

Leeds Diocesan Synod

DRAFT Minutes of the twenty fourth meeting of the Synod of the diocese held at 9.30 am on Saturday, 18 March 2023 via Zoom.

Chair: The Bishop of Leeds

1. Opening prayers, Welcome and Apologies

Worship was led by The Very Revd Simon Cowling, Dean of Wakefield, The Revd Doug Rice-Bowen, Assistant Curate at Holy Trinity, Skipton (Visitor with permission to speak), The Revd Eve Ridgeway and Tabitha Tanna.

Mr Jonathan Wood, Secretary to the Diocesan Synod, confirmed the Zoom meeting procedure and that the Diocesan Communications Team would be using social media to provide a live general commentary on Synod.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone including:

Newly elected members:

House of Clergy

The Revd Mike Cansdale (Aire and Worth deanery)

The Revd Philippa Slingsby-Lunn (Outer Bradford deanery)

House of Laity

Major Geoffrey Berry, TD, KLJ, KSR, FRGS. (Ripon deanery)

Visitor (Observer)

The Revd Dorothea Bertschmann (Assistant Curate, Dewsbury deanery).

The Chair's permission to speak (SO3) was granted to:

Item 9 Presentation: Update report Barnabas, the Revd Jude Smith, Director of Church Revitalisation.

Apologies

17 apologies were received.

Chair: Canon Matthew Ambler (Chair of the House of Laity)

2. Minutes of the last meeting on 15 October 2023. DS23 03 01

Motion:

The Chair to propose:

"That the draft minutes contained in DS23 03 01 be accepted as a true record of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 15 October 2022".

There was one notified amendment from Mr Graham Foster (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery) to Item 6 on page 6 of the Draft minutes. Graham had said that he represented “**one of the poorest parishes in the diocese**”.

There were no further amendments.

The Chair proposed:

“That the draft minutes contained in DS23 03 01 with the notified amendments be accepted as a true record of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 15 October 2022”.

The Synod was paused for ten minutes to enable the Synod team to extend the Zoom licence as the limit of 100 participants had been reached. Upon the Zoom licence being updated further members joined the Synod.

The Chair began Item 2 afresh.

There was one notified amendment from Mr Graham Foster (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery) to Item 6 on page 6 of the Draft minutes. Graham had said that he represented “**one of the poorest parishes in the diocese**”.

There were no further amendments.

The Chair proposed:

“That the draft minutes contained in DS23 03 01 with the notified amendments be accepted as a true record of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 15 October 2022”.

The Synod members voted via a poll.

Result of the voting:

For: 89

Against: 0

Abstain: 04.

The motion was approved.

3. Presidential Address

The Bishop of Leeds gave his presidential address to the Diocesan Synod. A copy of the address is attached to these minutes.

4. Questions to the Synod.

No questions had been received.

5. Motion: Appointment of Honorary Assistant Bishop. DS23 03 02, DS23 03 02 01.

Motion:

“That this Synod consents to the execution of the draft Instrument of Delegation (DS23 03 02 01) by the Bishop of Leeds in favour of The Right Reverend Paul John Slater.”

Proposer: The Bishop of Leeds

Papers:

DS23 03 02 Legal Note on proposal to appoint an honorary assistant bishop

DS23 03 02 01 Draft Instrument of Delegation to appoint honorary assistant bishop.

Presenter: The Bishop of Leeds.

The Bishop of Leeds said there were a number of retired bishops who minister in the diocese with the Bishop of Leeds permission. The former Bishop of Kirkstall did not intend ministering in the Leeds episcopal area but this had not been excluded from the proposed instrument. This was so that it would be possible, should the need arise and with the current Bishop of Kirkstall being content, for Bishop Paul to minister in the Leeds episcopal area.

There were no questions.

The Bishop of Leeds moved the motion:

“That this Synod consents to the execution of the draft Instrument of Delegation (DS23 03 02 01) by the Bishop of Leeds in favour of The Right Reverend Paul John Slater.”

No debate was offered by the members.

The Synod members voted via a poll.

Result of the voting:

For: 93

Against: 01

Abstain: 04.

The motion was approved.

6. Report: General Synod February 2023 and time for questions on the report DS23 03 03

Paper: General report Feb 2023 DS23 03 03

Speaker: The Revd Gary Waddington.

The Revd Gary Waddington (GW) said he would not be adding to the circulated report but was happy to answer any questions the Synod members wished to raise.

Questions

Tabitha Tanna (Wakefield deanery)

Asked what the next steps would be in the LLF process. When would the Diocesan Synod get chance to reflect on this?

GW - commented that the next step would be for the College of Bishops meeting in the w/b 20 March 2023, to consider how to take the matter forward.

The Bishop of Leeds - said General Synod had debated the motions in February 2023 and sent the matter back to the House of Bishops. The matter needed to be agreed with the College of Bishops. A group would be set up to look at Pastoral Guidance. The timetable was for the matter to return to the General Synod in July 2023. The Bishop of Leeds said his personal view was that until the material was ready it shouldn't be sent to the General Synod. The process for the Diocesan Synods being consulted would depend on the status of the General Synod motion. So the process remained open and wasn't clear at the current time.

