

Coventry Diocesan Synod Minutes – 25 March 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Synod which was held on Saturday, 25 March 2023 at St John's, Westwood.

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

Bishop Christopher welcomed the Revd Charles Higgins to the role of Chaplain to Diocesan Synod, highlighting that this role is to provide liturgical and pastoral support. Charles led synod in worship.

2. Notices and apologies for absence

Apologies were noted [15 Laity, 8 Clergy].

3. Minutes (DS 23-02)

Minutes of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 19 November 2022 were **approved**.

4. Presidential address

The Bishop of Coventry addressed the Synod. A copy of his address is available on the [diocesan website](#). The address was focused on the concept of shaping the soul inspired by the book, *The Shaping of a Soul* by Richard Harries, former Bishop of Oxford.

5. Appointment of Assistant Bishop (DS 23-03)

Bishop Christopher paid tribute to Bishop David Evans, Assistant Bishop, as he takes a step back from public episcopal ministry. His latest publication, 'Forty Years in Purple' was commended. Bishop Christopher shared memories, expressing that Bishop David was a wonderful example of the shaping of a soul by the grace of God. Bishop Christopher informed synod of the appointment of the Right Reverend Dr Edward Condry as assistant Bishop. Bishop Edward was formerly Bishop of Ramsbury and one-time Team Rector of Rugby. He is now based in Daventry, just over the border of the diocese. Bishop Christopher invited questions from synod:

Comments and questions:

What is the role?

It is useful to have another bishop to call upon should it be needed. This can be for counsel, not just for bishops but also for clergy. Assistant bishops can undertake confirmations, licensing and other episcopal actions.

What are the cost implications? What happens in other dioceses? Other former bishops go to a parish to help, Would his ministry be better in a parish?

Chichester and Oxford have several retired bishops and it is brilliant to have lots in a diocese, but Coventry does not. Bishop David worked in Ettington Parish and brought life to the parish. Bishop Edward is based just over the border in Daventry and will not have a parochial role within this diocese. There is no formal budget but travel expenses may be claimed.

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

6. General Synod Feedback

The Revd Claire McArthur introduced the new system of feedback whereby one clergy and one lay General Synod member will give verbal updates for a maximum of 4 minutes to Diocesan Synod, before taking questions, General Synod members are not permitted to ask questions.

Feedback for this meeting is from clergy only, as no lay member was available and willing to speak.

The Revd Kate Massey addressed synod: At the February Synod a variety of church business was discussed over the 5 days; a new method for theological education was considered, and there was debate over the cost of living and parochial fees, as covered in today's questions. The report of safeguarding was included and legislative work was carried out, amending the canons to allow the creation of Diocesan Safeguarding Officers. As some dioceses

are struggling more than others due to the disparity of historic assets, dioceses are now permitted to help each other, and those in a stronger position can pay the clergy stipends in a less fortunate diocese if they wish. The Archbishop of Canterbury made an address to the Monarch. There was group work on Living in Love and Faith and a nine-hour debate. For this the majority of people wanted to do the right thing. The motion passed with many amendments and the decision was taken to apologise to the LGBT community. There will be prayers of Thanksgiving, Dedication and for God's blessing of people in same-sex relationships which will be further refined, and so prayers are requested for those within the working groups. Prayers were also requested for individuals and families of the LGBT community as they are in a difficult period with this issue under the microscope.

Questions from Synod: none

7. Affirming and Including Disabled People in the Whole Life of the Church

The Revd Charles Higgins, Diocesan Disability Adviser, presented on the work happening across the diocese. Expressing why disability mattered, Charles reminded Synod that Jesus meets us in bodily form and interacts with people. To be embodied is at the heart of Christian faith. There is a huge variety of bodily experience and we all have some experience of disability. To live this out across the diocese, we must cherish the life and faith of disabled people. There has been a reflection on the diversity of bodily experience, with a focus on the path of ordination. When we include, we are saying 'join us' and also 'be like us'. For someone to belong in a community we need to ask how it should change to help someone belong. We need to resist assumptions. For example, with language we often use "hear our prayer" but if we are considering deafness, we should say "receive our prayer". We must resist unhelpful theologies that treat disabilities as a form of sin. Access adjustments need to be made for all to play an active role and the Diocesan Disability Advisor role is here to dismantle barriers in addition to networking across the CofE. The booklet, *All Stand* is to be distributed electronically. There is also a huge range of neurodivergent and autism spectrum factors to consider. General Synod have aspired to take steps since the motion last July eg rubrics in services are to be changed; Diocesan Disability Advisors to be appointed; and data will be collected in the form of stories and so Diocesan Synod are asked to share any stories or people they know with stories by contacting Charles Higgins.

