

A Summary of Diocesan Synod Meeting held in two parts via Zoom – 9 & 18 November 2020

Bishop John opened the meeting with prayer.

The Chair announced that Bishop John had made a direction under the Church Representation Rules to allow the meeting to take place electronically and Bishop John gave a statement in response to the report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.



Bishop John gave his **Presidential Address** and began by reflecting on some of the contributions of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who had just died. He shared some of his words about joining together across our different religions, “bound by their commonalities, enlarged by their difference. It is where we join together in civilised conversation about the kind of society we wish to create for the sake of our grandchildren not yet born.” Bishop John expressed the view that this approach is much needed in our world – as it is in our church, mentioning the launch of the ‘Living in Love and Faith’ resources, as a hugely important contribution to engaging with human sexuality. He expressed the hope that we shall

all engage in a period of engagement using the resources for open, honest and gracious listening, learning and discussion, but reflected that the process will not succeed without love, grace, kindness and compassion of the sort commended by Rabbi Sacks. [Read the full address.](#)



After his address, Bishop John gave short introduction about the **impact of the pandemic on our communities**, talking about the important role that churches have played during the pandemic and how public worship can't be divided from the other work that churches do. He also referred to the considerable toll on mental health which the crisis is having, which is not always clear to see. Following this introduction, synod split into breakout groups to discuss this issue further.

Bishop Martin introduced an item on **Minority Ethnic Anglican concerns** and the response within the Diocese to Black Lives Matter and the death of George Floyd. He then introduced Francis Moloney, Curate in the Holy Trinity Team in Redditch.

Francis talked about his own experience as a black person. He explained that as he saw signs of solidarity and protests after George Floyd's death, he began to notice that he had learned to accept a particular narrative of the subtle racism that is often accepted in the UK as normal. The first black person arrived in the UK in the year 1AD, but black history is not British history. When people say Black Lives Matter, some people say 'All Lives Matter'. Francis talked about how he began to notice small micro-aggressions – even from some people who are Christians. He decided to email Bishop Martin to chat through what might be done to join in with this cultural moment.



Bishop Martin explained that for our synod to be representative of our population, there should be seven or eight members who have black or ethnic heritage; as a diocese, we've still got a long way to go. He talked through [this Powerpoint](#) of current activity and future plans – including regular meetings for BAME clergy and laity, the appointment of a Dean of BAME ministry and unconscious bias training. Members of synod were asked to pray, read, notice racist assumptions and challenge racist behaviour. There was then an opportunity for Synod to respond to Francis and Bishop Martin with comments and questions.



The Revd Andy Todd, Chair of the DBF, introduced an item on the **Diocesan Board of Finance's budget for 2021** ([see Andy's Powerpoint slides](#)) He explained that the budgeted income for 2021 would be just over £250k more than 2020 thanks to extra support from the Church Commissioners. Expenditure is planned to be £250 less with significant cost savings made.

Covid has obviously had a significant impact on the figures for 2020 – parish share is down 18% on budget (a drop of £885k). To reduce the impact of this, savings of around £790k have been identified (including furloughing DBF staff and donations from the Church of England's Ministry Fund). The current estimate is that the operating deficit in 2020 will be £886k. Andy expressed his thanks to parishes and the central DBF team for all the work to ensure that this is not worse.

It is proposed that parish share shouldn't be increased in 2021. It is not possible to cut parish share because it funds parish ministry and the costs of stipends etc still remain. However, it is understood that the parish economy has been dramatically affected by Covid and parish share receipts are not expected to return to 2019 levels. Andy explained that the key message remains to just do what you can.

As parish share is remaining static, there is also no budgeted increase in stipends/wages in 2021.

Andy spoke about the ongoing plan to reduce our £1m deficit by 2023, explaining that the budget is currently on track to achieve this break-even position. However, he went on to say that the pandemic is likely to mean that parish share receipts will be lower and the actual deficit is likely to be higher. Current projections suggest that in 2021 it will be between £787 and £1.9m, although we obviously don't know what the actual outcome will be yet. However, we do need to set a budget which we can use to manage our income and expenditure. The finance team will continue to assess these levels of outcome as we move forward. Andy expressed his thanks to John Preston, Helen Archer-Smith and the finance team for all their work.



