

A meeting of the Newcastle Diocesan Synod hosted using Zoom video conferencing on Saturday 27th June 2020 at 10:00am

President: The Rt Revd Christine Hardman, Bishop of Newcastle. The meeting was chaired by the Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Catherine Pickford and the Chair of the House of Laity Canon Carol Wolstenholme.

Welcome

The Revd Catherine Pickford (Chair of the House of Clergy) took the Chair:

The Chair welcomed all present to the first Diocesan Synod to be hosted using Zoom video conferencing.

The Chair opened the meeting with a short reading and a prayer around the theme of trust and courage. The reading, titled *God Knows* by Minnie Haskins, had been used at a carol service held at Stannington 2019 which the Chair had found useful over the last few months. The prayer, written specifically for the COVID-19 pandemic, was by Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference.

The Chair gave a summary about the use of Zoom to facilitate the meeting.

The Synod noted the transcript of a meeting held on 23rd November 2019.

Notices

The Secretary gave notice of a need to have an election for the Chair of the House of Clergy to succeed the Revd Catherine Pickford who would be moving to London following her appointment as Archdeacon of Northolt.

The Secretary gave notice of the appointment of Prof Gary Holmes to the Bishop's Council. The Secretary explained that one lay vacancy on the Council remained to be filled.

The Secretary confirmed that the election to the Vacancy in See Committee would close on 29 June.

The Secretary highlighted that the Revd Catherine Pickford's move to London would also create an vacancy on the General Synod. The Secretary explained that arrangements to fill the vacancy would be confirmed in due course.

Vacancy in See of Berwick

Bishop Christine gave an update on the See of Berwick following the announcement of the translation of the Rt Revd Mark Tanner to the see of Chester. Bishop Mark would take up his new appointment on 15 July. Bishop Christine confirmed that her submission to the Dioceses Commission seeking permission to fill the see of Berwick had been granted. The Bishop had convened an Advisory Group to help her with the discernment process which would seek to identify who God was calling to become the next Bishop of Berwick.

The Bishop confirmed the members of the Advisory Group: Sir Philip Mawer; Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth; the Revd Canon Christine Brown; and the Revd Dr Benjamin Carter. The Diocesan Secretary, Canon Shane Waddle, would staff the Group and Brad Cook from the National Church was assisting the process.

The first task of the Advisory Group had been to discern the role for the next Bishop of Berwick. The Bishop advised the Synod that the role description would be circulated to members. *[Note: following the meeting the role description was circulated to members as paper DS20 17]*. Two aspects had particularly struck the Bishop as the role description was drawn together. The experience of lockdown had helped to recognise the importance of relationships within the role of a bishop as shepherd, someone who deeply gets alongside others and in whom people can have trust in times of change. The second aspect was the need for the bishop to be a sentinel, someone able to stand on a hill and look into the middle distance to help us understand and discern the type of church that is needed at this time.

An advert had been placed in the Church Times and Brad Cook would be sharing the role description with all those who have been discerned to be ready for episcopal ministry. The Bishop would make a longlist for the Advisory Group to work with to agree a shortlist. The Advisory Group was scheduled to meet on 23 July to agree a shortlist and interviews were scheduled to take place on 21 August. The consecration date was yet to be agreed.

Appointment to the DAC (Paper DS20 15)

The Chair explained that papers to support the Rt Revd Stephen Platten's nomination to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) had been circulated.

By a show of hands, the Synod agreed the nomination.

Parish Share Review Group (Paper DS20 12)

The Chair invited Robin Brims to present the report of the Parish Share Review Group.

Robin began by setting out that the Review had not been about less but about enabling as much mission and ministry as we could achieve. Robin set out that this could be achieved by helping to change the atmosphere and context associated with Parish Share. Transparency, in all directions, trust, empowerment, enabling creativity and having accountability would all help. The implementation of the recommendations, if approved, would require leadership and communications.

Robin highlighted the main points of the report. He reflected on the importance of listening and not imposing; and recognising the need for healing within and between parishes where finance was concerned. There was a need to agree an affordable forecast income from Parish Share rather than imposing on parishes something that was aspirational and unachievable. There was also a need to be clear about how the income was going to be used. During the review he had noticed confusion about the use of income, even within our clergy cohort.

