

Note of business transacted at a meeting of the Newcastle Diocesan Synod held on Saturday 7th May 2022 at 10:0am and hosted using Zoom Video Conferencing

The Revd Canon Brian Hurst took the Chair

1. Welcome and opening worship

The Revd Canon Brian Hurst welcomed members and guests to the meeting and invited the Revd Phyl Carruthers, Assistant Curate of Bamburgh, Belford and Lucker to lead the Synod with an opening reflection.

An audio file of the opening reflection was shared after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from 18 members.

3. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

4. Meeting held on 13 November 2021

4.1 Note of business transacted on 13 November 2021 (Paper DS22 02)

The Synod noted the business transacted on 13 November 2021.

4.2 Matters arising

- a) The Secretary reported on the donations made to the Bishop of Botswana to help establish a Mission Relief Fund. The sum of £6,500 had been transferred to the Bishop of Botswana made up of £3,000 of donations from parishes and individuals from across the diocese and £3,500 from the Bishop of Newcastle.

Fr Allan Marks (Newcastle Central), on behalf of the Botswana Task Group, expressed his thanks for the prayers and financial generosity of so many. Fr Marks added that he would be travelling to Botswana in September, together with Bishop Mark and the Revd Chris Minchin, to represent the Diocese of Newcastle at the Diocese of Botswana's 50th Anniversary celebrations.

5. Notices

There were no notices.

6. Questions

There were no questions.

7. Presidential Address

The Chair invited the Bishop to give his first Presidential Address to the Synod. A copy of the Bishop's address was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

8. Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

The Chair invited Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth, the Diocesan Advocate for Living in Love and Faith, to update the Synod about progress with Living in Love and Faith.

The aim of the session was to:

- reflect on the characteristics of a 'better way' of discernment and decision-making, as suggested in the hopes of the LLF discernment and decision-making process; and
- how the Diocesan Synod might better embody these hopes in its way of working together.

The session began with a presentation and the Synod noted the completion of the first phase of Living in Love and Faith which had involved consultation and discussion. Within the Diocese of Newcastle 90 questionnaires had been completed. As a comparison with other dioceses, our engagement was mid-range. One diocese had completed over 400 responses and another 15. Overall the central church had received 6600 responses, the largest amount of engagement experienced in a consultation in recent times. The Synod noted all twelve deaneries across the diocese had engaged with this work.

The process moving forward would be the collation of data to produce a report for the College of Bishops in September. The College would use the report to begin the next phase of its discernment and was expected to bring forward clear proposals to the General Synod in February 2023.

The presentation was followed by groupwork across seven breakout rooms (Aidan, Bede, Cuthbert, Ebba, Ethelburga, Hild and Oswald). Groups were asked to focus on:

- What might Diocesan Synod do differently to better embody this way of working?
- How might Diocesan Synod encourage embedding such a vision in the life of local churches and deaneries?

After the groupwork the Revd Joanne Thorns, Regional Officer for North East Churches Acting Together, led the Synod in prayer.

The Synod paused for a break.

On returning from the break the Chair opened a plenary session and the following points were made:

- Groups noted some participants had engaged fully with the LLF conversations while others, particularly those parishes in vacancy, had not and were unaware. Could thought be given as to how the LLF work could have greater reach?
- The use of the Pastoral Principles was a good basis for facilitating all consultations.
- There were differing experiences with this topic, particularly with the use of video conferencing where some had felt excluded and would have preferred in-person sessions.
- It would be good to look at making Diocesan Synod more accessible with a wider invitation for guests to attend and to provide more opportunities for safe spaces to facilitate sharing and listening.
- It would be useful to continue to run LLF sessions to help greater engagement.
- Need to be mindful of those who are absent or find it difficult to speak.
- Need to be clear about who is guiding and leading vision: is it locally driven or top-down?
- Be aware of those who are not speaking.

Canon McDonald-Booth thanked everyone for their group discussions and contributions and encouraged members to continue to use the LLF resources. This would help and support parishes in vacancy and also to reach those who were yet to engage. Canon McDonald-Booth confirmed she was available to help with facilitation and training facilitators and signposted those seeking more to consider the story films produced for LLF which had been well received and were excellent resources to help open good discussions.

The Chair thanked Canon McDonald-Booth for the work she had carried out as the Diocesan Advocate for LLF and for her continuing work as an advocate.

A copy of the presentation was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

9. Growing Church Bringing Hope: Next Steps

Bishop Mark provided an update on engagement with the National Church following the Strategic Investment Board's decision not to support the development of the Next Steps programme. The Board's decision had been disappointing given the proposed programme had been the result of

diocesan wide consultation over a 24-month period and had been developed with the support of officers from the National Strategy Unit.

