



## BIRMINGHAM DIOCESAN SYNOD (DS)

Saturday 16 March 2024 at 9.30am  
Holy Trinity Parish Church, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1TF

### MINUTES

#### 1. Prayers and Welcome

Prayers and worship were led by the Revd Canon Becky Stephens, Priest-in-Charge at Holy Trinity Parish Church.

#### 2. Welcome to New People, Apologies and Previous Minutes

Bishop Michael was delighted to announce the following appointments: the Revd Philip Bowden, Vicar & Oversight Minister of St Mary the Virgin, Acocks Green; the Revd Christopher Kennedy, Vicar of St Mary Magdalene, Tanworth in Arden; the Revd Mark Danks, Vicar of St Paul, Blackheath. Warm thanks were given to Bishop Anne for chairing Diocesan Synod from November 2022 and for all her work and ministry as Acting Bishop during the Vacancy-in-See.

Bishop Michael noted the apologies given before the meeting. No further amendments to the Minutes of DS 231118 had been received so they stand as agreed by Bishop's Council.

**RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS 231118**

#### 3. Bishop's Presidential Briefing

Bishop Michael gave his Presidential Briefing, a copy of which is attached to the Minutes.

#### 4. Education at the Heart of the Church's Mission

Bishop Anne introduced the item on education and church schools. Members were reminded that Nigel Roberts, West Midlands Further Education Chaplaincy Ambassador had presented at Diocesan Synod in November 2022 and had spoken of the project to strengthening links between churches and further education within Birmingham. In giving an update, Bishop Anne was pleased to announce that progress has been made and that Matthew Bolton college in Sutton Coldfield have asked for help in establishing a chaplaincy team. She encouraged anyone who was interested in exploring chaplaincy, the discernment process and training to contact the Revd Claire Turner for further information.

Bishop Anne also urged members to read the publication '*Vocation, Transformation & Hope, A vision for the Church of England's Engagement with Further Education*' which was produced in 2021 and is available to download from the Church of England website.

Mrs Sarah Smith, Diocesan Director of Education, gave a presentation on mission in church schools and how they are enabling children to experience the transformative nature of God.

Mr John Heywood (Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery and a member of the Net Zero Carbon Group) asked if there was a possibility of school governors taking up the net zero carbon agenda and taking their enthusiasm into schools? Sarah responded that schools are aware of the targets but are burdened with several issues with little funding available to address them. However, practical measures are being undertaken such as preparing schools for when funding comes into place to change heat sources.

Miss Joan Ayre (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) raised a concern on connecting with schools when the church does not have a priest. Sarah acknowledged the difficulties when the church is in vacancy, however all schools would have some form of connection with someone who knows the gospel and she suggested finding a local contact.

Ms Dawn Brathwaite (General Synod Representative) thanked Sarah for the enlightening presentation, but she wished to hear further about the challenges. Sarah responded leadership is really important along with a commitment to school values. Finding the right leaders can be a struggle and prayers are needed for leaders that want to be in our schools. There are many accountability metrics such as Ofsted, thriving children, safeguarding etc and we must always ensure that we are offering the highest quality of education.

The Revd Canon Becky Stephens (Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery) noted that the wellbeing of teachers was important and that offering small gestures such as taking hot cross buns into schools and praying for them would be welcomed.

The Revd Toby Crowe (Yardley & Solihull Deanery & Chair of the House of Clergy) was invited to speak about the Easter Experience project in Sparkbrook. Toby explained that the project is aimed at years 5 and 6 and takes place every two years in a Victorian church building. Within this space, the Easter story is told by moving around the church. All schools that the parish has a relationship with are invited and there are currently six schools involved in the project.

Bishop Michael asked members to remember schools and our school teams in their prayers.

## **5. Global Mission**

The Revd Amanda Featherstone, Bishop's Advisor for Global Mission, explained her role leading this key Church of England Birmingham ministry, which has been built, over many years, on friendship and mutual learning. Amanda offered to meet with parishes seeking and preparing for engaging in immersive partnerships and extended her ministry in holding space for people to debrief those experiences once they've been overseas. She also offered to meet with mission communities to talk about their existing mission links and how to make more of them.

