

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod
18th November 2023, 9.30 am, Catalyst Building, Stoke-on-Trent**

- Present:

The Bishop of Shrewsbury (President)
The Bishop of Stafford
38 clergy members
31 lay members
- In attendance:

The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark (Acting Bishop of Wolverhampton)
Mrs Julie Jones (Diocesan Secretary)
Mr Jonathan Hill (Director of Finance)
Mrs Jess Dace (Deputy to the Director of Finance)
The Revd Simon Foster (Chaplaincy and Mission Team leader)
Mr Mark Davis (Director of Education)
Mrs Alex Wolvers (Mission in Schools Enabler)
- Apologies:

The Bishop of Lichfield
20 clergy members
22 lay members

The President assumed the Chair

1. Welcome and Opening Prayers

The Revd Mick Williams, Chaplain of Staffordshire University welcomed all and led opening worship.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising (DS23/11/01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th June 2023 were approved and signed by the President accordingly. No matters arising had been notified.

3. Presidential Address

In her Presidential address, the Bishop of Shrewsbury spoke mainly about the meeting of General Synod in the previous week, where an amended motion relating to Living in Love and Faith and particularly to stand alone services had been approved. She acknowledged the pain this had caused for many on all sides of the debate, and wanted to assure all, on behalf of the bishops, that the tradition that had nurtured them in their faith was still welcomed, and pastoral conversations were offered to anyone who had been distressed by Synod’s decision. She added that the bishops had also felt the pain of disunity, but all had in common the love for Jesus and a desire to serve him in the world. We turned to our community of the beloved in Christ to ask that we may have the grace to see Christ in the face of one another, and to be the body of Christ together, with our differences. She also looked forward to the items on the day’s agenda.

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) queried the wording of the General Synod motion quoted by Bishop Sarah, and this was clarified.

The Chair of the House of Clergy assumed the Chair

4. Adopting a formal link with the Diocese of Hyderabad

The Bishop of Shrewsbury explained that this proposal had emerged from conversations at the Lambeth Conference. The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent, and Alex Wolvers, Mission in Schools Enabler gave a presentation. They spoke about the Church in Pakistan and the Diocese

of Hyderabad which they had visited in March this year. They spoke about the extensive work being carried out there and the ambitious future plans. During the visit they had received warm hospitality and had a very busy schedule of visits including schools, churches, clinics and projects. The Bishop of Hyderabad and his wife had made a reciprocal visit this Summer. It was suggested that initially a link could work around the areas of schools and clergy support. Another priority was the development of women's leadership. Alex Wolvers spoke about education and schools and the work done by the diocese to support them. She also spoke about the mutual benefits of a partnership through schools. The Archdeacon spoke about how we might help support the clergy.

The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) said that when giving feedback regarding the appointment of the next Bishop of Wolverhampton, the need for governance to be for the benefit of parishes had been spoken about. He was concerned about the impact on already overstretched parishes.

The Archdeacon and Alex responded that there had not been communication directly with parishes yet, but there was interest in involvement from clergy who were aware and from schools. They felt this would be a very uplifting and positive partnership.

Mrs Penny Allen (General Synod) spoke about her experience of a link with a school in Africa, saying that it had been extremely positive and mutually beneficial.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) had worked in Pakistan and was delighted by the proposal. She asked how it was envisioned links with schools would work.

Alex said that currently this was still being worked out.

The Revd Gilbert David (Walsall) asked for more information about the parishes in Hyderabad Diocese to inform how to support them.

The Archdeacon said that the links would be run and managed centrally rather than pairing of individual parishes.

The Revd Richard Merrick (Wolverhampton) quoted John 17: 22-23, saying that as a Church we were called to unity and despite difficulties we must look beyond the confines of the Church of England and of our own parishes, and he encouraged all to seek unity.

The Revd Catherine McBride (Hodnet) asked whether a such a link would present an opportunity for us to raise awareness of the plight of persecuted Christians in Pakistan.

The Archdeacon felt that we would be better enabled to engage with the matter through the learning that would come from the link.

The Revd Mandy Walker (Walsall) spoke about her experience of encountering our link with Matlosane through welcoming a St Chad's volunteer stay at her home which had been an extremely positive experience. She wholeheartedly supported the proposed new link.

The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) said that the Diocese of Hyderabad and the Church of Pakistan were member of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches and given the organisation's views on General Synod's decisions in respect of Prayers of Love and Faith, he questioned whether there was equal enthusiasm for the link. He expressed his own support for the proposal.

