

**A meeting of the Diocesan Synod held on Saturday 26 September 2020 at 10:00am.  
Due to the coronavirus pandemic the meeting was hosted using Zoom Video Conferencing.**

President: The Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd Christine Hardman  
Chair of the House of Clergy: The Revd Canon Brian Hurst  
Chair of the House of Laity: Canon Carol Wolstenholme

### **1. Welcome and opening prayer**

The Bishop opened the meeting and welcomed the Revd Canon Brian Hurst to his first meeting as the Chair of the House of Clergy. The Bishop invited Canon Hurst to chair the first part of the meeting.

The Chair of the House of Clergy thanked the Bishop for her welcome and also the members of the House of Clergy for putting their trust in him. The Chair led the Synod in prayer.

### **2. Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and Matters Arising**

The transcript of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> June had been circulated under paper DS20 18A.

The Bishop was invited to update the Synod with progress on the vacancy in the See of Berwick. The Bishop explained that interviews had been held in August and an appointment had been made. The appointment was awaiting consent from Her Majesty the Queen. Once that consent had been given an announcement would be made.

The Bishop also updated the Synod about the appointment of the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne. The Revd Preb Catherine Sourbut Groves had been appointed as the next Archdeacon of Lindisfarne. Her move from the Diocese of Bath and Wells to the Diocese of Newcastle was expected to take place at the end of October. A service of collation was planned, subject to restrictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, for Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> November at Bamburgh St Aidan.

The Chair invited the Bishop to address the Synod.

### **3. Presidential Address by the Bishop of Newcastle**

Forget not the former things do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it.

Those verses from Isaiah 43 18 and 19

*When I spoke to this Synod in May last year about a Kairos moment I didn't begin to imagine just what kind of Kairos moment it would turn out to be for us just a year later. I spoke in May 2019 about the need for us to respond with courage to God's call to us to say yes to God. I didn't envisage just how much courage we would need, but we do need courage now and we do need hope but the imperative to respond to God's call and not turn away is stronger than ever.*

*I don't think I can adequately express how moved and humbled I've been by the response of our churches at the local level to the needs of our communities. It's been simply outstanding. Properly and inevitably much of our energy has been absorbed by the practicalities of everything we've had to learn to do. We've had to master new technologies, we've had to make our church buildings COVID safe. But now, as we know that we are not facing just a short-term emergency but a sustained period of living with the realities of this pandemic I want to invite you this morning onto a journey of theological exploration. A journey we need to make if we are to be a people of hope, sharing the hope that we have in a world that needs hope so much.*

*When I was a student on the ministerial training course on which I trained I remember vividly one residential weekend when we entered the lecture room to be confronted by the shock of an open empty coffin. We were invited to visualize ourselves in that coffin, to meditate on our deaths and what we would have wanted our lives to have stood for. In this pandemic we have all been forced to confront the issue of death.*

*In choosing a companion for our theological journey this morning, I've turned to someone I have turned to many times before. Indeed, he was my spiritual director in the 1980s and 1990s and that is our former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. He wrote an article for the New Statesman in August on COVID and confronting our mortality in which he suggests that the way we think about death has a major impact on the way we live our lives. We live in a culture which avoids acknowledging death. But now we can't avoid being faced with its reality. I'm having to think about the risk of my own death. I'm having to think about the death of those I love; I'm having to face the trauma of people dying unaccompanied; being unable to say goodbye socially distanced funerals.*

*We are being made so much more aware of the terrible pressures on the vulnerable, the poor and the abused. And how Rowan asks, do we begin to talk about all this to our children without causing terror and confusion? I believe we have become far more aware of the huge significance and value of our funeral ministry. Funeral ministry has always been a priority for me. But I'm aware that this has not been universally the case in the Church of England. A Christian funeral conducted with care, integrity and compassion tells us that the limit to human life does not make the life that has ended meaningless. It doesn't deny the reality of death and the profound almost unbearable sense of loss, but it does offer the sure hope that to use Rowan's words: 'my biological demise does not destroy the relationship I have with the sacred reality and which I and everything else depends'. In the words from the Book of Common Prayer Collect for the burial of the dead: 'We are not to be sorry, as men without hope, for them that sleep in him: We meekly we beseech thee, O Father to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him as our hope is this our brother doth'.*

