

## WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD the Eighth Session of the Eighteenth Synod

held at St Peter's Baptist Church on Saturday 9 March 2024

Opening prayers were led by Bishop John and included the commissioning of Area Deans at the start of a new five-year term.

**Lynn Nichol**, one of our General Synod reps asked the following question under Standing Order 71:



*“The Remunerations and Conditions of Service Committee of Archbishop’s Council (I am a member) held an emergency meeting in December to consider the implications of the 3% decrease in required pension contributions from the Diocese for clergy stipends.*

- 1. They recommended to Archbishop’s Council that in the light of known hardship this unexpected windfall could be passed on to clergy and clergy stipends should be raised by 7%. This proposal was accepted by Archbishop’s Council. Why has this increase from 5-7% not been implemented in this Diocese?*
- 2. Can we be reassured that the same policy, not to increase stipends was applied to all stipends across the Diocese including senior staff?”*



**Chair of the DBF, Wadham Downing** responded to the question explaining that both the National Minimum Stipend and National Stipend Benchmark are advisory, and decisions regarding stipend and salary levels fall to Diocesan Synods.

Our Diocesan Synod voted in November 2023 to increase stipends and salaries in this diocese by 5% from 1 January 2024, with a consequent 5% increase in Ministry Share. In early February 2024, the Diocesan Secretary wrote to all stipendiary clergy in the Diocese to explain that our intention at that point was not to seek to increase stipends and salaries further, but to keep the situation under close review during the year.

We will certainly look again at stipend and salary levels ahead of the next budget presented to Diocesan Synod. We would encourage any clergy who find themselves struggling financially to speak to the Diocesan Secretary, one of the Archdeacons or the Bishop’s Chaplain so that help can be offered. The same policy has been applied to Archdeacons. *[Bishops’ stipends are set by the National Church, and normally follow the National Stipend Benchmark.]*

Bishop John explained that Diocesan Synod has been asked to reappoint Derek Valentine as a Trustee of Holland House when his term comes to an end on 31 March. Synod members were content for this to happen, voting unanimously in favour of reappointing Derek.

Bishop John’s **Presidential Address** was combined with an item on **Preparations for the General Election**.





A number of local MPs had been approached to come to Synod to talk about the process of the election, but unfortunately only one was available. Bishop John therefore decided to approach the topic in a different way, inviting Synod to reflect on the democratic process and the nature of democracy and how as Christians we might be involved in that process.

Bishop John commended the idea of running hustings in churches. There are materials available to help with that, churches are often seen as an honest broker and hosting hustings provides an opportunity to develop relationships with the candidates. There will also be prayers issued to be used in the run up to the general election, probably be issued once the election is announced. Bishop John also commended the resources produced by the bishops ahead of the last general election.

Bishop John encouraged synod to think about democracy as a principle. As Christians, do we believe that the majority is always in the right? God isn't elected and our faith talks about the Kingship of God. We try to be Kingdom People – how does this fit with our views on democracy?

Together synod spent some time exploring questions about what democracy means and whether it is a good thing.

Bishop John went on to say that our system sets those on the right who say that the market has the solution to our problems against those on the left who say that the state has the answers. He felt that it was important to have both, and most people sit somewhere in the middle of the two arguments.



Bishop John said: “Covenantal relationships such as seen in a family are also essential to a properly functioning democracy - people who are brought together by commitment to one another and a common cause with basic attitudes of trust. Both the market and the state depend for their function on values that they can't create themselves. The Church is therefore of huge importance in society, even to those who don't believe. Over the past generation or more, there has been an erosion of intermediate groups that help society to function, including churches. We have at our disposal Christian principles which could be very powerful. If these underlying principles break down, then society becomes more unhappy and fragmented. We should never be apologetic of the place of faith in society.”

Archdeacon Nikki, the Diocesan Leader for Transformation & Change and Bishop Martin, diocesan lead on the 'renewals' priority introduced an item outlining progress on our **priority to have a church with a congregation of over 150 people in each major area of population.**



Bishop Martin started by reminding synod that we want to see every parish thriving. However, within our overall ecology of different churches, we need some which are larger; somewhere where there can be thriving children and youth work, generating the leaders of the future and helping to train the leaders of today. We want to ensure that's available in each major area of population. We currently have very few churches of 150 people or more in the Diocese, particularly in the north where the majority of people live. We hope that funding from the national church will enable us to replicate the growth of Top Church in six other churches in Dudley Borough and one in Redditch.