The Ven Paul Ayers (Archdeacon of Leeds, General Synod)

Archdeacon Paul said that his understanding was that LLF, as such, was over and Next Steps had ceased and so the matter had moved to another phase. The decision about adoption of marriage had been taken at the February 2023 General Synod and so was not now on the table as a debate. The new question was about the prayers and Pastoral Guidance ie not LLF anymore.

GW - said his understanding was that it was for the House of Bishops to take the next steps and for them to decide when and at what point materials would go to General Synod. So it could be July 2023 or February 2024 but the precise date wasn't known at the moment.

The Bishop of Leeds – said LLF as a process of encounter and investigation was concluded. The Next Steps group would not formally conclude until the next group was formed. The material from LLF remained online and in book format and he encouraged Synod members to look at the resources. However, it wouldn't be known what the next steps would be until the bishops met. Questions of doctrine always remained on the table. These questions didn't disappear because General Synod had voted on them. The debate about marriage would likely continue in to the future.

There were no further questions.

A refreshment break was taken for 10 minutes.

(The Zoom chat function was changed from "Chat with the host and co-hosts only" to "Chat with all participants" for the period of the break and then returned to "Chat with the host and co-hosts only" for the remaining business items.)

Chair: The Revd Canon Rachel Firth (Chair of the House of Clergy)

7. **Presentation: Update report on the Linda Box case**

Papers: None

Presenter: Jonathan Wood. (JW)

JW explained that there remained an ongoing legal case and so the presentation would be read out from a report approved by the diocese's legal advisers. JW read the following report:

"PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1. At previous Synods there have been questions relating to the loss the Bishop and Diocese suffered as a result of the actions of Linda Box, formerly the Diocesan Registrar in the Diocese of Wakefield.
2. The account I am about to give attempts to cover the key points, but as the legal action is still live I hope Synod will understand there is a limit as to what can be said. However I wanted to bring this update at this point in order to ensure we were being as transparent as possible. Whilst there will be opportunity for questions at the end, I hope Synod members will understand that some questions may not be able to be answered. This includes detailed information on the current quantum of the claim due to ongoing legal discussions.
3. Turning to the background for those who may not know.
4. Dixon Coles & Gill (or "DCG") were a firm of solicitors who had a strong and long-standing connection with the Church. DCG acted for various Wakefield Diocesan Boards in relation to various matters, including conveyancing, which was done by Mrs Box who was an equity partner.
5. In addition, Mrs Box was Registrar of the former Diocese of Wakefield until 2005, when she became Chancellor of the Diocese of Southwell.
6. Upon her resignation, Mr Gill and Mrs Wilding took over as Joint Registrars of Wakefield. From 2005 Mrs Box had no formal role within the Diocese of Wakefield, save as a partner in DCG.
7. On Christmas Eve 2015, Mr Gill discovered that Mrs Box had been stealing from clients of the firm. This came as a total surprise to the Bishop of Leeds and The Diocese of Leeds.
8. It is clear that Mrs Box abused her senior position of responsibility within the Church of England by stealing. In addition it became clear during the course of investigations that Mrs Box used her position as a trusted partner in a law firm to steal millions of pounds from the estates of those who had died, depriving their grieving friends and families of their rightful inheritance.
9. During the course of the criminal proceedings the court heard Mrs Box used the money she stole on shopping sprees, expensive hotels, vintage wines and to pay off multiple mortgages.
10. She also paid more than £230,000 to a marketing and public relations firm which did work for her husband's firm of funeral directors.
11. In totality Mrs Box was prosecuted for 13 counts of theft, fraud and forgery. She pleaded guilty to 12 counts and was sentenced to 7 years in prison.
12. We have been reliant on the records kept by Mrs Box and the ledgers kept by DCG as to the exact loss suffered. It should be noted that it is up to DCG as the accounting party to explain what happened to the churches money and its investments.
13. We accept that the partners in DCG other than Mrs Box are honest but they are personally

liable as trustees for money that went through their client and office accounts. In addition they are liable for the losses incurred as a result of her wrongful acts. As with all Solicitors firms, DCG had indemnity insurance and this has been the main focus of our efforts to recover the loss.

14. When enquiries were first made with the insurers of DCG to see whether we could recover our losses from them the insurers indicated that all the claims from the clients which Mrs Box had defrauded would be aggregated and would not be treated separately. As such they said if we wanted to receive anything from them by way of compensation then we would have to act quickly as out of the £2 million of cover the Claimants had under the terms of their policy only the sum of £330,000 remained to be claimed. This was despite the total fraud by Mrs Box being in the millions.
15. Given the sums of money which were misappropriated by Mrs Box on behalf of both the Bishop and the DBF this was not acceptable and the decision was made to issue proceedings. This was to protect the interests of the DBF and the Bishop.

PART 2: PROCEEDINGS

16. Proceedings were issued on 25 September 2018.

The Bishop's claim arises out of missing funds from the Bishop's fund. There appears to be no record of what has happened to the monies contained within this fund.