*In his New Statesman article Rowan reflects on the 1973 work by Ernest Becker, 'the Denial of Death'. Becker writes about the strategies we use to silence the truth that we are moving towards an end and that we are not ultimately safe. He suggests that human beings live with two coexisting demands: one to make some sense of your life; and then secondly, the need to know you are part of a larger reality, it's not just about you. To focus only on the first leads to the myth that we are, what Rowan calls, self-created rather than God created. But to focus only on the second, being part of the larger whole can lead to a fatalism and an indifference to what can and needs to be changed in our world.*

*Both are ways of denying death. Becker argues that religious faith, when it does what he calls doing its job, tells us that we are capable of making a difference, but not all the difference. When we accept that we depend on something far greater than ourselves, then no human power or regime should intimidate us. We can act in hope and yet not be trapped into thinking that we are in control and in charge. It is this faith and hope which enables us not to invest in the myth of either ourselves or our leaders as infallible heroes.*

*With our faith and our hope we are saved from oscillating between impossible expectations of our leaders on the one hand, and corrosive cynicism on the other. Our Christian faith and hope enables us to be grown-ups. Facing our mortality leads us to reassess our lives. To look with courage and with a steady gaze at the empty coffin. If we take it seriously our Christian faith gives us the spiritual resources, not to be overwhelmed by fear or despair or consumed by bitterness or anger. It can help us to lead lives marked by compassion, by love and by hope. This is most beautifully expressed by an*

*amazing woman, that many of you might remember, called Pauline Webb. She was extraordinary and she died in 2017, probably at the time the best-known Methodist in Britain. She was a broadcaster and one of the 20th Century's most eminent ecumenical leaders.*

*She wrote this: 'The first Christians lived face to face with death, but their faith in the salvation that lay beyond their final death enabled them to die daily to their immediate sufferings to live in the power of resurrection life. For many of us today, the refusal to look death in the face robs us of the reality of that resurrection experience. Tidying up the affairs of a person who has died, puts new perspective for all that person lived for. What would be saved out of it all? The money, of no value to him now? The property standing empty? The clothes to be cast away? But the faith and the hope and the love by which he lived, these surely are vindicated. These are of eternal value, these are saved as his life reaches its ultimate meaning beyond the grave in the salvation that belongs to our God.'*

*If taking our faith seriously and facing our death helps us to reassess the meaning and priorities of our personal lives, which it does and which should, then this is powerfully true to in our life together as a church. This is a time when our Christian faith and our hope will sustain us in reassessing and in discerning what really matters in our church life together. This is a time of urgent reassessment of cutting to the heart of it. What is the core of our purpose in God? This is a time to discern how we are called to share our faith that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, love overcomes hatred and life ultimately triumphs over death.*

*This is a time when we need to be 100% focused and committed to our vocation to share in God's work and we need to recognize that this is a serious charge to us. This is a life and death matter, that we fulfil our vocation with courage and don't turn away from it as a church. We need to make every other concern secondary to this charge, this privilege we have to share in God's work. We're called to serve God's people, especially the poor and the vulnerable.*

*There's a wonderful passage in the ordination services, which always makes my spine tingle actually, and we will be having those ordination services in the first two weekends of October, it is something like you cannot bear the weight of this charge in your own strength, but only with the strength of the Holy Spirit in God's strength. And that is true for those ordained as deacons and priests and it's true for each one of us in our baptismal calling, we cannot bear the weight of it in our own strength but in God's strength we are able to share in the privilege of this work.*

*Our main agenda item today is to consider our budget. I beg you, not divorce this financial discussion from this refocusing and recommitment to which we are called. It must not be a case of we've done the theology now we will look at the money. Our theology, our faith, our decisions about how we use our personal resources and our PCC resources are inextricably linked. It's all of a piece. The purpose of our financial deliberations today is not to grapple with strategies for our own survival. This is not about the survival of Newcastle Diocese PLC. No, we are called individually and corporately to commit wholeheartedly to playing our part in building and growing the church God's people need with faith, with hope and with love.*

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? As a charge to us, verse 19 continues: I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland to give drink to my people. This is the task in which we share, to bring the water of life in the desert, God's water of life. That people's deepest longings, deepest thirst, may be assuaged.*

On behalf of the Synod, the Chair thanked the Bishop for her Address and invited members to be still for a few moments to absorb that hopeful message of resurrection.

