

Diocese of Leicester

Acts of Synod held on Tuesday, 22 September 2020
at 10.00am by Zoom

<u>Present:</u>	House of Bishops	2
	House of Clergy	42
	House of Laity	42
<u>Apologies:</u>		26
<u>In attendance:</u>	Ecumenical Observer	1
	Officers and Speakers	12

Chair: David Wilson, Chair of the House of Laity for item 1 to 4 and Peter Hooper, Chair of the House of Clergy for items 5 to 7.

1. Worship

The meeting began with worship led by David Cowie and Claire Bampton. The worship focused on blessing God for his gifts to us and committing ourselves to God while facing an unknown future.

2. Presidential Address

Bishop Martyn used Psalm 62 as the basis for his presidential address, reminding Synod that the Psalmist says, *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.* After thanking Synod for all that they had done during the period of lockdown and through the summer, he reflected on the uncertainty of these difficult times and the disappointing news of the recent growth in cases of Covid-19. The Psalmist reminded himself repeatedly that God is our rock and our fortress. Waiting in silence for God was not at all easy in times of anxiety, but the Psalmist was clear that this was the route to hope and our salvation. Discernment of what God was saying was important for all of the business to be discussed at Synod. God was reshaping the Church, but it was not yet clear what this would look like in the future. Bishop Martyn encouraged Synod members to wait to hear from God, even at this anxious time.

3. Shaped by God Together Process

Stuart Burns updated Synod on the Shaped by God Together process where the focus was currently on gathering stories and generating insights, with the aim of understanding clearly what was happening in churches and fresh expressions at this time. The aim was then to ask what we might do in the future, given our current reality. He noted the importance of not rushing to solutions, but instead seeking creative space that allowed discernment to take place.

4. Modern Slavery

Margaret Rouse presented to Synod on the subject of Modern Slavery, sharing the shocking statistic that there are around 136,000 people in slavery in the UK now. Nationally the highest number of those trapped in slavery are from Romania, followed by Vietnam, but in Leicestershire research showed that British people are the most exploited group. Paskal Clement and Richard Worsfold shared stories of their experiences of encountering modern slavery in parish ministry. Margaret Rouse summed up the plight of those caught in slavery as being 'hidden in plain sight' and highlighted the need for people to speak up where something felt wrong. This could be done via the Modern slavery Helpline – 0800 121 700.

5. AGM of Diocesan Board of Finance

Stephen Barney took the Chair for the Annual General Meeting of the Diocesan Board of Finance, which swiftly adopted the Annual Report and Accounts for 2019. (Separate minutes are produced for the AGM of the DBF)

6. Diocesan Budget 2021

Jonathan Kerry reported to the Synod on the draft diocesan budget for 2021, which had inevitably been impacted quite seriously by the pandemic and lockdown. The budget forecast showed a likely deficit of £1.4m if no corrective action were taken and the DBF trustees and the Finance Review Group were both of the view that a budget deficit of no more than £500k should be agreed. This would mean seeking savings of £900k and this meant taking some difficult decisions. The proposed areas for savings were outlined as follows

1. No increase in stipends or staff salaries: saving £120k;
2. Savings in central support structures/clergy vacancies: saving £300k;
3. Cancel the Youth Bus Ministry project: saving £180k
4. Pause the Capital Fund: saving £100k;
5. Pause the Growth Fund (existing commitments to be honoured): saving £70k;
6. Pause the Tithe Fund (tithing from the Total Return asset sales): saving £60k;
7. 50% cut in grant to St Philips Centre: saving £45k;
8. 50% cut in grant to the Diocesan Board of Education: saving £50k;
9. Additional ask from parishes able and willing to increase in Parish Contribution: £100k.

There was a lively discussion of these proposals via questions submitted in advance and comments received in the Zoom Chat function. The comments received and responded to focused mainly on the proposed cuts in grants to the St Philip's Centre and DBE, savings from clergy vacancies, and the likelihood of realizing an increase in Parish Contributions. Following this discussion it was agreed to aim for a budget

deficit of no more than £500k and to refer the proposals back to the Finance Review Group for further reflection.

7. General Synod report

Shayne Ardron reported on the activities of General Synod, which had been significantly curtailed by the impact of Covid-19. Discussions had been held in July without any votes being possible and in person meeting would take place later in the month so that a vote could be held to allow future Synods to take place via Zoom. She also reported that the General Synod elections had been postponed to 2021 and existing members would therefore continue until then.

Bishop Martyn closed the Synod with prayer and a reminder of the words of Psalm 62: *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.*