The Archdeacon said that she had had direct conversations about this issue. The Diocese of Hyderabad were extremely keen for the link and the relationship to take place. They were fully aware of the decisions but valued the partnership and prayer offered by the link.

The Revd Ben Whitmore (Trysull) was also concerned about the future of a link for the same reasons, given that our link with West Malaysia had ceased for these reasons.

The Archdeacon answered that of course the future could not be guaranteed, but in this case the situation was known at the beginning, and all were aware of it when entering into a partnership.

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) was enthusiastic about the proposal but was concerned that we may be stretching resources as there were already several such links in place. He was also concerned about the possible impact on the aim to achieve net zero carbon by 2030.

The Archdeacon said that there was an awareness of the environmental issue and there had been conversations regarding using virtual meetings and keeping flights to a minimum.

The Archdeacon of Lichfield added that this would not stretch current resources as the links were separate, and a new group was being formed involving new people.

Mr Philip Dooley (Wolverhampton) welcomed the initiative but said that the situation in Hyderabad was not typical of much of the rest of Pakistan, with little persecution taking place in the diocese.

Alex Wolvers agreed this was the case but added that there were many individual stories of pain and grief, and isolation from families when following a Christian faith.

The Chair then moved the following motion:

This Synod supports forming a companion link between the Diocese of Lichfield and the Diocese of Hyderabad, Pakistan

This was voted upon and was carried with 3 abstentions.

5. Continuing Shaping for Mission

The Bishop of Stafford and the Archdeacon of Stoke gave a presentation about the Shaping for Mission process, which was now in the phase of trying to implement deanery visions that had emerged earlier in the process and doing this in a way that ensured missional and financial sustainability. The national church also had its strategic priorities and had an expectation that dioceses would also work in a strategic way. This could also unlock resources from the national church and also the Church Commissioners would want to see strategic use of the Low Income Communities Funding that we were already in receipt of. The senior staff team had been considering this and 4 shaping principles had emerged: to grow younger, to be more diverse, to engage creatively with local communities, and to be intentional about evangelism. These would help us as we considered our strategy, and what we would and wouldn't be doing. Members were asked to think about how these aligned with missional priorities in their own deaneries and would this result in some missional priorities being "squeezed out". Members discussed this in groups, with feedback noted. Members were then asked to carry out an exercise to look at outcomes by writing "postcards to our previous selves" in order to illustrate where we might want to be in ten years' time. These written responses were collected. The Bishop of Stafford concluded by saying this was an iterative process and encouraged members to get in touch with any further feedback particularly on what would help their parish or other context to engage with the shaping principles. The Senior Staff team would continue to work on this with some careful thinking around where we believed God was leading us.

The Chair of the House of Laity assumed the Chair

6. Ratifying the appointment of the new DBF Chair

The Bishop of Shrewsbury introduced this item, explaining that the role of Chair of the Board of Finance was appointed by the Diocesan Bishop. Following a recruitment campaign, interviews had been held and Mr David Wright had been appointed. She then moved the following motion:

This synod ratifies the appointment of Mr David Wright as the Chair of Lichfield Diocesan Board of Finance

There were no questions, and this motion was voted upon and clearly carried.

7. Budget 2024 (DS23/11/02)

The Deputy Chair of the Board of Finance introduced this item. He spoke about the rebuilding of the budget following the pandemic which had resulted in one which was far better able to reflect the reality of the volatile economic climate. He testified to the enormous effort that had been put into the Budget by the Finance team and noted that what was being considered had already been subject to robust interrogation through the governance process. The result was a 2024 budget in which we could have confidence. It was the first balanced budget we had seen for a number of years, and although it was deemed achievable, it was not without challenges. He noted that expenditure for 2024 was almost in line with that of 2023, due to several factors such as conscious effort, but also the reduced number of curates and the vacancy factor. All but 11% of expenditure in our control was spent on ministry and its support. Regarding income, the budget assumed an additional £1 million. It was envisaged that fee income, property rentals and returns on investments would contribute to this. Provision for the adoption of Total Return Approach (TRA) provided £500,000 of this target, and the remainder must come from Common Fund receipts. This represented a 2.7% increase on current receipts. He then invited the Finance Director to present the budget.