Questions and comments:

Hidden disability and non-visible social and psychological barriers must be remembered.

Has the diocese undertaken any access surveys? Is there a budget to help with access? We also have an ageing population to consider.

There is an access audit by Oxford Diocese which churches can work through for their building.

Charles could not comment on funding. [Secretarial note: The Church Fabric Fund can provide some funding for access.]

It all begins with conversation - Jesus asked what do you want? People are scared that they need to have everything perfect first, but it all starts with a conversation.

As we came out of lockdown, there was a commitment to have hybrid meetings to allow others to participate.

Temporary online meeting arrangements were put in place during lockdown to allow the business of synod to continue while in-person meetings could not take place. The Business Committee will continue to review meeting arrangements, including the possibility of hybrid meetings, but there has been no agreement or commitment to implement this.

8. Alive 23

April Gold, Diocesan Director of Education introduced the upcoming event. Statistics show that 56% of Christians date their belief as starting before the age of 11, yet most of our events focus on adults. Data show that this age group is worshipping in school communities in larger numbers than in our churches, alongside a considerable number of adults.

Alive 23 is a praise party giving the opportunity for largescale collective worship and the chance to talk to pupils about God. There will be four sessions over two days with different groups of pupils, who on each day will picnic together at the changeover of sessions. Young Voices and I Sing Pop are partners of the event. A video

was shared promoting the event. At present 7612 children accompanied by 847 adults are booked to attend. There is a request for stewards at the event, and volunteers can sign up at: <https://coventrydbe.org/alive-praise-party-2023/>

The theme of the praise party is: being a world changer, you are the people who can make it happen, Jesus as a changer. To aid the legacy of the event, each attending school will be provided with 12 easy to do intergenerational worship material from The Pop Box, and there will be training for school mentors. Every child will receive a 'Next Steps for Jesus' booklet to take home and there will be mini Alive Sunday events through hubs and deaneries that children can attend with parents.

Questions

Can Church Brigades come?

They would have to take time off school but there is space. If any Community Schools would like to attend, please contact the DBE.

Clarifications:

- Date: 15th and 16th June
- It is not residential; a child would attend one of the four identical sessions over the two days.
- Morning and afternoon sessions cross over with a picnic lunch.
- The event is for key stage 2 only (7-11 year olds)
- The event will be recorded so that younger pupils can take part
- An event for secondary schools is to happen next year
- Only 3 schools have not confirmed attendance.

Chris Edwards, DBE Chair, paid tribute to the team for their bravery to step out with this venture. No other diocese is doing an event of this nature.

Bishop Christopher gave thanks to April Gold and to Chris Edwards for his great encouragement and his enabling spirit.

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

9. Our Shared Future Strategic Framework – annual cycle of review

Andy Waddams, Director of Communications and Engagement provided an update on feedback from the listening exercise within the annual cycle.

The videos and documents launching the Strategic Framework have had over 100 views so far. We are currently in the listening phase of the annual cycle, facilitated by the Parish Needs Survey, the Vision and Strategy Day and the Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry. Andy shared feedback collected via these methods, highlighting the identified areas where support is requested. The most common theme was support or relief in mundane and heavy workload tasks such as safeguarding, finance, administration and building care to allow time to develop mission and growth activities.

Questions:

Was feedback sought about consistent church goers/engagement with existing members?

There was opportunity to respond through some questions but this did not feature highly this year. Noted for the future.

In France the state pays for buildings and parishes pay for what goes on inside, would that happen here?

Bishop Christopher responded that there is a different set up in England.

10. Diocesan Synod Code of Conduct (DS 23-04); includes cover sheet (DS 23-04a) and summary (DS 23-04b)

Bishop Christopher introduced the motion:

There are 4 reasons for the adoption of the code of conduct:

1. General Synod has a voluntary code, it makes sense for Diocesan Synod to have one also. This code is adapted from General Synod's.

2. It is good for each of us to be reminded of the process of deliberations, courtesies and responsibilities.
3. Effective working will include robust debate in which there will be exchanges of contrasting views. The code is not intended to stop the exchange of views. It is to ensure conduct in a manner that is courteous and speaking the truth of love, building up in love. All members need to be considerate in meetings and on social media, remembering they are representatives of Diocesan Synod and churches of Coventry. They are ambassadors of the church and so should seek to be a good ambassador.
4. A member has made unreasonable demands of process and staff, proving the need for facilities to be in place to run affairs. It is needed to protect the integrity of process and DBF staff for whom we have a duty of care.

The code is voluntary but members should make every effort to follow it. Sanctions are limited which is why appeals and adjudication is limited. The Registrar is exploring changes to standing orders and this will be discussed by Bishop’s Council in May and Diocesan Synod in June. We may regret the need for this code but we ask for support to better order affairs and hold ourselves responsible for a higher degree of Christian standard.