Members noted that as well as the long-standing link with Malawi, the diocese also has a newer link with Bolivia and Bishop Maurice was invited to speak to members about the trip to Bolivia along with the Revd Geoff Lanham during the summer of 2023. A copy of Bishop Maurice's presentation is attached to the Minutes.

The Revd Geoff Lanham shared a deeply engaging film of their visit and connection with the people and churches, sharing their vibrant worship and witness of God very much at work in lives of people there.

Dr Rachel Jepson (General Synod Representative) noted her involvement with Malawi and wished to learn more about how the link worked, as well as the cost and the brief for the visit. Geoff responded that funds for the visit had been raised by themselves and that while they had been able to share teaching, they mainly came away from the visit having learnt from their hosts.

Bishop Michael invited Geoff to pray for our friends, the Bishop and churches of Bolivia.

## **6. Racial Justice Update**

Dr Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary, explained that a bid had been submitted on behalf of the six dioceses of the West Midlands and she was delighted to announce that all the funding requested had been received. A process is now underway to create a regional team together with a legal framework. There will be a joint venture agreement between all six dioceses and the Regional Racial Justice Board will proceed to take this forward. This is a huge piece of work that focuses on deep culture change and implementing recommendations from the From Lament to Action report. We believe that working collaboratively will bring about significant changes and the national team are interested on to explore how collaborations between dioceses work. Birmingham has taken the lead on this exciting programme and Jan asked for our prayers as the journey continues.

## **7. Report of the proceedings of General Synod – February 2024**

The Revd Philip Calvert (General Synod Representative) reported on the February 2024 session of the General Synod. A copy of his report is attached to the Minutes.

Bishop Michael expressed his gratitude to all the General Synod Representatives for the time and hard work they each give to General Synod.

## **8. Vision and Strategy**

Dr Jan Smart gave a presentation on vision and strategy. A copy of her presentation is attached to the Minutes.

Mr Jonathan Goll (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) expressed his concern about the emphasis on leadership when parishes are struggling with other roles such as Treasurers. Jan responded that today's presentation was focussed on strategic change, not the equally valuable core work of parishes. The difficulty in recruiting Treasurers is acknowledged and the Finance Team do what they can to help with limited resources.

The Revd Patrick Gerard (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) welcomed the part about talking to the Church Commissioners about the basic fabric of the church rather than strategic issues. A rebalancing depends on having people on the ground and he welcomed the exploration. Jan explained that a significant piece of financial analysis and modelling is taking place to inform the conversations. She also noted that most dioceses are running structural deficits. Some have large historic assets to rely on to cover annual deficits, but Birmingham does not, and, in any case, this would not be the right way to run an organisation.

The Revd Ben Green (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) raised a concern regarding clergy pensions and funding. Jan replied that this is not yet in scope in the national financial review, but a response is being sought from the Church Commissioners. The Revd Philip Calvert added that the point was made at General Synod with regards to the amount of money being held by the Church Commissioners.

The Revd Emma Sykes (Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery) asked how much work is being undertaken with communities and partnering with other organisations. Jan agreed that partnerships are important and Thrive is a great example. When local funding initiatives are available, this is shared via the Bulletin, but applying for bids does take a lot of work.

Mr Adam Chinery-North (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) stated that he was aware that the Church Commissioners are currently sitting on £10billion and asked if there was scope for individual churches to approach the Commissioners directly for funding. Jan explained that this is not currently available as Church Commissioners normally work through diocesan teams who in turn work with parishes.

Jan ended by saying it is important for our parishes to be aware of our financial situation and the national context. Diocesan Synod members are encouraged to share this with their deaneries and parishes.

## 9. Environmental Update

Members noted the following update:

The Net Zero Project Manager, Ben Smith has now been appointed. Ben is aiming to produce a more comprehensive Net Zero Carbon Plan for the CoFE Birmingham which he will share with Synod in Autumn 2024.

Two churches have been invited by the national team to submit their applications for the Net Zero Carbon Demonstrator Project: St Martin in the Bullring for preparatory funding and St Germain Edgbaston for capital funding.

Our Eco Diocese Silver application has been submitted to A Rocha and we are now awaiting the outcome. Potentially we could become the first silver Diocese in the Church of England. Thanks were given to those who are working on the silver award.

### Progress Update Fossil Fuel Investments

Members noted the paper DS 240316 9, a copy of which is attached to the Minutes.