#### **4. General Synod Report**

The Chair invited Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth (General Synod Member) to report on the proceedings of General Synod

Canon McDonald-Booth began her presentation by sharing a piece of synodical business, the Clergy Covenant, from the February Group of Sessions. The Covenant was a commitment to the Church of England members to promote the welfare of clergy and their households and to coordinate and improve the approach to clergy care and wellbeing. The Working Group appointed by General Synod had also proposed that diocesan synods, deanery synods and parochial church councils be encouraged to consider the covenant and engage with it to help foster a bigger conversation.

In July the General Synod had met on Zoom for one day. It wasn't as interactive as usual and the business conducted was limited. There was an overwhelming focus about the COVID pandemic and also safeguarding. A key item was the newly appointed Archbishop of York's first address to the General Synod. He spoke about leading the start of a conversation to look at the next ten years of our strategy as a whole church. The Archbishop spoke of his longing for a more Christ centred and Jesus shaped church.

The Archbishop also paid tribute for the witness and service of the local church in our parishes, chaplaincies and other expressions of church life. He gave thanks for the creativity and tenacity and especially for the care of the vulnerable and in sustaining the life of worship.

Canon McDonald-Booth explained that a quorate General Synod was scheduled to meet in person to enact a measure to allow the General Synod to transact business remotely.

Before closing, Canon McDonald-Booth took the opportunity to ask members to encourage people in their parishes to consider standing for Deanery Synod at the APCM and serving on the General Synod. Members of Deanery Synod elect the members of General Synod and elections would take place in 2021.

The Chair thanked Canon McDonald-Booth for her clear report and invited questions or comments from the members present. There were no questions arising and the Synod moved to the next item of business.

#### **5. Clergy Covenant: Proclamation of an Act of Synod**

The Chair invited Canon Carol Wolstenholme (Chair of the House of Laity and General Synod Member) to proclaim the Act of Synod.

Canon Wolstenholme began by thanking everyone for their very kind messages of support which had been received following her recent diagnosis. Canon Wolstenholme explained that the Covenant would not create legal rights but expressed a moral, religious obligation on the part of the church towards its clergy. The Covenant would help to improve our approach to clergy care and wellbeing to help ordained ministers flourish in their service and the ministry to God.

The Clergy Covenant for Wellbeing Act of Synod 2020 was proclaimed.

Canon Wolstenholme explained that the Synod would be invited to engage in further conversation and debate about the Covenant at future meetings of the Synod.

The Chair thanked Canon Wolstenholme for proclaiming the Act of Synod so beautifully. In response to a comment within the Zoom chat function the Diocesan Secretary confirmed that papers supporting the Clergy Covenant would be circulated to Synod members. Drawing the item of business to a close

the Chair hoped members would engage in a positive and interesting debate at a future sitting of the Synod.

## **6. Transformation Programme: Growing Church Bringing Hope - next steps**

The Chair moved to the next item of business and invited the Archdeacon of Northumberland to present to the Synod.

The Archdeacon gave an update about the transformation programme.