Amendments brought to this motion, as laid out in DS 23-04c

Sam Margrave, mover of the amendments was invited to introduce the 14 amendments (three are numbered 6 in the accompanying paper):

He shared the story of the Archbishop of Canterbury misquoting the Bishop of Uganda, an example of how misquoting can make something bad when it was not intended.

He expressed that he was in support of the General Synod code but he views this this code as going further, thus he does not support this code for Diocesan Synod. He emphasized that he has not sought to dominate, that he wants members of synod to speak more often and be heard. Members should speak the truth.

He expressed concern that this code goes too far and shuts out speech, referring to it as sinister and not just a form of the General Synod code, it also includes matters that are for Standing Orders.. Removing people from a meeting should not happen, members of synod are elected and so this action should be voted upon, members have a right to be present.

The Code incorporates provisions allowing the Bishop or Diocesan Secretary to cancel or postpone a meeting, and Mr Margrave expressed that this is a fundamental change that takes away the rights of synod members, for if you disagree with a structure, that meeting could be stopped so how can synod have a meeting to decide?

His view is that the provisions in the Code in relation to a reprimand letter from the Diocesan Secretary could be subjective as to whether they like you. This letter could operate to embarrass people into silence and so he urges members to not be silent.

He concluded that we have been warned about the failings of silence, and that we need more contributions, not less. He highlighted that he has been shut down on many issues and does not want others to go through this. He will go on being a voice of the Diocese and those parishes which elected him cautioning that the effect of this code is to create silence, giving power away to authority. It will damage the power to hold those with power to account. He intends to keep free speech with the amendments outlined and thanks supporters for their prayers.

The Chair outlined how debate on the amendments would work. Bishop Christopher would be asked for each amendment whether he accepts or resists it. The Chair will accept one speaker in favour and one speaker against each amendment, before each are voted on in turn.

<i>Amendment</i>	<i>Debate & Vote</i>	<i>Result</i>
1		Withdrawn
2	Bishop Christopher resisted the amendment. For: 2	Defeated

	Against: Majority Abstentions: 6	
3		Withdrawn
4		Withdrawn
5	Bishop Christopher resisted the amendment, noting that this is a necessary element of the code. Our debates must be conducted in a responsible way. For: 1 Against: Majority Abstentions: 5	Defeated
6 i)	Bishop Christopher resisted the amendment, as all members of synod should have a proper and proportionate opportunity to speak openly, and there have been instances of certain members of synod seeking to overshadow synodical proceedings. Mr Margrave did not agree with the implication that he was accused of dominating proceedings, and expressed further dissatisfaction before leaving the meeting. The Chair apologised to synod for the disruption and suggested a moment of quiet before returning to the debate. Speaker for – Tim Pollard: dominating the agenda is in the eye of the beholder. There is concern that the wording can provoke and that this clause is stepping into the area of standing orders. Speaker against – Kate Massey: the code sits atop standing orders and outlines how we as a group of people work together. The code makes us ask ourselves if we are contributing to discussion or dominating. For: 5 Against: majority Abstentions: 6	Defeated
6 ii)	Bishop Christopher resisted the amendment, reiterating that this is a voluntary code and independent adjudication is therefore not necessary. Under standing order 9 it is the responsibility of the Diocesan Secretary to manage the affairs of synod so that we can operate efficiently. Speaker for – Jim Perryman: This is one paragraph where the General Synod code does offer an alternative person to talk to but our does not. We should be in line with General Synod to offer an alternative person as the contact person could be the source of the concern. Bishop Christopher clarified that if the concern is regarding the Diocesan Secretary, the appropriate action is covered in another clause. Speaker against – Sarah Mount: We do not need an independent person. It is not helpful as part of the point is to increase trust and be self-governing. There should not be one person responsible. There is a need to protect staff but where there is enforcement of the code there should be a small group of people, as the chairs are elected they should work on it and consensus should be needed to move forward. Amendment to amendment – proposer Jonathan Jee: “If a member continues to act in a such a manner, this should be reported to the Diocesan Secretary or one of the Chairs of Diocesan Synod, who will consult with the Bishop if considered appropriate.” Bishop Christopher accepted the amendment to the amendment. For: majority Against: 0 Abstentions: 3	Amendment to amendment passed
6 iii)	Bishop Christopher resisted the amendment, noting that the code mirrors that of General Synod and is the only point where it has ‘teeth’. This point would not be reached without warning and prior steps.	Defeated

