

A Summary of Diocesan Synod Meeting held via Zoom – 27 June 2020

Bishop John opened the meeting with prayer.

Diocesan Secretary, John Preston set out the process of holding a Diocesan Synod meeting via Zoom and explained that the Articles of Association of the DBF require any decisions made by the Diocesan Board of Finance during this synod meeting to be ratified at the meeting in November (if it is possible to meet in person).



The minutes of the last meeting were approved and there were no questions under Standing Order 71.



Bishop John gave his **Presidential Address** in which he said that the last synod in February seemed to have happened in a different world. The Coronavirus pandemic has changed everything and it has been a different experience for different people. Bishop John said that his heart went out to all those who have suffered during the pandemic, both here and abroad.

Bishop John explained that he believes that God will bring good out of the pandemic in a number of ways:

1. Reinforcing the profound truth that we're all dependent on each other. We've all been affected by the pandemic and no one been immune. As the Church we can play a real part in helping others through this – for example, through the 'Together' movement.
2. A greater appreciation of 'the essentials'. Thomas Traherne was insistent that the most important things in the world was the glory of God's creation, life and love; things that are so easy to take for granted but are essential for a happy and fulfilled life. Many of us have a better appreciation of creation as a result of our time in lockdown.
3. Moving away from 'the market society'. We have all benefited greatly from the market economy which has produced wealth and healthcare that our ancestors couldn't have dreamt of. However, this has often meant that things have only been appreciated because of their monetary worth. We need a recalibration of our society, for example through realising that the 'key workers' deserve much more than being applauded every Thursday evening. We rely on them: they deserve a fair and living wage.

Bishop John said: "I hope that as a result of the pandemic, we will love God, love one another and love God's creation more than we have done. And encourage others to do the same. As church, we can play a really big part to play in helping that to happen."

Director of Communications, Sam Setchell introduced a paper on the Church's **Response to Coronavirus**. She highlighted some of the great work that has happened as churches have been forced to completely change over the last few months and find new ways to connect with congregations and our wider communities. As things change again, Sam emphasised that there is no pressure to rush back to opening all our churches and said that this was a unique opportunity to look at everything that's been achieved and decide what to take forward alongside the best parts of traditional church. This was discussed by synod in smaller breakout groups.





Chair of Diocesan Board of Finance, Andy Todd, introduced the DBF's **annual report and accounts** and shared a few highlights. He reminded Synod that in 2018, the DBF spent more than £1m more than its income on mission and ministry. The plan during 2019 was to take steps to reduce the deficit and this has happened – the deficit for 2019 was £754k and this reflects cost reductions made at the diocesan office.

Parish share income also increased by 5.4% from 2018 to £4.8m and this is something we should celebrate and thank parishes for, although it still represents less than 90% of the total asked for.

Andy explained that a large proportion of our investments is glebe land and any income from this can only be spent on clergy stipends. The DBF investments performed well over the year, although it has been a bumpy ride for investments ever since. In 2019, investments contributed almost £1m which could be used on mission and ministry, reducing the cost falling on parishes.

The DBF has total reserves of over £70m, but all but just over £6.1m is restricted. Much is also tied up in buildings – it is not all cash in the bank.

Although Covid-19 doesn't directly impact the 2019 accounts, it does indirectly and Andy warned that the impact of the pandemic will loom large in the 2020 accounts.

Andy concluded by thanking Helen Archer Smith who led the preparation of the accounts for the first time and his predecessor, Alastair Findlay for his years of faithful service. He also expressed his thanks to the members of synod and all the parishes represented for their generosity.

Following an opportunity for questions, Andy moved the following resolutions, which were both unanimously carried:

Resolution No.1: "That the Annual Report and Accounts for 2019 of The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited be received."

