within us. This is what our Christian discipleship is all about – "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus", as it says in Philippians 2.

I'm reflecting on how the one-time popular wristbands had something going for them with their bold lettering WWJD – "What Would Jesus Do"? I think that simple question may be a good one to continue to ask ourselves as we engage with real people and real lives, with one another, and as we seek to reflect the radical Christian inclusion that the archbishops have called us to.

General Synod Report prepared for Diocesan Synod Meeting on Saturday 25 March 2023.

General Synod took place between Monday 6 to Thursday, 9 February 2023.

The regular representatives from Birmingham were joined by Bishop Anne Hollinghurst and Father Philip Calvert for his first General Synod meeting.

Living in Love and Faith:

The main agenda item was undoubtedly the proposal to provide “Prayers of Love and Faith” – a suite of optional resources offering prayers of thanksgiving, dedication or prayers for God’s blessing to be used to mark significant steps of commitment in same-sex relationships, including following same-sex civil partnerships or civil marriages. This generated a significant amount of questions ahead of General Synod, supplementary questions and passionate debate throughout. The formal motion was proposed by the Bishop of London, the Rt Rev Sarah Mullally, and amongst other things, sought to lament and repent the failure of the church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people and the harm that they have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church. It further sought agreement to welcome the House of Bishops’ decision to replace Issues in Human Sexuality with new pastoral guidance and to commend and issue the “Prayers of Love and Faith”, a draft of which was produced for General Synod.

This motion spanned close to 9 hours of debates, motions, proposed amendments and votes over 4 days. There was a range of contributions from every side of the debate, including opposition on theological grounds; some felt that this was a slippery slope towards marriage of same-sex couples, a blurring the lines of the current Canon B 30 that states that Holy Matrimony is a permanent and lifelong union between one man and one woman, to those who did not believe that the motion went far enough. We heard from those who felt that the proposed Pastoral Guidance document in which much of the detail of context for use will be set out, was necessary before General Synod should be asked to vote. Without this Pastoral Guidance some clergy members felt they could be exposed to discrimination claims from either side of the debate. We heard views in the main chamber and in smaller groups to allow for wider or more ‘safe space’ sharing. The views of the wider Anglican Communion were appealed to but it was also noted that views within the Communion were varied. Archbishop Justin spoke of how there has been and remains a deep commitment to conversation with primates / bishops across the Anglican Communion and of his own personal commitment to the communion from the start of his ministry as Archbishop. Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Representative) felt that the distinction between prayers for God’s blessing and Holy Matrimony in these circumstances sounded like a mere technicality.

The afternoon of Wednesday 8 February saw Synod consider a significant number of proposed amendments to the main motion, each one being debated and voted on by

House. Due to the sheer number of amendments proposed, this session re-convened on Thursday 9 February.

In the end, all the proposed amendments were defeated except one. The amendment was as follows:

'Endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England'.

Outcome: The motion was passed as set out below (for-against-abstentions).

Bishops: 36-4-2

Clergy: 111-85-3

Laity: 103-92-5

The above shows that particularly amongst Clergy and Laity there were very split views.

Next Steps:

The Next Steps Group chaired by Bishop Mullally will now reflect on the views aired as work on the Pastoral Guidance is undertaken and as the prayers are refined. They will also consider how best to provide assurance for those who believe that the prayers go against their doctrine. Work will commence shortly on the Pastoral Guidance recognising that for many clergy, this will be a very critical document to give them reassurance about protection from discrimination. We heard a lot about trust in the process from the Bishops as they prayerfully consider the 'takeaways' and the next steps.

Other matters:

Safeguarding: General Synod had the opportunity to hear from the newly appointed National Director of Safeguarding, Alex Kubeyinje. Passionate concerns/rebuke were raised by members about the unacceptably slow pace of progress for the IICSA recommended redress scheme for victims and survivors of church related abuse.

Cost of Living Crisis: General Synod unanimously carried a motion on the cost of living crisis which recognised the deepening crisis on ordinary people, to pray for those whose efforts help mitigate human suffering and to commit ourselves to doing all we can to support the most vulnerable. The motion further called on the government to recognise that the resilience of the nation, communities and people is limited and advocated for policies that offer generous support to those who are falling into poverty. Our Bishop Anne contributed to this debate by highlighting the collaborative work of THRIVE, where the church, the community and the local authority work in partnership.

Governance Review: This will be picked up in July.

Legislative Amendments: Wedding and funeral fees to rise by no more than 5%.

Other: The AGM of The Queen Victoria Clergy Fund was held. This Fund continues to support clergy in hardship. A plea from the Chair for all Dioceses to respond to requests for updates as to how fund is being used (suitably anonymised).

Report prepared by Dawn Brathwaite, GS250

Update Report Presented to Diocesan Synod on Saturday 25th March 2023

This update is presented on behalf of the Racial Justice board, to synod, and I will like to commend this scripture to us for reflections, as we continue to engage with the implementation of “From lament to Action” with openness of heart to the Holy Spirit.

“34 Then Peter began to speak: I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. Acts 10: 34-36”

The board was inaugurated in September 2022 and the past 6 months have been used to strengthen the foundation the board is building upon. The major focus have been on the implementation of the different recommendations contained in “ From lament to action report” within the diocese with the most recent being these two key areas:

Data collection:

The establishment of a data monitoring system that would help us keep sight on the progress we are making to ensure diversity in our recruitments. This piece of work is in conjunction with the diocesan secretary and HR director who both work with colleagues AT the NCI to monitor our report structure and ensure that diversity is reflected in the recruitment of staff in Church of England Birmingham.

This is by no means an easy process because candidates who apply for jobs and who are recruited eventually may choose to (or not) to supply information about their ethnicity. But regardless of that bottleneck, the diocesan secretary and HR director are committed to ensuring that we are able to generate this data.

Data is collated on basis of anonymity and would be done on a quarterly or half yearly basis and would be captured for DBF support posts and clergy posts

- Interview panels

In order to maximise the potentials of Interview panels in Church of England Birmingham, effort is being made to ensure that interview panels not only reflect diversity but that individuals with the right skills sets are invited from across the diocese, to be part of these panels, whenever there are interviews to be conducted.

To achieve this, an online form is currently being designed by the HR director which can be used by individuals with specialist skills, to express their willingness and availability to be part of interview panels.

When this online form is ready to go live, the support of the Cathedral, Area Deans, incumbents, priest-in-charge, readers, wardens, would be appreciated in creating an awareness amongst members, particularly those of GMH background.

Race module: this is currently being developed to help us engage with the dynamics of racial justice to defeat the sin of racism. This is being proposed as the next stage after the unconscious bias training. The details of this module will be presented to synod at the next meeting.

Thank you.

The Revd Canon Dele Sotonwa
Chair, Racial Justice Board
Church of England Birmingham