

NORWICH DIOCESAN SYNOD

**Minutes of a meeting held via Zoom
Thursday 16 June at 18:00**

Attendees:

House of Bishops – 2 representatives

House of Clergy – 43 representatives

House of Laity – 39 representatives

Please note that not everyone attended the whole meeting, and this is reflected in the voting.

Apologies:

Apologies were received from 26 members of Diocesan Synod.

Opening Prayers were led by The Revd Margaret McPhee.

Presidential Address by the Bishop of Norwich

Bishop Graham spoke of the dimensions of discipleship.

Upwards to God in Prayer and Worship, both individually and collectively. Inwards to the Self and Outwards to the world by putting faith into action.

And, Sideways to connect with other members of the body of Christ, living out discipleship in the company of others, who walk alongside.

NORWICH DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LTD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. Introduction by the NDBF Chair and Chair's Comments

Mark Jeffries, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance introduced the first half of the meeting, being the Annual General Meeting of the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance (NDBF) and explained that all Diocesan Synod members are members of the NDBF, and are therefore invited to take part in the Annual General Meeting.

2. Amendment to the Memorandum and Articles of Association

Stuart Jones, The Diocesan Registrar talked to the previously circulated papers and introduced Kevin Wilson of Birketts, who is to be a Deputy Registrar.

Stuart led the meeting through the changes outlined in the New Articles Comparison paper, assuring Synod that there are no changes to the Memorandum, only the Articles have been revised. This is in order to make the document consistent with the Terms of Reference instigated in September 2021 when the new structure of Boards and Committees was formed and also to make provision for ongoing use of technology to hold virtual meetings to conduct business.

Mervyn Wilcox, Breckland referred to Article 51 still retaining references to him/her and asked if different terminology could be used for gender equality.

Stuart Jones agreed that in the next iteration, a single pro-noun would be used.

The Chair moved that the amendment to the Memorandum and Articles of the Association be accepted.

The result was as follows:

In Favour 78 Against 4 Abstentions 0

3. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2021

The minutes were approved and would be signed as a true record at a suitable time. No matters arising were received.

4. Receive and adopt the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2021

The Chair sought permission for Rebecca Frost of Lovewell Blake to join the meeting.

The Chair referred to the previously circulated report and explained that the report and accounts had been considered by the Bishop's Council of Trustees at their last meeting and invited the Diocesan Secretary and the Director of Finance to address the meeting.

Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary explained the aim of the report was to give a high-level summary of the key activities of the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance staff, now referred to as the Parish Support Team, commended the work of the team over the last year, during difficult circumstances, and their committed support of the parishes.

Susan Bunting, Director of Finance presented the annual accounts and results for 2021 to Synod and invited questions from Synod.

John Brydon, Norwich East commended the work of the Director of Finance and the finance team for the excellent report.

The Revd Dr Steven Sivyver, Great Yarmouth thanked the Director of Finance for the clarity of the accounts and questioned page 42 and the pension costs and the retirement age assumptions.

Susan Bunting advised that the figures and assumptions are produced by the actuaries of the clergy pension scheme and are under review currently.

The Revd Canon Riaz Mubarak, Lynn questioned the sale of vacant buildings and if there were other ways to use buildings for different purposes in the future?

Susan Bunting assured Synod that the sale of houses is not a method used to raise money and asked the Diocesan Secretary to inform Synod of the work of the housing review.

Tim Sweeting explained that the residential property review was underway, to look at future ministry needs, environmental factors and financial drivers and seeks to identify the right number of properties to be retained for the future.

Mervyn Wilcox, Breckland informed the meeting that 20 years ago, Synod had set up a Children Youth and Family Forum and asked why the members were not consulted on the content of the report. Advising that as the Forum was instigated by Synod, then Synod needed to be consulted on the future of the group.

The Chair agreed that proper consideration would be given to this issue raised.

Tim Sweeting explained that the annual report presented had a change of emphasis and focussed on the activity of the different teams and not the boards and other committees.

Mervyn Wilcox, Breckland further stated that information had been sent to stakeholders at the end of the last year and as yet, no responses had been received.

The Bishop of Lynn agreed that as the Forum was instigated by Synod, therefore it needs to be dissolved by Synod if it is not thought to be the way forward, and that following the completion of the strategy work, the situation would be reviewed.