Robin explained there had been five options during the consultations. Two options had received strong support at all the consultations. There were misgivings about each option but in general it was agreed a merger of the two would mitigate those concerns. The consultation also looked at the consequences of not achieving the Parish Share request. Robin explained that the accountability rested with a PCC view (the body accountable to the Bishop and the Charity Commission) and if a PCC felt it couldn't achieve the requested Share it should work with the deanery officers to establish the facts and agree a way forward. Robin cited his experience as a Deanery Finance Officer and his work with parishes which had sometimes shown they could afford to achieve their Share and had sometimes proved they could not.

The Review discussed at length the pros and cons of the role of the deanery. The Review established a split: in some places it didn't work well, in others it did. The Review Group took the view that the deanery should be included because to separate finance from all of the other responsibilities would be incoherent. However, because of the challenges some deaneries have faced there would need to be a transition and some deaneries would require some help to overcome past hurt.

The Review recommended a Parish Share Agreement which is based on the transparency of PCC accounts and the costs incurred on providing ministry less the central funds made available to support particular parishes. The Parish Share Agreement is between one parish and all other parishes across the deanery and the whole diocese represented by the Bishop of Newcastle.

The Review recommended that each deanery is empowered by the Bishop as the agent to reach the Parish Share Agreement. Throughout the Review people were consistently asking for another term to be used instead of Parish Share until one participant explained that it would only be sensible to change the term once the experience itself had changed. This wisdom removed the need to seek an alternative term. The Review recommended the use of plain English and not to be diverted through the use of organisational language. Every organisation has its own language but we need to talk in plain English.

Throughout the consultation people highlighted first call costs. Parishes felt strongly the responsibility of maintaining a listed building for the next generation. The Review recommended that there should be a strategy for church buildings which would pull together existing plans to help identify the priorities of mission and ministry or historic preservation.

Implementation of the recommendations would require leadership and communications. The Review recommended the coming together of PCC members across wider areas could help to bring about a greater understanding. In addition, the Review recommended a diocesan wide giving and sharing week.

Robin drew attention to Annex C which showed where the money raised actually goes. The size of the discs attempted to show that the majority was spent on resourcing stipends and pension costs.

Robin hoped that the Synod would approve the plan and asked Synod members to help communicate and inspire the implementation of the plan. He hoped that the Synod would hold everyone to account for delivering the plan which he explained provided clear lines of authority and accountability. Robin commended the recommendations as something which the people across the diocese throughout the consultation had recommended to the Group.

The Chair thanked Robin for the report and the huge amount of work that had gone into the research and report.

The Chair explained that the meeting would move into smaller break out rooms to discuss the Review's recommendations for 20 minutes. On returning to the main room the following comments and questions were made:

Benjamin Carter (Hexham) asked a question about how the recommendations from the Review Group would be held with the work to transform ministry deployment. There was a fear that the recommendations would continue to result in a year-by-year pattern which would not help deanery planning. **Emma Doran** (Tynemouth): welcomed the transparent approach and asked if there was a way of facilitating a consistent approach to PCC accounting to make it simpler to compare parish accounts. In response **Robin Brims** referenced the experience of his sister-in-law in Oxford where a

standard form of accounting had been introduced and the change accepted but care was needed and people needed to be mindful of the volunteers fulfilling treasurer roles. With reference to transformation he believed the recommendations around the transparency of costs associated with parishes would help deaneries with their planning and the work underway with transformation. Robin also referenced a question that had arisen in his breakout group about how would people in the 'middle pew' be persuaded. He felt the answer was set out in paragraph 11 with the introduction of an annual diocesan wide giving and sharing week.

Carol Griffiths (Bamburgh & Glendale): highlighted how Robin's reference to the challenge of mission and ministry or historic building preservation had resonated with her experience given many parishes carry a huge burden of fabric maintenance which placed a great strain on congregations. She added that the financial impact of COVID-19 on churches was yet to be fully seen but parishes, like her own, which relied on fundraising to help meet Share would have significant losses this year and into the future. In response **Robin Brims** referenced paragraphs 9 and 10 from the report and the need to face reality about the number of buildings we need. In addition, Robin shared his local experience of fundraising during the COVID-19 pandemic where people had made contributions in lieu for a cancelled church fayre.

