

Synod Listens with Love and Faith

Diocesan Synod met at Christ the King, Beaumont Leys on Saturday 24 September for a meeting that was largely given over to discussion of and reflection on Living in Love and Faith (LLF), the Church of England's conversation and discernment process about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. As befits a very sensitive and difficult subject, the discussions took place in an atmosphere of respect and care with speakers covering various themes interspersed with prayer and small group discussion. Bishop Saju reflected at the end of the 2 hour discussion that he had felt as if standing on holy ground during the time spent on LLF.

The Synod began with worship led by Emma Davies which drew on Psalm 139 and also included a reading from Isaiah 11 which contains a picture of the world living in harmony and full of the knowledge of the Lord.

In his presidential address, Bishop Martyn reflected on the extraordinary period that had followed the death of the late Queen. This had showed the importance of ceremonial worship and pastoral care along with simply being there for people and he was grateful to all those who had worked so hard during this time. At the same time there had also been unrest in Leicester in recent days and this had had an impact on some of our churches. Prayers were needed for young people who felt excluded and disenfranchised.

Reflecting on the discussion to follow around Living in Love and Faith, Bishop Martyn said that this was an opportunity to listen to each other, as well as to inform bishops and others on General Synod who will carry forward discernment. He noted that the budget was also an agenda item and that it was hard to know how to talk about money at a time when people are struggling to make ends meet. The issue of balancing individual needs with diocesan running costs was a difficult one to manage.

In all of these disparate subjects, Bishop Martyn saw a common theme of reconciliation, which did not mean everyone agreeing but was about a process of listening and being open to receive the gift of the other. This then led us back to God and what he has done for us.

Andy Brockbank opened the discussion on Living in Love and Faith as LLF Advocate, setting out a summary of the feedback which had been presented in the national church document *Listening with Love and Faith*. This was followed by a carefully structured process involving 13 speakers arranged over 3 blocks with intervening periods of discussion in small groups and prayer. The speakers reflected honestly and bravely on a range of themes including: the biblical witness in the area of sexuality and gender; lived experience including of abusive conversion therapy; pastoral care for LGBT+ people; the impact on young people of the Church's approach to sexuality; the impact on the Anglican communion; how God is at work among LGBT+ people; the need for a theology of dating; the need for agreement

across the whole historic church from a traditional catholic viewpoint; how church culture can be damaging to LGBT+ people; reflections on what holy living means; and how there should be room for everyone within the Church even across disagreement. Each speaker was listened to attentively.

Prayers were led by a diverse group of Synod members, and facilitators helped with reflecting in small group discussions. At the end of the discussion there was time for Synod members to fill in a feedback form reflecting their views on the discussion and what General Synod should or could do. These forms are being collated for presentation to the bishops and General Synod members from this Diocese and their views will be presented in a summarized form to a future Synod.

In the final half hour of the Synod there was a presentation about the draft diocesan budget for 2023. David Palmer, Chair of the DBF, explained to the Synod that the initial budget, which showed a £1.4m deficit, would need further work to bring that deficit closer to £1m before the budget could be brought back for approval in November.

There was then a brief update on the Governance Review from Jonathan Kerry, who explained that substantive proposals would be brought to the next Synod meeting. This was followed by consideration of written questions submitted by Synod members which focused on staff numbers, the Resourcing Churches project and diocesan finances. Finally, Barry Hill's written report on the July meeting of General Synod was noted.

In closing comments Stephen Adshead, who chaired the meeting, thanked the speakers, worship and prayer leaders, facilitators and all those who had taken part for the respectful and careful engagement with Living in Love and Faith. The Synod then closed with prayer led by Bishop Martyn.