*Good to be with you all today and we just want to give you something in way of an update on progress with what is called transformation. Yesterday I spent the day helping my mother move house. It is one of those things we have been planning for an awfully long time for at least a year and I was reminded that moving takes a lot of time, a lot of thought, a lot of planning, a lot of negotiation, a lot of setbacks and a lot of hard graft - especially trying to get washing machines into what seems to be very small spaces. I am also struck that my mum has far more optimism about what might fit in my car than I do.*

*Over the last few months we have been doing a lot of planning, a lot of negotiation, a lot of thinking and taking a lot of time as we contemplate transformation and you were very helpful back in our last meeting helping us to think through some of the big questions around transformation. We have been thinking more in the last few weeks about the conversations that we have been sharing in across the diocese via Zoom, which most if not all of you have been involved to some degree or other. As we do that we are trying to sharpen our values and our priorities which will enable us to define a model of mission and ministry that will enable us to move forward as a church to meet the challenges and priorities that Bishop Christine was speaking on just a few minutes earlier.*

*At Newcastle Diocese we are called to be growing church bringing hope. We are called to be a growing church bringing hope to our parishes and communities. We have often said that our values which are key to us are open generous and engaged. But for the purpose of transformation, we wanted to just to try and focus those values to help us think about the future. One of the joys of our values is that they have been quite wide ranging and quite open, but for the purposes that we are setting about we wanted to think about how do our values of being open generous and engaged help us. And so, at the moment where we're thinking about how are we open to God's transforming love. In that sense of being rooted in who we are and whose we are and the vocation that we share within the overall overflow of God's love, which is always flowing outwards into the world. It was a strong sense in all of the consultations that we took part in and all the things that people were saying to us that we want this to be very much rooted in who we are, and in our call to be God's people sharing God's love, where we are.*

*So, we want to be open to God's transforming love, but we also want to be generous with God's transforming gifts, generous with one another sharing our gifts as lay and ordained and that was a universal theme in all of the conversations we held. That our partnership as lay and ordained needs to be strengthened further and developed more. We also want to be generous with our resources in terms of finance, as well as other gifts and skills that we might share. And that comes down to that sense of why do we share what we have and how do we do that and of course our Parish Share Review. which has been running alongside this work for part of the time has been key to helping us think through that. But, how might we be generous with all that God gives to us. How might we be generous with God's gifts, which are given for the purpose of transformation, transforming the church so that it might engage in the world.*

*And finally, that other part of our values: 'engagement'. How are we engage together in God's transforming mission in the world? How will we be meaningfully and intentionally engaged in our communities? How might we further promote social action and justice, evangelism and not see those things as being separate? How might we continue to work and grow our partnerships with other organisations and as churches working together ecumenically?*

*How might we be open to God's transforming love, generous with God's transforming gifts, engaged in God's transforming mission in the world and we see these as being core to understanding our values in the current context. But in all of the consultations we also had this sense that what we do and who we are, has to be for everyone, every day, everywhere as a really strong sense for our sub not losing sight of the individual. respecting our different contexts and valuing the call of all ages, all stages and all backgrounds. I think Fr Brian summed it up nicely at the start. How do we value that sense that we are all ordinary people made extraordinary by God's transforming love? And so, these values of what we've been thinking about and working on a drawing out of all the conversations we've been having with you over the last few months, and these are developing into our priorities. Now, none of these are rocket science, but the significance might be in how we prioritise them.*

*So, we are exploring a first priority which is about bringing to faith bringing people to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ being that Jesus shaped community. This is about how we resource our mission, our evangelism, our community development and social action. How we are demonstrating and inviting people into abundant life?*

*Another priority is growing in faith, how are we nurturing people in our faith? How are we resourcing that across our communities? How are we helping and enabling people to explore their vocation? What about our training and clergy development? How are we called to love and live and serve and enabling one another to do that? And there's all sorts of initiatives out there about that. I know we all are very fond of initiatives, everyday faith and growing faith, but these things are important for us to consider as we try and ensure that we are nurturing faith and that has got to be a priority for us. So, growing in faith.*

*And of course, how do we live in faith and hope? How are we sharing generously building partnerships and working together and how do we resource that intentionally? How do we build relationships and how do we remember that living in faith implies there will be risk? Our faith is always risky because God is always calling us outwards, calling us further.*

