

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD

the Fifth Session of the Eighteenth Synod and a general meeting of the WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED

Held at St Peter's Baptist Church, Worcester on Saturday 11 March 2023

The meeting was opened with prayer led by Claire Lording, Chair of the House of Clergy

There were a number of **questions under Standing Order 71** (Synod members are allowed to ask up to two questions each which must be submitted in advance)

Garth Nathaniel (Redditch & Bromsgrove) asked whether parishes would be guaranteed an incumbent who holds the same views on the Prayers of Love and Faith. Bishop John answered by saying that in any appointment, parish reps need to agree and this question will, no doubt, be one of the factors which they will wish to take into consideration.



Garth Nathaniel also asked whether curates would be able to be trained by an incumbent whose convictions on the use of Prayers in Love and Faith are the same as their own. Bishop Martin replied by saying that there are many factors that need to be considered in finding the best training post for each curate, and this will no doubt be one of them. No one is required to take a curacy against their will, nor will anyone be required to use commended prayers if they do not wish to.



Fraser Oates (Worcester) asked a question around the risks associated with divisiveness around the Prayers and Love and Faith and if these had been considered in relation to our transformation strategy. Archdeacon Nikki answered by saying that drawing together Christians who hold different views on aspects of doctrine has always been part of what we do in the Church of England, so whilst significant, the issues and risks of potential disunity posed by the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith are similar to those we have had to contend with at different points through church history. She confirmed that the risk register would be updated accordingly.



Fraser Oates also asked whether there had been any correspondence with our partnership link dioceses of Peru and Morogoro on the Prayers of Love and Faith? Bishop John said that he had not had any direct engagement on this matter since the Lambeth Conference but would do so once the prayers and guidance are finalised. The two link bishops were part of the extensive discussions which took place at the Lambeth Conference as part of the call on Human Dignity.

Jon Evans (Greater Dudley) asked whether the Dean and Chapter with the endorsement of our Bishops would please commit to abstain from using the proposed prayers commended by the House of Bishops within the Cathedral Church of our diocese for the sake of unity across the spectrum? The Dean responded by saying the Cathedral Chapter had yet to decide its policy with regard to the prayers, but he will be recommending these prayers to the Chapter, and felt that there would be a strong support within it.

The **Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, Andy Todd** made a statement to Synod reporting likely small operating surplus for last year arising from the higher level of vacancies than expected. He explained that this will be added to the Ministry Support Fund so that it could be used to help parishes meet their Ministry Share contributions this year. The final figure will be confirmed and fed back to Synod at its next meeting. Andy also emphasised the importance of keeping the channels of communication open between parishes and the diocesan office with regards to Ministry Share payments.



Bishop John introduced an item inviting Andy Todd to serve a **second term of Chair of the DBF**, paying tribute to all Andy has done during his first term. This was approved unanimously by Synod.

Bishop John gave his **Presidential Address** announcing that the national church has agreed to work in partnership with us on our priorities, allocating significant funding to our diocese over the next seven years and investing in our plans to grow as Kingdom People.



He explained that the funding will support the renewal of seven churches in Dudley and Redditch as phase 1 of our plan to ensure that each major area of population has at least one larger healthy and sustainable church by 2030 – one with at least 150 people attending in an average week. In total we hope there will be over £7 million of investment, with each renewal project being allocated funding as detailed plans are developed.

This partnership with the national church sits alongside our own funding agreed by Bishop's Council in February for our plans to increase the number of children and young people's workers in our parishes, encourage parishes to establish new worshipping communities and the invest in training our clergy and lay leaders. Taken together, this means we have a largely fully funded approach to the priorities which were approved by Diocesan Synod last November, and without any additional cost being borne by Ministry Share.

Bishop John said that he was delighted that the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board have enthusiastically endorsed our vision to have as many healthy and sustainable churches as possible by 2030. This funding will enable us to create 40 new posts, over 90% of which will be in parishes. He asked Synod to pray for our plans, that they will help us to reverse the decline in numbers of people attending our churches.

Following Bishop John's introduction in his Presidential Address, Archdeacon Nikki, The Diocesan Leader of Transformation and Change updated Synod on the **Diocesan Transformation Strategy**. She explained that we are now moving into the delivery stage of our priorities and that the morning's session would enable Synod to hear more about what they involve and enable members to dig a little deeper so they can become advocates for our strategy. Synod watched three films - David Hoskin, Andrew Sillis and Paul Lawlor talking about the renewal plans in Greater Dudley and Redditch, Ness Everitt talking about her work in Dyson Perrins School and the wider parish and some examples of New Worshipping Communities. Youth and Children's Adviser, Simon Hill also spoke about the plans to grow the number of children and youth workers in parishes in the Diocese with the aim of doubling the number of children and young people in our churches.



