

Diocesan Synod Summary – November 2024

The Diocesan Synod meeting on 23 November took place in the context of the challenges resulting from the publication of the Makin Review and the subsequent resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This context was reflected in a change to the usual running order which saw Bishop Martyn's presidential address at the start of the meeting.

In his address Bishop Martyn focused on the Makin Review, expressing deep regret and introspection over the Church's past safeguarding failures. He acknowledged the significant harm caused by senior leaders and the inadequate responses to abuse cases, emphasizing the need for better support for survivors. Highlighting the importance of listening to survivors' individual needs, he expressed confidence in and gratitude for the diocesan safeguarding team and called for continued efforts to ensure the Church is a safe environment for all.

Bishop Martyn also stressed the importance of transparency and accountability within the Church, urging leaders to take responsibility for past mistakes and to work diligently towards rebuilding trust with the community. He mentioned ongoing training programmes aimed at improving safeguarding practices and encouraged the Synod to support these initiatives wholeheartedly. The ongoing need for a cultural shift within the Church was stressed, where safeguarding becomes an integral part of our mission and values. By fostering a culture of openness and vigilance, it is possible to prevent future failures and create a more secure and supportive environment for everyone involved in the Church's activities.

Synod members were invited to reflect in small groups and there was then a time of discussion and questions. Contributions from the floor covered concerns about past failings and the need for greater accountability and independence in safeguarding. There was concern about the length of time it was taking for the Archbishop's resignation to take effect and at the impact of his ongoing public appearances. Bishop Martyn thanked contributors to the discussion for their honesty and expressed his support for the proposal for an independent review body to hold the church accountable, noting that it is also essential for safeguarding to be embedded in local congregations. He acknowledged the humbling of the Church and the need to act differently, stressing again that safeguarding should be at the core of all church activities.

The meeting continued with an act of worship incorporating the commissioning of Sophie Holder as the new Director of Racial Equity (DRE). In conversation with Bishop Saju, Sophie talked about her faith journey and her passion for working with people. Bishop Saju stressed the Biblical roots of the concept of racial equity, rejecting perceptions that it is 'woke'. Sophie then shared her personal and theological perspectives, highlighting the importance of understanding different worldviews and the spiritual battle involved in discipleship, and concluding by

expressing her vision for the diocese and the importance of every person being represented.

The Synod then received an update on Minster Communities (MCs) including reflections from parish level through Liz Wilson (City of Leicester) and Sue Wilson (Goscote). Liz shared her reflections on the MC process, acknowledging the mixed responses and anxiety within her parishes. She emphasized the importance of collaboration and working through differences to enable churches to flourish. Sue discussed the progress of forming MCs, highlighting the importance of maintaining existing mission work at a local level and avoiding bureaucracy. She shared the positive experiences of meeting in focus groups and the desire to continue learning and supporting each other. In the wider discussion that followed, issues raised included concerns about the pace of the process, the need for local leadership, and the importance of maintaining local identity while forming partnerships with other churches. Responding to the points raised, Programme Manager Claire Bampton stressed the commitment of the diocese to both robust organizational change and commitment to Christian discernment.

Following a break, the Synod allowed time for follow up to the written questions which had been received. Issues raised under this item included how the Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP) can best be used, concerns about the budget process, governance processes for ensuring implementation of review recommendations, and the appointment process for Oversight Ministers.

The diocesan budget for 2025 was then presented by David Palmer, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, who highlighted a projected deficit of £1.5 million. The reduced deficit compared with 2024 has been achieved by reductions in central posts and expenditure but also in the number of stipendiary clergy posts. The need for increased income from parish contributions to improve the financial situation was emphasized. The discussion on the budget included concerns about the impact of inflation, the challenges of maintaining church buildings, and the importance of motivating people to give. David Palmer acknowledged the difficulties faced by poorer areas and the need for each church to review its funding. The Synod then voted overwhelmingly in favour of approving the budget along with a Total Returns Release to fund the deficit, with 3 voting against and 8 abstentions.

The Synod then received an update on the Net Zero Carbon initiative from Adam Clarke, the NZC Programme Manager for the diocese, in which, alongside the threat posed by climate change, he also highlighted the benefits of taking action to reduce our carbon footprint and practical actions which can help towards achieving Net Zero. Contributions from the floor included concerns about the complexity and expense of replacing church boilers, who to contact for advice, and the suggestion that the Church should focus on lobbying the biggest polluting countries. Adam responded that he is happy to be available to talk to parishes within the limits of his part-time role and that the Church can contribute by setting a positive example in its efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Matthew Gough briefly presented on Living in Love and Faith, highlighting the plans for all Diocesan Synods to provide feedback to the National Church before the July meeting of General Synod.

In other final business the Synod approved a minor amendment to the membership of the Trustee Board and some changes to the scheme for quinquennial inspection of church buildings.

The meeting concluded with prayer led by Bishop Martyn.