*So, the priorities we are exploring at the moment are: bringing to faith; growing in faith and living in faith and those are part of defining our priorities and values to help us in that work a defining ministry and mission model. We are laying out the groundwork part of the planning work and going on from that there is more to do so in the next week we are hoping to make significant steps forwards in defining a model of ministry and mission that we might be able to take out for further conversation across the diocese. And also think about how that impacts in all of our different settings with all of our varied traditions, with all of the challenges and different challenges that face us in different parts of our diocese. Also working to see how that will engage with all of our current strands of growing church bringing hope.*

*You will know that we are working with our Transformation Programme Manager, Chris Elder, and he has been very good at preparing our roadmap for us and helping us to see what lies ahead of us and we would like to share this timeline with you. [Sharing a slide - attached] So this is part of preparing the background, which has been going on over the last few months with the different groups and consultations that we have been having. It also timelines all the other things that are going on at the*

*moment for us. As we come out of September we are in this process of, as I say, defining our model based on our values and priorities. We have got a lot to do in October, November and December.*

The Archdeacon invited the Secretary to set a broader context about how this piece of work would connect with work that was happening more nationally. The Secretary spoke to a presentational slide (attached) about ongoing work across the National Church titled 'the emerging Church of England'. The workstreams supporting this work were:

- A Recovery Group led by the Bishop of London
- A Vision & Strategy Group led by the Archbishop of York
- A Governance Group led by the Bishop of Leeds
- Transforming Effectiveness led by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

A Coordinating Group, led by the Bishop of Manchester, was overseeing the workstreams and was expected to report to the General Synod in February 2021.

The Secretary explained that Mutual Finances, a sub-group for Vision and Strategy, was looking at the resources across the Church of England and the disparities. The Bishop of Sheffield was leading this work and the Secretary was a member of this group.

The Archdeacon hoped that the overview of the national work helped to give a sense of the bigger picture.

The Chair thanked the Archdeacon and invited questions or comments from the Synod.

Carol Griffiths (Bamburgh & Glendale): Reflected that as so much of what had been said was new to her, how could this be communicated this down to local parish level? She strongly suspected there were many people in her parish and deanery who would be largely oblivious to much of what had been discussed. In response the Archdeacon explained that there was a lot of work to do to engage people more widely and as the work progressed communication would be a key priority.

The Revd Tim Mayfield (Area Dean Tynemouth): Asked about the conflict between the values and priorities and the budget which proposed freezing the post of evangelism adviser. In response the Archdeacon explained that the budget proposal was set around current resources and the current level of resources. The bid to the Strategic Investment Board would include the resourcing of the posts required to help realise the vision and priorities.

Dr John Appleby (General Synod Member): Thanked the Archdeacon for his presentation. While Dr Appleby had found lots of interesting and exciting things in the presentation he wanted to stress a point about the timeline and dissemination. He found himself asking what does it actually mean in practice? Without the greater detail parishes will see this as aspirational. Does it mean there will be fewer clergy? He apologised if his reference to 'airy-fairy' would be seen as rude but he was concerned that the lack of detail would not help with dissemination.

The Revd Simon White (Morpeth) reflected on the amazing vehicles for communication, particularly with online activities and asked if inspirational resources, such as the Bishop's Presidential Address, could be shared across the diocese to be used within digital services.

The Archdeacon thanked Dr Appleby for highlighting the aspirational 'airy-fairy' aspect which some would struggle to understand without the detail. He explained that while it was aspirational the work had developed through listening and learning with people across the summer consultations. The model would be refined over the coming months and that refinement would add the measurable and quantitative aspect that Dr Appleby was seeking to see.

The Archdeacon thanked Simon White for his observations and gave assurance that the digital world was something to be included within this work. He deferred the technical aspect of sharing the Presidential Address to someone more qualified. [The video extract was shared post Synod.]

The Chair thanked the Archdeacon for his presentation and the Secretary for helping to frame our work into the into the national context.

### **The Synod paused for a break**

Canon Carol Wolstenholme, Chair of the House of Laity, took the Chair.

### **7. Budget Proposal 2021**

The Chair set out the process for the next part of the meeting which would include an update on the financial position for 2020 and consideration of the budget proposal for 2021. The Synod would be invited to break into small groups to discuss three questions about the budget proposal.

