

**Coventry Diocesan Synod
Minutes – 19 November 2022**

Minutes of the meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Synod which was held on Saturday 19 November 2022 at Hope Hall, Harris Church of England Academy.

The meeting of the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Coventry opened at 9:30 am under the Standing Orders 2009 The President, The Right Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth, the Bishop of Coventry, took the Chair

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Worship led by Helen Bryant, Chaplain, pupils and the music teacher of Harris Church of England Academy.

2. Notices and apologies for absence

Bishop Christopher gave thanks to all involved with this synod. Karen Morris was welcomed as Mother's Union President and Steve Lee as Interim Director of Finance for the DBF. 23 apologies were noted.

3. Minutes (DS 22-19)

Minutes of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 21 June 2022 were approved.

4. Presidential address

The Bishop of Coventry addressed the Synod. A copy of this address is available on the website. The address ranged from national to local issues, Bishop Christopher invited synod members to come to him with local concerns, introducing and sharing justification for item 10, a discussion on a potential Diocesan Synod Code of Conduct.

5. Dioceses, Pastoral & Mission Measure: sections 12 & 17 (DS 22-20)

Bishop Christopher spoke to paper DS 22-20

The wrong paragraph had been quoted in the paper, the correct paragraph was shared visually. Bishop Christopher reiterated that the key issue is not one of finance, but the level of care provided; is this more or less than required? The CofE are to hold a consultation process on the size and shape of dioceses and whether they should merge. Therefore, Bishop Christopher is keen to make this application before a potential reconfiguration is considered. Bishop's Council had previously indicated that they were not in favour of a reduction.

Question: Is synod content with the current funded provision, or does it feel that it is more than is responsibly needed or less?

Synod members were invited to share views:

The majority of members that spoke supported the continuation of two bishops for Coventry Diocese, many preferring more than two bishops.

Supportive comments included:

By having two persons consecrated as bishop, should one be incapacitated, there is another to continue the essentials works.

If it was known that it was not a question of finance then three bishops would have been opted for during the Bishop's Council discussion.

Laity don't always feel they have access to bishops. A minimum of two bishops is desired due to the value of involvement of bishops to feel heard.

In terms of hierarchy, we don't need more chiefs, but, bishops are part of the clergy team, and so a minimum of two is supported.

This paradox was highlighted; there is reducing clergy per head count in parishes, so should we reduce bishop count? The answer would be the opposite, an over worked vicar with lots of parishes, results in a greater need for a bishop's advice. Therefore 2 ½ bishops are needed.

Other comments:

With the increasing pressure of affordability, does the leadership structure remain affordable, such as levels of senior staff and archdeacons? Bishop Christopher responded: funding for bishops is different to other diocesan colleagues, funding for bishops comes directly from the Church Commissioners, the diocese funds only Warwick House.

Should efforts be focused at deanery and parish level, distilling money down?

Should there be area bishops rather than a suffragan and areas having archdeacons. Bishop Christopher remarked that a lot of episcopal time is taken with national business.

The economic crisis results in increasing pressure to reduce costs. However, the crisis results in an increased need for pastoral care and service to those in need and so as part of the consideration of reduction, there should be a risk analysis and assessment of the impact to the people we serve.

A desire for a Bishop of Nuneaton was expressed but it was highlighted that the funding could support many parish priests, bishops in parishes or a different model of leadership such as other areas are adopting. Bishop Christopher responded that the creation of more bishops is an issue for parliament as parliamentary approval is need for a new see.

Bishops Christopher asked the synod whether Coventry Diocese would like to continue with two bishops, with a show of hands.

Votes in favour of continuation of the see of Warwick - unanimous

Against 0

The Chair of the House of Laity, Phil Swards, took the chair

Motion to suspend the Standing Orders (under SO 50) to allow a discussion to take place

6. Our Shared Future – strategic framework (DS 22-21)

Graeme Pringle, Director of Communications, spoke to paper DS 22-21

Page 4 notes two types of support: core and focused. Core support is the basic functions that all dioceses undertake to provide support to parishes. Graeme elaborated that in Coventry Diocese a team equivalent to 30 FTE diocesan staff serve and equip: 302 clergy, 131 readers, 311 church wardens, 179 treasurers and 130 parish safeguarding officers (numbers are adjusted to avoid double counting where a person is in multiple roles). Covid put pressure on DBF staff and there has been a high staff turnover but this has now stabilised.

Page 2, Graeme elaborated on our identity and purpose, only half of synod were familiar with identity, yet the majority were familiar with purpose. Graeme elaborated further on the reasoning behind each section of the framework and ¾ were familiar with Bishop Christopher's vision for the diocese.

The nine areas of support are elaborated on throughout DS 22-21, which also details the 27 specific commitments for 2023.

