

## **Diocesan Synod Summary – May 2025**

### **Something is Stirring**

Diocesan Synod met on Saturday 17 May to reflect on a range of themes, including finance and safeguarding, but also heard Bishop Martyn suggest that something is stirring in society as young people take an increasing interest in the Church.

The Synod opened with worship led by clergy couple Rhi and Steve O'Rourke, which invited those present to reflect on verses from Philippians 4. This was followed by Bishop Martyn's presidential address in which he noted signs that there is a change in the trend of church decline.

These signs include:

- The Bible Society report suggesting that there is a 'quiet revival' particularly among young men;
- Statistics for Mission for the Church of England showing an increase in numbers;
- Reports from around the diocese of excellent attendance at Easter services;
- Evidence that 750 new disciples have emerged through the Resourcing Churches programme; and
- His own experience of meeting people who had started attending church for 'no particular reason'.

Bishop Martyn then reflected on the Intergenerational Communities strategic priority, which is the focus of the Diocesan Investment Programme bid being developed at present. He noted that there is a desire among church schools to work with churches and went on to talk about a recent presentation he had attended where it was stressed that a truly intergenerational church is one where everybody feels involved and children do things with adults rather than having a separate programme. The intergenerational priority is being explored through a Diocesan Investment Programme bid which will help to establish intergenerational hubs with a skilled worker (usually clergy) to enable ministry. These hubs will provide an opportunity for people to take risks, try new things and encourage others, as we look to move from developing big youth groups to growing lifelong disciples. In closing his address, Bishop Martyn quoted Rachel Gardner from Youthscape, who has asked whether this is a Dunkirk moment, in which young people find themselves metaphorically stranded on the beach, while small boats go out to help them.

Following the Presidential address, the chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, David Palmer, presented the DBF's Annual Report and Accounts for 2024. He explained that the overall position of the DBF has improved slightly compared with 2023, but that the 2024 deficit of £2.2m is still higher than was budgeted. Parish Contribution income remains stable at around £3.9m but this is a real terms reduction when taking inflation into account. The trustees want to set a challenging target for a lower deficit in 2026, so that the move towards financial sustainability continues. Questions from the floor looked at issues such as what diocesan expenditure is tied to national church funding, whether it is possible to achieve a balanced budget by 2028, and how to face the future with optimism. In addressing the issue of facing the future, Bishop Martyn said that our hope is in God and comes from prayer and worship. Speakers also highlighted the need to increase congregation numbers and giving in churches.

Rachael Spiers, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, then gave a brief update on safeguarding work, noting the decision of General Synod in February to ensure independence of the functions of the National Safeguarding Team, and to undertake further work on what independence of diocesan safeguarding provision would mean. Rachael then highlighted the National Safeguarding Standards, which link to the independent safeguarding audits of dioceses and cathedrals currently

being undertaken by INEQE. Contributions from the floor included expressions of thanks to the diocesan Safeguarding Team and also raised issues about culture change and capacity. The Synod heard that the Trustee Board has approved an additional caseworker post in the team.

Following a short break, the Synod received a report from the Diocesan Board of Education, including their Annual Report and Accounts. Russell Andrews, Chair of the DBE, highlighted work to increase the diversity of the Board. Carolyn Shoyer, Diocesan Director of Education, presented the Annual Report and Accounts and provided context for the reported £225k surplus, explaining that this included sale of a property and that the DBE runs a balanced budget with one of the smallest teams in the country. Deputy DDE, Tracey Manns, then unpacked the DBE's vision of 'transforming the lives of children and young people through effective, distinctive, rooted and inclusive education'. She explained that the culture of schools tends to be focused on external things like results, behaviour and attendance, all of which are very important, but the DBE is also concerned with the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2). For this reason it is important to focus also on character development, based around Christian values, the holistic development of pupils, and on daily collective worship, so that those in C of E schools can experience something of the kingdom of God. One of the questions in response to the presentation was about explaining spirituality to younger children, which gave Carolyn Shoyer the opportunity to suggest prompts around how we relate to ourselves, others and the other, as a way to do this.

Crystal McAllister, speaking on behalf of Framland Deanery Synod, presented a motion referred by the deanery which sought to ensure that those criticised in the Makin Review should not be considered for appointment as the next Archbishop of Canterbury, or sit on the Crown Nominations Commission for this appointment. Following debate, the motion was subject to two amendments and was approved as amended by a large majority with 1 vote against and 11 abstentions. The full text of the agreed motion, which has been referred to the Clerk to General Synod, is as follows:

*In view of recent revelations of the cover up of abuse following the publication of the Makin Report, this Synod agrees that:*

*1 No-one named in the Makin Review as, or subsequently revealed to be implicated in the cover-up, failure to report, or disregarding of abuse, should be on the list for appointment as the next Archbishop of Canterbury.*

*2 No-one named in the Makin Review as, or subsequently revealed to be implicated in the cover-up, failure to report, or disregarding of abuse should sit on the Crown Nominations Commission that will choose the next Archbishop and any such person already appointed to the Commission should be asked to resign.*

*This Synod requests that this be acted upon accordingly and be taken forward to General Synod.*

Written questions from Synod members focused mainly on finance and on Minster Communities, and time was taken to consider supplementary questions. In final business the Synod received a report on the February meeting of General Synod and approved the appointment of Stephen Gorton as a DBF Trustee and Chair of the Resources and Compliance Committee, before Bishop Martyn led the closing prayer.