**PETERBOROUGH DIOCESAN SYNOD**

The Autumn Session

Held on Saturday 7 October 2023

At the Malcolm Arnold Academy Northampton

1. **OPENING PRAYER AND PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS WITH QUESTIONS**

Opening worship was led by the Rutland Deanery

Bishop John began his address by offering a greeting from the new diocesan Bishop, Bishop Debbie, who is looking forward to ministering in this diocese, and feels privileged to join us in our journey in faith. +John asked all present to pray for Bishop Debbie and her family as the complete their preparations to leave the Winchester Diocese and join us.

Thanks were given to all officers, staff and clergy who helped in the vacancy in see process, to the crown nominations committee, and for all the prayers offered up to help us in filling the diocesan bishop vacancy. There was an acknowledgement of the workload carried by the diocesan staff in the administration functions of the diocese with many people going the extra mile. Synod were asked to keep this in mind.

Thanks were given to the communications team for the way the announcement was handled last week, and to his Chaplain for the excellent interview with Bishop Debbie. which allowed Bishops Debbie’s natural style to shine through

Following a recent visit to Korea, +John reflected that, whilst the Church of England might not always appear a church which is unified, the experience he felt when visiting Korea was very much one of unity, friendship and kindness.

Today’s theme in the presidential address is one where we are all asked to reflect on what it might mean to follow Jesus today; God has told us to act justly, to do what is right, to show love, mercy and kindness, and walk humbly with him. The current debate around Living in Love and Faith (LLF) challenges this, we see many people trying to act justly and do what is right, but less obvious to see people walking humbly with God.

Society is struggling with the whole transgender agenda; in the church there is an un kindness in some of the behaviours we see when engaging in the LLF debate. As we see Bishops speaking out for minority groups, showing concern for the vulnerable, all too often we see these groups portrayed as on the peripheral, but they are not. We should remember the quality of the spiritual side of society is measured by how that society treats those on the peripheral of society, this a key principle in the bible.

Financial and people resources and how we use them is also a spiritual matter. In recent years the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) on behalf of the Bishop, has invested heavily on clergy and parish resources as we believe in enabling mission and ministry. The trade off is the central services functions do not always have the level of resources to serve you as you wish to be served.

The world we have inherited from God, and how we treat it , is a fundamental spiritual issue going to the heart of the 5 marks of mission. We will be hearing later on the progress we are making towards Net Zero Carbon (NZC) as we seek to align ourselves with the wider Church of England target of reaching NZC by 2030. Its striking that everywhere you go in Korea, the 5 marks of mission are visible at the forefront, we should be doing likewise as a reminder of gods (and our) mission in the world.

Comment:

Kevin Fear noted we should ensure that we care for the carers.

1. **DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE: ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND REPORT FOR 2022**

Refer to the full paper from Dr Paul Buckingham Chair DBF. Appendix 1

Questions:

Steven Barber Oundle Deanery

The report presented meets our legal and financial obligations as a registered company. However it is lacking in a more comprehensive picture of the overall health of the diocese; both in consideration of parish health and performance health. Synod is the governing body of the diocese yet we do not have sufficient information to adequately assess how the diocese is really doing; and where help may/may not be needed. The overall performance of the diocese cannot and should not be only reported in financial terms.

Revd Katrina Hutchins Wellingborough Deanery

Commented the report meets the statutory obligations of a company further supporting the earlier view that we need the parish context as the other side of the conversation. We should understand the performance of teams supporting parishes as well as parish share payment to have a fuller and more meaningful conversation.

Revd Michael Moore Peterborough Deanery asked that we speak more about Benefice Share, as payment of share is a benefice responsibility and the more able should be helping those parishes where they are unable to pay.

June Bull Peterborough Deanery asked a technical question on the downward trend in the re-evaluation of funds on p23. DM replied that we should take a longer-term view of fund evaluations as the stock market is volatile over the shorter term which is what we are seeing here. In answer to the previous point about parish financial health, we will be bringing a report to DBF later in the year which has a longer term look at parish financial trends. This is fed by the parish finance returns data from the National Church, so there will be a data lag. .