17. The Diocesan Board of Finance's claim arises out of sale land. Following an in-depth analysis of ledgers relating to conveyancing files where Mrs Box was instructed to act reveal a considerable number of payments out to or on behalf of the DBF but which it does not recognise. There is a significant claim in respect of these payments.

PART 3: SUMMARY JUDGMENT APPLICATION

18. In October 2019 our solicitors issued an application on our behalf of Summary Judgment of an account from the former partners in DCG. In addition we made an application for an interim payment and for a declaration that the insurers were not permitted to aggregate the claims of the Bishop with those of the DBF or with the Claims of the other victims of Mrs Box. This was a significant application in that the issue of aggregation has been one which has been the source of much legal discussion and debate. A decision in our favour had the potential to see a significant change in practice by insurers and to increase the protection available to the victims of fraud and other loss. The case therefore has become bigger than simply about our loss – as will become clear as I explain the fact we have gone all the way to the Supreme Court. But first to the claim.
19. Our application for an account by DCG and an interim payment was brought on the basis that DCG at one time held very substantial assets belonging to the Bishop and the DBF. A large part of those assets had been stolen by Mrs Box. DCG (and therefore its insurers) are liable to account as trustee of these assets. Accordingly the Bishop and the DBF are entitled to an account and enquiry into what has happened to these assets.

PART 4: POINTS OF DEFENCE CONSIDERED

20. As mentioned the claim form was issued on 25 September 2018. Mr Gill and Mrs Wilding argued that any claim for money misappropriated before 25 September 2012 is therefore statute barred.
21. The insurers were purporting that for the purpose of the limit of indemnity under the firms professional indemnity insurance, they were entitled to aggregate all the claims by all the firm's clients who have sustained a loss by virtue of Mrs Box's dishonesty.

PART 5: OUTCOME OF APPLICATION

22. Our application was heard in the High Court on 29 September 2020 and in totality lasted the course of four days. His Honour Judge Saffman found that we were successful in our request for an account and enquiry, he did not agree with the limitation defence brought by DCG nor did he agree that the insurers should be able to aggregate their claims. This was, as noted above, a significant ruling in challenging the behaviour of insurers.
23. His Honour Judge Saffman did not order an interim payment, however as we were partly successful in our application we were awarded costs in the sum of £45,000

PART 6: APPEAL HEARINGS

24. The solicitors for DCG and the insurers decided to appeal the decision of his Honour Judge Saffman in respect of his findings on limitation and aggregation.
25. The matters were referred to the Court of Appeal and were heard on 8 July 2021 and 22 July 2021 respectively.
26. The insurers however were unsuccessful in their appeal against aggregation and we received a cost order against them in the sum of £25,000 plus vat.
27. DCG were however successful in their application for limitation - and the Court found that our claims would be subject to a limitation date of 25 September 2012. This means that any claims before that date would be statute barred and could not be considered.
28. The insurers then decided to apply for permission to appeal to the Supreme Court. This permission was refused by way of an order dated 27 May 2022 on the basis that their application did not raise an arguable point of law. We were awarded our costs of having to respond to that application in the sum of £8,500.

PART 6: PRESENT POSITION

29. To date we have recovered £547,936.35 from the Proceeds of Crime Act proceedings and £83,500 in respect of payment of costs from our opponents in this matter. The Bishop and DBF are therefore still seeking a significant amount to remedy its losses.
30. We have since been invited to mediate on the outstanding issues in this matter to see whether a resolution can be reached without further Court involvement.
31. The parties are under an obligation to act in accordance with the Civil Procedure Rule to explore all types of Alternative Dispute Resolution throughout the course of proceedings.
32. A mediation date has been set for the summer of 2023. This will provide an opportunity to resolve the matter but only if a suitable settlement can be reached. This will need to meet the interests of the Bishop and DBF.
33. If the matter is not resolved at mediation then the matter will proceed to a Case Management

Hearing whereby the court will consider the list of issues outstanding between the parties and a time table will be set where by all parties will have to comply with matters such as disclosure of documents, preparation of witness statements and potentially the instruction of experts.

34. As I hope Synod can see, this is a complex matter but one we are taking seriously. We are determined to ensure the position of the Bishop and DBF is remedied. We will not be providing a commentary on the ongoing discussions but will ensure Synod is further updated when the matter is resolved. “

Questions

The Revd John Bavington (Inner Bradford deanery and General Synod)

Asked what the level of award was needed to satisfy the Bishop of Leeds claim and the Leeds DBF claim. What was the hoped for award?

JW said that the total amount stolen from all of the victims by Linda Box was in excess of £4m. This full amount would not be recoverable. JW wasn't able to comment on anything to do with a settlement as this would interfere with the mediation process. JW would be working with the Leeds DBF Board members to consider what would be a good settlement.

Barbara Smith (Brighouse and Elland deanery)

Thanked JW for the explanation. She was conscious there had been a lot for hard work going on and offered her best wishes to JW for the mediation process.

