

**WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD**  
**the Sixth Session of the Eighteenth Synod**  
**and a general meeting of the**  
**WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED**

**held at St Peter's Church, Ipsley at 7pm on Monday 26 June 2023**

Opening Prayers were led by the Revd Garth Nathaniel, Rector of the Ipsley Team.



Synod welcomed guests from our partner churches in the EKM in Germany: their diocesan bishop Friedrich Kramer, their area bishop Bettina Schlauraff and their partnership coordinator, Judith Koenigsdoerfer. Bishop Friedrich offered the synod greetings from Germany.

Robert Barbour (Kidderminster & Stourport) asked two **questions under Standing Order 71:**

1. Meeting in Ely in 2019 representatives of 7 dioceses referred to market towns as 'an overlooked scale of community (falling between urban and rural)' whose churches 'have the potential to act as centres for the resurgence of surrounding rural churches.' To what extent do churches in market towns form a key part of Worcester Diocese's plans for renewal?
2. What steps are being taken to proactively engage parishes in vacancy into the Mission Accompanier's scheme?

These were answered by Archdeacon of Dudley, Nikki Groarke, who explained that there is support available for churches across the Diocese whatever their size. She said: "We hope the 'market town' churches will explore starting new worshipping communities, doubling their engagement with children and young people, and tapping into the resources on offer for equipping ministers for mission. We hope too that they will network with each other and work collaboratively, sharing ideas and new learning opportunities, both locally within the diocese, and also more widely with those convening gatherings such as that in Ely to which your question refers."



In answering the second question, Nikki explained that the Mission Accompanier model doesn't allow for a church in vacancy to be able to work with an Accompanier, but that we "offer interim support to parishes in vacancy who wish to work with a coach or mentor on pulling together the best parish profile, and would very much hope that when appointed, a new incumbent would be glad of the opportunity to join the scheme – it can feature in the profile as part of the attractive package we offer in the Diocese of Worcester." [Read her full answer here.](#)

The Diocesan Secretary, John Preston advised Synod that the Diocesan Synod motion: 'Contribution of faith to the rehabilitation of offenders' is being presented at General Synod by Lay Rep (and Faith Lead in the Probation Service), Kashmir Garton. It is scheduled for debate 2:15pm on Saturday 8 July.



Bishop John began his **Presidential Address** with some words of thanks to the Diocesan Secretary, Archdeacon of Worcester and Dean of Worcester, for whom this was their last synod before leaving their roles. He paid tribute to John Preston, saying that he “has made a huge difference in a short period of time and is a person of enormous gifts and energy. John has enabled us to grapple with diocesan finance and worked in partnership with Nikki to help the Diocese move forward with our vision.” Bishop John continued: “Archdeacon Robert is everyone’s favourite priest! Robert is the consummate pastor and there will be few people in the diocese who have not experienced the way in which the people to whom he ministers are

written on his heart. All good strategy should be underpinned by relationships and the relationships that Robert has built have enabled many people and places to flourish. Finally, the Dean, Peter Atkinson, is a person of very deep spirituality and is described by the Archbishop of York as the best preacher in the Church of England. We are very fortunate to have had him at the helm of the Cathedral for many years.”

Bishop John went on to say that he is delighted by the appointments of Roger Latham (as new Director of Mission and Ministry) and Andy Todd (as Diocesan Secretary). The interviews for Archdeacon of Worcester will take place in July, but the new Dean will take some time to be appointed. Bishop John also reassured Synod that he wasn’t thinking of leaving any time soon!

Diocesan Director of Education, Tim Reid, led an item giving Synod an opportunity to discuss the **issues currently facing church schools**, and how we can most benefit from the links between them and parishes. [See his presentation here.](#)

Tim set out some of the challenges facing church schools including academisation, financial uncertainty, staffing recruitment and retention, mental health and wellbeing, a culture of fear around Ofsted, governor vacancies. He then explained how the DBE and education team work alongside schools to offer support and try to ease the pressure of these challenges.