Synod had the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and then Andy moved that:

“This Synod approves the budget presented by the Bishop’s Council and Standing Committee for the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited, which provides for expenditure of £8,182,000 in 2021 involving no increase in the amount of Parish Share requested, and leading to a budgeted deficit of £277,000”

This was passed with 55 votes in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.

The meeting then became a general meeting of the DBF and Andy Todd moved the resolution:

“The Company hereby approves the budget of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited for 2021, as approved by the Diocesan Synod in its immediately preceding business.”

This was approved with 54 votes in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.



As the meeting reverted back to being the Diocesan Synod, the Chair of the House of Laity, Hugh Richards, introduced a discussion on **clergy wellbeing**. He explained that the recently published Clergy Covenant was the product of four years' work by members of the General Synod and it was important that it was owned by the Diocese centrally as well as local churches. Hugh also introduced a new 'Flourishing in Ministry' booklet which has been published on the diocesan website to demonstrate commitment to this area of work.

Bishop John thanked Hugh for raising this issue. To emphasise the importance of this area of work, Bishop John has asked the Archdeacon of Worcester, Robert Jones to take the lead for the Diocese. He will work with the diocesan HR team as well as the Chair of the House of Clergy and others.

Synod discussed this issue in breakout groups, feeding back thoughts to the main meeting.

At this point, Synod voted to adjourn the session under Standing Order 55 and Bishop Martin closed the evening with prayer. The Synod reconvened on Wednesday 18 October with Bishop John opening it in prayer.

The issue of clergy wellbeing was discussed further in the reconvened meeting, after which Hugh Richards confirmed that the version of 'Flourishing in Ministry' on the website (which will also be circulated to clergy and readers) had been amended to include Holland House in Annex D.

Hugh then moved the motion:

“This Synod notes the Clergy Covenant (GS2133) and welcomes a greater focus on clergy wellbeing. This Synod:

- a) asks each PCC to consider how it can best support clergy wellbeing locally and review this periodically;*
- b) commits to promote the welfare of our parochial clergy and their households and commends the 'Flourishing in Ministry' handbook to all who engage in ministry.”*



The motion was carried with 48 votes in favour and 4 abstentions.

The Revd Andy Todd presented the **initial report of the Governance Review Group**. [See Andy's presentation.](#)

He started by explaining that governance should be a positive expression of our Kingdom values. There are 20 recommendations in the report and Andy highlighted some of the main ones:

- establishing a single finance and resources committee
- proposing that the Mission and Pastoral Committee should have equivalent membership to Bishop's Council with three new local pastoral committees helping to streamline work
- looking at the pattern and length of synod meetings to ensure they are focussed on social and mission issues whenever possible

- broadening the role of the Audit Committee to include wider 'challenge' – it will become the Audit, Risk and Challenge Committee.

The report also sets out measures to ensure all committees are functioning properly through a consistent approach to meetings, a diocesan governance handbook, a clear induction process and light touch training. It recognises the importance of increasing diversity of those involved in diocesan governance as well as the need to balance representation with the right skills on each committee.

After the report was discussed in breakout groups with feedback brought back to the main meeting, the Chair moved the motion:

“That this Synod approves the recommendations as set out in the report DS 20/21.”



The motion was carried with 50 votes in favour and 4 against.

Synod considered the proposed **new scheme for the inspection of churches**, which was introduced by Church Buildings Officer, Mark Carter. The Chair moved the following motion:

“That this Synod approves the revised Diocesan Scheme for Inspection for use within the Diocese with immediate effect”

This was carried with 51 votes in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.

Synod received a paper from the Archdeacon of Dudley as **Diocesan Leader for Transformation and Change**. This summarised feedback from the Open Conversations in September, and updated Synod on the current situation with regard to the need to make reductions in the number of stipendiary positions.



The Diocesan Secretary, John Preston, presented a paper updating Synod on the situation with regard to the **DBF's occupancy of the Old Palace**. It was confirmed that whilst the DBF were considering alternative accommodation, any decision would be ratified by Bishop's Council who would ensure that the July 2019 Synod motion was adhered to.

The **next meeting of Diocesan Synod** will take place on Saturday 13 March, probably by video conference. Synod will also meet on 28 June and 11 November in 2021.

Bishop Martin closed the meeting in prayer.