The Revd Canon Catherine Grylls (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) gave her thanks to the Finance Director, Ms Karen Preece, for delivering against the recommendations approved by Diocesan Synod in March 2022.

## 10. Questions

### 10.1a Question from the Revd Katie Stock (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery)

*In GS2277, The Church of England Clergy Conduct Measure Implementation Group identified the need for a policy to identify vexatious and malicious complaints. It states:*

*'As much as the Church must defend her integrity and that of Holy Orders, she must also protect her clergy from frivolous, malicious and vexatious accusations. Clergy offer a sacrificial ministry with limited material reward. Allegations of wrongdoing not only cause stress and anxiety but also threaten the home and income. Disciplinary procedures therefore must be robust in providing protection against misuse.'*

*How are our diocesan disciplinary procedures currently protecting clergy from vexatious and malicious complaints and how might these procedures be improved?*

**10.1b Answer from Dr Jan Smart (Diocesan Secretary)**

*For complaints raised through the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM), there is an initial assessment of the complaint by the Registrar. The Registrar will scrutinise the complaint to determine whether or not there is sufficient substance in the complaint to justify proceeding with the CDM.*

*Our diocesan Dignity at Work policy, which can be found in the Clergy Handbook, makes clear that false (or clearly unfounded or deliberately malicious) accusations are a serious matter and that where possible formal action taken. In the case of a clergy person this may be a complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure; for a lay licensed or commissioned minister, a review of such licence by the Bishop; and, for DBF staff the complaints process alongside the disciplinary policy.*

*Whilst there haven't been any complaints in recent history which could be called vexatious and/or malicious, if such a complaint was to be proven as such the Bishop and/or Archdeacon would meet with the individual concerned to explain how the making of such complaints is unacceptable and try to understand any underlying reasons prior to any further action being taken, if available.*

*It should be noted that a couple of motions related to lay church officers were brought to the February 2024 Group of Sessions of the General Synod, specifically contained in GS2335 and GS2339 which deal with a Code of Conduct for PCCs and Bullying by Lay Officers, respectively. We look forward to the work requested in these proposals being undertaken by the Archbishops' Council as, at present, the Church Representation Rules do not provide for the removal of lay officers where poor conduct or bullying has taken place.*

**11. Meeting Dates 2023 followed by The Blessing**

Members of the Diocesan Synod noted the meeting dates for 2024:

Saturday 29 June 2024 at 9.30am

Saturday 16 November 2024 at 9.30am

On behalf of Diocesan Synod, Bishop Michael thanked the Revd Canon Becky Stephens and members of Holy Trinity Church for hosting the meeting. He also expressed his gratitude to all Synodical representatives and members for their strong commitment and investment of time and energy and called us to pray for them all.

Synod adjourned at 12.30pm with prayers led by Bishop Michael followed by the Blessing.

**Summary of Resolutions**

Agenda Item	Resolution
2.	The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS 231118

**Birmingham Diocesan Synod**  
**Saturday 16 March 2024**

**Presidential Briefing. Bishop Michael**

*'It is good to be here'*. These words, spoken during my Installation sermon at St.Philip's Cathedral on 2 March continue to hold true. My family and I have received a wonderfully warm welcome here in Birmingham for which we are deeply grateful.

That afternoon at the cathedral, having climbed the pulpit steps, I began my sermon with these words:

*Jesus said, 'Abide in me... If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'*

This too, continues to hold true. These words are critically significant to the church; the people-of-God-in-mission. A focus on living deeply into Jesus' call to abide in him is something I believe God has particularly put on my heart for myself and for those I serve as Bishop of Birmingham. More on these words of Jesus in a moment...

The process of appointing a diocesan bishop is rigorous and lengthy(!) After many months, during which my wife Rachel, our children and I made several visits to the city and wider region (we found IKEA...!), I finally arrived at Bishop's Croft on Wednesday 31 Jan. That afternoon I began as, in God's grace, I intend to go on, with a home visit to a local parish priest. A good deal more have followed and if I haven't reached you yet, please bear with Pat and I as we plan for the coming months. In fact, February was mostly meeting people and finding places; JC House, B4 carpark, St. Chad's Cathedral, Boston Tea Party, the train to Sutton Coldfield, alongside churches and vicarages across the six deaneries.

