

PETERBOROUGH DIOCESAN SYNOD

The Autumn Session

Held on Saturday 12 October 2024

At The Malcolm Arnold Academy, Northampton

1. SEPARATE MEETINGS OF HOUSES OF CLERGY AND LAITY

Chris Banks Elected as Vice President (Chair of House of Laity)

Revd Alison Twigg Elected as Vice President (Chair of House of Clergy).

2. OPENING WORSHIP

Led by Greater Northampton Deanery

3. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Bishop Debbie began by thanking members of Synod reflecting on the last 6 months and how many faces she now recognises before her. Thanking Chris (Banks) and Alison (Twigg) for stepping into their new roles as Vice Presidents of the houses of clergy and laity of this Diocesan Synod, Bishop Debbie went on to say how much she was looking forward to working with them over the coming years in addressing some of the key issues currently facing the diocese.

Bishop Debbie then went on to speak of Joshua 3 and how God's message conveyed there is something we should all look to as we begin this new season of change and growth. The overarching message is one of leadership, faith and strategic preparation. Putting our trust in God's guidance even in the face of significant barriers will help us all to navigate our way through.

Bishop Debbie asked Synod to reflect on the journey we are on, relating this back to the Statement of Needs drawn up by the diocese, and against which she was interviewed for the post of Diocesan Bishop. In summary, the diocese asked for a Bishop who would help the diocese on its journey of improvement; set a clear direction of travel; notice what was good in the diocese, whilst also recognising where there are gaps; notice what to stop and help us to be courageous in our decision making.

In summary Bishop Debbie's message was one of her belonging here, committed to making this journey with all in the diocese. Asking of Synod, who is God calling us to be right now? In this season, Bishop Debbie believes God is asking her to be part of His people, to guide us in

understanding where we are and where we may need to change. Reminding Synod that what really matters is God is at work, in this specific place, and we celebrate this in acknowledgement of this is where we are meant to be, and this diocese is who we are called to serve. Our mission is to deliver God's purpose, working alongside Him in His Kingdom for the benefit of His people.

Bishop Debbie then outlined the work our National Church representative (Caroline Leveaux) has recommended following her participation in a number of senior meetings as the diocese thinks about working out what strategic framework we need to be really effective. Two consultants (Andy Brookes and Becky Hall) will be working with us to conduct this work, through interviews with key people and a review of our structure. It is recognised we do not have the capacity to do this work unaided and the importance of this being an independent process. Their final report will deliver their thoughts, reflections and recommendations for the way forward.

The Terms of Reference is still evolving as the scoping work continues. When the Terms of Reference is complete it will be shared with Synod members. This work will provide us with challenges and opportunities. The Charity Code, which governs what we do, requires us to do this work regularly. It is best practice and is not crisis driven.

4. DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE: ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND REPORT FOR 2023

Paul Buckingham, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) spoke to the Annual Accounts and Report for 2023 asking members to reflect on the contents as a picture of the financial health of the DBF at the 31/12/2023. Paul reflected his thanks to David Mason (CFO) and his team, and the wider team who assisted with the production of the report.

Synod were reminded the priority is to support full time clergy, and the provision of quality ordinands and curates. At all times, we try and achieve a balanced budget which has been challenging in recent years. We welcome the forthcoming Governance Review as we seek to find more effective ways of communicating and working together with parishes.

Dr Paul Buckingham moved, on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Finance "That this Synod takes note of the Trustees Report and Accounts of the Diocesan Board of Finance for 2023"

This was seconded by Andrew Presland and passed unanimously.

5. DIOCESAN BUDGET

David Mason (DM) (CFO) spoke to the proposed budget for 2025, outlining some key matters for Synod to reflect on;

We are managing a deficit budget. This diocese is currently 38/42 diocese when looking at the amount of parish share giving per head. In 2023 we received 80% of the Parish Share request, which compares to c90% in c2019. Whilst the pandemic has impacted giving, this is not the whole story.

In contrast we are 6/42 when looking at the scale of assets we have, our strategy in recent years has been to dispose of assets in order to fund the budget deficit. This cannot continue as reserves are a finite resource. DM informed Synod he is working with Revd Katrina Hutchins and all Rural Deans to improve the reporting of parish financial figures to help get a more accurate picture of parish financial health. The conclusion of a recent exercise looking at this has suggested that some parishes – compared to 2017 – have increased levels of reserves, some decreasing and some no reserves at all. More analysis is required, and this will come out of the work to improve reporting accuracy.

A number of Synod members raised a range of questions and concerns. Broadly speaking these related to the unsustainable parish share situation where we are asking more financial support from a declining and aging congregation; we have significant building costs due to the number of listed (at all levels) and aging church buildings; the parish share formula has in reality meant some benefices are being asked for (and therefore paying) less parish share than 10 years ago, a natural consequence of falling attendance (attendance being a variable in the formula). Synod members were reminded Church of England membership is in freefall, with c750K members in Sunday worship nationally. The answer isn't to ask fewer people for more money, the answer is church growth. Comment was made that a 3% increase in parish share was not enough, and parishes should be made aware of the seriousness of the situation.

