

DIOCESAN SYNOD
Fifth Meeting of the Fortieth Session

Northgate High School, 34 Northgate, Dereham NR19 2EU

Saturday 18 March 2023

Present:

Bishops (3)
House of Clergy (40)
House of Laity (35)

Apologies:

Apologies were received from 35 members of Diocesan Synod.

The Archdeacon of Norwich led the meeting in opening prayers

Kandi Kammoun, Diocesan Synod Chair of the House of Laity, welcomed The Dean of Norwich, The Very Revd Dr Andrew Braddock to the meeting and also Josh Whitnall, Ordinand, as an observer.

1. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2022

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

2. Matters arising from the previous meeting

There were none.

3. The Cost-of-Living Crisis

The Bishop of Lynn gave a verbal update on the activities of the Cost-of-Living working group, which was due to meet again later this month.

The two main considerations for the group were how to:

- resource and enable work across the parishes over the next few years
- map all the work across parishes, to help enable people to access help easily and locally

The Bishop of Lynn highlighted the value of information provided through Project 3 in the Vision & Priorities, which was to increase intentionality and ownership of local mission through an increase in the number of parishes/benefice mission plans, with support from the deaneries.

Initially thoughts had been to use Bright Map, but this was 'of its time' and technology had moved on. Michael Newey, Chief Executive of Broadland Housing Group, had led work on identifying how information was embedded in the Diocesan website that was accessible and helpful.

The Chair invited questions.

In response to a statement urging all present to be mindful of the challenges facing older, vulnerable parishioners and to offer help wherever possible, the Bishop of Lynn thanked the member and endorsed this as a timely reminder of the ongoing need to work to combat rural exclusion.

The report was noted.

4. Diocesan Vision and Priorities

The Bishop of Lynn gave a verbal update on the Diocesan Vision and Priorities agreed by Synod in October 2022, explaining this involved a significant programme of work which sat alongside and enhanced the daily business of parishes, schools, chaplaincies and the Parish Support Team. The Bishop of Lynn noted the good work of Julie Smith, Strategic Programme Manager.

The Vision Programme of eight strategic projects comprised twenty-one separate workstreams which formed a collection of initiatives designed to deliver the diocesan priorities and four themes of:

- becoming a younger church
- becoming a safer, more inclusive church
- working in partnership with others; and
- building on the good things that are already happening.

As well as being linked to the nine diocesan priorities, the projects and workstreams linked to each other which would be evident in the range of outcomes and success measures. Projects 1, 2, 3 and 7 were seen as key to taking forward the longer-term mission and ministry aims. Projects 4 and 5 were small-scale projects which would help evidence the fruit from those aims, whilst Projects 6 and 8 supported the other projects to meet the aims of inclusion and diversity and net-zero carbon.

All eight projects had a named project lead, were forming their teams and developing their thinking about aims and outcomes.

In order for the programme to succeed, resources of time and money, both existing and new, needed to be secured and carefully managed. The Vision Programme Board last met on 9 March 2023 and included Caroline Leveaux, Vision and Strategy Consultant, the strategic link with the national Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). A funding application towards essential costs needed in the next 12 months was to go to the SMMI Board in June 2023.

The Chair invited questions.

The Bishop of Lynn responded to a request for the names of project leads:

Project 1: Attract and recruit excellent lay and ordained leaders to an increased range of ministry pathways and support them to thrive.

The Bishop of Norwich and The Archdeacon of Norwich

Project 2: Form a diocesan plan to support mission and growth based on population, poverty, and proximity.

The Bishop of Lynn.

Project 3: Increase intentionality and ownership of local mission through an increase on the number of parish/benefice mission plans with support from the deaneries.

The Bishop of Lynn, interim lead.

Project 4: Encourage and support an increase in baptisms and confirmations.

The Revd Canon Aidan Platten.

Project 5: Establish a Bishop's Certificate in Christian Faith.

The Archdeacon of Norwich.

Project 6: Establish a Diocesan Task Force to take forward our inclusion and diversity intentions.

The Revd Canon Andy Bryant

Project 7: To strengthen our work with children, youth and families, we will develop more fruitful connections between school and church.

Paul Dunning, Director of Education.

Project 8: Strive to achieve Net Zero carbon by 2030.

Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary.

There were no further questions.

The report was noted.

5. Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

The Archdeacon of Norwich spoke to a presentation and invited Synod to take part in an interactive session on the Living in Love and Faith journey so far, recapping on the paper previously circulated, 'A response from the Bishops of the Church of England about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage'.

The Archdeacon explained that the aim of the day was to gather feedback and give everyone a voice, ensuring no one was excluded.

Revd Rachel Foster, Assistant Curate, Poringland Benefice, was available if anyone wanted a conversation about anything raised during discussions on Living in Love and Faith and her contact details were displayed on screen for the benefit of those present. The Archdeacon reflected: be considerate, be thoughtful, take time out if anything felt difficult.

The Archdeacon recapped on the Living in Love and Faith journey, explaining people had been given the opportunity to respond to the experience of engaging with LLF through a questionnaire, by offering a creative response or by simply writing to the LLF team. Over 6,000 people had responded to the questionnaire. Some people & churches had chosen not to engage, and some explained why. All these responses were compiled in a substantial report in September 2022: "Listening with Love and Faith"

At this point, the journey of discernment and decision-making had moved to the House of Bishops. Over three meetings they considered what they had learned from the Living in Love and Faith resources, from churchwide engagement, from Scripture and the Church's tradition, as well as through prayer and worship together. On 20 Jan 2023 they published a summary of their response to LLF – a description of what they had discerned God to be saying to the Church about these questions.

The Bishops response combined a pastoral welcome and affirmation of LGBTI+ people while maintaining the Church's traditional teaching on marriage, including:

- An open letter to the Church
- An apology to LGBT+ people for the way they have been excluded, hurt and rejected by the church
- A commitment to maintain the Church's doctrine of marriage as between one man and one woman
- Draft prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and for God's blessing for same-sex couples
- Plans to replace the 30-year-old *Issues in Human Sexuality* with new Pastoral Guidance

57% of General Synod members had voted in favour of the proposals after an 8-hour debate.

The Bishop of Norwich had released a statement: "I welcome that the General Synod of the Church of England has accepted the proposals of the House of Bishops which in time will enable same-sex couples to come to many of our churches in Norfolk and Waveney for prayers and a blessing after a civil marriage or civil partnership. The House of Bishops' sincere apology to LGBTI+ people about the way they have been treated was also welcomed by Synod. The correspondence and conversations around these proposals have often been hard and challenging, with a range of deeply held views expressed. I am committed to working with other bishops to reflect on what we have heard and bring forward the pastoral guidance, including how we guard the conscience of individual clergy, and refine the *Prayers of Love and Faith*. My care and concern is for all as we seek to live together in the diocese, always using the language of grace".

The Archdeacon of Norwich reflected that producing accessible teaching and learning resources and encouraging churchwide learning, listening to one another and to God represented a new way for the Church to engage with matters about which we disagreed or to which we needed to attend together.

The Bishop of Norwich thanked the Archdeacon for his presentation to Synod and shared an update on the work of the College of Bishops, explaining it was planned to meet several times as part of their work together to listen and share thoughts from the dioceses and the discussions at General Synod.

The Bishop of Norwich emphasised his support for any priest in the diocese who in conscience would not use the prayers and who framed their response to all couples in a caring and pastoral manner.

The Archdeacon of Norwich invited Synod to consider three questions:

- (1) What features of the proposals do you welcome (eg. prayers, pastoral guidance)?
- (2) What is important to address within the Pastoral Guidance?
- (3) What questions do you have?

Members of Synod took time to reflect and completed feedback forms which were passed to the bishops. The Bishop of Lynn explained she would share this feedback with the meeting of the College of Bishops on 23 March 2023.

The Archdeacon of Norwich then asked Synod to discuss a final question and delegate one person from each group to summarise and feedback via post it notes 'We meet together as Diocesan Synod in a years' time to review LLF and we agree that we have travelled well together as a diocese...what did we do that made this possible?'