I was blessed with induction meetings with some of the myriad people who give generously of their time, gifts and expertise to make Church of England Birmingham and our partner churches function. I am beginning to form working relationships, starting to understand what people do, and the particular struggles, joys and encouragements they face.

Since my Installation in early March, I have begun to chair meetings, lead worship and take a more visible role in the life of Church of England Birmingham. My focus is on listening, learning, encouraging, praying and seeking to understand what God is doing in and through his faithful people in this place.

Guided by our vision of Transforming Churches, and our desire to see growth at the heart of each community, it appears to me that work on forming Oversight Areas is making good progress; progress which I am keen to support and encourage.

I have much to learn and discover. But as I begin to understand I am encouraged. God has called together gifted and faithful people. Individuals who are diligent and who bring energy and hope to their roles. Combined with faithful prayer and a desire to please God, we can

certainly look forward with expectation and give thanks for all that God will provide and accomplish.

We have wonderful parish priests, curates, SSMs, Local Ministers, PTOs, Lay Readers, lay workers, youth, children and family workers and outstanding teams in Education, Mission-Support, Finance, Property, Governance, HR, Safeguarding, Comms, Ministry, Deanery Support, Learning and Development, Pathways and Projects.

Alongside many other initiatives these drive and resource our work on church planting and revitalisation, local and regional racial justice, attention to disability, accessibility, LGBT+ inclusion, care for the environment, and our relationships with a range of partners including with our link dioceses in Bolivia and Malawi. This list names just a few of the facets of Church of England Birmingham, which give us a great deal to be encouraged about and much to thank God for.

Jesus said, 'Abide in me... If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'

In my Installation sermon I spoke about *what* abiding in Jesus means; being attentive and active rather than distracted or passive. *Who* it is that says '*abide in me*'; the one through whom all things were created. *Why* he asks us to abide in him; because of the vast missional need and the fact that only in and through him can we be fruitful. *How* we abide in him; through studying our bible, prayer, worship with others, and acts of loving service. *What* the fruit looks like; 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control'.

I concluded the sermon by committing myself to abiding in Jesus, without whom I have nothing to offer, and by encouraging those listening to do the same. To quote the sermon, '*I invite you to... abide in him today – this afternoon – this coming week, and trust that as we do so, we will bear fruit that will last and participate in helping to realise God's hopeful future for Birmingham and the region, for the United Kingdom and, indeed, for the whole world.*'

This Synod, practically speaking, is a body which provides a way of discussing the issues of the day. Different parts of the church come together as the body of Christ so that we can, 'abide in Him'.

I encourage members of this Synod in your lives and ministries, to take these words of Jesus to heart in a new and deeper way. To abide in him, in order that together as Church of England Birmingham, we might bear abundant fruit for the Kingdom.

The need for the good news of the gospel and the transformation it brings is great. Locally and globally, individuals, communities and nations face significant social, political, and economic challenges. Rooted in our faith in God, Christian people – including all of us here in Church of England Birmingham - have much to offer at such a time as this.

On Tuesday 6 March, as part of a set of measures to address its financial crisis, Birmingham City Council voted to approve more than £150m of cuts to services. Labour leader, Councillor

John Cotton, with whom I spent time the following day, apologised to the people of Birmingham, and spoke in the media of his, 'deep sorrow' at presenting a budget that would, 'impact every resident'.

The cuts certainly will impact every resident. And even as cuts loom, the budget itself predicts increased demand on services, particularly in adults and children's social care and housing. The city and region, already struggling with significant levels of poverty and deprivation, is facing an enormous rise in need. More people, especially children and young people, will find themselves in poverty. They will face a drastically diminished quality of daily life and a future that looks bleak.

This is the time for Christian people to step forward in loving service. I recognise that many of us are already doing much. But more will be needed. More from our fellow Christians, from our partners of other faiths, and from Church of England Birmingham. God is full of compassion and love. God longs for human beings to know him and to be clothed with dignity. Under God, therefore, serving those hit hardest by the cuts will be a major focus for us for several years at least.

The Old Testament reading at my Installation was from Isaiah 58. In it the prophet says,

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

In this coming season, as we strive for growing churches at the heart of each community, these will be congregations that, 'share their food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter', who clothe the naked and do not turn away from those in need. As we attend to God's will in this, the prophet assures us that our, 'light will break forth like the dawn, and our healing will quickly appear'. We will call and the Lord will answer.