The Bishop's Council had recently written to the Strategic Investment Board to set out that the diocesan priorities for the short-term would focus on the continuing support of parishes recovering from the COVID pandemic; the recruitment to fill clergy vacancies; and the building up of morale to help re-engage with national processes for dioceses seeking national financial support to help deliver strategic priorities. The short-term would also include the development of pilot areas across the diocese utilising the models developed for the Next Steps programme.

The Director of Mission and Ministry, the Revd Canon Rob Saner Haigh, gave a presentation which provided an overview of the models supporting the Next Steps programme. The Director explained that four pilot areas, two areas in each archdeaconry, were being discerned to look at how the models could work to support local parish ministry to flourish and develop through areas such as engagement with children and youth and the discernment and development of lay ministry. The pilots would be resourced from existing capacity within the Mission and Ministry Team.

The Director provided an update on the diocesan self-review completed at the end of 2021 and confirmed that the outcomes of the self-review would be shared with Deanery Development Groups to help with deanery planning.

The Archdeacons provided a short update on developments with deployment planning for stipendiary ministry. The emerging work would be further developed with input from Area Deans and Lay Chairs before a more formal launch.

The Chair opened the item for questions.

Prof Gary Holmes (Morpeth) spoke about the importance of the self-review exercise and it was important to ensure an overview of the responses should be published to help people understand the aggregated view. **Carol Griffiths** (Bamburgh & Glendale) asked how the outcomes of the self-review would be communicated back to parishes. In response the Director confirmed that communications would be with the people who had submitted the self-review and they would be asked to share the information locally. **The Revd Tom Birch** (Corbridge) spoke about the importance of using the Pastoral Principles in all of our work, including our engagement with the Next Steps programme. While it was accepted that the National Church had limited funds, and therefore had choices to make about where to apply those funds, its preferences had been shown through its decision not to support the development of the Next Steps programme. The Secretary confirmed that ongoing discussions with the National Church had addressed disagreements. **The Revd Christine Brown** (Newcastle West) asked about the engagement with parishes which had not participated in the self-review. The Director confirmed that the response rate to the self-review had been an excellent response and the Secretary explained that officers had worked with the small number of parishes to understand why they had not felt able to complete the self-review within the timescale. **The Revd Dr Helen Savage** (Corbridge) welcome the news of the pilot studies and asked that clear parameters be set, time limitations be understood and evaluation be agreed and included from the start.

The Chair thanked all those who had contributed to the presentation and discussion.

A copy of the presentation was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth took the Chair

10. Annual Report and Financial Statements (Papers DS22 03A and DS22 03B)

The Chair reminded members that they were sitting as members of the Diocesan Board of Finance and invited the Chair of the Board of Finance, Canon Simon Harper, to make his presentation about the Annual Report and Financial Statements to 31 December 2021.

Following the presentation, the Chair opened the item for debate.

Fr Allan Marks (Newcastle Central) asked about the deficit in relation to the number of clergy vacancies and how it would impact the ongoing deficit if posts were filled. In response, Canon Harper confirmed the filling of vacancies would impact the deficit if there was no increase in income. The Bishop's Staff Team was responsible for managing the filling of vacancies within the constraints of the diocesan budget.

Following the debate, the Chair of the Board of Finance proposed that the Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2021 be received.

The Synod, sitting as members of the Board of Finance, received the Financial Statements.

A copy of the presentation was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

11. General Synod Report

The Chair invited **Fr Ian Flintoft** (General Synod Member) to give a report of the General Synod sessions from February 2022. Fr Flintoft reported that the sessions and debates had included items on:

- Racial Justice
- Modern Day slavery
- The persecuted Church
- Carbon net zero and faculty rules
- Central Church Governance Review
- Safeguarding

The Chair thanked Fr Flintoft for his clear presentation and reminded members that they should feel able to approach all of the General Synod members (the Revd Robert Lawrance; the Revd Claire Robson; the Revd Canon Ian Flintoft; Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth; Nicola (Nic) Denyer; and Lt Gen Robin Brims) about matters which the General Synod is considering.

A copy of the presentation was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

12. Any other business

There being no other business the Chair of the House of Laity reminded members that the next scheduled meeting of the Synod was expected to be in July to discuss finance with the date and venue yet to be agreed.

The Chair invited the Bishop to draw the meeting to a close.

The Bishop led the Synod in prayer and closed the meeting with a blessing.