	Speaker against – Jonathan Jee: the wording within the code reflects biblical principles. For: 1 Against: majority Abstentions: 5	
7	Bishop Christopher did not resist this amendment. For: majority Against: 0 Abstentions: 4	Passed
8	Bishop Christopher resisted this amendment, reiterating that the Diocesan Secretary has responsibility for synodical oversight. Speaker for – Jim Perryman: the clause is a valid comment about the workings of synod but should it be included within a code of conduct or would it be better placed in the standing orders? For: 6 Against: majority Abstentions: 7	Defeated
9	Bishop Christopher resisted this amendment noting that it has no relevance to the proposed wording of the clause. Speaker for – Tim Pollard: this clause would be better suited to standing orders than a code of conduct. For: 4 Against: majority Abstentions: 12	Defeated
10	Bishop Christopher resisted this amendment, confirming that there has been a great deal of thought and research into practice in other dioceses. Speaker for – Tim Pollard: this clause would be better suited to standing orders than a code of conduct. For: 7 Against: majority Abstentions: 6	Defeated
11	Bishop Christopher resisted this amendment, confirming again that synodical oversight is the responsibility of the Bishop and Diocesan Secretary. For: 0 Against: majority Abstentions: 3	Defeated
12	Bishop Christopher resisted this amendment, noting that this is a procedural matter and does not belong within the code. For: 0 Against: majority Abstentions: 4	Defeated

Having voted on the amendment, synod now discussed and voted on the motion. Comments and questions were invited.

Against:

- There is desire to be in favour but the code goes too far in places, it stands on top of Standing Orders and there is suspicion that synod have not fully digested the code. We do not fully know the ramifications of this. It is understood why it is needed but it will not necessarily stop outbursts. There is a feeling of forcing this through for speed.
- These codes can read formidably but we could have done with more time to think about the implications.
- There is unnecessary repetition and Standing Order matters are included therefore it needs to be shorted but there is agreement in principle.

For:

- We need to consider how much time we give to discussing this. We had time in November, today, and it has also been through Bishop's Council. There is nothing to hold laity to account and so this is a useful document which sets out standards of behaviours expected from members of synod. We should not prolong the debate unnecessarily, as it provides shared parameters.
- There is the temptation to think that the code is a way of putting people on trial, but the intended effect is, as referred to above, to document standards of behaviour expected from members of synod.
- The preparation and debate of the Code has highlighted provisions currently contained in the Code which may be better placed in the standing orders. We should vote the code through and then, once Standing Orders have been revised, look to see what needs reviewing.

Bishop Christopher expressed gratitude for the comments on time and recognised that it is a long document but length is required. It was acknowledged that there are some parts of the Code which appear to be better placed in the Standing Orders, and the Standing Orders will be reviewed with this in mind, following which the Code will be reviewed again. It should be considered whether the code should be mandatory for the next elected synod. Bishop Christopher thanked Phil Swards for his calm and skilful chairing of such an emotive item. Whilst the code will not solve all problems, it will help to provide a framework for future debate and communication with each other and with the diocesan offices.

Bishop Christopher moved the motion that:

"This Synod adopt the code of conduct as laid out in paper DS 23-04 with the approved amendments"

Vote

For: majority

Against: 0

Abstentions: 6

Motion is carried

11. Appointment of Chapel of Unity trustees (DS 23-05)

Jacqueline Ladds spoke to paper DS 23-05, highlighting that no nominations had been received in advance of the meeting for the laity or clergy trustee and that nominations can be made in this meeting.

Synod were asked to prayerfully consider if they would act as trustee.

No nominations were received during the meeting.

12. Questions received under Standing Order 69

Four questions received.

Question 1

Written response provided.

Question 2

A verbal response by Bishop Christopher:

There is a good relationship with the Bishop of Kapsabet yet there is some turbulence in the Anglican Communion following the recent General Synod debate. A visit is planned to Kapsabet and contact is ongoing with Bishop Paul to consider if this may need to be postponed. At the moment the visit is going ahead as planned and the existing good relationships are not impaired.

Jonathan Jee was given the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

There is value in questions to get discussions on record. Clearly divisions are possible within the CofE and Anglican community. Is it too soon, as a diocese of reconciliation, to think ahead to when General Synod have made decisions, what our role may be?

Bishop Christopher commended the question, which will be well received by other colleagues. He said that Jonathan is trying to enable us as diocese to react in a way that is authentic to our aspirations and hoped that everything he expressed will be achievable. How we will do that has not yet been considered as attentions have been on a national level.

Question 3

Written response provided.

Question 4

Written response provided.

13. Date of future meetings

Tues 20 June (evening) and Sat 18 Nov (morning).

Bishop Christopher closed the meeting at 13:03 with prayer reflecting on the shaping of the soul and the Annunciation of Mary.