The Revd Nicholas Clews (Inner Bradford deanery)

Thanked JW for all the hard work on this issue. Asked JW to say (either immediately or at a later date if that was more appropriate) what procedural changes had been made to ensure this level of fraud was less likely in the future.

JW replied that the Leeds DBF had robust governance in place around the Leeds DBF and property transactions. There were reconciliations around sales and purchases, double signatures for monies going in and out and approvals for sales and purchases by both a group of diocesan officers and a delegated group of the Property Committee. The transactions were also shown on a report to the Finance, Assets and Investments Committee every few months, reconciled with the Accounts and reviewed by the Auditors. The Bishop of Leeds would speak about the bishop's accounts.

The Revd Nick Clews asked if this governance was more thorough than that of the old diocese of Wakefield?

JW said he couldn't comment on the former diocese of Wakefield's processes and procedures. JW said he could confirm that the Leeds DBF did ensure that monies for sales and purchases were accounted for in the Leeds DBF accounts.

The Bishop of Leeds

Said the Synod members should understand he had to be judicious with what he could say. For the former Bishop of Wakefield's accounts in the former diocese of Wakefield, Linda Box was the sole signatory. There was no checking, recording or accounting for the accounts, which was appalling. There was not good governance for these funds.

For any of the Bishop of Leeds's accounts including the discretionary accounts there always had to be two signatories.

Graham Foster (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery)

Thanked JW for the update. He wasn't sure if JW could answer but with regard to the comment on the amount of costs recovered, JW had not said how much the costs were to date. Graham remained concerned about the conflict of interest in having a Registrar and Independent Financial Adviser as the same company, as this had been the problem with Linda Box.

JW asked for clarification for the reference to Registrar and "independent financial adviser".

Graham Foster confirmed he had meant "legal" adviser.

JW commented that with regard to costs the matter was quite complicated as there was insurance in place. This would need to be worked through as part of the overall settlement. JW would be able to provide an answer at a later date. Whenever there was litigation it was necessary to balance the cost against the benefit but the DBF had recovered its costs.

With regard to the query about the Registrar and use of the legal firm, there had been discussion about this at the previous Synod when it met at Bradford Cathedral. JW referred Synod back to the point made about governance. The position of power was very different. JW couldn't speak for what had happened before but the relationship between the Bishop, Registrar and legal firm had governance in place to ensure no individual exercised power without broader responsibility and accountability. There was clearer governance around these things.

The Revd Canon Paul Cartwright (General Synod)

Thanked JW for the update. With regard to the claim from the insurer, Paul asked if this included compensation for the loss of interest. With reference to the payment made to the media adviser of the company, was there any pursuit of the business which had benefitted?

JW commented that concerning pursuing the business which benefitted, there was a challenge to show a link between which monies had been used to pay for which item as Linda Box had stolen from a number of clients.

With regard to compensation for loss of interest, the DBF's calculation of the total sum of loss included this. The key point to stress was that there was a limitation on the total amount of insurance but the Leeds DBF had won on the legal question of whether there was to be an aggregation of claims. The

court had ruled that aggregation didn't apply. So accordingly, the Leeds DBF would be looking for a remedy for as much as possible.

The Chair thanked JW for the presentation and looked forward to the outcome of the mediation.

8. **Presentation and Discussion: Bradford UK City of Culture 2025.**

Papers: None

Presenter (PowerPoint presentation): Bishop Toby Howarth

Bishop Toby gave a PowerPoint presentation.

In May 2022, Bradford was announced as the UK City of Culture for 2025. The presentation was an update for the Synod members on the work of the Church in connection with this. Bradford Cathedral had appointed a Canon for Intercultural Mission and the Arts, Canon Ned Lunn. Ned who would be leading engagement with the City of Culture across the wider churches and faith groups. It was generous of Bradford Cathedral to offer one of its canons for this. Work had been carried out to liaise with and learn from other cities which had been UK cities of culture ie Coventry and Hull.

Leeds was celebrating its own year of culture event in 2023. Leeds Church Institute and other faith groups were engaging with this but to a lesser extent than the involvement in Bradford. A key person involved in the Leeds year of culture was Leeds Church Institute's Faith and Creativity Lead, Bronagh Daly.

For the Bradford City of Culture, there were two asks for parishes:

- 1 Space – one of the things which Bradford had learned from Coventry was they had needed a lot of work from outsider artists. Bradford was trying instead to raise up its own talent within the district. Often artists don't have space for storage, rehearsals and exhibitions. Churches and other faith groups do have space. Work was being done to map available space within the faith communities for artists.
- 2 Volunteering – Leeds now needed and Bradford would be recruiting at runway events.

Bishop Toby asked Synod to consider what extent that as a church people and parishes were willing to engage with the City of Culture? He said, Jesus told us to be salt and light and agents of the Gospel and God's love. We are encouraged by Jesus to "get out there". The churches could do their own cultural events but if they partner with other groups it was likely to be more dynamic. Bishop Toby encouraged the Synod at a time of austerity, difficult budgets and when the volunteer base was squeezed, to be willing to get out and let the Gospel values and message shine through in a deep way so that as Christians we might "infect" the wider work going on.