1. **REPORT ON STEPS TO TAKE US TOWARDS NET ZERO BY 2030: UPDATE**

Refer to the full presentation from Pete Brotherton Diocesan Environment Officer.

Peter Brotherton Diocesan Environmental Officer (PB) took Synod members through his presentation which shows the stark situation the planet is in and why it is so encouraging and important the Church of England has set the Net Zero Carbon (NZC) target they have.

The Net Zero Carbon Action Plan presented here meets milestone 4.1.4 in the National Route Map to NZC; whilst there are some large numbers presented here, there will be changes as this work develops. Synod are asked to note the contents of the paper. The next stage is for the working group, led by +John, to submit a funding application for the next tranche of central church funding. This will enable us to bring in the correct resources to work with our existing staff to deliver on the NZC target.

Questions:

Richard Burbage Greater Northampton Deanery

There is still much work to be done to convince people this problem is real, commenting on the significant costs involved and asking where this money is to come from. PB referred to the data coming from the scientific worlds which leaves no doubt the problem is real, and needs responding to now, +John acknowledged the costs, and referred to the significant funds the Church of England is setting aside to help Dioceses in this work. We must do this.

Revd Eddie Smith Wellingborough Deanery

Asked that we look at what we will do in relation to old, listed diocesan houses and not confine our activity to when a position is in vacancy. Those living in these properties are spending large amounts of their own money on heating etc.

Revd Roger Woods Greater Northampton Deanery

Commented it would be useful to understand where the 20% highest contributing churches were to enable targeted work. PB responded this is where the Energy Footprint Tool is vital to this work and encouraged all parishes to submit their data.

Revd Nikki Hobbs Kettering Deanery

Children and Young Adults get this issue, they are the future to helping us with NZC. We speak of ageing congregations, its our work with young people that is vital to success here.

Revd Hannah Jeffreys Kettering Deanery

Advised all parishes to look for external funding to help enable this work. They are focussing on St Giles Desborough as a large church in constant use and have secured local authority funding to help them in their eco church journey.

Comments from Archdeacon Richard, Revd Nolan Robson, Chris Banks all reinforced the challenges and difficulties faced to achieve NZC. Whether this is due to a lack of financial resources, or a lack of support from statutory agencies, such as planners, in implementing some of the changes needed to our historic buildings. The Dean of Peterborough Cathedral summarising that we cannot keep deferring and denying, we must make opportunities which enable us to do our part.

The paper was noted.

1. **DIOCESAN BUDGET FOR 2024 AND AN UPDATE ON PARISH SHARE REQUESTS**

Dr Paul Buckingham gave a brief overview of the 2024 budget outlining the efficiency savings made in central functions as well as the progress made towards increasing our returns on our investments. The DBF will support parish and deanery treasurers to ensure where parishes can pay they do, and where parishes can’t pay we will support.

Dr Paul Buckingham moved , on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Finance,

“That this Synod

1. Approves the proposed budget for 2024 and
2. Authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend a sum not exceeding £11,287,888

Moved,

Comments/questions were invited, none followed and the motion was passed.

1. **GENERAL SYNOD REPORT ON THE July 2023 GROUP OF SESSIONS**

See report at appendix 2

The debate on LLF at GS in July was not a comfortable one. Dr Paul Buckingham was thanked for his honest reflection on the July Session. Bishop John asked Synod to reflect on the mess society is in at present as it debates trans issues, and the poisonous nature of that debate. This is reflected in the debates within our Church and members were asked to help move us towards a kinder debate.

At least 6 members felt they were unable to receive the report from General Synod without further debate being enabled.

The remainder of members attending received the report.

1. **DIOCESAN SYNOD NUMBERS TO BE ELECTED FOR THE NEXT TRIENNIUM.**

Save for two amendments to the figure's, this paper was carried by a majority.