Alison Hardy (Alnwick): explained that the discussion in her group had focused on what was meant by the deanery in this context. In the current climate many had experienced less emphasis on the deanery and more on the local. **Helen Savage** (Corbridge) highlighted the *Rural Churches for All Project* which was seeking to see how churches could benefit all in the community and that while we did need to face the reality about the number of buildings we needed to resist underestimating the need for buildings in our communities. **Christine Brown** (Newcastle West) asked for clarity about how deaneries being empowered as agents would work. She felt it would rely on parishes allowing deanery officers to take on this role. There were different ways that this empowerment might be defined and it would be helpful to have some commonality about how deaneries look at this. In response **Robin** described how the Corbridge Deanery Development Group was using the opportunity to reflect how this model could be used to support and shape and future ministry across the deanery.

Adrian Hughes (Tynemouth) welcomed the report and asked if there would be assistance to help parishes to become entrepreneurial around the use of buildings and also sought clarification about the proposed allocation to deaneries. **John Appleby** (Tynemouth) recognised that a five-year transition may be necessary but sought clarity about when parishes should expect to see new elements coming into play. **Tony Thick** (Morpeth) shared an anxiety about the amount of support and advice that would be needed to help a deanery take on the responsibility given that parishes struggled to find treasurers. He suggested a group of people could be identified to help support the deaneries in this role. In response **Robin** explained that some buildings were well placed to be used in other ways but others were not, so not all could be entrepreneurial but others should be helped to seek to utilise their resources. He confirmed that it would be for a deanery to agree a distribution but information would be provided about the cost of each parish offset by national funds. In response to the question of implementation and transition Robin confirmed this would be for the Bishop's Council to agree.

The vote:

The chair moved that the recommendations within the report be agreed as a method for allocating the parish share. By a show of hands the report was carried.

The Synod paused for a break.

Canon Carol Wolstenholme (Chair of the House of Laity) took the Chair

Growing Church Bringing Hope: next steps (Paper DS20 13A and DS20 13B)

The Chair invited the Archdeacon of Northumberland (the Ven Mark Wroe) together with the Canon Director of Mission and Ministry (the Revd Canon Rob Saner-haigh), the Transformation and Strategy Manager (Chris Elder) and the Diocesan Secretary (Canon Shane Waddle) to lead the item.

The Archdeacon introduced the item and explained that the purpose was to provide an update on a piece of work which had transitioned through a number of national names (including sustainability and transformation) but which we were now referring to as growing church bringing hope: next steps. The Archdeacon reminded the Synod about Bishop Christine's Presidential Address to the Rothbury Synod which used two verses from Isaiah 43 to frame the Kairos moment that we had reached with our finances. The Archdeacon explained that this session with the Synod was an opportunity to share part of the listening that had begun in recent weeks and to hear from the Synod as we seek to discern God's call and together work out our way ahead.

The Transformation & Strategy Manager provided an overview of the process and explained that we had begun discussions with the National Church to explore an application for significant funding from the National Transformation Fund. National Officers were helping us with shared learning from dioceses who are on a similar journey. COVID-19 had presented challenges and opportunities around engagement and our approach was to learn from this innovation and to face the key issues, to listen and consult and to discern what a flourishing ministry could be. We have begun to hold conversations across the diocese and these would continue over the next six months to discern and help articulate the compelling vision for this flourishing diocese. We expect the transition journey to be five years.

The Canon Director of Mission & Ministry, Rob Saner-Haigh, explained that the approach to the conversations was for them to be rooted in a prayerful and theological reflection. Our faith excites us, it inspires us and will surprise us in what God is calling us to do together. What we are about is this amazing work of God.

That God is seeking to renew, reconcile and transform all things. God calls us all to be called up in this and we are all called to be partners, we all have an investment in this common work in which we are joining in with God. We are caught up the amazing work of God as we seek to hear God's voice calling us and showing us how to be a healthier church. Rod posed two questions: (i) how do we fully embrace the idea of partnership; and (ii) how do we sing the Lord's song in this place in a Northumbrian accent?

Using break out rooms (named Aidan, Cuthbert, Oswin, Oswald, Wilfred, Bede and Hild) members were asked to look at two questions framed around the Isaiah 43:18-19 text:

- What do you feel and believe are the new things you perceive God to be doing in our diocese in 2020?
- What do you think are the former things, perhaps the things we need to let go of?