The Chair asked the Synod if there was anything she could do to help members to participate in the finance discussions. In response, the Very Revd Geoff Miller (the Dean) suggested some space and silence could help members to process the information and contribute to the debate. The Chair thanked the Dean for his helpful suggestion and agreed to allow space in the debate for reflection in silence.

The Chair invited Canon Simon Harper (Chair of the Board of Finance) to make a presentation.

Introducing the item Canon Harper reflected on the Bishop's Presidential Address and on two particular points which he thought were helpful for the financial items: (i) what really matters; and (ii) how does the budget help us serve God's people, especially the poor and the vulnerable?

Canon Harper provided Synod with an update on the financial position as at the end of August 2020 (the slides supporting the presentation are attached). The Synod noted the following points:

- The budget for 2020 had been set with an agreed deficit of £90k
- As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic Parish Share receipts had fallen
- The shortfall in Parish Share was forecast to be £1.1M
- To meet the shortfall a savings package of £390k was put in place in April
- The Trustees of the Newcastle Diocesan Society had agreed to grant £100k to the Board of Finance
- Work was in-hand to seek financial support from the National Church to help with the remaining deficit related to COVID-19

Canon Harper thanked all parishes for their support generosity during the lockdown which had helped to maintain cashflow to pay clergy stipends and salaries.

Canon Harper then took the Synod through the budget proposal for 2021 (paper DS20 19). and made it clear that this was a proposal for consultation. The Synod noted the following points:

- The proposal would fund 82.0FTE paid stipendiary posts and 15.42FTE paid curacy posts
- The proposal would give provision for a stipend/salary increase in 2021 of up to +2.0%. (no increase was awarded in 2020).
- The proposal would result in the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board not receiving a grant in 2021. The Education Board would be expected to meet that from its own reserves.
- The proposal would not fund grants in 2021 to NECAT, NIM and Alnmouth Friary.



- To maintain the Parish Share request at the same level as 2020 savings of £175k would need to be achieved leaving a budget deficit of £80k

Canon Harper explained that the continuing pandemic was expected to further impact the ability for parishes to contribute to Share. As a result, the Board of Finance was preparing contingency arrangements to manage a further shortfall in Share. The Board was preparing to sell redundant property no longer required to support ministry housing needs.

The Chair thanked Canon Harper for his very succinct and clear presentation and explained that the meeting would move into smaller breakout groups to discuss three questions:

1. What really matters?
2. How do we use that budget to serve God's people everywhere?
3. And how do we actually feel about it.

The Chair asked for one person from each group to make a record of what was discussed and to send their notes to the Secretary.

Before the meeting moved into the breakout groups the Chair invited the Synod to pray in silence. The meeting then moved into eight smaller groups: Aidan; Bede; Cuthbert; Ebba; Ethelburga; Hild; Oswald; and Oswin.

The Chair invited the groups to report back from their discussions on the three questions:

**Carol Griffiths** (Bamburgh & Glendale): reported for **Cuthbert**.

Several points from our discussion group, starting with the fact that certainly from my own coastal parish experience, COVID-19 has exposed our reliance on fundraising which is used to top up committed giving so the amount we are able to give at the moment is confined to committed giving showing how much we need fundraising to be able to meet our share which we can't at the moment.

I have promised to raise on behalf of our Vicar his concern that part of this year's savings package includes a pay cut for clergy and also diminishing amount spent on clergy housing.

There was concern expressed in the group that the whole focus of bringing people to faith doesn't match with the fact that we are no longer supporting the Board of Education and we're very acutely aware of our responsibility to young people in schools and the reduction to what we are able to offer church schools.

We would like to know more from those parishes who have been able to meet their share. Could Simon Harper share tips about how those parishes have been able to do that when others of us are distinctly struggling? Have they dipped into their reserves? How have they been able to meet their share? Are there any tips that they can pass on to us? We feel that so many parishes are struggling in areas of social deprivation and maybe it's easier for more "middle class" parishes to be able to meet their share. Maybe should those parishes actually pay more? There were examples happily of where there have been people joining churches during lockdown and signing up to committed giving but I suspect, those were in minority.

