**Diocesan Synod February 2021**

The first Diocesan Synod meeting of 2021 was held via Zoom on Saturday 13th February, with discussion of big issues relating to the shape of ministry in the diocese, and the work of Leicester Cathedral and the Diocesan Board of Education.

The Synod began with worship led by David Newman and Chris Webb of Launde Abbey. The time of worship drew on Isaiah 49 to remind Synod members that God has said ‘I will not forget you’.

In his presidential address Bishop Martyn reflected on the power of stories to inspire us, but also to leave us feeling inadequate sometimes as we hear stories of success from others. He noted the ability of social media for sharing stories and connecting people, but also its destructive power when used badly. Bishop Martyn then spoke about the tension between the need to live in the present and the need to plan for the future. Even while still in lockdown it was important to begin to plan for what the Church might look like after the pandemic. The bishops of the Church of England were giving thought to this and the Shaped by God Together process was also about imagining a future where the Church might bounce back in surprising ways. In all of this it was important to follow Jesus’s teaching not to worry but to place our trust in God. Lent would be a time of reflection on the experiences of the last year, but it was important to remember that Easter is coming and we will sing our alleluias together once again. You can read the full address [here](https://www.leicester.anglican.org/about-us/bishop-of-leicester-and-loughborough/bishop-of-leicester/bishop-martyns-blog-talks-and-publications/presidential-address-to-diocesan-synod-february-2021.php).

**Shaped By God Together**

Claire Bampton, the Diocesan Programme Manager, explained that the decision had been taken to slow down the Shaped By God Together process. This meant that, instead of being asked to make a decision on the future shape of the diocese in May, this would now come before the Synod in October. The May Synod would still be engaging with the process and would in particular be looking at the principles for making decisions related to money. Meanwhile, the current phase of [conversations](https://www.leicester.anglican.org/about-us/sbgt/shaped-by-god-together-conversations-.php) would continue to allow creative thinking to take place with as much input from around the diocese as possible.

Synod members were then invited to take part in 14 conversation groups looking at the three areas of focus in the Shaped By God Together process – Ministry, Finance and Buildings. These conversations ran for 25 minutes and feedback is being collated and circulated to Synod members. In a brief plenary session highlights from the conversations were shared as follows.

Finance (Jonathan Kerry)

* More transparency is needed around ministry costs.
* More clarity is needed over priorities.
* It’s important to use ‘rainy day’ funds when it’s raining!

Ministry (Stuart Burns)

* Work is needed on how vocations fit with discipleship.
* How to authorise and release local ministry is important.
* We need to think about when and where the Church should be present in schools.

Buildings (Richard Worsfold)

* Work is needed on streamlining approval processes.
* We need to make use of partnership between community and church.
* It’s important to empower local people rather than seek to centralize.

Bishop Martyn responded to these comments and others received via the chat function by stressing that the 3 Key Questions remain at the centre of everything that we do. The six strategic priorities ([agreed by Synod last year](https://www.leicester.anglican.org/news/report-from-november-diocesan-synod.php)) were subordinate to the Key Questions and were focused more on the allocation of resources.

Claire Bampton invited Synod members to send any comments they had to her.

**Leicester Cathedral Revealed**

Synod then turned its attention to a proposal for the DBF to offer a grant of £500k to Leicester Cathedral for the Leicester Cathedral Revealed (LCR) programme of works. Stephen Barney, proposing the motion, explained that for him the principal consideration was about vision and supporting the Cathedral’s role in mission in the diocese rather than about money. He said that external partners were waiting for the diocese to show its support for this £13m project and that it was important for the DBF to offer this small part of its capital reserves as part of the final push. The Cathedral itself has already raised over £10 million. You can read the full paper that was presented to Synod [here*.*](https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/5f3ffd8a9f6aa/content/pages/documents/item-5-synod-130221-leicester-cathedral-revealed.pdf)

David Monteith explained what the Leicester Cathedral Revealed project would achieve and how it would help the Cathedral to tell the story of Christian faith in Leicester and Leicestershire. He said that the Cathedral is not just ‘one of our churches’ but holds the church’s witness in the Public Square in a different way. He said LCR would help shape the Cathedral’s ability for witness as we head towards the centenary of the founding of the diocese (in 2026).

Synod then debated the proposal. Nearly 30 people contributed to the discussion, many speaking warmly of the Cathedral’s ministry. The current financial challenges faced by parishes were also noted. Following this debate the Synod rejected an amendment, which proposed releasing money to the Cathedral in exchange for one of its clergy houses, and voted overwhelmingly in favour of awarding a grant of £500k towards Leicester Cathedral Revealed (72 in favour, 1 against, 6 abstentions).

The Dean told Synod that the Cathedral would go ‘on tour’ around the diocese during the LCR building works. Anyone with queries about the grant or the LCR project can email Stephen Barney ([stephen4747@live.co.uk](mailto:stephen4747@live.co.uk)) or David Monteith ([David.Monteith@leicesterCofe.org](mailto:David.Monteith@leicesterCofe.org)) respectively, who will be happy to explain and share more detail.

**DBE Measure**

Stephen Adshead (Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education) and Carolyn Lewis (Diocesan Director of Education) then presented information about the DBE Measure, which is a Church of England law affecting Boards of Education which is due to come into effect in 2021. They explained that this new law provides the legal framework for the DBE to do its work. Carolyn Lewis told the Synod that the Board of Education had a clear vision, linked to the diocesan vision, which spoke of schools being effective, distinctive, rooted and inclusive. The Board of Education believed that the most effective way of delivering its work was to remain as an incorporated organization. This would be brought to the Synod for a decision once the Measure had received royal assent.

**Other Business**

In a time of open questions following the Presidential address, Rob Gladstone asked about the possibility of the diocese assisting couples who were faced with paying the special marriage licence fee of £200. It was agreed that a costed proposal regarding this would be brought to the Synod meeting in March.

In closing the Synod, Bishop Martyn and David Wilson thanked Peter Hooper who was leaving to become Archdeacon of France after serving as Chair of the House of Clergy since 2014.