He went on to say that parishes can help church school leaders with pastoral support, community engagement, collective worship, religious education on the school curriculum, being a foundation governor or setting up a ‘Gather’ session after school.

Synod members were asked what would help them engage with their local church school and how can the education team best engage with the church community to encourage closer work possibly with opportunities to discuss Gather and support for church school governance? A number of ideas were fed in.



Three headteachers then spoke to synod to outline what it means to them to work in a church school and some of the challenges they’re currently facing.



The Diocesan Leader of Transformation and Change, Archdeacon Nikki Groarke introduced an item focussing on the **Children and Young People priority of our Diocesan Transformation Strategy**.

Diocesan Children and Youth Adviser, Simon Hill explained to synod more about the network of children and young people's workers that we are starting to build and support, introducing some of those who have already been appointed. Simon explained that where appropriate, these workers will be supported to work with other local churches, who might not themselves be able to afford a worker. Bishop's Council will consider two more applications for full-time workers next week with a contribution from the Healthier Churches fund. Simon is also planning a series of general adverts to attract people who might be interested in a vocation to be a children's and families' worker.



Synod had the opportunity to discuss the opportunities to grow ministry with children and young people in small groups and offer feedback on which risks they felt were most pressing and where they felt under-resourced in their deaneries.

The DBF Chair, Andy Todd presented the **2022 Annual Report and Accounts**, to be received by the DBF in general meeting. [See his slides here.](#)



In 2022, the DBF made a small surplus and Andy recognised the achievements of our parishes to meeting the ongoing costs of mission and ministry in difficult circumstances. However, he pointed out that a considerable contribution to that surplus was a greater than expected (or wanted) level of vacancies.

£4.2m of Ministry Share was received in 2022, a small decrease on 2021 and a larger decrease on 2020. This continues an ongoing trend, but it was the first year of new Ministry Share system and many parishes were still in the process of adjusting to the idea that grants are agreed at the start of the year and then parishes are expected to pay 100% of what remains. The total cost of Mission and Ministry in parishes was just over £6m.

A large proportion of the DBF's investments are in glebe which remained stable during 2022. However, other investments made an unrealised loss of £3m due to challenging market conditions. These investments help to reduce the cost of Ministry Share. Andy explained that DBF reserves often misunderstood. From £78m in reserves, all but £5.6m is subject to very specific rules as to what we can do with that and even the £5.6m includes things like Holland House so it is not the same as having cash in the bank.

Andy paid tribute to the diocesan team in reducing costs, ensuring liquidity and supporting parishes, particularly thanking John Preston for all he has done as Diocesan Secretary. He also reiterated his thanks to parishes for all that they have done to continue to pay Ministry Share.

Synod were given the opportunity to ask questions, after which Andy moved the following resolutions on behalf of the Bishop's Council and Standing Committee in their capacity as the Directors of the DBF:

Resolution No 1: "That the Annual Report and Accounts for 2022 of The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited be received."

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

Both were carried unanimously.

Diocesan Secretary, John Preston introduced the **consultation on stipends, wages and Ministry Share for 1 January 2024** which parishes currently have the opportunity to comment on. He explained that any increase in stipends and wages needs to be matched with the same increase in Ministry Share and with inflation currently at a high level, this is not an easy decision, which is why it was felt important to consult with parishes.



Synod was given the opportunity to provide input with a number of comments offered both about the current level of clergy stipend and impact on parishes of needing to raise Ministry Share.

All feedback to the consultation will go back to Bishop's Council to propose a decision which will be brought to the November Synod. John explained that he doesn't anticipate consulting on this matter every year, but this year is particularly difficult so helpful to get views from parishes before they receive their new Ministry Share figure.

The meeting was closed in prayer by Bishop Martin.

### **Date of next Meeting**

The Seventh Session of the Eighteenth Synod and General Meeting of the DBF will be held on Monday 6 November 2023 at 7.00pm by video-conference.