1. Action will have happened to reflect the current state within the Church of England and people will continue to be loving each other, using helpful and caring language in the process.
2. With Grace, love and genuine inclusivity of all people, regardless of their position.
3. We need to listen with honesty and empathy to all views, with a genuine wish to find compromise and a willingness to live fully in the way forward.
4. Amongst us we hold 3 core concerns:
 - Unity at the cross
 - More prayer and discussion
 - A return to biblical teaching and practice
5. We feel we have begun to travel together - but that we have only taken small first steps - meeting with others across the Diocese – talking more – hopefully will speed up the journey, enabling us to fully welcome those who have been damaged by the church's previous stance and those who continue to feel hurt and excluded. We hope we will have the opportunity to meet them!
6. Set aside the time to listen respectfully and allowing for freedom of conscience, which establishes a good relationship.
7. In order to travel well together, we need courteous conversations that acknowledge our deep differences, an ability to live with impartial communication (and continue to do so), and structural provision for the differing views.

8. Sensitive, clear, concise communication to our church communities of LLF, acknowledging the different positions and wider church issues (global): one way to do this may be a 'diversity day' at the Cathedral or in the deaneries.
9. We acknowledge the differences which will not be easily reconciled and resolved. How do we avoid a major schism?
10. LISTEN TO AND RESPECT THE FULL RANGE OF VIEWS (acknowledging that in some places the "full range" will need to be represented)
11. We had conversations with everyone in the room, this was facilitated through the deaneries; we respected and valued all contributions.
12. That we have recognised the challenge of walking well together when the destination is not agreed, hopefully by listening respectfully.
13. We have listened, we have consulted, we have acknowledged the range of differing views within our parishes and deaneries.
14. Love, respect, open, listening, honesty with local community. To be brave.
15. Celebrate diversity with humility and acceptance.
16. We listened well without prejudice and allowed the quiet voices to be heard.
17. Stuck closely to pastoral principles, while making room for disagreement, allowing reasonable emotions to be expressed.
18. Knowing each other better as fully rounded human beings.
19. Listening to everybody, giving equal weight to all positions, avoiding stereotypes and acknowledging this is not a binary issue, acknowledging difference, but committed to one another.
20. Listening in grace.
Respect for difference of opinion.
That this does not become a further cause of division and schism.
21. Recognising that each one of us is holy and made in God's image and loved by God, and so called to love one another on our different journeys showing kindness and compassion.
22. We acknowledge that it will be a very difficult journey. Therefore we need to:
 - (1) set aside our judgements
 - (2) be aware we cannot do it on our own strengths
 - (3) we need to spend time with others who hold a different view
23. Hear and honour all views and encourage others to do so.
24. We have travelled well together as a diocese...by maintaining and supporting the integrity of both positions.

In response to a question on whether there was a mechanism for Diocesan Synod members not here today to have a voice, the Archdeacon of Norwich gave an assurance that this would happen.

At the end of the group session the Archdeacon thanked everyone for their participation and asked Synod to join in prayer.

6. Children and Youth & Families Forum

The Bishop of Lynn spoke to the paper previously circulated and invited discussion on the future of the Children, Youth & Families Forum which was established by Diocesan Synod in 2003. It had not met for some years. The Bishop suggested it was arguable that the model of having a separate Children and Youth & Families Forum, and the work with children, youth and families held by a particular group, belonged to the previous diocesan mission strategy.

The Chair invited questions.

Regarding the way of working going forward and giving a voice to children and young people, the Bishop of Lynn gave an assurance that when she met with the Children, Youth and Families Development officer, she would discuss the best way to make sure this continues to happen.

When asked if this change had any implication for employment posts, the Bishop of Lynn responded that she was not aware of any such implication.

On the question of designated youth representatives on Synod, Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary, was to explore this suggestion.

Synod members briefly discussed ongoing training for those working with Children and Young Families in benefices. The Bishop of Lynn confirmed this was already underway and would continue, the CYF taskforce still existed and was looking at ways to continue to support youth projects in parishes across the diocese.

In response to a question regarding who was to be in charge of monitoring the CYF budget going forward, the Bishop of Lynn explained the new Vision and Priorities Project 3 team would consider the reporting structure and capture the points raised at Synod. Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary, added that in terms of budget planning, the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance (NDBF) had a core budget for CYF spend which would continue to be monitored. A separate budgeting process was planned to monitor the Vision Projects and CYF spending would be monitored as part of that.

In closing, the Bishop of Lynn said that she was conscious of pressures on PCCs, nevertheless the suggestion to elect young people onto Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) as a way of growing youth in the church might be explored.

