



BIRMINGHAM DIOCESAN SYNOD (DS)

Saturday 16 November 2024 at 9.30am
St Barnabas Parish Church, High Street, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 6SY

MINUTES

1. **Service of Holy Communion** – Synod commenced with a Service of Holy Communion and the commissioning of the Revd Toby Crowe and Mr Anesu Muyambi as Chairs of the Houses of Clergy and Laity respectively

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

The Bishop was delighted to announce the following appointments and new Curates to the diocese: The Ven Phelim O’Hare as Archdeacon of Aston; the Revd Tony Rindl, Vicar of St Leonard’s Marston Green and Area Dean of Yardley & Solihull; the Revd Angela Hannafin, Vicar of the Benefice of Moseley; the Revd Lizzie Longhurst, Rector of St Mary’s Handsworth; the Revd Pete Norris, Associate Vicar of St Luke’s Birmingham; the Revd Danny Payne, Vicar of St John the Evangelist Perry Barr; the Revd Graham Wigley, Vicar of Emmanuel Wylde Green & Associate Minister of Holy Trinity Sutton Coldfield; the Revd Sandra Daniels, Aston & Nechells; the Revd Paul Lacey, St Martin in the Bull Ring; the Revd James Leavy, St John the Baptist Longbridge; the Revd Sian Nicholas, St Patrick Salter Street; the Revd James Parry, Curdworth, Middleton & Wishaw; the Revd Valerir Powell, Smethwick Old Church; the Revd Alan Walker, SS Peter & Paul, Water Orton.

The Bishop acknowledged the apologies given before the meeting and noted that no further amendments to the Minutes of DS 240629 had been received so they stand as agreed by Bishop’s Council.

Attendance lists are attached to the Minutes.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS 240629

3. **Bishop’s Presidential Briefing**

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

4. **Update on the appointment process for the incoming +Aston**

This item was covered in Bishop Michael’s Presidential Briefing.

5. **Diocesan Synod Membership and Election Results 2024-2027**

Members noted Diocesan Synod Membership and the Election Results for the Diocesan Synod Board/Council and Committee Members 2024-2027. A second round of nominations would be held to fill the remaining vacancies, the closing date for which would be 12 noon on 21 November 2024.

6. **Adoption of Birmingham Diocesan Synod Standing Orders 2024-2027**

Dr Jan Smart reported some small changes had been made to the Diocesan Synod Standing Orders being proposed for the new triennium which members had received in the accompanying paper.

The Revd Mike Sermon (Area Dean, Warley & Edgbaston) asked if guidance could be provided on forming questions and motions to Diocesan Synod. Jan responded that this information would be provided as an additional document to support the Standing Orders.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod adopted the Birmingham Diocesan Synod Standing Orders 2024-2027

7. Net Zero Carbon Action Plan

Mr Ben Smith, Net Zero Carbon Project Manager reported on the General Synod Motion of February 2020, which recognised that the global climate emergency called for a plan of action to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions to achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2030.

In 2022, CofE developed a Routemap of how we can achieve this, with actions and milestones for all areas within scope of the target and Ben gave an update on progress. A copy of his presentation is attached to the Minutes.

Mr Adam Bennett (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) asked if there was any resource or companies that would support parishes. Ben responded that there is a lot of national guidance including a path to net zero checklist. Ben reiterated that he would be happy to assist with any queries.

Mr Alfred Beckett (Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery) asked if the costs as quoted were current. Ben replied that the cost projection was carried out in 2023. In response to Alfred's second question on protected buildings, Ben responded that each church was different, and he would be happy to talk to any parish about their plans.

The Revd Patrick Gerard (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) raised a concern that emphasis seemed to be on those churches with the highest energy use and asked if there would be the same focus on smaller churches. Ben responded that there is currently a focus on the top 20% of energy-consuming churches due to resources. Once a clear plan has been established for those churches, focus will be given on the next bracket down.