Feedback from each of the rooms was as follows:

Aidan

- **New:**
New ways of communicating, more authenticity and focus with Zoom, good for getting business done

Zoom good for people who can't get to church but not for those without internet access

Is an online community a real community? Is online church really church?

Zoom church should be an extension rather than an alternative.

What leads to Christian flourishing? Can we flourish without meeting face to face?

People are missing out on the conversations we would have when standing around or in queues.

Opportunity to refocus priorities & values on what and who really matters e.g. key workers, vulnerable people the environment – opportunity for the church to think about the bigger picture

- **Let go of:**

The mentality that we need to keep things going.

Cuthbert

- **New**

Slogans – letting go of slogans & initiatives but the importance of getting the message across!

Where does the church need to be and how does ministry need to change? Parish system is both help & hindrance with a focus on the local vs dispersed (enabled by technologies like Zoom)

Ministry – recognize that clergy can't and shouldn't do everything – prioritising how to help others develop their ministry.

Value of not being tied to a church building. Virtual worship can make it easier for those who are anxious but how does this reconcile with the ecclesiology and gathering of people

Church becoming more fuzzy edged – focus less institutional but more as an agent for good in the community.

- **How do we engage all of God's people in taking this forward?**

Who are we meaning by ALL? Just the church or all of God's people?

Oswin

All churches have seen some growth, this is a new thing - particularly under 30s engaging with the church

This has been a wilderness experience for us all recently – church and communities. People driven out of the familiar – opportunity to think about who they are and what they are really about

Future is one with economic uncertainty but this has enabled us to be experimental which is exciting

Can't go back to what it was before.

Some concern how to deal with Canon Law and the constraints this may present.

If we try to do everything we will burn out

Sustaining relationships both within church and the community is very important

Most people want change (e.g. phoning people) - we are increasingly becoming agents of change in the life of our churches & communities.

People have been released from the old model and invited into places they haven't been before – invited into conversations with the community where they haven't been before – Church being recognised as an important part of the community.

How do we empower and train people to spread leadership in the future

How do we build the physical back into ministry?

Oswald

Parish share consultation has been really well engaging – we need to allow people to participate in discussion and be part of the change rather than top down and do it collaboratively

Opportunity of Covid to reach a wider audience and try new things

Church is not just about what we do on a Sunday but more about the community and how we engage

Fantastic models of ministry already exist which share people and resources – need to stop working in silos, break down parish boundaries and work better at diocesan and deanery levels to use our resources more effectively

Develop lay people – 3 year Reader course is onerous - need bite sized course to use and reach the gifts of the laity – valuing people for what they can offer, not what we might want them do

Embrace the diversity of the gifts of people we have

We should work bottom-up not top-down. Whilst there has to be some organisation structure we should not be using these terms when we are all God's people.

Wilfred

Serious recognition that the world has changed over last 3 months and church is in and has to catch up – now!

No going back but need to accompany people to help them see the new things

Blended economy to worship both inside and outside of church

Need a season of permission to be creative and experimental to try new things, to be supported to try risky things and being prepared to fail

Bede

The pandemic has forced us to be more creative – Zoom encouraged more people to participate and pulled in people from outside – needs to continue alongside what we previously did

Support has been provided for people who are not technical e.g. regular phone calls and mailings which they didn't get before and need to continue

Communities and interregnums seem to have been left behind if there has been no one to organise so there is an opportunity to develop Anna chaplaincy for the elderly and vulnerable

• Let go of?

Let go of clericalism - more lay involvement

Discuss buildings – how do we make it easier to set aside building that we no longer need

Move principal mission to the deanery from the parish

Legalism – increasingly dependent on legalism and many don't know all the rules until something goes wrong

Travel – can have effective meetings without travel

Hild

God is showing us what is not necessary at this time, making us feel excited with transformation and challenging us to keep pace with a changing world

Showing us that we can be both local in caring for our communities and have a global reach with our online presence

We are being called to a change of culture (e.g. Parish Share Consultation), however at this time God is revealing to us the harsh realities of inequality in society around us in terms of race and poverty – challenges we are called to address.