There were no further questions.

The Chair proposed:

- (i) That this Synod be asked to dissolve the Children, Youth and Families Forum with immediate effect.**
- (ii) That Synod request the Vision Programme Board, in overseeing the eight projects, to ensure that Children, Youth and Families work features in each one and include this in regular reports. (Reporting to come via Vision Programme Board, quarterly).**

Vote: 75 in favour, 1 against, 2 abstentions

The proposals were AGREED.

7. Governance updates

Tim Sweeting, Diocesan Secretary spoke to the report previously circulated detailing Governance updates for information:

- a review which had been completed following the elections to the Vacancy in See Committee, which resulted in the election of one lay member, Mrs Anna Price, from the Archdeaconry of Norfolk.
- The membership recommended for appointment to Diocesan Advisory Committee from 1st January 2023.
- the process undertaken by the Chair of the House of Clergy to co-opt Revd Canon Simon Stokes to Diocesan Synod.

The Chair invited Questions. There were none.

The report was noted

8. Update from General Synod

The Chair invited questions on the summary report from General Synod and invited questions.

The Revd Dr Steven Sivyer commented that item 5(ii) of the summary referred to 1 January 2023 but questioned if this should read 1 March 2023. The Archdeacon of Lynn confirmed March 2023 was the correct date, the amended Parochial Fees table having been agreed by General Synod to take effect from that date.

Synod discussed the issue of funeral pre-payment plans; whereby financial institutions were reaping the benefits.

The Bishop of Lynn asked if the authority to waive Parochial Fees had been transferred to Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance or whether PCCs had authority to reduce or remit these fees. Stuart Jones, Diocesan Registrar, confirmed that NDBF had authority to waive fees and that PCCs should not waive or reduce the DBF element of parochial fees without reference to the finance team at the DBF. Applications for permission to remit the DBF portion of fees should normally be made via the Archdeacon.

The report was noted.

9. Questions under Standing Order 71

Question 1

The Chair invited Mrs Sandra Isaac, Deanery Lay Chair, Norwich South, to pose a question under Standing Order 71:

Sandra Isaac: I am troubled by the claimed difference between civil marriage and Holy Matrimony in the proposals for the Prayers of Love and Faith. We have many members of our congregations, baptised and confirmed, sometimes by you, who have been married in another country or married in a registry office. I am thinking in particular of our Iranian refugee friends, one of whom anointed you. Is his union somehow outside of Holy Matrimony and my union inside Holy Matrimony? Do we now have a two-tier marriage system in the Church where I can say my marriage and sexual union is blessed and legal in the Church of England, but his is not? How are we to pastorally care for our refugees who are married before they arrive, and now question if they are indeed in Holy Matrimony in the eyes of the Church?

Stuart Jones, Diocesan Registrar responded: The Prayers of Love and Faith make no mention of any distinction between Holy Matrimony and civil marriages. All are welcome within the Church, and every legal marriage is recognised by the Church as having legal effect regardless of whether the couple have been married in the Church of England or in a civil ceremony. The term 'Holy Matrimony' is a shorthand way of referring to a marriage celebrated according to the rites of the Church of England, following the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer or Common Worship. But any marriage recognised by the civil law under the Marriage Act

1949, which includes lawful marriages celebrated in other jurisdictions, will be recognised by the Church of England as a lawful marriage and may be blessed under the existing prayers provided for a service of blessing.

The Chair invited a supplementary question.

There was none.

Question 2

The Chair invited Mrs Caroline Herbert, Lay Deanery Synod Representative for Thetford and Rockland (Thetford Parish), to pose a question under Standing Order 71:

Given that there are already reports of lay people ceasing to attend Church of England churches in this diocese, and stopping their giving, because of the General Synod vote on Prayers of Love and Faith, is there an entry in the Diocesan Risk Register about the impact of the introduction of the Prayers of Love and Faith, including factors such as potential drops in attendance, giving and the numbers of ordinands and clergy, as a result of this decision taken by General Synod?