The Finance Director presented the budget in detail, copies of which had been circulated along with a summary leaflet. This was a break-even budget, but as mentioned, almost every element contained a challenge, some to parishes and some to diocesan officers. Work on meeting these had already begun. He noted that it was somewhat controversial to include funds provided though TRA as income and explained the rationale for this. The use of Resourcing the Future was also being brought in over the next 5 years very much to allow parishes transitional time with deployment changes and new ideas and opportunities. He noted the following key points:

- Common Fund Formula – Subsidised Cost of Deployment increased by 2% from £56,490 to £57,620.
- Real Cost of Deployment decrease from £63,587 to £62,630.
- General Inflation set at 5%
- Stipend increases set at 5%
- Total Deployment reduced by 6 posts
- Vacancy factor increased from 11% to 14%
- Salary Increases 5%
- Overall budget expenditure is reduced by 0.02%
- Budget Common Fund receipts increase by £0.207M to £9,752M

Another crucial factor was income from properties and he spoke of the importance of maximising this through sale or rental. This must of course be balanced with housing requirements and required work with senior staff to ensure this. The main challenge was the increase in Common Fund receipts. As an illustration of a simple way to think about generosity, he gave the example

that if half of our Average Sunday Attendance donated £3.50 (the cost of a cup of coffee) per week, then almost £2million would be raised.

The aim was to realise around £2.5 million in house sales over the next two years, and these had already been identified, with care not to impact rental income. Utilising TRA, £500k of this would be used to help the budget and produce cash to help with liquidity. It was hoped that at least £1million of the remainder would be invested to increase investment income.

Regarding expenditure, it was noted that the vacancy factor and the curacy budget could increase in future budgets. Regarding property, work was underway to install water meters in all houses as this would result in significant savings.

In terms of central costs, there had been an increase of £0.457 million or 36% over ten years. This however included additional areas that had been required, the largest being Safeguarding, where the cost had risen to £0.160 million. There had been savings across all areas and redistribution of resources to meet the demands as required to assist parishes.

In conclusion he reiterated that although this was a break-even budget, there was much work needed to ensure that it was achieved. He was positive about the challenges set, but implementation of the measures set out was key.

The Deputy Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance moved that:

The Board be authorised to expend in 2024 a sum not exceeding £16,089,364 as representing the net unrestricted expenditure for the year ending 31.12.24

The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) asked when the national fees had been set and was the amount budgeted for as expected.

The Finance Director answered that the amount budgeted for had been correct and in line with national fee setting.

In response to a question from The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone), the Finance Director explained the figures shown in the table at the top of page 10 of the budget document. Saying that they reflected the move between deployment and DVE work. This did include the vacancy factor and also the drop in deployment of 6 posts.

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) thanked the Finance Director and team for producing the budget, having the foresight to bring in TRA and for a budget that was achievable by the whole diocese. He acknowledged though the work needed by every individual and every parish to ensure that the required income was achieved. He asked whether there was flexibility in the amount of Common Fund or had every parish meet the requested amount.

The Finance Director encouraged any parish who were having difficulty meeting their Common Fund should talk to us. Every effort would be made to help and support and find mutually beneficial solutions. The aim was to keep arrears under control and not allow them to increase, as this was not helpful to the Diocese or to parishes.

The Finance Director then moved that:

The Board of Finance Budget for 2024 be received

A vote took place on the first motion. This was clearly carried with 1 abstention.

A vote took place on the second motion. This was clearly carried.

8. Vexatious Complaints Policy (DS23/11/03)

The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) spoke to this item. Members had received the draft policy in advance. He spoke about the replacement of CDM with the Clergy Conduct Measure (CCM) which promised clergy protection from vexatious complaints. Our policy would feed into the CCM Revisions Committee and may have wide ranging effects, making scrutiny of it all the more important. He explained that the policy was limited to the identification and handling of certain types of destructive complaining behaviour only, and did not cover safeguarding, criminal justice or serious misconduct which were dealt with under other policies. He then explained how the policy set out had been considered by a working group who had addressed the areas that he had identified as inadequate. In summary the goals had been: to provide objective measures for identifying destructive complaining behaviour; to direct complaints back to the parish before diocesan involvement (when not related to safeguarding or serious misconduct); to provide a model complaints policy for parishes; and to encourage collaborative and unified approaches based on written evidence between parish and diocese to address vexed, malicious or querulent complainants.

He commended the draft policy to Synod and then moved that:

This Synod affirms the steps taken to develop the present policy, recognises the need to address all concerns in a robust manner and seeks to strengthen attempts to deal effectively with all on-going vexatious complaints.

The Revd Dr Abbie Walsh (Lichfield) was thankful for this much needed policy. In her experience as a GP she had dealt with many vexatious complainants and acknowledged that it could be difficult to retain compassion and hope for them. She believed though that we must use compassionate and trauma informed language in such situations and asked if this could be incorporated into the policy. She made several suggestions of changes to the language used which were noted.