Page 5 shows the annual cycle of the framework and highlights how feedback is incorporated, ensuring that the framework remains dynamic.

Members of Synod were invited to ask questions:

The absence of Cathedral links was raised, it was highlighted that Parish Partners are being discontinued and it was asked if anything could be done to change this. Kathryn Fleming, Coventry Cathedral, responded: Parish Partners were asked if they wanted to continue, not one wanted to continue. Parish Partners started as cathedral liaisons, to share what was happening pre-internet. During the pandemic the communications moved online and the work of the Parish Partners has therefore moved on.

Clarity was sought on how it will be ensured that the annual cycle is outward looking, what the KPIs are and whether the budget would be reconciled against the nine areas of support. Graeme Pringle responded: It needs to be outward focused, looking to communities, one of the nine areas is healthy communities. Churches and schools are the ones who do this work and the diocesan employees will provide support with this. Jacqueline Ladds responded: The annual cycle will engage a wide range of people including parishes and deaneries. KPIs, milestones and metrics are being developed. These will sit in an implementation plan which will accompany the strategic framework. This implementation plan will be regularly reviewed throughout the annual cycle so that progress against the commitments can be

tracked. Progress against the identified areas and commitments will be reported in the DBF's statutory Annual Report. Feedback from the ongoing engagement will ensure that the budget is aligned with the identified strategy.

A request was voiced for training for leaders of children's groups and someone to point people in the right direction, perhaps a diocesan children's worker. Graeme Pringle responded: The strategic framework brings in a time for listening; parishes choose which areas they engage with, and the cycle will bring areas into Diocesan Synod for discussions. 2024 could look very different as this is a dynamic strategic framework.

Standing Orders reinstated

7. 2023 Budget for the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance (DS 22-22)

The Chair of the Board of Finance, Simon Danks, introduced the proposed budget for 2023, prepared by Steve Lee, Interim Director of Finance.

Steve Lee was thanked and it was highlighted that this budget has been scrutinised by the Diocesan Finance Group and Bishop's Council. As historical reserves are to be released the Investment Sub Committee have been consulted. Concern was noted that historical funds are being released to fund 'business as usual' and this is not a sustainable long-term approach

2023 offers for Deanery Share give a mixed message, four deaneries are contributing to the support fund and five deaneries have increased their offer. Last year 7% of parish share offers were not received and an increased contingency of 5% (2022: 2%) has been incorporated. The DBF subsidy is 12.58 posts, £792k (2022: £657k).

Simon expressed gratitude to those who had responded to the questionnaire circulated as part of the parish share review. Responses indicated desire for better communication and increased support for parishes and clergy and this is reflected in the budget as funding support and resources to encourage generous giving.

The diocese pays £17,000 annually to the Parish Giving Scheme, ensuring that parishes can access this without direct charge.

The deficit in the clergy pension scheme has reduced, enabling a reduction in the pension element of the parish share. 2022 has been a challenging year for the property team with a higher number of interregna than budgeted for, the impact of the backlog of works from previous lockdowns and the increasing costs of labour and materials, combined with an exceptionally cautious 2022 budget. This has resulted in an increased budget for 2023. A parsonage has been volunteered to be a test for achieving net zero and will receive funding for improvement works.

The budget continues to support Together for Change and the Cathedral.

Simon displayed a pie chart to show the use of unapplied total return in the 2023 budget: Cost of ministry £792,000 (30%), Growth strategy £785,000 (29%), cashflow support £700,000 (26%), Net Zero investment £250,000 (9%) and Grant fund availability £170,000 (6%).

Going forward priority will be given to creating a medium to long term financial plan and it is expected that the 2023 budget will look very different.

Comments and questions from the Diocesan Synod on the budget:

It is good to see the response in the budget for net zero. It is now time to make use of this and move forward within our churches with Net Zero Projects and Church Improvement Fund applications.

The Chair of the Board of Finance introduced the motion: *"that this Synod:*

- *Approve the 2023 budget, noting the release of historic funds to fund the planned activities*
- *Pass a resolution to authorise expenditure in 2023 up to a maximum of £12.063m"*

Vote:

For majority

Against 1

Abstentions 0

Motion carried

8. Deanery Synod numbers (DS 22-23)

Simon Danks spoke to paper DS 22-23, outlining that diocesan synod have the responsibility to agree the number of lay members to be elected to deanery synods from parishes at the 2023 APCMs.

Simon Danks introduced and moved the motion: *“that this Synod approve the proposed scale of representation for the calculation of the numbers to be elected to Deanery Synods in 2023.”*

Jonathan Jee raised an amendment to the motion, as outlined in DS 22-23a.