In response to member questions, Synod were informed that not addressing these financial issues and continuing to underpin the deficit through sale of assets gives all of us no more than 5 years to change this. Bishop Debbie was keen to stress this is a collective talk, we can only do this by working together. The governance review (funded by the national church) is the beginning of this journey. One member commented on the need to shape a new strategy - what does church need to look like to get growth? We are presented with an exciting opportunity.

Bishop Debbie thanked all for their honesty, and their questions and comments, reinforcing the need for us to face this to make the future a reality. Bishop's Council has a key role to play in this as does Diocesan Synod, so should we consider meeting more regularly? Acknowledging some members discomfort at being asked to approve a 2025 budget which is unsustainable going forward, but also commenting on the real collaborative journey we as a diocese are on to improve, Synod were asked to vote.

Synod were asked to consider the proposed budget for 2025 in accordance with Standing Order 110

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

“That this Synod

- (a) Approves the proposed budget for 2025
- (b) Authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend a sum not exceeding £12,384,810 in 2025.

This was seconded by Robert Addie, there were two abstentions.

6. PRESENTATION FROM THE DAC SECRETARY

Emily Elliot gave an overview of the work of the DAC and the back office function supporting parishes in their faculty applications. As the new DAC Secretary Emily is keen to improve support and communication with parishes and hopes in the coming weeks, when the team is up to full strength to provide a more personalised service. Emily is currently recruiting to a DAC Case Officer Post and is looking at the strategy and underpinning structure beneath that in order to help everyone in the diocese to celebrate and improve their church buildings. The implementation of the Online Faculty System is part of our improvement journey.

The overarching aim of the DAC is to be missional, and we have many volunteers with significant expertise to assist us in our aims. Member questions commented on the role out of OFS and how that has hindered in some parishes, but welcomed the move to this as it does bring many benefits to parishes and the process. Emily reassured parishes anyone not able to work in the digital space will still be supported by the DAC office, they simply need to ask. Emily explained suitability of contracts chosen by parishes is considered in the DAC decision making, but ultimately the DAC is an advisory board, thus adhering to legislative requirements in this area is a parish responsibility.

7. PRESENTATION FROM THE NZC PROGRAMME MANAGER

Adam Clarke outlined the breadth of work he is currently undertaking in his role as NZC PM, explaining this is a shared role across both the Peterborough and Leicester Dioceses. Adam acknowledged the scale of the task ahead both in resource and financial terms, however commented this diocese had already laid down good foundations from which he has started. There are some difficult discussions to be had with statutory bodies, not least relating to West Northants Local Authority and their

stand on Solar Panels in conservation areas (blanket ban). Adam accepts these are some of the issues he will be working to overcome in the coming months. Both Adam and Emily acknowledged the link between the work of the DAC and NZC and are working closely together on this. This is an externally funded post to assist us in delivering the NZC Route Map agreed at Synod in 2022.

Whilst it might appear there are competing demands in driving growth in the church and delivering NZC, AC was clear to explain the co benefits to be had through working together in both aims. The success in Kettering in Achieving Gold Eco Church status has resulted in increased use of the Church and more people coming forward to know God than was once the case. The fifth mark of mission underpins this work.

8. GENERAL SYNOD

Dean Chris spoke briefly about his time at General Synod as the Cathedral Representative. Commenting on the recognised need to change the tone and style of debate and discussion, he reflected it is possible to have differences of opinion whilst retaining courtesy, graciousness and our Christian ethos. This was something Mark Lucas testified to in reflecting on his discussions with Chris from very differing stand points. The Dean acknowledged the importance of non personalising some of these debates and to work and live together with difference.

There is General Synod work underway looking at how we restore trust in our institution, and looking at the culture of the church. Two particular debates to highlight were those on the Human dignity of Disabled Children, and Churches with Foodbanks. The Bishop of Stepney reported on how we are dealing with the Jay and Wilkinson Reports in the Safeguarding environment, and looking at how we might implement a strong and independent structure. A report is to come back to General Synod later in the year. Bishop Debbie commented when clarity comes from General Synod we will work with that.

The Bishop of Leicester is steering the Church through the Living in Love and Faith debate , and will be outlining a road map of proposals whilst recognising the depth of division and feeling on this matter.

9. TIME FOR QUESTIONS (STANDING ORDER 70)

In response to a question submitted by Revd Paula Challen, Andrew Roberts agreed Synod Papers would be distributed electronically in future to save on costs.

10. OTHER APPROVED BUSINESS

The Diocesan Secretary proclaimed that at the February 2024 group of sessions of the General Synod, Amending Canon No 43 was made, promulgated and executed.

11. DATE OF MEETINGS IN 2025

22 March 2025

11 October 2025

Venue to be confirmed.