Bishop Michael thanked Ben for his hard work on the Net Zero Carbon project.

The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 1 against and 2 abstentions.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod adopted the following motion put forward by the Revd Canon Catherine Grylls, member of the Diocesan Environmental Board and Net Zero Environment Group:

The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 3 abstentions.

That this Synod, having recognised that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation, and a fundamental injustice, affirming the fifth mark of mission and our Transforming Church vision for environmental sustainability, and building on the Environmental Policies agreed by this Synod since March 2018, endorses the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan 2024, detailing actions to the end of 2025, and laying a foundation for action 2026 – 2030.

8. Report of the Proceedings of General Synod – July 2024

Mr Guy Hordern, General Synod Representative, gave a summary of his paper which had been circulated before the meeting.

Revd Tracy Browne (Handsworth & Central Deanery) asked what we could expect to see on the ground with regards to Living in Love and Faith. Bishop Michael responded that, in terms of a timetable, in February 2025 the General Synod will receive an update, including detailed draft outlines. Diocesan Synods will be invited to discuss these outlines and provide feedback. In July 2025 proposals will go to General Synod for final consideration prior to implementation.

9. Strategy Update

Dr Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary, gave an update on the Diocesan strategy Vision.

TRANSFORMING CHURCH – GROWING CHURCHES AT THE HEART OF EACH COMMUNITY

As shared before, the main elements to our strategy are:

- Growth – Church Planting. Revitalisation and local parish growth in lots of different ways
- Structure & Culture Change
- Oversight Areas, Oversight Ministers, OAs work together culture of collaboration for mission
 - Sustainability
- Environment
- Financial Sustainability

In June next year we will have the opportunity to make a major funding bid to National Church for partnership over the next 10 years to support our strategy for TC. We will need to demonstrate in detail how we plan to achieve our strategy and what we are actually asking the national Church to partner with.

However, as you know we have very limited resources and you will be aware that since COVID significantly reduced our income from Common Fund, we have had to cover an annual operating deficit of around £1.5m each year since. This year we will need to channel money set aside for mission into covering that operating deficit.

So, given that situation, we have recently been awarded funding from the National Church to help with the planning process and also to keep going with mission while we are still in the planning phase. This funding will provide:

- capacity for the planning work via three short-term roles
- funding for mission as Anchor Church and St Mary & St Ambrose in Edgbaston join together in a new way (more of that in a moment) and
- funding to avoid us having to use our mission fund to cover the operating deficit in 2024

This is great news, and we are thankful not only for the cash (which of course we are!) but also that it demonstrates the confidence the National Church have in Birmingham Diocese, our leadership, our people and our ability to deliver.

This puts us in a strong position for 2025 when we will have created our strategy for the next 10 years of Transforming Church and we will then be ready to ask for long-term partnership and funding from the National Church. This will include seeking their support in our operating deficit as we transition back to being financially sustainable through a combination of growth and getting Common Fund back to the needed level.

Following Jan's report, a video was shown featuring Pat from St Mary & St Ambrose and Chris from Anchor Church as they talked about their joint hopes for this next season, made possible by the funding received. Jan asked members to prepare to be encouraged as they heard about how God is at work.

10. 2025 Budget

Ms Karen Preece, Finance Director, gave a presentation on the following topics:

- Current financial context – 2024
 - National picture
 - Management Accounts to September and forecast to December
 - Common Fund – September
 - Communication of our financial position
- 2025 Draft Budget
 - Income
 - Expenditure
 - Clergy/Lay numbers
- Management of deficit

A copy of her presentation is attached to the Minutes.

Members noted that the budget has been reviewed by FIPS in detail and was approved by Bishop's Council at their meeting on 9 October 2024. FIPS have considered the amendments necessary following the recent Government Budget and recommended that the budget be amended to reflect these. In line with our standard practice, the stipend and salary increase will be formally approved by Bishop's Council having taken account of the financial position at that time, at their meeting on 13 March 2025.