Jonathan explained that the amendment was focused on the role of lay deanery synod members as the electorate for General Synod. He observed that the overall numbers on deanery synod would not be widely impacted by the proposed revised scale, but that it would give larger churches a more even representation in national elections. He noted that it had previously been a struggle to fill a large number of deanery synod positions within his parish but this was no longer an obstacle.

Members were invited to speak.

Views for not passing the amendment included:

- Preference to having 3 or 4 dedicated representatives rather than pushing to get 6 or 7 from one congregation.
- Voice is more important than number. Larger churches can already dominate deanery synods in terms of finance and so to give them extra influence in numbers would be unfair. If the larger churches get more votes it may affect inclusion, as they can often be of a particular style of church tradition. Big churches already have a lot of power and sway and do not need anymore.
- Delight at more people attending deanery synod was expressed but balance can be addressed in other ways.
- Agreement was expressed that General Synod is not currently fully representative but work should be done from a grassroots level to improve this.
- The current scale allows smaller churches to have a fair level of laity representation alongside representatives from larger churches.

Vote on proposed amended scale:

For 18

Against 39

Abstention 4

Amendment defeated

Paper DS 22-23 contains a numerical error (W&L total should read 78, not 80). This will be corrected.

Simon Danks introduced the motion: *“that this Synod approve the proposed scale of representation for the calculation of the numbers to be elected to Deanery Synods in 2023.”*

For 46

Against 3

Abstentions 4

Motion carried

9. Deanery Synod rules (DS 22-24)

Simon Danks addressed members highlighting paper DS 22-24

Point 6.4.3 singular bishop and archdeacon to be amended to plurals.

The draft rules were discussed at synod last year and have since been circulated to deaneries for their feedback.

Simon Danks introduced and moved the motion: *“that this Synod adopt the rules, as set out in pages 2-8 of paper DS 22-24, as the rules for Deanery Synods in the Diocese of Coventry”*

For majority

Against 0

Abstentions 4

Motion carried

Motion to suspend the Standing Orders (under SO 50) to allow a discussion to take place

10. Diocesan Synod Code of Conduct (DS 22-25)

Bishop Christopher addressed the synod and opened discussion on the introduction of a voluntary code of conduct which he gave rationale for in his opening address. He emphasised that this is a discussion with Standing Orders suspended rather than a formal debate, enabling members to converse and share their views. At the next synod meeting there will be a revised proposal, incorporating feedback from this discussion. Feedback is also welcomed via email to Jacqueline Ladds. Synod were encouraged to discuss in small groups before representatives were invited to share feedback.

Feedback from Diocesan Synod members:

- The voluntary code of conduct received overwhelming support although the length of the draft was highlighted as a drawback by several groups.
- The 3 documents shared as DS 22-25 is more than rules for synod, it is workplace policy and procedure, perhaps it should be values, behaviour and technical procedure.
- To slim the code down, take out minor offences such as side conversations. The section regarding reporting back should be extended to include reporting back from Diocesan Synod.
- It would be good to filter the code down to PCCs but perhaps it should be in summary form, 5 key points.
- Synod was referred to as a safe place but concern was raised regarding digital conduct and comments made on social media, where there can be less support. The clauses which governed digital conduct were endorsed, highlighting that this is where help and support are needed.
- The draft lists that the Diocesan Secretary may write to an offending member and this may be made public. It was requested that if this were the case, only the matter is made public and not the name of the individual.
- The process for a breach was questioned; can an offender defend before the issue is made public? Should there be a motion put to General Synod to change their rules so that if there is a breach a bishop can rerun an election? Should a serious breach of the code occur, the electorate should have the power to recall an elected candidate.
- Sadness that it was needed was expressed but it was still welcomed as although most people will fix something when it is pointed out as wrong, others either do not care or can get abusive. In order to right a wrong, Jesus said, see someone individually, then take someone with you, then go to the church.
- Although it is helpful and appropriate, there must be a distinction between the code for employees and volunteers. If this is weaponised, challenging views risk getting spilled, attacking a safe space is disrespectful, so this code should be a benchmark and hence it is important that it remains voluntary.
- We can debate and disagree but the moment a line is crossed, we need to stop and assess where we are going, after all we must not let unimportant talk come out. Anything that offers protection is a good thing.
- One member gave feedback strongly against the code highlighting several issues and alleging that it weaponises and limits free speech. Further specific points made were that: there is no process for natural justice appeal which infringes human rights; there is no clarity over who decides if the code is breached; several clauses are not being part of the General Synod code and several clauses are irrelevant; people have different opinions on what constitutes unbecoming language, and people should be encouraged to contribute and not be silenced; the code gives the diocese power over

parishes when it should be giving a voice to the people who do not have a voice; what is needed is a fair process for complaints and an independent ombudsman.