Questions

Roger Lazenby (North West Leeds deanery)

Said he was a member of the hand bell ringing community and was based in Leeds. Asked if the City of Culture applied across the whole Bradford metropolitan area or if it confined to the City of

Bradford?

Bishop Toby confirmed the City of Culture applied to the whole district including the villages and was a particular call to work across the whole district. The way the diocese worked with wealthier churches contributing to the poorer churches across the area was precisely the across area approach wanted for the City of Culture.

The Ven Paul Ayers (Archdeacon of Leeds and General Synod)

Said he knew very little about the Leeds City of Culture. He thought it hadn't been well publicized. He asked how much effort it was worth churches putting in to this type of thing. It seemed that with civic led events they were happy for help with the agenda but was it possible to be involved without diluting what the Church stands for?

Bishop Toby said there wasn't a clear answer but a balance had to be found in terms of engaging with other people.

In Bradford there was clearly a desire to engage with stories from the faith communities. There were more difficult issues to address regarding reconciliation. As a church we would want to ensure that the City of Culture wasn't just froth and a rebrand of Bradford. Different areas and stories were needed, it wasn't just about preaching in a narrow sense about the claims of Christ. It was about the wider agenda the church and other faith communities brought to provide a deeper resonance about hurt and reconciliation.

The Revd Anne Russell (East Leeds deanery)

Endorsed this approach. It was a privilege for her in her context to be part of other organisations in connection with what the church was doing eg with regard to poverty. It was good to talk about love and being open together and sharing resources. Particularly powerful had been the building of a story telling approach. The Church was valued as a voice and because it had tradition, had been around a long time and was volunteer led. This was particularly key as other organisations (eg professionals such as social workers and council workers) were not usually part of the local community, living and sharing culture and traditions. So she would endorse the Church getting involved in what was going on in local communities.

The Bishop of Leeds

With reference to Archdeacon Paul Ayers query, the Bishop had chaired Bradford Literature Festival and seen it grow from a few hundred participants to 59,000 when he handed over the Chair. The arts were about the questions of life, meaning and experience. The Bishop encouraged Synod members to get involved.

Bishop Toby Howarth

Encouraged churches to get involved. If they needed some guidance please contact Bishop Toby or Canon Ned Lunn.

The Chair commented that the cultural economy across all episcopal areas was huge and encouraged Synod members to look in to what was happening in their areas and across areas.

The Revd Tracy Milne (Outer Bradford deanery)

Thanked the Synod for the discussion on this item. Tracy noted that 2025 would not be the end of the Bradford City of Culture and hoped it would be sustained beyond 2025.

9. Presentation: Update report Barnabas.

Papers: None

Presenter (PowerPoint presentation): The Revd Jude Smith, Director of Church Revitalisation (JS) and Jonathan Wood (JW).

JW said that Barnabas was an opportunity to be alongside parishes to enable them to engage with communities with renewed mission and confidence. The diocese had been looking at its plan for deployment of resources in the future and Barnabas was the response. Barnabas would be a continuing journey and the Synod would be kept updated.

JS spoke to the circulated PowerPoint presentation. Barnabas was the result of strategic thinking for the deployment of resources in a post-Covid and “Cost of Living” world. There would be seven strands of support for parishes to respond to where they were and what they needed help with. JS had now presented Barnabas to every deanery synod. The feedback from these presentations had refined and shaped Barnabas. A question had begun to form about what people had to give to the process too.

JS spoke about the seven strands of support. Some of the offer involved resources which were already available but were being drawn together to make them more accessible. Parishes were also being encouraged to share resources (including experience) with other parishes to create a learning community eg for governance support and to partner eg to make the job of PCC Treasurer more easily do-able. Missional leadership development was for clergy and lay together ie those who take responsibility for mission and the life of the church. It would enable them to understand the unique role, tell the Story and know what they needed to do next and how to get support. There would be a mission accompanier team and a training and learning community would be developed. Another strand would be starting a new congregation. This strand would identify proven ways to engage more people again with a learning community and more resources. Strategic grafting for revitalisation was an approach which had emerged from national programmes.

Support for churches would be delivered in three ways: “Strengthening” support open to everyone, “Specific” support (This may be something a parish asks for or an archdeacon or bishop invites the parish to do) or “Significant” which a bishop, archdeacon or JS would ask them to be involved in.

The Barnabas programme was deliberately messy and there were overlaps in some areas.

Barnabas resources were now on the diocesan website along with a video. The website also outlined the strands of support and these will be developed and built on over the next six months. In addition, the Barnabas team would be seeking more funding from the national church and would also form a coalition of the willing. Synod members were encouraged to email the Barnabas Team and there was a form on the website for people to get involved. Barnabas would be shaped as it went along.

Questions

Canon Ann Nicholl (East Leeds)

Canon Ann said she understood there was a revitalization initiative in the East Leeds deanery but some churches had had no contact at all on this. Ann asked how to get churches involved in the initiative which was going on around them in the deanery.

JS commented that alongside Barnabas were other initiatives which were already in place in episcopal areas. These were separate from Barnabas.