The Chair agreed to bring this back to Synod at a suitable time in the future.

The Chair proposed that the Report and Accounts for 2021 be adopted, following the recommendation by the Bishops Council of Trustees and the report from the auditor on the sound operation and high standard of management controls applied within the NDBF. Placing on record thanks to the Director of Finance and her team for the work undertaken.

The Chair moved to adopt the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2021.

The result was as follows:

In Favour 82 Against 1 Abstentions 0

5. To approve the re-appointment of Messrs Lovewell Blake as Auditors at a fee to be arranged.

The Chair explained that the Finance Committee had looked to go out to tender for new auditors, however felt assured by the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee that the required level of independence of the Auditor was in place, the proposal is for the re-appointment of the Auditor as Lovewell Blake for a further term.

The Chair moved to approve the re-appointment of Messrs Lovewell Blake as Auditors at a fee to be arranged.

The result was as follows:

In Favour 80 Against 3 Abstentions 0

The Chair thanked Synod for their participation during the Annual General Meeting of the NDBF and handed the Chair to The Revd Dr Patrick Richmond, Chair of the House of Clergy for the first session of Diocesan Synod.

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6. The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2022

The minutes were approved and would be signed as a true record at a suitable time.

7. Any matters arising from the previous meeting

No matters arising were received.

The Chair, Revd Dr Patrick Richmond, Chair of the House of Clergy took the opportunity to update Synod on the discussions of the national conference of the Clergy Chairs regarding the Clergy Covenant and urged deaneries and parishes that had not yet discussed the Covenant to do so at their next Annual General Meeting.

8. Synodical Updates including General Synod

The Chair, Revd Dr Patrick Richmond, General Synod gave an overview of the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of General Synod, with particular reference to the Clergy Stipend Measure, the Crown Nominations Commission, Living in Love and Faith and the Church of England's Vision and Strategy.

John Brydon, General Synod highlighted the discussions to take place relating to the spending plans of the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council and the Archbishops' Council budget.

Caroline Herbert, General Synod informed Synod that the House of Laity met on Zoom to confirm the co-option of five additional members to act on the recommendation of the Lament to Action report, to increase the diversity of General Synod.

The Revd Canon Riaz Mubarak, Lynn questioned if the cause of Asylum Seekers is to be discussed at General Synod?

The Revd Dr Patrick Richmond, General Synod explained that the notice period required to produce information for a meaningful debate to take place, at times made it difficult to address topical news events.

The Revd Charles Read, Norwich East advised that as a former member of General Synod, that there are other means to use; emergency debates or use of question time to bring any topical business to the attention of General Synod.

Dr. Julian Litten, Lynn advised the use of supplementary questions to further discussions. Further asking for a private members motion to ask for an increase of LGBT diversity and specific membership of General Synod.

The Revd Graham Kirk-Sprigs, Norwich North assured Synod of LGBT representation on Diocesan Synod and advised of his membership of a group on General Synod that is campaigning on behalf of the LGBT community.

The Bishop of Norwich advised of the need to behave in a Christian and caring manner with all interactions at General Synod, and to ensure that our Diocese models a good way of working together.

9. The Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance: 2021 Annual Report and Accounts

The Chair, referred to the previously circulated report and accounts.

The Chair moved the motion *that the 2021 Report and Accounts be received.*

The result was as follows:

In Favour 82 Against 1 Abstentions 0

The Chair thanked Synod for their participation during the first session and handed the Chair to Kandi Kammoun, Chair of the House of Laity for the second session of Diocesan Synod.

10. Diocesan Vision and Strategy Update to Synod

The Chair sought permission from Synod for Julie Smith, Strategic Programme Manager to join the meeting and asked Bishop Graham to introduce the session.

The Bishop of Norwich stated how he was heartened to see how the vision has been received across the diocese and how the three areas of Prayerful, Pastoral and Prophetic had caught the imagination of our people, in the parishes and in schools.

Julie Smith, Strategic Programme Manager and Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary spoke to the previously circulated papers and invited Synod to continue to give feedback, thanking the 50% of members that attended the online meetings over the last weeks.

Julie requested Synod to discuss in breakout groups an order of priority to focus energy in the year ahead, so that we might have the greatest traction and impact to benefit the Gospel across the diocese.