1. **PROMULGATION OF AMENDING CANON No 42**

Amending Canion No 42 was promulged by Andrew Roberts Diocesan Secretary

1. **TIME FOR QUESTIONS (STANDING ORDER 70)**

There were no supplementary questions from those members raising questions under standing order 70

1. **OTHER APPROVED BUSINESS**

None

1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Saturday 23 March 2024

Appendix 1

**Annual Accounts and Report for 2022: Dr Paul Buckingham Chair Diocesan Board of Finance**

Several years ago I warned Synod in the words of John Kotter that “Our iceberg is melting.” Allegory of Penguins on an iceberg, where one penguin spotted the danger and tried to get others to see it and do something about it.

To use another metaphor, we have, financially, an elephant in the room = parish share shortfall of £1.5m. Parish Share giving remains stubbornly at 80% of the ask (was 94% - cannot entirely blame my lack of charm for this!)

The DBF has sought to serve the parishes in a number of ways, both to encourage churches and their people, and to limit the effects of the said elephant

1. We hold a priority of growth and health in the parishes = (mission and discipleship are primary, and we seek more ordinands and curates, whilst supporting parish clergy.) One of the fastest ways to shrink a church is to have no minister. We may not always like them, but they are good for us.

2. The DBF is working to maximise our investments as hard as possible to backfill the Parish Share shortfall. We have upgraded our investment policies and personnel. We are now getting 3 or 4% yield on investments, having shifted the emphasis from land towards the stock market. (Agriculture gets 1%, Fossil fuels investments, which we sold, got 6%.)

3. We offer support for parishes and treasurers. Excellent work by Paul Adams and Pete Squires. Thanks!

4. We are pleased with the timely success of the Parish giving scheme, which helped subscribed parishes through the pandemic better than those not in the scheme. Never too late to join.

5. Looking at best practise elsewhere. (2015 report)

6. Trying to get the best accurate information from the parishes (e.g. from ASA and Stats for Mission.)

7. Church card payment machines.

I have been continually impressed by the hard work and dedication by the finance department, and the various DBF subcommittees. These are tough times, and we need to be wise, shrewd and careful in what we do, but we are on the King of King’s business, and what could be better than that.

**When the chair permits, possibly after any questions, on behalf of the DBF I will move**

**“That the Synod takes note of the Chairman's report and the accounts of the Diocesan Board of Finance for 2022.”**

Diocesan Budget 2024 and Update on Parish Share Requests

We come to consider the proposed budget for 2024.

Although there is a lot of detail on the budget sheets, I want to give a broad-brush comment on the last line on the second page (surplus / deficit)

In 2022, expected deficit at the start of the year was £1m. Clergy vacancies (0.5m), Increased income from investments and some land sales, and extra grants and Covid savings turned a £1m deficit into a £0.5m surplus.

In 2023, the deficit may be £0.8m, which is well less than the £1.5m shortfall in the parish share receipts.

In 2024, as usual a worst-case scenario is given, with a projected deficit of £1.75m (£1.5m is the parish share shortfall). The DBF will be able to cover this from reserves, and our outcomes have historically always been better than budget due to cautious accounting.

There are less central staff working than before the pandemic and Andrew Roberts has introduced many efficiencies and savings, such as on-line meetings, multitasking, etc. But the elephant of parish share shortfall is still in the room.

Looking at parishes as a whole, what else can the DBF do to help parishes to flourish and become radiators instead of drains?

C.S Lewis said, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy has been offered to us.”

Let me put it another way. I want you to know that God loves us, and has a wonderful plan for our bank accounts. There are many unconverted wallets our there! So what should our goals be for the coming year?

1. We wish to **support the new Bishop and the BMT** to make Jesus known in our communities and to be a sharing, caring church.
2. We want to help parishes **liberate and use reserves more effectively**. (e.g. insurance premiums could come out of the building fund)
3. We wish to encourage every parish to have an annual **stewardship campaign**. When did you last have one? Guess what percentage of Anglicans have never been asked to give regularly, of perhaps, what percentage cannot remember being taught about money and giving. **40%**
4. We would like to provide more **education and support for parish and Deanery treasurers** either on zoom or teams or with hybrid meetings, and this will encourage the sharing of good practice.
5. We are looking at using **half a million pounds for incentive funding**. In a sense this is our own strategic Development Fund. This thinking is in the early stages, but it could support local initiatives particularly among younger people and families, and would tie in with imaginative ideas in the parishes and the new bishop’s strategic directions of travel. What should we incentivise for the churches future? How would your church encourage growth and health if you had an accountable grant to help you? How good that Bishop Debbie has such an interest in families and the young.
6. Deanery adjustments. These could be reconsidered as **mutual support arrangements within benefices.** Again – early days.
7. We will need to **grasp the nettle** of those benefices who don’t pay and won’t pay, whilst supporting those who can’t pay. William Wilberforce used most of his fortune for Christian Work – look at the impact this had. He is someone to emulate.