Barnabas was something for everyone and parishes could get in touch with the Barnabas team to discuss what resources could help them.

The Revd Daniel Miles (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery)

Daniel said he was a Synod representative for Halifax and Calder Valley deanery but was ministering in East Leeds deanery. He was a first time incumbent and part of the first incumbent training required attendance at a LYCiG course. Daniel asked if there were clear links between Barnabas and LYCiG or was Barnabas another initiative ie something else to do. He said he was in favour of what was being proposed but wondered how Barnabas sat with the other initiatives.

JS commented that Barnabas sits in the space of what you are doing as a parish and how we can help. Rather than saying to parishes “come and do our thing” and recognizing that doing nothing isn’t an option for anyone anymore, Barnabas asks “How can we help?” So if a parish had been on a LYCiG course and the parish had worked out a LYCiG plan, then Barnabas was there to offer help to achieve this.

Daniel Miles asked further if there were links with the clergy development team for first incumbents training as some of the Barnabas offer was in this too.

JS replied that she was not saying that everything was perfect with Barnabas at the moment. JS acknowledged that at the moment the first incumbents’ course wasn’t something Barnabas had been involved in. Barnabas would want to involve the bishops and archdeacons to ensure that conflicting messages weren’t sent.

Canon Professor Joyce Hill (General Synod)

Canon Professor Joyce said that putting information on the website was only half of a communications job. Putting information on the website depended on people knowing that the information was on the website and wanting to look at it. Website material did not achieve communication effectively. Something else had to be done to send people to the website to use it as a resource. There needed to be a systematic plan for effective communication which bridged the gap between the website and individual parishes and this wouldn’t be just sending information to the clergy.

JS asked what Canon Professor Joyce would do to address this.

Canon Professor Joyce Hill replied that she would admit the fact that for people to recognize they need to actively participate, they needed to be contacted individually, little else was effective. This could be done electronically by making materials available to parishes to be distributed in paper format.

Paper format was still an effective means of communication to open doors. Not everything would need to be paper. Individual PCCs could work out what was the best for their congregations and clergy to be personally and directly contacted with information. The information needed to be structured to show who could be of help. Clergy were bombarded with communications. People needed to have the information handed to them on a plate to achieve quick and effective communication.

JW commented that he agreed with having a clear segmented communications strategy. The challenge though was that what was brilliant for some people, others regarded as over communicating. Barnabas has been presented to all deaneries, Chapters and the youth chapter. Other communication vehicles will be looked considered. With regard to paper as well as those who like paper, there was feedback that people don't want to print diocesan communications. JW thanked Canon Professor Joyce for her helpful challenge. There needed to be a clear communications strategy and the Barnabas team were working on how parishes might engage with one another across the diocese.

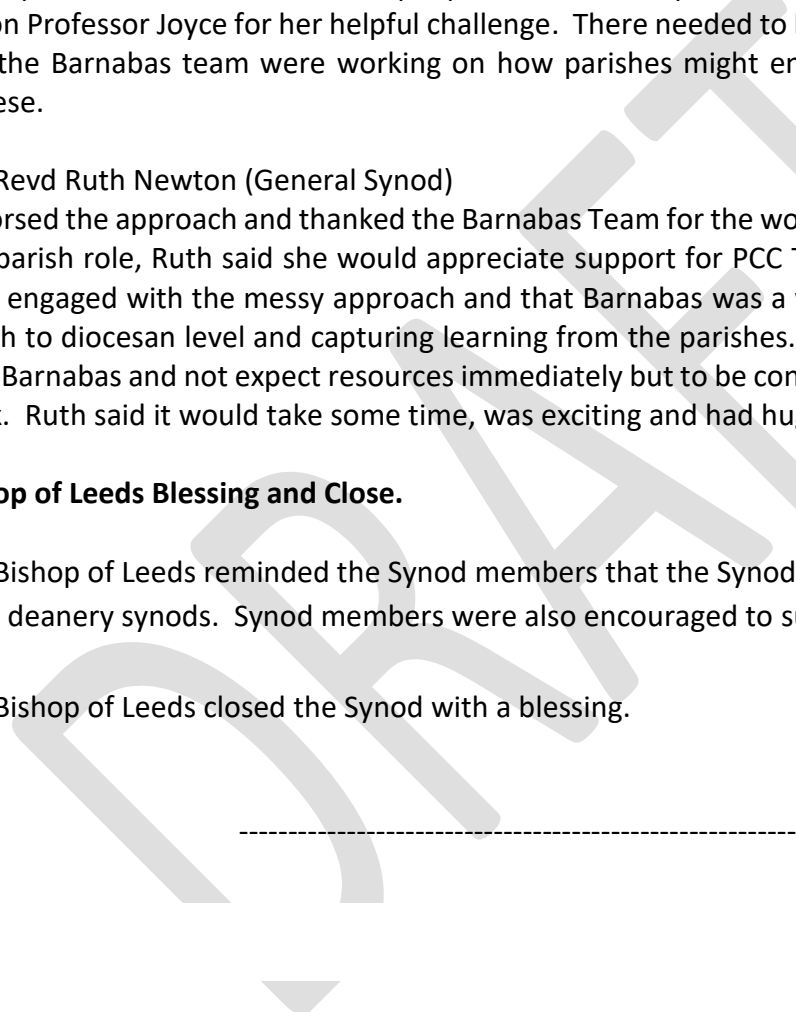
The Revd Ruth Newton (General Synod)

