

Diocese of Leicester

Acts of Synod held on Saturday, 15 May 2021 at 9.30am by Zoom

<u>Present:</u>	House of Bishops	1
	House of Clergy	39
	House of Laity	37
<u>Apologies:</u>		24
<u>In attendance:</u>	Ecumenical Observer	1
	Officers and Speakers	9

Chair: Wendy Dalrymple, Chair of the House of Clergy, was in the chair for items 1 to 3, David Palmer, Chair of the DBF for item 4, and David Wilson, Chair of the House of Laity, for items 5 to 6.

1. Worship

The Synod began with worship led by David Cowie which drew on Psalm 47 and verses from John 16 where Jesus encourages his disciples to ask the Father in his name.

2. Presidential Address and Questions

Bishop Martyn reflected on the influence of the experience of exile on much of the Old Testament, noting that the impact of the pandemic has left many of us also experiencing a form of exile. Where some talk of silver linings, he felt that it is important to hold in the tension the call to be a people of hope with the ongoing suffering of many. Adding to the challenge of the pandemic, there was now an additional financial challenge for Leicester Diocesan Board of Finance which has become apparent because income has fallen and expenditure has risen more than we had realized. It was important to learn lessons from what has happened and for this reason Bishop Martyn and Chair of our Board of Finance, David Palmer, have commissioned a review of governance which is being carried out by somebody external to the diocese. However, Bishop Martyn stressed that this is not about apportioning blame but making sure we improve for the future.

He went on to say that the Shaped By God Together process had started before the full scale of the financial challenge was known, but the core aim has not changed, and this is to hear what God is saying and renew our core commitment to growth in depth of discipleship, numbers of disciples and service to the world, while creating a new framework for ministry, finance and buildings to enable the work to continue. In the context of a year which had revealed both the ugly side of the church (eg racism) but also the wonderful ways in which parishes were able to serve their communities,

Bishop Martyn said that his prayer was that the Church could be humbler, simpler and bolder.

Before moving to other business, Synod noted two questions from Synod member Ann Reddecliffe in relation to criteria for selection for ordination and a General Synod motion relating to gay conversion therapy and the written answers which had been provided to these.

3. Shaped By God Together

The Chief Executive and Diocesan Secretary, Jonathan Kerry presented a paper outlining the four financial principles which it was proposed should be adopted to guide the implementation of the outcome of the SGBT process. These principles can be summarized as

- The diocesan budget should support the diocesan priorities.
- Transparency and trust need to be developed in financial matters.
- Generosity should be nurtured through the parish contributions system.
- The benchmark for parish contributions should be the basic cost of ministry.

There was a wide ranging discussion of the proposal. Some Synod members expressed concern that a focus solely on the diocesan priorities, which had been approved in November 2020, would fail to recognize the wider purpose of the church. Other concerns expressed included concern for churches which could not cover the basic cost of ministry, rural churches, and those which did not obviously fit with any of the five priorities. There was also a widespread feeling that the 3 Key Questions needed to be held alongside the five priorities and Bishop Martyn stressed that they were still central to the diocesan vision and strategy. He also said that the reason for adopting priorities was to signal a shift from working with assumed priorities to named priorities. Jonathan Kerry noted that the Rural Commission had affirmed the diocese's support for the rural church and added that this had not changed.

Charlie Styles proposed an amendment setting the four principles in the context of the call of God as expressed in the ordinal, along with the 3 Key Questions. This amendment was accepted and agreed. An amendment from Jon Walker reinforcing this and requesting reconfirmation by Synod of the priorities was withdrawn following discussion. The financial principles as amended were agreed with 67 votes in favour, 4 against and 5 abstentions.

4. AGM of Leicester Diocesan Board of Finance

David Palmer, recently appointed Chair of the DBF addressed the AGM and invited those present to adopt the audited Annual Report and Accounts for 2020. The main focus of his address, however, was the present financial situation of the DBF, which not surprisingly had been adversely affected by the pandemic but was also worse

than had been reported to the Synod in November 2020. It now appeared that the budget deficit in 2021 was likely to be in the region of £2m which was around £850k more than initially forecast, chiefly arising from greater expenditure on resourcing and supporting ministry in parishes than had previously been calculated. David Palmer apologized to the Synod for this situation. He said that processes were being looked at carefully and that he was working closely with Jonathan Kerry and new Director of Finance, Paul Stothard, regarding this.

In response to questions from the floor, Jonathan Kerry explained that the deficit was partly the result of the pandemic, but also partly due to the ongoing and increasing gap between income and expenditure, which has been a challenge well-known to Synod and parishes for several years. David Palmer explained that a group was working with Bishop Martyn on proposals to address the deficit. This would be a phased process over the next few years. A number of Synod members expressed their gratitude to David Palmer for his clear explanation of the situation. The Annual Report and Accounts for 2020 were adopted unanimously.

5. Digital Exclusion

Alison Adams explained that digital exclusion was an area of poverty that is newer and less well understood than some other forms of poverty. Digital access is now very important for enabling access to many other aspects of modern life and those who for various reasons lack internet access or appropriate equipment can experience isolation and exclusion. In addition to stories of individuals which had been circulated with the papers, Sian Rigby, Richard Worsfold and Vic Allsop read stories of how churches had responded to help people through, for instance, organizing a computer club, or providing a congregation member with a 1p a minute SIM card to allow participation at Zoom services. Sian Rigby provided examples of assets available to most churches which could be used in addressing digital exclusion. The Synod then met in breakout rooms to discuss this issue and ideas what could be done in individual parishes. Feedback was provided via the Zoom chat function to be gathered and analysed by Sian Rigby and Alison Adams.

6. Other business

In other business Synod also received a series of short reports and updates on the Community of the Tree of Life, Living in Love and Faith, the 'Women, the State of Play' report, the Racial Equity Strategy, the annual report of the DAC and the latest sessions of General Synod.

In closing the Synod, Bishop Martyn used the prayer for Thy Kingdom Come.