And so, I encourage us to trust in God; to put our faith in God's willingness and ability to provide for our needs, to abide deeply in Jesus and to step forward in radical service to those in desperate need.



This time of financial crisis and drastic cuts is the moment for the church to offer the good news of Jesus with confidence and joy. This will be demonstrated in multiple acts of kindness and generosity and will serve as a beacon of hope in dark and desolate times. I look forward to being with and alongside you in this season as we put our hearts and hands to God's kingdom work and move into God's hopeful future.

**Rt Rev Dr Michael Volland, Bishop of Birmingham**

## **BOLIVIA PRESENTATION - Maurice Sinclair's Contribution**

With Manda Featherstone and with Geoff Lanham I am so pleased to have this opportunity to share with you news of this partner church of Bolivia we have grown to love. First Bishop Walter Toro has asked me to give to all of you members of this synod his cordial greetings.

Now a little bit of history: Just over 16 years ago a priest from the Anglican Church in Bolivia accompanied with his wife arrived in the UK with a train ticket, enabling them to visit every cathedral city in England. Their mission was to establish a companion relationship with an English diocese. My wife and I happened to meet them, and had them to stay with us in Birmingham. We introduced them to Bishop David, and he welcomed them warmly. That was the very beginning of what has turned into a very happy, and I believe significant, diocesan partnership.

But why Bolivia and why Birmingham? Part of what make this relationship important is the difference between us. We belong to the mother church of the Anglican Communion with its long history. Bolivia has the newest member church in the Communion; fifty years ago there was no Anglican Church in Bolivia. Anglican missionaries from Peru began work there in the 70s, invited by the Bolivian Council of Evangelical Churches.

Since then 5 Anglican congregations have been planted in 4 major cities with church plants in formation. Each of these cities is a mission field of huge proportions: La Paz, the administrative capital with its Aymara and Quechua population crowding in from the Altiplano; Santa Cruz, in the lowlands, racially different and more industrialised; Cochabamba a city with new ambitions; it has a statue of Christ high than the one in Rio; Tarija different again with a proud history and a tradition for education. These are major cities on the scale of Birmingham. But for the Diocese of Bolivia as a whole a big difference remains. It is geographically huge, but its membership is still only small. The Bolivians are grappling with the challenges of being a new church; our challenge as an older church is to become new.

So how has the Bolivian Partnership worked out? It has flourished through a series of reciprocal visits. A team visit from Birmingham in 2012 was of crucial importance. The twelve of us visited all four cities, and then shared at the end in a training conference bringing local Bolivian leaders together: something that previously they were unable to do, because of distance and cost of travel. Distance also had complicated relationships and this conference was the occasion of a wonderful reconciliation. Since then visits to Bolivia have deepened friendships, provided opportunities for worship and witness together, and training. Bolivians coming to Birmingham have been an inspiration to the congregations that have received them here. Currently 7 of our congregations are seriously involved in the partnership. Especially notable was the visit in September 2022 of Bishop Walter Toro and his wife Adela. Walter is the first Bolivian Anglican Bishop and his consecration has come at a time when his church is led entirely by Bolivians.

What then are the challenges of the Bolivian Anglican Church in this early stage of its development? How can we help them and how can they help us? They have gifted and very hard working local leaders, but this is a nucleus with few reserves. There is an urgent need to raise up new ordained and lay ministers. The conditions of those working in the churches are very tough. In comparison, ours are extremely good. Then too their sphere of mission is a hard one. The society they serve is even more unequal in terms of wealth and poverty. Political corruption and regional strife is endemic,

making poverty even worse. Although Bolivia is becoming more secular, traditional religion still holds a grip on people and has some sinister expressions. On one visit Bishop David and I went down a mine in Potosi and we met miners pouring out libations to the devil. Anglicans in Bolivia have a special opportunity to reach out to spiritually needy, disillusioned, and unchurched Bolivians. There is a thirst there for a church and a ministry which has roots in history, and is recognisably catholic as well as biblical and evangelical, and indeed one that meets deep pastoral needs. Anglicans have invitations to enter new cities, but would that spread them thinly?