**When the chair permits, possibly after any questions, on behalf of the DBF I will move**

**“That this Synod**

1. **Approves the proposed budget for 2024, and**
2. **Authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend a sum not exceeding £11,287,888 in 2024.”**

Appendix 2

**Report of General Synod July 2023 for Peterborough Diocesan Synod** **Paul Buckingham**

The General Synod of the Church of England met at the University of York in July

There were some pleasing moments to be encouraged about.

There was an excellent debate about **Revitalising the Parish for Mission**. We affirmed the parish system as a central component of our “mixed ecology”, welcomed the Church’s commitment to increasing the number of ordinands and encouraged each parish and Diocese to use Mission Action Planning to become more effective in parochial mission.

Tom Woolford gave what I think was the best speech in the whole Synod arguing that we **ditch fees for weddings** to support marriage in church, which the Synod agreed to (with a pilot scheme).

**The contribution of faith to the rehabilitation of prisoners** was discussed. We heard about people who had become Christians in prison but had then struggled to find churches that would welcome them. There was widespread support for calling on dioceses to partner with the Probation Service to enable a swift welcome of offenders, subject to appropriate safeguarding boundaries.

A presentation and a debate on the **Environment** highlighted and supported the disinvestment strategy of National Investing Bodies (NIBs) - ie the Church Commissioners, the CofE Pensions Board and CCLA.

We agreed the **Archbishops’ Council Budget 2024**, noting that recent reductions in central costs have saved around £3m/year, and also that in spite of high inflation, the share requested from Dioceses is 5.2% below the level of 2019 and 2020.

We agreed to bring forward legislation to simplify the central organisation of **National Church Governance**.

We agreed **Recommendations to replace the Mission and Pastoral Measure** with a new suite of legislation that aims to be simpler and more collaborative, and a better enabler of mission.

We agreed to bring in an *optional* **Electronic Register Book of Services Form**.

But there were a number of low moments, and I want to focus on three.

First, was the two times set aside for **answering Questions**. The initial answer is provided in written form—which saves time, and allows a more informed follow-up question.

The great thing about Questions is that it is (potentially) the one place where you can ask about things that would otherwise be brushed under the carpet, perhaps getting a straight answer to a straight question.

But two things have been happening recently.

First, the number of questions being asked has ballooned. This time, 237 questions were asked. This limited the chance to ask supplementary to only 40% of the total questions—which is problematic, since it is in the supplementary questions that the real issues can be teased out.

The second trend is that, increasingly it seems, the answers given to questions are less than honest, woolly, or less than complete.

Another low moment came in the **presentation by members of Archbishops’ Council** about the situation with safeguarding and ending of the interim Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB) in a state of disarray.

From the platform a clear, undefended, and factual account of the Council’s decision was offered. There was an admission that mistakes had been made, but the commitment to establish legally independent scrutiny of the Church’s safeguarding work remained.

Angry members registered their displeasure at how this whole messy business involving resignations and sackings was handled.

In spite of this, Synod overwhelmingly approved:

an outline bill setting out a Safeguarding Redress scheme, initially underpinned by £150m of Church Commissioners money,

and a code of practice for Safeguarding reviews, aligning our processes with external good practice.

The Archbishops’ Council has committed to initiating an independent review of all that has happened.

The final low point was the **presentation about LLF progress** with a panel answering questions. Despite the graphics, there was little evidence of the three groups *(covering prayers, pastoral guidance and pastoral “reassurance”)* set up following February Synod having made substantial progress in resolving the questions they were set.