And the final comment was that even those people in parishes who have committed to regular giving, some of those actually haven't increased their donations for years. Can we find a way to encourage them that to review?

Overall, reluctance is not the right word but anxiety that with COVID-19 continuing until a vaccine comes to the rescue we won't be able to meet our 2020 share and 21. Thank you.

**Izzy McDonald-Booth** (GS Member): reported for **Aidan**.

Okay, so the main points that I want to make are, again about anxiety and also that people don't get damaged/embarrassed by not paying their share because it's very difficult for clergy, if they genuinely can't pay the share. The emphasis is always on the failure and it's just important to move beyond that, I suppose there's also that tension between our aspirations. People are overwhelmingly positive about our aspirations and want to move forward, but there's a tension there with what is the actual reality. People are tired, especially clergy, but also I imagine PCCs are spending all their time trying to pay the parish share and there's not much energy left for other things. It is really about how can we move beyond a situation that we're not working all the time for money and not for God, necessarily. So that's one thing. And the last point I wanted to make was somebody in the group said we really need to get on with reconfiguring ministry. We've been talking for years about it but we really need to do something. Thank you.

**Benjamin Carter** (Hexham & GS Member): reported for **Bede**.

Sorry, I don't think we actually nominated somebody to speak. We talked about the experience, the value and the huge importance of parish ministry both towards our identity as the Church of England, but also in terms of how we've been able to respond as a church to the current challenges. How there's been tensions between online worship and worshipping in church, depending on context and generations, but also how important the parish structure has been to that and therefore certainly, perhaps I'm speaking for myself here, the real importance of how we serve God's people best is by ensuring that the ministry of our parishes is as strong as it can be going into the future.

As our conversations we had, I think, very similar discussions to what has been reported of other groups, which is about the relationship between the budget as it is constructed and how that will then be deployed in terms of ministry on the grounds and a desire that if we're going to reconfigure ministry around the budget, it's done in a way which is sustainable into the future.

**Emma Doran** (Tynemouth): reported for **Hild**.

We recognize that everyone's trying as hard as they can to do the best that they can and we did kind of wonder is it now time to face the reality of the situation that we're in the same old, same old conversation every year that we're trying to plug a gap. We're spending more than we have. The ultimate Kairos moment for us all has been COVID-19 and is this the opportunity and the time for us to get out of this continual loop. We are doing a new thing as we are doing things differently because we've had to. We've thrown ourselves into it and we are surviving. So, is this not the future, do we not just need to go with it and catch glimpses of the new possibilities and stop just trying to survive year on year and actually just do what we can to get on with being the people of God and being with people and for people and for God and in whatever future challenge that is going to be.

We discussed other things that other groups have also discussed, but actually we need to just every year we get so hung up on the budget. Let's rip it all up and start again because COVID-19 has shown us that we can do that. We're very resilient and we're very adaptable and so this is our new Kairos moment. So, let's stop having the same endless conversations year on year and just be free to be God's people somehow.

**Pauline Pearson** (Newcastle Central): reported for **Oswin**.

In relation to how we felt we felt that we had been doing really well because the share request was realistic. We were much concerned about the ability to strive for that level again because a lot of

parishes have been digging into reserves. A lot of things like income for weddings and from lettings were down and somebody else said the uncertainty about where we're going next with COVID-19.

What really matters? A priority, a really high priority, especially as we Rachel Scheffer in the group was sharing the Gospel with children who've been impacted heavily by COVID-19 and that that should be something done so all parishes can feel confident in what they're doing over this next year. But in the longer term it is about affirming the priorities that Mark Wroe began to share in his presentation.

We can't keep financing overspends we need to raise more cash. We talked about challenging people about the amount of giving that they do and through that raising of cash to do the things that support our mission.