With all their difficulties and opportunities what can our Bolivian brothers and sisters do for us? Two things at least: They can alert us to the urgent need to train and mobilise our membership. If they don't raise up new leaders, they will not survive. If we fail to do so, we are in danger of serious decline. Even more important, though, is their joyful exercise of faith. They trust God in circumstances that are very insecure, but they trust him. This example is contagious

It is time now to hear from Geoff, who chairs the Bolivia Task Group, and to see and hear something of the visit to Bolivia last August

Note this completion of the report was shortened through lack of time.

I would like to now suggest some specific ways that congregations here become actively involved in this link. It is great that seven are committed but it would be wonderful if many more joined in. Let me say at the outset that there are two limiting factors in this partnership. One is distance and the other is finance. Bolivia is 7,000 miles away. For reasons of environment and cost visits need to be spaced out. We have never been in a position to give the kind of financial help to the Bolivian church that covers salaries. There is no plan to do so. Having said that, new factors comes into the equation. Social media and zoom or other online conferencing have a wonderful way of shrinking distance. Online we can now maintain and deepen friendships, exchange news, and engage in prayer. Out of these, new possibilities of cooperation arise. These are already being focused through a twinning relationship between Birmingham and Bolivian congregations. There is a language difference to overcome but this hasn't proved insuperable. Then there is the possibility of training using zoom. Imagine yourself in Birmingham contributing in a training course in Bolivia. You would be on the same screen in just the same way as the Bolivians. The fact that you were thousands of miles away and the other participant were at most only a hundred miles apart wouldn't make much difference.

Through these contacts, quite specific needs crop up. And not least, for those who pastor the Bolivian congregations. Bishop Walter wants to establish a welfare fund for his clergy. We want to contribute to it. Relatively small amounts can make a big difference. One way congregations here could help is my contributing to a Christmas donation. What we sent last year contributed to some very specific needs of the pastors and an excellent children's programme.

Lastly there is contribute books and courses to help equip more local leaders. Do visit our Bolivia display stand where you will find what has been produced at the request of the Bishops in Bolivia and Northern Argentina. What you will see is in English but the exact equivalent is in Spanish and already in use in Bolivia. The hope is that the English versions will also be of value. So do have a look at what is available on the Bolivia display table, including copies of a diocesan bulletin.

## Report to Diocesan Synod on General Synod Feb 23-27 2024.

The February session of General synod took place at Church House, Westminster from Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> to Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup>.

After the opening worship and introductions and welcomes, during which Bishop Michael was welcomed to Synod, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave the presidential address. The theme was on being the Church in a world of suffering.

Archbishop Justin said: *“God is greater than our fears, our enemies and our failures. He is unbreakably faithful. When that is our comfort and peace, then in this world of suffering we can truly be God’s Church for God’s world.”*

*‘We live in a world of suffering,’* he added, *‘and unlike in the past, it is a world where we are aware of the suffering.’* He spoke of how the psalms address the matter of suffering and of how bishop George Bell, in 1939, said that in *‘a time of war the role of the church is to be even more the Church.’*

The full text of the archbishop’s address along with all synod papers and voting figures can be found on the General Synod website.

The first item of business was the final stage of Vacancy in See legislation to consolidate and simplify procedures in the event of an episcopal vacancy. This was passed and the Proclamations read by the Registrar.

A motion from London diocesan synod was sought to amend parochial fees rules so that a portion of funeral fees for services conducted at crematoria and cemeteries is retained the PCC. It is worth noting that Birmingham already does this!

Questions began an hour ahead of schedule and the session finished with evening worship at 7pm.

On Saturday morning business commenced with a motion moved from Chelmsford diocesan synod on a code of conduct for PCCs.

There was general support for the need for a safer environment in which to conduct PCC business but concerns were raised about the proposed approach. Two amendments were proposed: one suggested each PCC draw up it’s own code, the other to remove formal disciplinary procedures. Both amendments were lost. The item passed after it was pointed out this was a call for a review rather than a final solution.

Questions then resumed, covering topics such as Safeguarding and Statistics for mission.

The bishop of Stepney moved a motion on Safeguarding Independence. Sarah Wilkinson and Alexis Jay were thanked for their reports on the independent safeguarding board and the future of safeguarding. Proposed amendments included speeding up the process and improving its independence. Formal apology was made to survivors and those failed by the process. It was mentioned that 62 DSAs from 36 diocese had written to the Archbishop's Council expressing concerns which had not been addressed. It was also remarked that the terms of reference of the Jay report by -passed the question of *whether* safeguarding should be made independent and went straight to the question of *how* it might be done. Another comment was that independence would undermine the notion that Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The motion passed.