Steven gave his thanks to Karen, Jan and the finance team for their hard work.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod adopted the following motions put forward by the Chair of the DBF:

This synod authorises:

The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 1 against and 3 abstentions.

- a) expenditure of £11,461,000 in 2025 in accordance with the 2025 Budget following approval by Bishop's Council based on a parish stipendiary clergy deployment of 108.08 with an average of 5 vacancies and an average of 24 stipendiary curates-in-training;***

The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 1 against and 3 abstentions.

- b) an incumbent's stipend of £29,972 (+3.00% from 1 April 2025) and a staff salary rise of 3.00% with effect from 1 April 2025;*

and notes that at its meeting on 9 October 2024, the Bishop's Council has determined an interim approach to Common Fund for 2025 (projected income of £5,268,000) which will allow an aspect of "free will" to PCCs in their discernment of their contribution within the context of BDBF operating costs and their direct ministry provision.

11. Motions from Warley & Edgbaston Deanery

11.1 The Revd David Gould (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) to move the motion passed to Diocesan Synod by Warley & Edgbaston Deanery Synod on 13 June 2024:

Following our last W&E deanery synod meeting and in the light of:

- a. a rising diocesan financial annual deficit budgeted to be £1.6 million in 2024,*
- b. low clergy morale*
- c. and a widespread lack of awareness at parish level that we have a significant financial problem*

W&E deanery request that the diocese provide greater clarity and better engagement with parishes and deaneries concerning our financial future, so that we can properly participate in prayerful conversations that lead to a clear and understandable plan to eliminate the deficit within this financial year in order to restore morale amongst clergy and laity in the medium term.

The Revd David Gould spoke to the motion and raised his concern around communication and that underlying deficits were not being addressed. Within his own area, four churches had been closed and a church was rebuilt bringing 53 people together to form a congregation. Detailed structural problems with the church building were dealt with and his wish was for other parishes to enjoy the same privilege.

Mr Jonathan Goll (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) stated that each area was different, and that there were some large areas of the diocese that would not be favourably served with a merger.

The Revd Dr Al Barrett (Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery) was not convinced that there was a direct link to morale and the deficit. He felt that a motion related to the deficit in the current financial year was undesirable as it would require a quick shift in the way we do our finances. We should be inspired by wisdom that in urgent times, we need to travel slowly and it was important to engage a wide participation.

In response to a question raised by the Revd Ben Green (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery), it was confirmed that the deficit would be dealt with this financial year so that there would be something more sustainable in the new financial period.

The Revd Claire Turner (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) gave her support to the Finance Team as she had always received a quick response to any queries she had submitted. She added that information is available and that Treasurer meeting days had been warmly received. She suggested that it might be helpful for W&E deanery synod to discuss what they felt better communication would look like.

The motion was then put:

For = 6

Against = 20

Abstentions = 35

The motion was not carried but thanks were given to Warley & Edgbaston Deanery for bringing it to Synod.

11.2a The Revd Dr Katie Stock (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) to move the motion passed to Diocesan Synod by Warley & Edgbaston Deanery Synod on 13 June 2024:

At their meeting in June 2024, an item on vexatious complaints against clergy was presented to W&E deanery synod, which recognised the unique vulnerability of clergy to such complaints and synod are invited to support the following motion:

- a. Review current diocesan complaints policies for their suitability regarding complaints of a vexatious, malicious or querulant nature.*
- b. Bring forward policies which incorporate best practice to ensure complaints are handled on merit and in context, with provision and guidance on how to recognise and deal with vexatious, malicious and querulant grievances.*

11.2b The Revd Canon Catherine Grylls (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) to move the following amendment to replace the original motion:

This Synod, following a meeting in June 2024 of Warley & Edgbaston Deanery Synod, at which an item on vexatious complaints against clergy was presented, which recognised the unique vulnerability of clergy, call upon the Bishop of Birmingham to:

- a. Review current complaints policies for their suitability regarding complaints of a vexatious, malicious or querulant nature.*
- b. Bring forward policies which incorporate best practice to ensure complaints are handled on merit and in context, with provision and guidance on how to recognise and deal with vexatious, malicious and querulant complaints.*

The Revd Dr Katie Stock spoke to request adjournment of the debate on her motion. The reason for the adjournment was in relation to the national safeguarding-related events over the last week and it was felt that focus and energy should be on encouraging victims and survivors of abuse.