Mrs Penny Allen (General Synod) welcomed the policy. She reported her concerns about what she considered to be examples of poor behaviour at the previous week's General Synod meeting which she felt illustrated the need for such a policy. She also commended the policy for General Synod consideration.

Mrs Amanda Robbie raised a Point of Order stating that speaking about the General Synod meeting was not relevant to the item being discussed.

The Revd Preb Ben Whitmore (Trysull) thanked and congratulated Neil Robbie and those who had worked on the policy in taking on this very difficult and complicated issue.

The Revd Matt Beer also thanked Neil Robbie for his work on this and was pleased that the diocese were leading the way and feeding into the CCM review. He asked about how GDPR legislation fitted alongside this, particularly around holding, gathering and presenting records; he also asked about how the process would be open to external scrutiny.

Mr Matthew Edwards (General Synod) thanked Neil Robbie for his work on the policy which he commended along with the motion. He also supported the comments made by Abbie Walsh. He suggested the inclusion of a provision for advocacy, particularly for neurodivergent people.

The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod) supported the motion and echoed Abbie Walsh's comments. Referring to the template parish policy, she suggested that it should clearly state that it was not for use regarding safeguarding issues.

Mr John Wardle (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) echoed this and suggested that Safeguarding contacts should be included in the document.

The Archdeacon of Walsall echoed the thanks to Neil Robbie, and asked how others might make suggestions and comments and over what period. The Diocesan Secretary asked for comments to be sent to her by email.

The Revd Treena Larkin (General Synod) welcomed the document and asked about how the assessor, their qualities and how they might be recruited and supported. This was noted.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) who was a member of the CCM Review Committee, said that there were to be assessors in dioceses dealing with CCM matters, and therefore could have appropriate skills and training for this.

The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) suggested that the working document should be in place as soon as possible and brought back to this Synod at the review date.

The Revd Neil Robbie acknowledged all the comments and proposed amendments and suggested that the working group should reconvene as soon as possible to enable a working document to be put in place.

It was agreed that the document should be brought back to Synod at its next meeting in March 2024. The motion was then voted upon on this basis and was clearly carried.

9. Promulgation of Amending Canon 42 (DS23/11/04)

The Diocesan Registrar explained that this was a notation item. Amending Canon 42 made it a requirement for every Diocesan Bishop to appoint a Diocesan Safeguarding Officer rather than a Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and created more liaison between the officer and the National Safeguarding Team. This was noted.

10. Elections to Diocesan Synod - ~Representation for 2024 (DS23/11/05)

The Diocesan Secretary spoke to the previously circulated paper and moved the following motion:

This Synod approves the basis of representation for elections to Diocesan Synod in 2024 as set out

This was voted upon and clearly carried.

11. General Synod Reports (DS23/11/06)

Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) spoke to the previously circulated report of the July sessions. He asked members to note that the internet links in the paper may not work due to changes made by the national church. He urged members to email him with any difficulties regarding this. The report was noted with no questions.

The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod) gave a verbal report on the very recent November sessions (the written report was to be circulated to members and made available on the diocesan synod web page). It was noted that this had not been an emergency meeting but rather a contingency date which were always planned into the schedule and used if needed. The report contained details of many of the items discussed, with links to a recording and written report.

The main item of business had been regarding Living in Love and Faith and the consideration of the use of some standalone services for same sex couples being made available for use, possibly on a trial basis, on the timescale envisaged by the motion passed by General Synod in February 2023. She recommended members read GS2328 in regard to this. Put simply, the trajectory agreed in February 2023 would continue. There was no doubt about the depth of disagreement this caused and as the motion acknowledged, there was uncertainty about how the implementation of what had been agreed would work out, especially as the pastoral guidance that would accompany the prayers was still a work in progress. She reiterated how seriously the matter was taken by the General Synod representatives, and the debate had lasted 8 hours in a packed chamber. There was a recognition that underlying this issue were deep differences as to the interpretation of Scripture and the nature of the Church.

She drew attention also to the introduction of the Abuse Redress Scheme, designed to give financial and other compensation to those who had been abused. Of key interest was the proposal that PCCs should share in liability for abuse committed by those for whom the PCC was the accountable body. The report also contained links to detailed information. She would also be adding details of sub-committees on which our General Synod representatives served.

The report was met with warm appreciation.

The Revd John Grice (Tamworth) asked about the extra insurance PCCs may require in respect of the Abuse Redress Scheme.

The Diocesan Secretary said that parishes insured with EIG should be covered under current policies. Any claims could affect future premiums, however.

The Revd Matt Beer pointed out that this did not come into effect immediately as there were refinements still to be made to the scheme. The Diocesan Secretary added that some parishes had already had to make such payments.