The bishop of Norwich moved an item on Land and Nature, the response to the ecological crisis and ways in which the church can use it's land to help Improve biodiversity.

A motion on a code of conduct for General Synod members was presented. Paul Cartwright, chair of the Business Committee said *'this side of heaven we are not perfect.'* The bishop of Blackburn added that synod *'is a place to listen to one another and to God.'* The motion passed.

The bishop of Oxford moved a motion on the future of work. Members discussed the changing landscape brought on by the rise of AI technology. Concerns were raised about the inequality of wealth and the value of unpaid work.

The day ended with evening worship at 7pm.

On Sunday morning some members accepted the invitation to attend worship at St Paul's cathedral whilst others took the opportunity to visit places of worship across the capital.

The afternoon session began with a motion moved by the bishop of Dover: *'Racial Justice: furthering the implementation of 'From Lament to action.'*

The bishop said *'there is one human race of whom God is the Father of all'*, and that *'racial justice is not an optional extra.'*

*'Racial justice and working for inclusion,'* she added, *'is love in action.'*

The archbishop of York said that there was an emerging theme to this synod: 'lament the past and look to the future.' Dawn Brathwaite, one of our Birmingham reps, spoke of 6 West Midlands diocese working collaboratively together in their interracial work, with a joint-venture arrangement for a regional justice board to take this work forward.

In a counted vote of the whole synod the motion passed with 364 votes in favour and 2 abstentions.

Bullying by lay officers was next. Testimony was given about the impacts of bullying but what constitutes bullying was not defined. It was raised that clergy already have the power for temporary excommunication but this is not often used.

Then came a discussion on amendments to standing orders, with a surprisingly lengthy discussion on whether the bell should be rung to inform members not in the chamber that a vote was about to take place.

The last item was a discussion on the Archbishop's Commission on Families and Households' report: '*Love Matters*'. This was moved by the bishop of Durham, who asked '*How can we support every family and enable them to flourish?*'

It was noted that the word 'marriage' was mentioned 250 times in the report.

In an excellent maiden speech, Guy Horden, one of our Birmingham reps spoke of the challenges of parenting alone, and how he had to face this after his wife died leaving him to raise four children single handed. Guy listed how the local church could help support single parents.

An amendment calling for marriage to be honoured as the best setting for bringing up children was defeated but the overall motion passed the next day.

On Monday we began with an item on the transatlantic slave trade. The presentation talked about a £100 million fund that will be used to make reparations for the church's past involvement in the slave trade.

Then came an update on parochial fees, chancel repairs and liability for them and the reappointment of 2 members of the Archbishop's council.

After lunch we finished the item on the Future of Work. The importance of securing a fair deal for workers but also the responsibilities of workers was discussed

After lunch the bishop of Blackburn introduced a lively discussion on estates evangelism. Bishop Philip spoke of how '*loving, worshipping communities can help liberate people and families*', but cautioned that COVID had a 'massive impact' on these churches and communities. There was a focus on resourcing and on the Church

being more present on the estates, on diocese prioritising estates ministry. We heard many moving accounts of where and how the Church makes a real difference in these areas of our cities.

We then discussed clergy pension benefits and how they have fallen behind. The motion called on the Archbishop's Council and Church Commissioners to look into a solution for this.

Finally, the bishop of Leicester introduced a motion on Living in Love and Faith, with a call to unity and reconciliation. Themes raised included the lack of speed in implementation, the importance of building trust.

This debate continued on Tuesday morning with amendments committed to openness and transparency passed. In the end the Synod overwhelmingly committed to move to next business without a vote on the original motion.

We then considered the Church Funds Investment Measure, which was followed by a debate on the war in Ukraine.

The motion was amended to call for the Government to maintain support for Ukraine until there is a just peace.

Lastly there was a debate on removing the canon requiring divorcees who remarry to obtain an archbishop's faculty in order to train for ordination. This was amended so the decision becomes a matter for the Diocesan Bishop and not the Archbishops.

After a farewell to the Rt Rev'd Paul Butler, bishop of Durham, Synod was prorogued until the July meeting in York.

Fr Philip Calvert.