The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 3 against and 2 abstentions.

RESOLUTION: Diocesan Synod agreed to adjourn the following motion to a future meeting of Diocesan Synod:

This Synod, following a meeting in June 2024 of Warley & Edgbaston Deanery Synod, at which an item on vexatious complaints against clergy was presented, which recognised the unique vulnerability of clergy, call upon the Bishop of Birmingham to:

- a. Review current complaints policies for their suitability regarding complaints of a vexatious, malicious or querulant nature.*
- b. Bring forward policies which incorporate best practice to ensure complaints are handled on merit and in context, with provision and guidance on how to recognise and deal with vexatious, malicious and querulant complaints.*

12. Questions

12.1a Question from Mr John Heywood, Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery and BACA Member

A number of parishes are dismayed by the way that Parish Buying puts forward a subsidiary of Total Energies as a suitable renewable electricity supplier. In the light of the ambitions in the Net Zero Action Plan will the Environment Board be supportive of making fully transparent information on 'renewable electricity' available to PCCs and urge that the Parish Energy Basket negotiate a tariff with a truly 'renewable electricity' supplier?

12.1b Written response from Mr Ben Smith, Net Zero Carbon Project Manager

The CofE Net Zero Carbon Programme is currently working with external consultants to support it in developing the following work relating to green tariffs:

- 1. Definition of a Green Tariff for the Net Zero Carbon Programme (by 22 November 2024)*
- 2. Assessment of tariffs (domestic and non-domestic) to identify which existing tariffs meet this definition (by 13 December 2024)*
- 3. Assessment of the implications and viability of setting up a bespoke renewable energy tariff for the Church (by 17 January 2025)*

The NZC Programme's intention is that the Parish Buying Energy Basket will align with the CofE definition of a green tariff following this exercise. Further details should be released once this work relating to green tariffs is considered by the NZC Programme Board in February 2025, and guidance around green tariffs will be circulated to dioceses and parishes.

13. Meeting Dates 2025 followed by The Blessing

Members of the Diocesan Synod noted the meeting dates for 2025:

Saturday 15 March 2025 at 9.30am
 Saturday 28 June 2025 at 9.30am
 Saturday 15 November 2025 at 9.30am

On behalf of Diocesan Synod, Bishop Michael thanked the Revd Emma Sykes and members of St Barnabas Erdington for hosting the meeting.