- **Let go of:**

Traditions that lead to exclusivity – having become much more accessible we must not revert back to how we were

Unnecessary and burdensome structures – are some of our structures the best use of resources? – particularly around becoming more flexible in ministry and parochial structures

Need to be creative and more playful in how we face the future – using our time better to provide more creative methods of offering training and worship – making the most of the few key resources we have

The Chair thanked the Synod for an exciting and interesting hour and looked forward to the next steps.

Board of Finance Report and Accounts 2019 (DS20 14)

The Chair invited the Chair of the Board of Finance, Canon Simon Harper, to give a presentation to the Synod. Canon Harper proposed to divide his presentation into two parts: (i) the 2019 accounts; and (ii) the 2020 position to date.

Canon Harper explained that the Accounts for 2019 were not on the Agenda to be received and were subject to the approval of the Board of Finance. Canon Harper took the opportunity to highlight the key points from paper DS19 14.

Moving to the 2020 position, Canon Harper felt it important to recognise the good work of the 2020 budget consultation, the consultations with the Review of Parish Share and a better debate about what Parish Share was about. In the first three months of 2020 the first quarter Parish Share receipts were above those received in 2019. From the end of March Share receipts began to change as the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact.

A number of scenarios were modelled to help the Bishop's Council and Board of Finance to implement measures to achieve expenditure savings between April and December 2020. These measures included the furlough of a small number of administration staff, not implementing a stipend/salary increase in April 2020, activity savings and a reduction to the level of grants to be paid in 2020 to partner organisations. Additional measure that were being considered included the disposal of property assets and engagement with the National Church to seek potential funding to meet COVID-19 related shortfalls.

Canon Harper thanked all parishes for the efforts they were making to help other parishes and to those who were able to continue to make contributions to Parish Share during the pandemic.

The Chair invited questions following the presentation:

John Appleby (Tynemouth) as a member of the Finance Group observed that the surplus with the 2019 Accounts related to pension changes and should not be seen as things being fine when set against clergy vacancies, mission opportunities not being taken up and little financial ability to build up a strategic mission fund. These were aspects of mission and ministry that were not able to be resourced in the current climate.

The Chair thanked Canon Harper for the presentation. The slides used to support the presentation were circulated after the meeting under paper DS20 16.

Welcomes and Farewells

The Chair invited Bishop Christine to lead this item.

Farewells

The Bishop welcomed:

- the Revd Canon Rob Saner-Haigh, as a fellow traveller in the adventure ahead. Rob had taken up the appointment of Canon Director of Mission and Ministry in March and the Bishop invited him to introduce himself to Synod. Rob explained he had been in the middle of moving when the national lockdown had been imposed but was delighted to now be in Fenham having completed the move in June. Rob had previously served in the Diocese of Carlisle as Vicar of Kendal for the last 10 years.
- Carol Butler, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, who had started her new post in June. Carol was thrilled to join the Diocese of Newcastle and had previously worked for Barnados for 32 years in safeguarding and risk management. Carol looked forward to meeting and working with people across the diocese.

Farewells

The Bishop began the farewells by recognising the contribution made by the outgoing Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, Ruth Rogan. All across the diocese had benefitted from Ruth's kindness and passion for the work.

The Bishop invited Bishop Mark, Archdeacon Peter and Catherine Pickford to offer some words of wisdom as they prepared to take up new roles:

The Rt Revd Mark Tanner, translating to the see of Chester, reflected on St Aidan and encouraged us to keep walking among the people and keep looking up. Bishop Mark had served as the first suffragan Bishop of Berwick.

The Ven Dr Peter Robinson, to be the Dean of Derby, reflected on the great conversations he had observed at the Synod and challenged the Synod to turn the conversations into real actions. Peter underlined fellowship and partnership as a way of listening with our fellow human beings in our communities. Peter had served as the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne since 2008.

The Revd Catherine Pickford, to be the Archdeacon of Northolt, reflected on John 10:10. *I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.* Catherine had served for 20 years in the diocese and shared with the Synod that her time here had been a fulness of life which had included the birth of her children. The family were preparing to move to London in July. Catherine's most recent appointment was Priest in Charge of Stannington and Officer for Continuing Ministerial Development. Catherine was also the Chair of the House of Clergy.

The Bishop prayed a blessing, particularly for those with new adventures. In closing the Bishop reported the death of Baroness Diana Maddock and asked the Synod for prayers of thanksgiving for Diana and her family.