The feedback session closed and it was reiterated that the code was not an attempt to close down freedom of speech, it is a function of synod that every voice is expressed and matters under consideration are discerned in a way that does not offend or hurt others. Bishop's Council will reflect on this discussion and any email contributions, and a revised code of conduct will be brought to the March 2023 diocesan synod meeting.

Standing Orders reinstated

The Chair of the House of Clergy, Revd Claire McArthur, took the chair

11. Investment in Fossil Fuels (DS 22-26)

Nicola Perryman spoke to paper DS 22-26 and introduced the motion on behalf of the Diocesan Environment Group: *"that this Synod, recognising the increasing severity of climate events now resulting from anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, strongly affirms the current diocesan policy of no investment in fossil fuels and commits not to reverse this policy in the future without Diocesan Synod's approval."*

Comments:

A pragmatic concern was raised - due to the war in Ukraine, supplies are under threat and so this could prevent the diocese taking emergency action, such as to buy a bag of coal for a pensioner.

Nicola Perryman responded that the motion is not about buying fuel, it is about the diocese investing in fossil fuel companies.

The comment was clarified, if a company was set up to distribute fuel of all natures in an emergency situation, we would not be able to invest.

For 45

Against 5

Abstentions 9

Motion carried

12. Cost of Living

Claire McArthur commended the honest video that had recently been shared by Bishop Christopher. Barry Dugmore addressed the synod outlining the work being undertaken at a national and diocesan level.

In September a national £3m hardship fund was launched for clergy and lay workers earning less than £29,000 FTE. 85 individuals from the diocese will receive a one-off grant of £600.

The CofE has pledged £15m for energy bills for churches:

£239,000 has been allocated to Coventry and is divided as:

- i. £10,800 to offer the 18 Chaplains in our Diocese a grant of £600 each
- ii. £178,000 allocated to PCCs, the energy submission in the online parish returns is being used to calculate the grant and letters will go out to parishes informing them of their grant
- iii. £49,800 to Warm Spaces, allocated to Together for Change to support parishes, particularly in the most deprived areas.

Together for Change have already started to identify churches in the poorest areas who either want to extend their warm space offer or open as a warm space for the first time. There will be an application process with grants of between £500 to £5,000. Together for Change are part of the Aviva Crowdfunding Scheme to increase this fund.

It has already been noted that more people are connecting with parishes in this testing time and Barry elaborated on the successful outreach work of several parishes.

Questions and comments:

Exeter Diocese are sending the money directly to parishes and parishes can apply for warm space funding from the council – why are we duplicating the support offered by other organisations and incurring admin costs for this, rather than giving the money directly to PCCs? Barry Dugmore responded: no admin costs are being taken, a diocese can choose how to disseminate the funds in order to target those most in need. Jaqueline Ladds confirmed that the money is going directly to PCCs and there is no application process for the parishes. Warm Spaces funding is going to PCCs to start or expand their existing provision.

It was requested that these slides be made available for sharing at Deanery Synod and Barry thanked Jaqueline Ladds, Tim Cockell and the Together for Change Team for their rapid response to this crisis.

13. Questions received under Standing Order 69

Six questions were received and written responses have been circulated prior to the meeting.

Supplementary questions:

1. No further comment
2. Written supplementary question answer provided was satisfactory
3. No further comment
4. It was thought that the question may have been misunderstood:
The Honest Church Campaign aims to encourage greater honesty regarding LGBT and welcoming. There is a spectrum of scale, we can decide where we are on this scale and can we encourage our churches to use this as a discussion point?
Bishop Christopher responded that welcome to everyone is critical and this includes all, including LGBT people. Open discussion on PCCs as to how this is lived out is commended and the pastoral judgement of clergy should be trusted.
No further comment
5. Written supplementary question answer provided was satisfactory

14. Date of future meetings

Dates of the 2023 meetings: Sat 25 March (morning), Tues 20 June (evening) and Sat 18 November (morning).

Farewells

Bishop Christopher expressed thanks and farewell on behalf of diocesan synod to several people who are moving on from their current roles:

Jo Parker, St Marks Leamington. Jo arrived when the parish was going through a difficult time and she has seen through many developments as a dedicated parish priest.

Graeme Pringle, Director of Communications, will be with us until to end of January and so full gratitude will be expressed nearer the time. He has been winding up for retirement when most people wind down.

Mary Allanson, Diocesan Registrar, is retiring. Mary has provided great stability, working jointly with Jenny Dymond her successor. Good local knowledge meant she took on David Dumbleton's mantle with great skill and precision of mind but also with a warm heart. Thank you from the whole diocese for working beyond the call of duty. Mary was presented with a bouquet and replied with thanks and noted the privilege of being a member of the team and diocesan family.

Bishop Christopher led the closing prayer including the collect of St Hilda as we mark St Hilda's Day.

Bishop Christopher closed the meeting at 12:45.