Synod moved to breakout rooms for discussion, before returning to the main session to give feedback on the discussions.

The Revd Graham Wilkins, Humbleyard questioned the funding for projects and those gifts and skills which exist already in the diocese that might be useful i.e. 40 prayers for 40 days. He reported that the group looked across all the projects, to identify projects that “made hearts sing” and projects that encouraged creativity.

Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary shared the hope to hear about Synod identified priorities and using feedback, to select projects that would be costed, and funding sought to support so that money would follow the mission.

Mark Little, Ingworth and Sparham shared a different approach to the discussion, having focussed on only the prophetic, as felt time was too short to do otherwise, focussing on God's creation as a standout element of the paper.

The Revd Dean Akrell, Norwich North talked of the group discussion that focussed on increasing the variety of lay and ordained ministers, reflecting on resources that are needed and a scheme to release people from administrative responsibilities, to therefore develop distinct ministry talents and encourage diverse lay ministry.

Pam Spychal, Great Yarmouth suggested various communication methods and the power of Prayer, to attract people and reach into the community, not looking specifically at the projects but talking around the themes of the projects as a group.

Dr Judith Ford, Norwich East voiced thanks to the teams who put the project paper together but feels that the timescale is not appropriate to complete the review and that emergency Deanery Synods might be needed. Further voicing concern over the fair representation of the deanery, and the effect on the buy in for this process.

Tim Sweeting, assured Synod that feedback from parish and deanery and diocesan level is welcomed. The aim is to be able to bring back a proposal to Synod in October, following the governance processes of Bishops Council of Trustees, and therefore be able to move forward the work that Synod approved in March 2021.

Dr Judith Ford, further challenged the timescale for feedback, requesting more time for representative responses to be gathered, to add validity to the responses.

John Hooper, Humbleyard gave a personal viewpoint, advising of the need to build the family of the church in the local community.

The Revd Charles Read, Norwich North expressed the need to resource lay ministry and the ministry of lay people. Expressing the importance of resourcing lay people as they live their faith in the workplace and in their community.

The Revd Taylor Wilton-Morgan, St Benet at Waxham and Tunstead referred to the number of people coming forward for training, and equipping is relatively small, and there is a reliance on particular churches to produce the majority of vocations. Further highlighting the need to provide pastoral and sacramental care across the diocese and church communities where vacancies exist.

The Revd Canon Julie Boyd, Ingworth and Sparham observed the importance of partnerships and advised of the need to be mindful to build partnerships both ecumenically and with other organisations.

The Revd Matthew Jackson, Thetford and Rockland advised of the need to consider and work in non-church schools as well as church schools, where support is also welcomed.

Julie Smith asked for feedback via email and that the extended deadline for feedback is to be amended to Monday 18 July 2022.

The Chair asked Synod to vote to endorse the direction of travel for the vision and strategy.

The result was as follows:

In Favour 78 Against 2 Abstentions 4

11. Presentation of the proposed changes to The Responsibility is Ours (TRiO)

Revd Margaret McPhee, Chair of the TRiO Working Party spoke to the previously circulated papers and shared a presentation of the proposed changes to TRiO.

Douglas Bain, Blofield stated that he had served Diocesan Synod for 10 years and referenced the “can’t pay won’t pay” parishes and the support they receive.

Susan Bunting, Director of Finance explained that there might be many reasons why parishes can’t pay, and work is undertaken to identify the reasons for this and would be willing to come back to Synod with quantified numbers, acknowledging the need to support ministry across the diocese whilst addressing with the support of the Archdeacons, those who choose not to pay.

The Revd Dr Harri Williams, Burnham and Walsingham questioned the factors affecting allocation of Low-Income Community Funding (LINC) and the relationship to population numbers for the allocation of LINC funding.

The Revd Margaret McPhee assured Synod that LINC funding will be shared fairly.

Susan Bunting explained the factors built into allocation of the funding.

Gerald Palmer, Dereham and Mitford voiced concerns over the percentage increases over the years, that have not been possible to achieve, particularly in rural areas.

The Revd Margaret McPhee explained that the 15% year on year and transitional support that was part of TRiO was removed over time and the aim is for all transitional adjustment to be removed. Those unable to pay would be supported and not left alone in order to enable mission and ministry to be funded.