Synod were reminded that there is something in our priorities for every church that wants to grow. Alison Maddocks is working with our smaller churches, there is an emerging rural mission strategy and any parish can apply for a Healthier Churches or Kingdom People grant. Synod was asked to think about how our priorities can be effectively communicated to all in our parishes and ensure it is understood and engaged with. This was discussed in small groups with members given a summary document of our priorities and how parishes can engage with them. [See this here.](#)

Feedback from individuals included: A feeling of excitement as this represents a shift in where we are. It will be important to think wider than individual parishes. A request for preaching and reaching resources which explain the 'why' and reinforcing the importance of enabling more people to have a good relationship with Jesus. A reminder that outside of the funding for the few renewal churches, there is still £2m for everyone to access – this in itself is an exciting amount of money. We should emphasise this dual nature of the priorities and celebrate it.

Synod heard a report from General Synod on the **Living in Love and Faith** process with a chance to explore the draft prayers proposed by the House of Bishops. The item was introduced by Bishop John who spoke about the debate held at General Synod and the graciousness by which it was conducted. He reminded Synod that there is a lot of pain around this debate; we are talking about people's lives and their identity and the bishops were very aware of this - their response to LLF began with an apology.



He went on to say that there is nothing new about division in the Church – even St Peter and St Paul argued about what scriptures and tradition were saying. The bishops wrestled for six years with the question of what the bible and the Holy Spirit is telling us about this issue and their slightly amended motion was passed by General Synod. Diocesan Synod now needs to reflect upon this issue ahead of the publication of the final prayers and guidance. No one will be asked to use these prayers if they don't feel able to do so – Bishop John explained that he and the other bishops want to value all those who want to hold to a traditional view of marriage and sexuality. The bishops are simply proposing that the church should be allowed to offer prayers for blessing for those who have committed to life-long relationships. Bishop John said that the overwhelming majority of the responses he has received on the letter written by both himself and Bishop Martin have been positive.



There was an opportunity for Synod to explore the proposed prayers in small groups before there was a chance for feedback to be given in a plenary session.

A number of contributors spoke movingly about how these prayers would impact on them personally – both positively and negatively.

Individuals spoke about their support of the bishop's apology, but expressed a worry that a move towards using these prayers could be construed as condoning or promoting lifestyles which are sinful. There was also a sadness expressed that the Church appeared to have lost sight of the biblical gospel. It was felt that decisions on these prayers shouldn't be rushed and there should be proper safeguards for those who hold different views. At the moment we don't have much information about the guidance which will be issued alongside the prayers. Who in the parish will decide whether to use these prayers and what happens if the PCC, congregation and clergy don't agree?

Others spoke about the fact that there were many different interpretations of scripture and made a comparison to the fact that divorced people are now able to marry in church. It was felt that same sex attraction was not a lifestyle choice but was about who some people are created to be. God is present in the journeys that we all make individually and this is an opportunity to bring joy out of pain, to tell LGBTQI+ people that they are loved. We also need to consider how we are being seen by people outside of the Church.

Members also commented that we need to develop a simpler message which can be more easily understood, as well as find ways of disagreeing well – learning to listen to each other and learning to live with people with whom we disagree.



Synod was asked to consider the **revised statement of environmental policy** from the Climate Crisis Task Group which is required for our submission to become a bronze eco-Diocese. Bishop Martin introduced this item explaining that this strategy brings together previous work and looks forward to a more detailed plan which will be brought back to Synod at a future date.

This was unanimously approved.

Doug Chaplin introduced a discussion around **Everyday Faith** and synod heard from Martin Allen from Alvechurch and Kashmir Garton, Lay Chair of Redditch and Bromsgrove Deanery. Martin has produced a series of articles in their parish magazine looking at how others share their faith from Monday – Saturday and Kashmir talked about the role of faith in her life outside of church.

Dick Johnson, Lead Chaplain for Faith at Work in Worcestershire and Chaplain to West Mercia Police and H&W Fire and Rescue Service, spoke to synod about the work of Chaplains, whether formally or informally. He also introduced Steve Bentham from the Black Country Urban Industrial Mission. There was a chance to talk in small groups about where faith and life might connect better than they do currently and the opportunities for chaplaincy within parishes.



The following motion was then proposed by Dick Johnson:

'This synod commends the resources of the Everyday Faith Programme and Faith at Work in Worcestershire/Black Country Urban Industrial Mission to the people and parishes of the Diocese as practical means of exploring current issues of Faith, Work and The Economy and growing as Kingdom People.'



There was a chance for comments and discussion, which included the question of what would happen next and a reminder that most people spend most of their time out in the world and we need to encourage people to live out their faith where they are.

The motion was unanimously carried.

The meeting concluded with a Eucharist led by Bishop John.

Next Synods - The remaining Synods in 2023 are Monday 26 June at St Peter's, Ipsley and Monday 6 November (via Zoom).