The Chair of the House of Laity then moved the following motion:

The reports of the General Synod sessions in July and November 2023 be received.

This was voted upon and clearly carried.

12. Question Time

A paper had been circulated containing 25 written questions and answers. The following supplementaries were asked:

In respect of question 5, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) suspected that the situation regarding payment of Common Fund may worsen, and asked how many parishes had not met their formula share in full last year, and the unpaid amount.

The Diocesan Secretary replied that she was unable to answer at that time, but would provide an answer after the meeting.

In respect of question 8, Mrs Amanda Robbie asked for clarification regarding whether the information given was for worshipping communities and that some churches may be missing from the lists.

The Head of the Mission Team answered that the information was self-reported and was from the October count.

Following a question from the Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich), he explained how that October count asked how many individuals attended a church on 4 successive Sundays in October.

In respect of question 9, The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) asked if outcome from the February General Synod been discussed by Bishop's Staff in relation to retention of curates after training.

The Diocesan Secretary replied that the issue of a disappointing number of curates had certainly been discussed at Bishop's Staff meetings but in a general way, not in the light of the LLF proposals. It was a matter of great concern and work was ongoing with the vocations team.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury added that low numbers of curates was an issue nationally.

In respect of question 12, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) thanked the Bishop of Shrewsbury for her reply. He asked if, given her public views to take the matter further than had been originally presented in the General Synod report, was an offer of a pastoral conversation to those who may be hurt by her actions appropriate.

As this question was asking for an opinion, and answer was not provided.

In respect of question 13, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) thanked the Bishop of Shrewsbury for her reply. He could not see how the statement could be seen as sensitive to the differing convictions of a clearly divided church. It was strongly believed that the legal advice suggested that standalone services were indicative of a departure from the Church of England, and it clearly moved away from the report originally presented to Synod by the House of Bishops. The letter caused considerable damage to the unity of the Church Catholic, the Anglican Communion, and the Church of England. Why had the unity of the Church not been sought to be maintained given its primary credal importance?

As this question was asking for an opinion, and answer was not provided.

In respect of question 15, The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) said that when considering applying for vacancies, ordinands and clergy were looking at Bishops' views on LLF. He asked if this could be taken into account during the recruitment process for the Bishop of Wolverhampton.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury said that this was in hand.

In respect of question 16, the Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie asked for more pro-active work on helping clergy who may be affected by migration of Child Tax Credit to Universal Credit.

The Diocesan Secretary and Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) responded, and it was suggested that an item in the bulletin or a direct email to clergy about this would be appropriate. The Diocesan Secretary agreed to liaise with Tim Vasby-Burnie regarding drafting a communication.

Mrs Penny Allen (General Synod) reminded members about the Clergy Support Trust which offered financial help to clergy.

In respect of question 19, the Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) asked whether consideration had been given to providing Unconscious Bias training for clergy.

The Diocesan Secretary replied that some training had already taken place, particularly for parishes in vacancy.

The Revd Treena Larkin (General Synod) added that it was also part of curates' compulsory training. The Bishop's Staff team had also undertaken this training.

In response to Mrs Amanda Robbie, the Diocesan Secretary said that this covered all protected characteristics.

In response to question 21, Mr Matthew Edwards (General Synod) asked if, in the absence of a diocesan strategy, could the diocese consider how barriers to vocation for the LGBTQ+ community might be overcome in the future.

The Head of the Mission Team said that he was personally aware of the significance of this issue through his work as a Vocations Adviser and this was a helpful question.

The Revd Preb Romita Shrisunder (Nominated) (Bishop's Director for Ordinands) acknowledged the lack of a strategy but said that vocations advisers were aware this was an issue that needed to be addressed.

In response to question 22, Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) was bemused by the written answer given which she found to be contradictory.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury reiterated that the proposals passed by General Synod did not include or permit same sex marriage.

The Revd Mark Wilson (West Bromwich) quoted Diocesan Synod Standing Orders and the wish to "work in a collaborative and inclusive way at all times". In this vein he asked whether the completed Question Time paper could be sent out at least 4 days before a meeting to help those with neurodiverse needs.

The Diocesan Secretary said that this was not straightforward due to the deadline for the submission of questions and the time needed for answers to be provided. She would however put this to the Agenda Planning Committee.

The Chair thanked all for their attendance and participation.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury closed the meeting in prayer.

The following items were deemed to have been noted by the Synod:

- Standing Committee Report (DS23/11/07)
- DMPC Annual Report (DS23/11/08)