Resolution No.2: "That haysmacintyre be reappointed as Auditors to The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited"

Diocesan Secretary, John Preston introduced an item on **Coronavirus & Financial issues**. He explained that it's tough for both the DBF and the parishes at the moment and is a really hard time to be a treasurer. A number of briefings have been held for treasurers with the key message that we're in this together and can get through it together, by supporting one another. Parishes are being asked to do what they can on paying parish share - we understand that it's a difficult situation. John noted that parish share receipts were currently still strong, showing real commitment from parishes and this was helping the DBF to weather the crisis better than expected, along with the sale of unrestricted equity investments to maximise cash and some property sales happening more quickly than anticipated. As a DBF it's important to make sure we have the cash to pay stipends and wages and are navigating this time to ensure we can manage the restructuring process effectively.

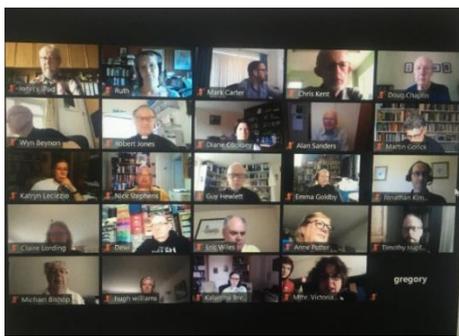


Synod had the chance to ask any questions in this area.

An update on the **Parish Share review** was introduced by the Archdeacon of Dudley, Nikki Groarke. She reminded synod of the decision after a debate at February's synod to move to a more cost-based model, adjusted for wealth. The review group were asked to go back and come up with more detailed proposals to enable the new system to be in place by 2021. However, the impact of the pandemic has meant that the group are now suggesting a slightly different approach.



Nikki explained that any new system needs to have the full buy-in of as many people as possible and it's not possible to have such a full and careful debate on zoom as it would be in real life. The review group is therefore suggesting that the full adoption of new share system should be deferred until 2022. For 2021, the group proposes that the same figures as this year are used (only adding any change agreed to stipends), while starting to use the language of a cost-based system. The parish share review group is still meeting and will bring detailed proposals back next year when we're hopefully able to meet in person. The idea is not to change the process, but to move much slower than had been originally anticipated.



Following some discussion around clergy stipends and the advantages of moving more slowly vs having an extra transition year, the approach suggested by the review group was approved.

Archdeacon Nikki, as the Diocesan Leader for Transition and Change, then presented a paper on the current progress of the **diocesan restructuring group**, explaining that her new role was possible thanks to the Archdeacon of Worcester, Robert Jones also taking on additional responsibilities to help free some of her time.

Nikki talked through some slight changes to the Diocesan Restructuring Group's objectives, which have been revised in the light of the coronavirus crisis. She said that the group was moving forward in developing a second booklet, which will update people more widely on the different strands of the restructuring process. The group is currently looking at how this can best be taken forward through online meetings and possible socially distanced traditional meetings to enable consultation throughout the Diocese. There are also a number of local discussions – some already happening to help move things forward. On the topic of deanery simplification, a proposal to reduce from 13 to 6 to enable more flexibility in how we use people across the areas has been discussed with a number of groups and a full consultation on this is just beginning.

Finally, we are confident in securing a grant from the Church Commissioners to be able to appoint a Deputy Diocesan Secretary – Restructuring who will help to underpin much of this work, along with consultants with previous experience in this area and a Champion for Smaller Churches.

Following questions around the importance of taking the implications of a likely recession into account and a request to ensure language used is understanding, the Synod split into breakout groups to discuss the question:

How can we best engage the wider diocese in our thinking in the coming months?

John Preston introduced a paper about a diocesan **Governance Review** saying that collectively as a DBF, we spend over 2000 hours a year in meetings! John explained that this is an opportunity to step back and reflect which is actually needed. Bishop's Council have commissioned a review with proposals brought to the November synod.

The **statutory reports of the Diocesan Board of Education and the Diocesan Mission, Pastoral & Resources Committee** were laid before the synod.

Bishop John moved that the **Audit Committee Report 2019** be received. This was carried unanimously.

The **next meeting of Diocesan Synod** will take place on Monday 9 November at 7pm (If the meeting needs to be held virtually, it is likely to be held in two parts, with the second part being held on Monday 23 November.

Bishop Martin closed the meeting in prayer.