Susan Bunting emphasised that the comments regarding the 15% year on year increases in the transitional period had been listened to and has recommended to link increases to the stipend and cost of living increases within the budget, rather than a straight percentage increase.

The Revd Dr Steven Sivyer, Great Yarmouth voiced support and thanked everyone who had developed the new approach and agreed that the initial lower asks did not grow a culture of generosity, leading to people thinking the lower amount was payment in full. Advising that having a higher target to aim for would allow for the grace of God and his generous acts.

Susan Martin, Dereham and Mitford paid personal tribute to Revd McPhee for taking on the role of Chair and urged all members of Synod to show support for the review.

The Bishop of Norwich voiced heartfelt thanks to the TRiO working group and the parish support team for the detailed work on the review.

Bishop Graham also thanked members of Synod for their contribution and shared that since the pandemic, the growth of payment of parish share has started to address the financial situation of the NDBF. Further explaining that parish share pays for the ministry in the parishes, and the parish support team, who are there to support the parishes. The “won’t pay” parishes are letting the poorer parishes pay for the ministry of others and urged the reading of Acts and consideration of the spiritual health of the parish. Concluding by stating that if a spirit of generosity can be engendered, the mission of God’s Church would achieve more, particularly in the most economically deprived areas of the diocese.

Bishop Graham referred to the support given by the National Church institutions and asked Synod to have thankful hearts for the monies received to support mission.

The Chair invited Synod to adopt the recommendations of the TRiO Working Party.

The result was as follows:

In Favour 76 Against 2 Abstentions 5

12. Questions under Standing Order 71

David Griffith – Thetford and Rockland Deanery

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was heavily criticised by much of the Press, the Home Secretary, the Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth, and other Members of Parliament for opinions he expressed in his Easter sermon this year 2022. He was accused of “clumsily interfering in political issues”. The Archbishop had spoken of the horrors of war in Ukraine, the stress caused by rising costs, and the proposal to send asylum seekers overseas, which he said was “contrary to the nature of God”.

I ask, on behalf of Banham PCC, whether Bishop Graham would encourage members of Diocesan Synod to write to Archbishop Welby at Lambeth Palace, London, SE1 7JU, or via the contact form on his website, expressing their support for Justin Welby when, as the Senior Bishop of the Church of England and as a member of the House of Lords, he is asking serious ethical questions about political matters?

Response by: The Bishop of Norwich

Thank you for your question. I would always welcome members of Synod writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury to express their support for him speaking in the public square about moral issues.

The Archbishop's role in public life is one of the key responsibilities of the position he holds, focused around key issues such as how Christians and others can make a difference in their local communities and to the society we live in as a nation. He roots his comments, as I try to do more within my own responsibilities here as well as nationally with the environment, in what Christianity has to say about the big questions we all face. Speaking out on issues that affect people and the life of the nation is a vital part on every episcopal role and ministry.

I would suggest that all Christians must be actively concerned with the pursuit of the common good and the flourishing of all in our society – be it local, national or global. The Church has always played a vital role in public life, from its role in education and healthcare, to its role in the campaign to end the transatlantic slave trade. While never party political, Jesus did not shy away from addressing the key issues of the day. He told the rich that, unlike the poor who were blessed, they would face woes. He criticised the King of the time as a fox. He spoke harsh words to leaders of the nation's when they were uncaring of the needy. This follows a long line of concern for refugees, widows and orphans that we can see going back through the Hebrew Bible.

As I am sure you are aware, the Archbishop has spoken publicly a number of times on matters of migration policy and, with other Bishops in the House of Lords, has argued in Parliament for a more generous policy towards refugees and migrants – a consistent policy of the Church of England and other Christian and faith groups for many decades.

It was, of course, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said, in the face of the evil of apartheid, 'When people say that religion and politics don't mix, I wonder which Bible it is they are reading.' He, of course, received much venom for speaking truth to power.

David Griffith asked for Bishop Graham to commend this course of action.

The Bishop of Norwich reiterated his support for members of Synod to make direct contact with The Archbishop of Canterbury's office on this matter.

The Chair closed Synod by inviting the Closing Prayers and Blessing.

The Closing Prayer was led by Thompson Zulu and the Blessing by the Bishop of Norwich.