Synod adjourned at 1pm 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 240629
6.	The Diocesan Synod adopted the Birmingham Diocesan Synod Standing Orders 2024-2027
7.	<p>The Diocesan Synod adopted the following motion put forward by the Revd Canon Catherine Grylls, member of the Diocesan Environmental Board and Net Zero Environment Group:</p> <p>The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 3 abstentions.</p> <p><i>That this Synod, having recognised that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God’s creation, and a fundamental injustice, affirming the fifth mark of mission and our Transforming Church vision for environmental sustainability, and building on the Environmental Policies agreed by this Synod since March 2018, endorses the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan 2024, detailing actions to the end of 2025, and laying a foundation for action 2026 – 2030.</i></p>
10.	<p>The Diocesan Synod adopted the following motions put forward by the Chair of the DBF:</p> <p>This synod authorises:</p> <p>The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 1 against and 3 abstentions.</p> <p>a) expenditure of £11,461,000 in 2025 in accordance with the 2025 Budget following approval by Bishop’s Council based on a parish stipendiary clergy deployment of 108.08 with an average of 5 vacancies and an average of 24 stipendiary curates-in-training;</p> <p>The following motion was put and carried on a show of hands with 1 against and 3 abstentions.</p> <p>b) an incumbent’s stipend of £29,972 (+3.00% from 1 April 2025) and a staff salary rise of 3.00% with effect from 1 April 2025;</p> <p>and notes that at its meeting on 9 October 2024, the Bishop’s Council has determined an interim approach to Common Fund for 2025 (projected income of £5,268,000) which will allow an aspect of “free will” to PCCs in their discernment of their contribution within the context of BDBF operating costs and their direct ministry provision.</p>
11.	<p>The Diocesan Synod agreed to adjourn the following motion to a future meeting of Diocesan Synod:</p> <p><i>This Synod, following a meeting in June 2024 of Warley & Edgbaston Deanery Synod, at which an item on vexatious complaints against clergy was presented, which recognised the unique vulnerability of clergy, call upon the Bishop of Birmingham to:</i></p> <p><i>a. Review current complaints policies for their suitability regarding complaints of a vexatious, malicious or querulant nature.</i></p> <p><i>b. Bring forward policies which incorporate best practice to ensure complaints are handled on merit and in context, with provision and guidance on how to recognise and deal with vexatious, malicious and querulant complaints.</i></p>

Diocesan Synod Presidential Address
Rt Rev Dr Michael Volland, Bishop of Birmingham
16 Nov 2024

“But what about you? [Jesus] asked. “who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:29)

This is a brilliant question, and one which anyone hearing it is prompted to answer. In the past I have enjoyed placing this question in public places, such as bus stops and benches. I like the idea of random passers-by being confronted with an invitation from scripture to consider who Jesus is.

This is the first half of Mark 8:29. The next part of the verse tells us that Peter responded, ‘You are the Messiah’.

Like Peter, we understand that Jesus is the Messiah. We are part of Church of England Birmingham because we believe that Jesus is alive and that he has commissioned his church to, ‘go and make disciples of all nations...’ (Matt 28:19).

Our vision is *‘growing churches at the heart of each community’*. This is a good vision. There is no need to change it. The People and Places strategy, with its commitment to six deaneries divided into oversight areas is solid and is already bearing fruit. We are well underway and will keep up our momentum because we believe that this is the right direction of travel for Church of England Birmingham.

We long to see a growing church. Not for its own sake. Not as a badge of success. And not as a result of management techniques imported from the world of business.

And, anyway, there is nothing any of us can do to make the church grow. This is God’s church and growth is God’s business.

For our part, we can be faithful in loving and worshipping God, in serving others and in seeking, intentionally to make disciples – as Jesus commanded us to do.

We can be committed to abiding in Jesus, to staying close to him, and to praying fervently that God will bless the church, and give growth in faith, hope, love, depth of maturity and yes, growth in numbers.

A healthy church is a growing church. There is room for growth. There is hope of growth because God is building the church, and people are happy to hear about Jesus.

The question I began with is a helpful one. ***“But what about you? [Jesus] asked. “who do you say I am?”*** As we find ways to put this question in front of people in humility, and

with love and compassion, we trust that the Holy Spirit will be at work in hearts and lives, bearing witness, revealing and making known. And as this happens, we anticipate that the church will grow.

And a growing church can contribute even more to the flourishing of this wonderful city and region. We do a great deal already. Many of you give above and beyond in time, effort, creativity and prayerful attention. These efforts in Jesus' name are highly valued in God's sight and nothing is lost.

As God grows God's church here in Birmingham, we may expect that we can offer even more by way of loving service, contributing to raising people out of poverty, providing dignity, contributing to a healthy, safe city in which there are opportunities for our young people, where racism becomes a thing of the past, and where hope and joy and love are tangible and experienced by many.