Endorsed the approach and thanked the Barnabas Team for the work already done. As a clergy person in a parish role, Ruth said she would appreciate support for PCC Treasurer and administrative tasks. Ruth engaged with the messy approach and that Barnabas was a work in progress and working from parish to diocesan level and capturing learning from the parishes. Ruth said parishes should partner with Barnabas and not expect resources immediately but to be content to learn from things that don't work. Ruth said it would take some time, was exciting and had huge potential.

10. Bishop of Leeds Blessing and Close.

The Bishop of Leeds reminded the Synod members that the Synod was always looking for motions from deanery synods. Synod members were also encouraged to submit Questions to Synod.

The Bishop of Leeds closed the Synod with a blessing.



Diocese of Leeds
Twenty Fourth Diocesan Synod, Saturday 18 March 2023

Presidential Address

When Jesus instructed his friends to “love one another as I have loved you” – more than once – did he mean it? Faced by the one who would betray him and the one who would deny him, and aware of the tensions between them as they walked along the way with him, was he being a little bit romantic or idealistic? Or did he intend there to be exceptions in particular circumstances for particular members of the group? Did he define closely enough just who was to be loved – within the group of disciples – and who might be excused?

These are not idle questions – especially as we examine ourselves in Lent. They are deeply biblical. For when we read the gospels we are supposed to be struck by the uncomfortable fact that it is always the ‘wrong’ people who find themselves healed, restored, forgiven by Jesus ... whilst the ‘right’ people consistently either miss the point – the Word made flesh standing in front of them – or, eventually, nail him for breaking the theological rules. If you don’t believe me, read about him healing a woman – it’s usually a woman – on the wrong day, the sabbath; or preventing a woman from being stoned to death, as the Law prescribed.

It is a while since I focused on Mark’s Gospel and my contention that the key to the narrative lies in chapter one and verses 14-15. So, I’ll re-visit it now.

Jesus returns to Galilee “proclaiming the good news of God.” If you were listening to him in Galilee – the hill country of the north where all the difficult people come from – what would you hear as the “good news of God”? What might be the content that, when you hear it, would sound like good news for you and your people? Well, I think this is an easy one, largely because of what follows in verse 15: the sign of good news is that the Romans are leaving. When the Romans go, we know we have got our land back; we no longer have to carry in our pockets or do our everyday trade in currency that blasphemously bears an engraved head of the pagan emperor surrounded by the words ‘Emperor and Son of God’. When the impure heathen have left our land, then we will know that the pure God can be among us again without fear of contamination.

So, ‘good news’ for the Galilaeans will be signified by the removal of the occupying forces of heathen blasphemy, idolatry and sacralised violence.

Mark then summarises the ‘good news of God’ in four phrases: “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Which means what exactly? And remember we are trying to listen through first century Palestinian ears, not twenty first century Christian ears. I want to suggest this reading of the text:

To a people longing for liberation, an end to their latest exile, the evidence of God’s return will be the removal of contamination, impurity. Yet, Jesus says that they need wait no longer – the time is now here ... the Kairos of God. And the people will look to see that the Romans are on their way out. Which they are not. So, are these hollow words? A fantasy by the latest aspiring liberator who will also fail to deliver more

than words and violence? How can this be the time if the 'unclean' is still hanging around, keeping God at bay?

Well, Jesus rubs home the point: "the kingdom of God has come near." How? How can the presence of God – what John in his gospel calls "the glory of God" – be near while nothing has changed? This is a theological as well as a political nonsense, surely? A good Jew would be wondering if this was a wind up by the returning carpenter. Is he just playing with our hopes and longings?

But, then comes the clarifying bit: "repent!" Not just admit your own failings and sin – the sort of thing meant when people with placards get in the way of shoppers on a Saturday in town. Repentance, from the Greek 'metanoiein', means literally 'change your mind'. And I venture to suggest that in this context Jesus is telling the people that if they want to spot the presence of God in the here and now, they are going to have to change the way they look and see and think and live. Put bluntly, the challenge is: dare you see the presence of the holy God right here and now while the Romans remain and everything is compromised? Yes, even while the heathen blasphemers rule? Yes, even while we all feel contaminated by the offence of pagan presence?

In other words, dare we challenge our inherited and assumed theology – which has shaped and coloured our understanding of God, the world and us – and look differently for evidence of the presence of God while life and the world are a mess? Can we, who challenge others to 'repent', start by repenting ourselves?

"Believe in the good news" does not mean "give your intellectual assent to a set of propositions about God", but, rather, "now commit yourself – body, mind and spirit - to this new way of looking and seeing and thinking and living in the world as it is". The rest of the gospel narrative offers a series of illustrations of those who could repent and those who could not. Read the whole gospel when you get home and you will find yourself laughing at the end because the wrong people get it and the right people don't. This is echoed in John's Gospel by Jesus's words to the religious leaders of his day: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40)

In other words, you read your Bibles, but miss what is standing in front of you right now.