Diocesan Transformation Programme Director, Damian Herbert explained further where the proposed renewal projects might be based and the resources going in, saying that growth is all about the lives and communities transformed by the love of Christ. All these projects will be nationally funded, and it is hoped that outcomes will include the numerical growth of 1,110 disciples, 315 children and young people and 22 new worshipping communities. Each renewal will also become a hub for Christian witness, community and discipleship and a resource for other churches. They should become self-sustainable, able to self-resource their own mission and ministry.



Synod heard from two leaders of renewal churches - Adam Hadley from Kingswinford and Wall Heath and Fraser Oates from St Stephen's Redditch.



Adam explained that he is from a tradition of the church which isn't usually associated with renewals and is keen to show that churches in the liberal Catholic tradition can still grow. He said: "I want to learn and share that learning with others. It's been a hard slog at times as our renewal project needs to be authentic. We want to use occasional offices to reach out to people and be a sacramental community, living the theology of incarnation. Having a Mission Accompanier has been a challenge, a support and a

friend, the diocesan team has been really helpful, and we have a Children's and Families Worker who has hit the ground running and already set up a number of opportunities for children to be involved. We are currently recruiting a pioneer minister. The funding isn't a magic wand but we have to start somewhere and I wanted to give it a go."

Fraser talked about St Stephen's church in Redditch explaining that church planting is a key part of his background. He will arrive in Redditch in the Summer but is already visiting regularly. St Stephen's is a renewal and not a church plant and Fraser doesn't want to undermine the people who are already faithfully serving there. He has been spending time talking to those people, sharing the vision and understanding what is happening already. He said: "There is excitement but also fragility as well as a genuine thirst for what's coming. Please pray that God will continue to prepare the ground before the renewal officially starts. The church is right at the heart of the town centre and the potential is incredible." Fraser explained the project outcomes and the church vision and values as well as plans for the buildings and staff. He is keen to bring as many people as possible into a living faith with Jesus.



Synod also watched a film about the church renewal in Bengeworth, Evesham, which can be [seen here](#).

In small groups, synod discussed what they had heard about the renewal programme and what the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks might be. There was then a chance to offer feedback and ask any questions.



Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, Hilary Higton offered an update on **developments in safeguarding** both nationally and in the Diocese, including the upcoming National Audit. [See her presentation here](#).

Hilary explained that INIQUE has been commissioned to audit Church of England dioceses and our diocese will be audited from 1 July.

The auditors want to hear from as many people as possible ahead of that. Hilary encouraged people to fill in the questionnaire, available on the diocesan website. ([See an article from Bishop Martin here](#)).

Bishop John expressed thanks to Hilary and the safeguarding team.

Synod was asked to reflect on safeguarding in the Diocese over the last five years, listing three strengths and three areas of improvement as we seek to make the Diocese of Worcester as safe as possible for all. There was an opportunity to provide any feedback.



Synod was asked to receive a report on the **implementation of the Auxiliary Pathway** to date. Director of Mission and Ministry, Roger Latham introduced his review of the scheme, explaining that 13 out of 14 from the first cohort have gone through national selection, with the final one hoping to do so before the summer.

The review questioned all the candidates and their incumbents as well as talking to diocesan staff. It highlighted areas that were going well including the very thorough selection and vetting procedure, candidates valuing the engagement of the bishops, and teaching and learning pitched at a relevant level. There were also a few points of improvement which have been discussed within the team and with the bishops. There will be some adjustments made ahead of the second wave of participants.

Roger highlighted the success of the Auxiliary Pathway as a way of discerning vocation to ordained ministry. He suggested that there would also be value in running a foundation year which allows people to dip their toe in the water.

At the end of this year, the current candidates will integrate into the wider curate cohort. None of the candidates will have finished training on the Auxiliary Pathway until they have completed their curacy.

Bishop John thanked Roger on his work completing the review and there was an opportunity to ask questions.

Bishop Martin closed the meeting with prayer.

**Date of next meeting:** Monday 24 June 2024.

