

Diocesan Synod Digest

Saturday 18th November 2023

Diocesan Synod met for their final meeting of 2023 at the YMCA Showroom in Lincoln. This was the first meeting of Diocesan Synod since the enthronement of our new Diocesan Bishop, the Rt Revd Stephen Conway. The meeting was chaired by Canon Nigel Bacon, Chair of the House of Laity.

To begin the meeting, Canon Prof Muriel Robinson led Synod in a reflection of 2 Corinthians 9, under our regular Dwelling in the Word item.

Bishop's Address

Bishop Stephen made his first Presidential Address to Synod as the permanent Bishop of Lincoln. He reflected on the coming of Advent, his recent enthronement and the welcome and well wishes he had received and his future plans for an oversight ministry residential for February 2024. The Bishop also discussed the recent meeting of General Synod and the House of Bishops' motion on Living in Love and Faith. He reaffirmed his belief that it will always be "we" and not "them", when discussing people within our Christian community who may have different opinions than he does. The Bishop also considered the current conflict in Gaza and noted the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech passionately in favour of a cessation of fighting and bombing. He called on all synod member to be vigilant in our own communities against both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Elections

The Chair announced those nominated and duly elected for a number of positions on the Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees and the Vacancy in See Committee. Those elected were confirmed as follows:

Chair of the House of Clergy: The Revd Canon Martyn Taylor

Boston Clergy rep on BCDT: The Revd Georgie Machell

Stow and Lindsey Lay rep on BCDT: Ms Ruth Brewin

Stow and Lindsey Clergy rep on BCDT: The Revd Julie Donn

Vacancy in See Committee (Stow and Lindsey members): Mr Alexandra Curran, Mrs Emma Shave, Ms Ruth Brewin and Mr Steve Cartwright.

A casual vacancy for the remaining lay position from Stow and Lindsey on the Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees was then re-opened, with an election planned for April Synod.

Finance: Budget and Covenant Pledge total for 2024

Canon Prof Muriel Robinson, Chair of the Board of Finance, presented the 2024 budget brochure to Synod.

The key messages of the presentation for members to communicate back to their Deanery Synods and Parishes were as follows:

- That Covenant Pledges had been estimated at £3,642,000 for 2024.
- Income budgeted to be received from our investments would be £1,950,000, which in total was £539,000 better than expected when compared to the revised five-year plan.

- Due to high inflation across the board which meant a 5% increase on stipends and salaries, expenditure would be £378,321 more than in the revised five-year plan, taking the 2024 total to £10,397,650.

The presentation detailed the breakdown of income and expenditure as percentages, with Synod learning of our aim to increase recruitment throughout the year to work towards our previously pledged stipend figure of 100.

Following the presentation, Synod took part in round table discussions considering what key points from the budget they would be taking back to their Deanery Synod meetings over the coming weeks.

After feedback and a question and answer session, Synod members voted to:

- 1- authorise Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees to expend £10,397,650 for the year ending 31st December 2024 with no votes against and 1 abstention and
- 2- authorise Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees to raise at least £3,642,000 in Covenant Pledges for the year ending 31st December 2024 with no votes against and 2 abstentions

Environmental Action Plan

Canon Sarah Spencer, Diocesan Mission and Environmental Officer, presented the Environmental Action Plan to Synod, which is the document that explains how we will implement the Environmental Strategy that Synod has already approved. The presentation noted the National Church Framework, our commitment to "Net Zero" by 2030 and the additional funding that will be made available to the diocese from the National Church, should the plan be approved.

It was confirmed that the meeting of Synod in April 2024 will receive the usual annual update on Environmental activity across the diocese, as well as progress against the strategy and action plan.

Following questions and discussion from the floor, Synod voted to adopt the Environmental Action Plan as the mechanism by which the 12 Goals of the Diocesan Environmental Policy would be embedded into all we do.

A Time to Change Together update

The Rt Revd Nicholas Chamberlain, Bishop of Grantham, provided an update to Synod on behalf of the Bishop of Grimsby who was not present. The Vision Days had been held around the Diocese in September and October and had provided a forum for discussion on the key themes of collaboration, generosity and growth. It was noted that amongst the new pages of the diocesan website there was a section dedicated to Time to Change Together and the Vision Days, which included recordings of the main speeches, written resources and other material people may wish to review.

A new Strategic Programme Manager would be starting work in the Parish Support Office in January, who would be partially funded by the National Church. Along with Time to Change Together, this role will also be responsible for our Strategic Development Fund project.

The Bishop commented on the ongoing work to improve clergy recruitment in the diocese, as well as Evangelism being a priority within the College of St Hugh following the transfer of the Lincoln School of Theology to St Hild Lincoln. The full launch of the St Hild Lincoln was planned for 13 January, with more details to follow.

Safeguarding

Jack Redeyoff, the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, informed synod of a number of networking events being held around the diocese for parish safeguarding officers, recruiters and clergy with cure of souls. The new Safeguarding Hubs were also recommended for all those who have reached a level 3 on the Parish Safeguarding Dashboards. More information can be found on the safeguarding section of our website.

Promulgation of Amending Canon 42

For this procedural piece of General Synod business, the Chair read out a declaration to Synod on the amendment of Canon 42 which relates to the national requirement for the Bishop to appoint a Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor. In our diocese, this change in Canon will result in a name change of this role to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer(DSO). The DSO will also gain independence from the Diocesan Bishop on management of safeguarding matters and receive new professional supervision from the National Safeguarding team.

General Synod Report

Canon Nigel Bacon provided a verbal update to Synod members on the recent group of sessions held between Monday 13th and Wednesday 15th November. It was confirmed that around half of the allotted time was spent considered the Prayers of Love and Faith for same sex couples. It was noted that this subject also featured heavily in the Questions section of the agenda, with 93 questions directly related to the Prayers of Love and Faith and a further 133 connected to it. There were many speakers who spoke in favour of the motion, or were critical of it because it went too far or not far enough. The Archbishop of York set the scene for the debate during his Presidential Address. He explained his own position as being fully supportive of the proposals. Acknowledging that this was a divisive topic, he committed himself to working for the flourishing of the whole Church, with all its differences. By walking together, the Church could lead by example in showing how to live with difference and, in so doing, would enable people to see Jesus better.

As well as Living in Love and Faith, Synod also considered a draft measure to provide redress for victims and survivors of Church-connected abuse. This was approved to the revision stage of the legal process. A question was also raised about the current method of deciding the annual Legal Officers Fees which vary greatly from diocese to diocese. These proportional calculations have been the same since 1974, so they have agreed to revise this which will likely benefit our diocese.

The full report on the recent General Synod sessions can be found on our website.

Diocesan Synod Representation: election figures for Deaneries

Synod approved the representation figures to be used in the 2024 elections to Diocesan Synod, which included a reduction in the overall size of Synod. The Chair also noted the importance of informing the Diocesan Office each year of your parishes electoral roll numbers following each Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

There were no questions received in advance under Standing Order 72

The Bishop of Lincoln thanked Synod for their attendance and participation. Special thanks were given to the Revd Cameron Watt as the outgoing Chair of the House of Clergy, and a welcome extended to the Revd Canon Martyn Taylor as the new Chair.

The Bishop then closed the meeting in prayer.