Can you imagine how enormous was the challenge this presented the first disciples? It isn't trivial or obvious. Jesus was asking for a complete change of sight and mindset and lifestyle. Easy for us to read; murderously difficult to do. Do we fear being contaminated by mess while God chooses to contaminate mess with love and mercy and justice and forgiveness? And, of course, Jesus was asking for trust – fundamental to this notion of 'belief' – in a future that they couldn't yet see: trust in him, but also trust in those who also walked with him, despite their real differences.

Now, you have come to a synod, not to a sermon. But, I have used half my time to set this out because it offers a biblical context for the sorts of issues we are dealing with today and in our Church. *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF) was not a bright idea dreamed up by bishops determined to undermine the Church of England and follow some pagan agenda. It involved serious work over nearly seven years. Like Jesus in the gospels, it was a response to the challenge of what and who are standing in front of us and raising challenging questions about people's lives and response to the call of Jesus Christ. It is the most serious and in-depth exploration not only of sexuality, but also of anthropology, history, science, psychology,

theology, and so on, that any church has ever done. And the aim was to bring Christians together in order that we all might recognize the person behind the issue. It wasn't about changing people's minds (unless they chose so to do); it was about getting out of trenches and meeting co-disciples of Jesus who look and see and think and live differently. Many, if not most, of those who engaged openly with LLF found it enlightening at the very least.

As you know, the bishops eventually brought a proposal to the General Synod last month and the proposals were accepted by the synod. I won't rehearse here the mechanics of the debate or some of the nonsense that went on. Suffice it to say that nobody likes bishops unless the bishops say exactly what different people want to hear the bishops say. That's life, I guess.

But, that was not the end of the process. The LLF Next Steps Group was required to take it away, in the light of the debate, and return in July with a further proposal (which, obviously, the Synod could accept or reject). However, between now and then the College of Bishops will meet again next week to look at what further work has been done. And all of us can take the time to revisit the theology addressed in LLF resources. (I won't be at the College as I will be at my final meeting of the Governing Board of the Conference of European Churches in Brussels before the General Assembly in Tallin in June.)

I am grateful to those who have written to me with their reflections and concerns, some of which are premature or driven by fear. I get it and understand why people, particularly on the conservative end, are worried. But, given that those who are content with what is proposed don't write to me, I can also reveal that nobody seems to be happy: the church has gone too far or not far enough; the church (and remember that the General Synod is comprised of bishops, clergy and laity) is denying scripture or is driven by a secular agenda. It is the case, however, that the church – that is Christian disciples of different experience, culture, conviction, repentance, and so on – is in this place precisely because it is taking seriously a challenge that won't go away if we just ignore it or pray hard enough against what we don't approve (for whatever reason).

So, the process has not finished. And none of us can abdicate responsibility for how we obey Jesus's command – not suggestion – that we love one another as he has loved us. Whatever the cost. We get no opt-outs or vetoes. And Mark's challenge to repent is not just aimed at those whom we think are mistaken.

Along with CS Lewis's *Screwtape*, I have felt for decades that all the Evil One has to do to neuter the church is to distract them with a bit of sex. But, there are other issues which demand our attention and common commitment. Our economies are fragile, our political discourse has been corrupted, injustice is seen everywhere, conflict and violence are fired up all over the globe, and people long for words, vision and actions of hope. Not despair by looking at what is, but daring to believe that God, in Christ, is here now, among us and with us and for us, calling us to see beyond the immediate challenges whilst committing ourselves in the world as it is. I once tweeted that "Easter means being drawn by hope, not driven by fear". And I believe our vocation is to embody and articulate that hope.

Today we will look at adding the former Bishop of Kirkstall to our cohort of Honorary Assistant Bishops in the diocese. We will consider the last meeting of the General Synod (which addressed far more than LLF and sex). We will receive an update on the case of a former registrar who stole millions of pounds from the historic Diocese of Wakefield and some of which money we are trying to win back from insurers. Bradford

will be UK City of Culture in 2025 – something that offers this diocese great opportunities to infect our local culture with gospel celebration in the midst of our contemporary West Yorkshire cultures.

And, finally, we will consider Barnabas. Not the character in the Acts of the Apostles, but our programme to support our parishes – all of them – in ways that might make a difference, starting from where they are. Yet, Barnabas is worth ending on in the light of where this address began. For he and the Apostle Paul found they couldn't work together because of differences and tensions over priorities and personality. Yet, they did not deny their belonging to one church, being shaped like Jesus Christ, yet having to confront and adapt to new situations and challenges in different contexts. They belonged together – even when distanced – and that was part of the witness of Scripture.

I will listen with interest to all that is said or asked today. I will ask myself where I might need to repent and look differently. But, I will not cease to see this church as Christ's and all disciples as equally called by God to a new way of living. Together.

The Rt Revd Nicholas Baines
Bishop of Leeds

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