Following the publication of the Makin Report and the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, we recognise that this is a painful time for victims and survivors. And so, we continue to hold all who suffer or have suffered abuse in our prayers.

This is also a challenging time for the Church of England. And so we pray that God would give wisdom and courage to those responsible for bringing things into the light and ensuring justice is done.

We give great thanks for all those who are working towards a safer church. Here in Church of England Birmingham we commit ourselves to ensuring that our churches are safe places for all, and we thank our Safeguarding team for the quality work they have been doing and continue to undertake with us.

The Church continues with the LLF process. The schedule for four LLF working groups is in place and their membership has been agreed. The groups are as follows:

- *Prayers of Love and Faith* (Chair +Ruth Worsley)
- *Pastoral Reassurance* (Chair +Martyn Snow)
- *Bishops Statement Drafting Group* (+Martyn Snow)
- *Ministry and Vocations Guidance* (Chair +Sam Corley)

The Working Groups will act as advisory bodies drawing on a range of perspectives to provide integrated draft documentation for consideration by House of Bishops. Because

of the extent of current disagreement, the *Bishop's Statement Group* will meet with principal leaders of key stakeholder groups in the coming months.

In terms of a timetable, in February 2025 the General Synod will receive an update, including detailed draft outlines. Diocesan Synods will be invited to discuss these outlines and provide feedback. In July 2025 proposals will go to General Synod for final consideration prior to implementation.

We continue to hold the process and all involved in our prayers, asking God to help the church to navigate the coming months with compassion, wisdom and clarity.

MPs will debate and vote on the **Assisted Dying** bill on 29 Nov. The bill proposes that Adults with less than 6 months to live be given the right to end their own lives. Along with over 900 clergy, including 30 bishops, I have signed an open letter from clergy opposing proposed legislation.

The letter includes 'a call to improve the quality of life for all those living – including those who are dying'. It expresses a concern that assisted dying will become more widely available over time and increasingly acceptable, and it proposes greater investment in hospice and palliative care, ongoing research into pain relief, and greater support for families of those who are dying.

I don't doubt that across Church of England Birmingham there will be a variety of views on this complex and deeply personal question. I encourage us to engage with scripture, to think, pray and dialogue in order to come to an informed understanding and contribute fruitfully to ongoing discussion as we are able.

You are all aware that a process has been underway to discern whom God is calling to be the next **Bishop of Aston**. The Advisory Group met in October to interview candidates, and a person was invited to take up the role. That person's name has now been submitted to the King and we look forward to a potential announcement before Christmas. As a reminder, in the Person Specification, we asked for:

'A prayerful, hope-filled, mission-minded priest who has a deep commitment to seeing people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ...

He or she will be energised by our Transforming Church vision, will share our desire to see growing churches at the heart of each community and will have the gifts and experience to assist us in making this a reality.

A person of clear and generous theological conviction who can relate well and work with Christians of all traditions, and actively contribute to unity within the church.

The next Bishop of Aston will share my heart for racial justice and will be active, alongside me and others, in offering leadership to realise real and lasting change in order that Church of England Birmingham truly represents the breadth of diversity of the communities we serve.

Do continue to pray for this person as they and we prepare for the announcement and, in due course, to receive them as a co-worker in the gospel.

I am delighted that in Church of England Birmingham we are taking the first important steps towards **carbon net zero**. Our Carbon Net Zero manager, Ben Smith, is working with churches to obtain funding and develop plans to reduce emissions. Ben will be saying more as part of his presentation to Synod. I would like to thank you for all you are doing as individuals and parishes and to encourage you to continue on this challenging and prophetic journey.

In closing I would like to thank you for your ongoing commitment to the flourishing of Church of England Birmingham and for your loving service in communities across the city and region. We can give thanks for much that is good. And we have a hopeful future because we trust in a kind, compassionate and merciful God, who has promises that, '*I will be with you, and I will keep you.*' (Gen 28:15)