Also reviewing the number of buildings and asking the question, can we afford to maintain a presence in each locality? Thinking about partnerships with other users and other uses, but knowing that that wouldn't work for everyone. We did talk about short term loans from the Church Commissioners, but decided that was probably not going to happen.

**Gwyn McKenzie** (Corbridge): reported for **Ebba**.

We talked about several other things that people have already mentioned including the importance of the parish in a community. One of the things we thought that really mattered was maintaining a presence in the community and the parishes be resourced to have the resources they need to deliver whatever that might look like.

We also talk about buildings and referenced the fact that if the High Street has too many shops, then perhaps the church has too many buildings. Maybe we do need to grasp that metal and start thinking about getting rid of some of those because some parishes just cannot afford to maintain those buildings.

I think our main concern was that the loudest voices will be heard and what really matters is making sure everyone is heard. We were concerned that those with the loudest voices would be the ones that would be heard and that the poorer parishes will not be heard when it comes to the consultation. We also need to remember that the poor parishes are in different contexts and they are very different. It's different in the rural areas and in the inner-city areas.

Our final point really was around language and how we felt there was some anxiety again by some of the ways that we might be presenting this information. We were concerned that some parishes may feel or be made to feel that they failed because they haven't paid their parish share and we think it's important that that doesn't happen.

**Sarah Lunn** (Bellingham): reported for **Oswald**.

A lot of what we've said has been said, but I think I want to say we were extremely encouraged by Simon's presentation. It was honest and accurate and to say thank you so much to all of the folks in Church House, etc, who have done this in this very difficult year and we feel confident we are in good hands. So I think the rest of the stuff has mainly been said and I'll write it up and send it to Shane, but I just wanted that huge thank you to Shane, Simon and the team in an horrendous year

**Lynne Craggs** (Bedlington): reported for **Ethelburga**.

Just to pick up on three points. One was that we have to hang on and build on the relationship that has developed between parishes and the finance team over the last 18 months. That had given a good

understanding about the original budget and we were all doing so well and we just have to hang on to that relationship because it was so positive.

Another point was, we've got a step up the lay training. We've got to create realistic ministry teams that can cover all aspects. We have to look at deployment for laity and looking in our parishes for potential new lay ministers.

When the proposed budget goes out to the parishes, who are going to be the people you're going to be talking to?

**Simon Harper** (DBF Chair): responded to a specific point about Education. Although the proposed budget does not include provision for a grant to the Education Board, the intention is that the Education Board will use some of its own reserves to fund activities in 2021.

The Chair thanked all who had participated in the groups for their input and the honesty of the responses which would help to shape the consultation with parishes.

## **8. Closing remarks**

The Chair invited the Bishop to offer her reflections of the meeting.

The Bishop reaffirmed how moved and humbled she was about the amazing way parishes had responded to the pandemic and asked Synod to help to cascade her thanks to all involved.

Reflecting on the resources that God has endowed us with the Bishop highlighted that for many the pandemic had allowed time for us to assess our priorities. The pain of COVID had not hit equally in all kinds of ways. Some, like herself, had the benefit of a large house and garden and were lucky enough to be living in a household with the company of others, whereas some had experienced very different situations. The Bishop was painfully aware that COVID hadn't hit us equally with finances. Some had faced financial ruin while others had continued in employment and many with pensions had not been affected financially.

With less chance to spend money, many had accumulated reserves and funds and the Bishop encouraged all who resonated with this to reassess their personal giving in the light of that. The financial state of our PCCs was very different across the diocese. Each PCC needed sensible levels of reserves, but our core purpose was not to accumulate money but to use resources for God's mission.

The Bishop asked the Synod to pray for those who were to be ordained deacon and priest over the first two weekends of October and expressed her thanks to Bishop John Packer, Bishop Mark Bryant and Bishop Stephen Platten for their help, support and encouragement to enable the ordinations to take place.

On behalf of the Synod the Bishop thanked the Revd Canon Brian Hurst and Canon Carol Wolstenholme for holding the meeting together so beautifully and for making the meeting so constructive and purposeful.

The Bishop gave a blessing. The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you now and remain with you always.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and the meeting closed at 13:00