Revd Canon Simon Stokes (Audit and Risk Assurance Committee - Chair) responded: The potential risks around the Living in Love and Faith process have been monitored within our management and governance structures for some time, considering the potential impacts of the reaction to the House of Bishop's proposals within the Church of England and wider society. It was recognised that there was a risk of a negative impact on the factors mentioned in a number of the potential scenarios. This work has since been updated as a result of the General Synod endorsement with the result of reducing the perceived levels of risk related to those who will have received the Prayers of Love and Faith more warmly and increasing the levels of risk related to those who are unhappy with the outcome. We believe that good communication with those who feel particularly impacted by the Prayers is key and senior clergy have been in close contact with a number of individuals and groups. This has been supported by the clear message of our bishops that they represent everyone within our diocese, including those who have a different sincerely held position in this matter. We will continue to emphasise that we are stronger together and encourage unity in our mission and ministry across the diocese.

The Chair invited a supplementary question.

There was none.

Question 3

The Chair invited The Revd Kevin Billson, Assistant Rural Dean, Blofield, to pose a question under Standing Order 71:

Given the Bishop shares the cure of souls in all our parishes, and that the Cathedral is the mother church of the Diocese, how will the Bishop ensure that he continues to be a focus of unity in the Diocese and that the Cathedral does not alienate members of the Church when the Prayers of Love and Faith are commended for use?

The Very Revd Dr Andrew Braddock, Dean of Norwich Cathedral responded: Thank you for your question. Bishops focus the unity which the Church has in Christ and which the Church receives from Christ. The Church, being the fragile vessel it is, has always lived with disagreement, and I am well aware that Bishops, particularly during Lent, hold that brokenness at the foot of the Cross. Bishop Graham, together with the bishops of Thetford and Lynn, said in their pastoral letter of 20th January 2023 that their "commitment is to have a care and concern for you all, irrespective of where your conscience leads you on these issues, as we seek to live our life together in the diocese". The Dean and Chapter endorse this and have a prayerful desire that the Cathedral

continues to be a place that welcomes all. I am aware that the House of Bishops is working on pastoral guidance which I imagine will explore the issues you raise in more detail.

The Chair asked if there was a supplementary question.

The Revd Kevin Billson asked “Has any thought been given by the Bishops and the cathedral as to how the endorsement of the prayers of love and faith might offend the conscience of those who cannot accept them, and so become a stumbling block to ‘the weak’ in the terms described by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8”

The Dean responded: It is very important that we are able to live and act with a good conscience. In acknowledging our differences, we are seeking to enable each other to live with integrity. Bishop Graham has reaffirmed his commitment this morning to enabling people to follow their conscience. We do so seeking to walk together in the way of Christ and to respond faithfully to the grace of God at work in our lives.

Question 4

The Chair invited The Revd Dr Steven Sivyver, Flegg, on behalf of Martham (Parish) PCC to pose a question under Standing Order 71:

Diocesan Synod passed a motion instructing the Diocesan Board of Finance to be knowingly free of any investments, whether directly or indirectly, in companies that trade in fossil fuels by the end of 2022. Now that this time has passed, could you please confirm whether to the best of your knowledge that this target was met?

Mark Jeffries, Chair of the Diocesan Executive Board of Finance responded that this had been confirmed at the meeting of the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance Asset Management Committee on 10 January 2023. Further to this, the Asset Management Committee had noted that in future the wording of notes should refer to Fossil Fuels rather than Oil and Gas.

The Chair invited a supplementary question.
There was none.

The Bishop of Norwich commended the life and work of the late Captain Anthony (Tony) Poulter OBE Royal Navy, who sadly passed recently.

The Bishop of Norwich paid tribute to The Bishop of Thetford for his work and wider support and care of the people of the diocese, care of ordinands and work with schools across the diocese. The Bishop of Norwich wished Bishop Alan and his wife, Pippa, well as they moved to the Diocese of Worcester.

In response, the Bishop of Thetford reflected on his time as Suffragan Bishop and his plans to retire at the end of April 2023, by which time he would have served almost 14 years in the Diocese of Norwich. During this time, he and his wife Pippa had made many friends and shared a great deal with the people of the diocese, for which he gave thanks to God.

The Chair stated that this concluded the business for the Fifth Meeting of the Fortieth Session of the Norwich Diocesan Synod.

The Bishop of Thetford led closing prayers and the Blessing.

The meeting closed at 12:14pm