

Synod summary – May 2024

Diocesan Synod met on 18th May at St Martins House to discuss a variety of topics including the diocesan strategy, Resourcing Churches and the Diocesan Board of Education's (DBE) annual report.

The Synod began with worship led by Revd Elaine Sutherland and Lois Young from Holy Trinity Leicester. They focused on Pentecost, sharing stories from what is happening at HTL and a reminder that God is good – because it's God's nature.

Noting that the AGM of the DBF formed part of the Synod meeting, Bishop Martyn reflected that we cannot talk about money in a vacuum, and he used his presidential address to talk about child poverty, sharing the shocking statistic that in Leicester, 2 in 5 children live in poverty. Despite the UK having the fifth biggest economy in the world. He noted that the DBF balance sheet does not show the huge amount of time and energy that churches put into tackling poverty, and he took the opportunity to thank those present for their generosity and commitment and to ask them to pass on these thanks to others. But, Bishop Martyn added, whilst the Church is active all over the country in working to help those in poverty, it cannot solve this issue on its own. He shared his work in the House of Lords to raise the issue of the two-child limit on benefits and how lifting that could lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty overnight.

The Synod then received an update on Resourcing Churches from Revd Michael Broadley and Revd Sami Lindsey. Their presentation involved videos from St Peter's, Oadby, where a congregation now meets in the local pub, and St Barnabas in Loughborough which is a church plant on a new estate. Michael Broadley said that the Resourcing Churches' vision is to plant churches that reach people who don't yet know Christ. He shared that 26 new expressions of church have been set up since the project started. A recent review carried out by the national church shows that the overall project is broadly on target – assessed as amber/green in the language of project management. Revd Sami Lindsey said that his role is about ensuring that Resourcing Churches will continue to play a critical role after the end of the funded programme by encouraging new community formation in the wider diocese through connecting with the other diocesan strategies. One key aspect of this is training new leaders. He shared that we are already making progress toward this end as in 2023, 23 new communities were started by 21 different parish churches. Questions focused on the learning to be had from experiences of Resourcing Churches in other dioceses, financial stability and the recent assessment by the national church. In closing, Bishop Saju stressed the good progress that has been made, and affirmed our diocesan focus on reaching the 93% of the population who do not have any contact with Church.

The next agenda item was the Annual Report of the Diocesan Board of Education. In her presentation, Diocesan Director of Education, Carolyn Lewis, drew on Renaissance art to highlight how developments in realism, depth and perspective

had greatly enhanced artistic endeavour. She then prompted Synod members to think about the picture that we need to paint for our church schools; how this work can be imbued with realism, depth, and perspective; and how prepared we might be to let God do something new. Questions and comments raised by Synod members focused on how to make links with secondary-age children, working with community schools, examples of good practice, how to make connections between churches and schools to address poverty, and encouraging adults to share their faith meaningfully with children. One contribution highlighted that schools are always looking for volunteers to listen to children reading. Carolyn Lewis thanked Synod members for their contributions and invited those eager to find out more to contact her and other staff and members of the Board of Education.

In the remaining minutes leading up to a short coffee break, the Synod noted written questions and answers about the Diocesan Investment Proposal; financial priorities for parishes; and clergy HR matters, with a particular focus on maternity policy. Synod then approved the appointment of Chris Sheldon as Chair of the Resources and Compliance Committee, which is part of the new governance structure.

Following the break Revd Barry Hill invited the Synod to contribute further to the ongoing work of strategy development with a particular focus on the top-level aspects of the draft strategy. Questions for small group discussion were:

- What encourages you in what you read?
- What questions does it raise for your context?
- What is the top question you hope the full draft in June will answer?

Verbal feedback from the meeting raised themes such as how the various aspects of the strategy will be integrated, how much freedom individual churches will have, how we identify what we will stop doing, and the fact that for some churches the issues raised are already imminent. Written feedback was also collected from each group. In closing the discussion, Bishop Martyn said that it is fine for individual churches to identify areas of focus which do not come under the five strategic priorities if that is their calling, and Bishop Saju invited people to pray during the next phase of development and discernment.

The final major item of business was the Annual General Meeting of the Diocesan Board of Finance. David Palmer, the Chair of the DBF, presented the Annual Report and Accounts, saying that the underlying financial position continues to be challenging, with the deficit in 2023-24 reaching £2.35m. He reported that reserves to cover such deficits will only last for another 4-5 years and that a small group has been set up to look at reducing costs, with this also being linked to the work on strategy. He added that if parish contributions had kept pace with inflation over the previous 10 years then this would have eliminated most of the deficit. Following a discussion, the Annual Report and Accounts were adopted with one abstention and no votes against. In other business, the reappointment of Hays McIntyre as auditors and the revised Articles of Association were approved unanimously.

Other brief agenda items were as follows:

- Synod discussed its regular pattern of meetings and opted to continue with 4 in-person meetings a year expressing the preference that these should be hybrid meetings if at all possible.
- DAC Chair Richard Trethewey presented the DAC's annual report.
- Amending Canon no 43 was promulgated, thus confirming the various amendments to the canons introduced by legislation in 2023.

Stephen Adshead, Chair of the House of Laity, thanked Synod members for their service over the last 3 years and advised them of arrangements for the Diocesan Synod elections. Bishop Martyn then led the closing prayer.