

**Minutes of a meeting
of
Blackburn Diocesan Synod**

16 July 2019

Present

2 Members of the House of Bishops
30 Members of the House of Clergy
41 Members of the House of Laity

Apologies

1 Member of the House of Bishops
10 Members of the House of Clergy
20 Members of the House of Laity

1. Opening Worship

Members of Diocesan Synod were welcomed by **Mr Tim Cox**, Vice Chair of the House of Laity, who chaired the meeting.

Opening worship was led by Kirkham Deanery.

2. Presidential Address

Bishop Julian addressed the Synod, reflecting on all the positivity in the Diocese at present. He sensed this was a time of God's favour, with many examples of good work taking place including:

- last year's Diocesan Conference, with another Diocesan Conference booked in October 2021
- achievements within the Outer Estates
- the project at The Minster and St George's in Preston
- the work with Mpower in Lower Darwen
- 2,700 children completing the Children's Bible Challenge
- the Adult Bible Challenge
- a successful tent week at Bishop's House
- the Festival of Baptism at the Cathedral due to take place in October.

There had also been a number of important appointments to be thankful for within the Diocese recently, including Rev Nick McKee (Director of Vocations), Miss Ruth Hassall (Director of Discipleship), Rev Sam Cheeseman (Bishop's Chaplain) and Mrs Carolyn Barton (Vision Co-ordinator).

Bishop Julian also spoke of the IICSA hearing currently taking place. He described it as something that will be a real challenge to the whole Christian community which must be taken seriously. It is essential for parishes to have a safeguarding link on the front page of their website.

There was a farewell service at the Cathedral on Saturday 13 July for Archdeacon Michael Everitt. Interviews for the new Archdeacon of Lancaster will take place on 24 September. All were asked to pray for Canon Simon Cox, who would be taking on some of the responsibilities of Archdeacon during the vacancy period and for Rev Linda McCluskie, who would be temporarily taking on some of the responsibilities of the Assistant Archdeacon during the period.

Diocesan Synod meeting as members of the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Finance Limited

The Annual General Meeting of the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Finance followed. A separate set of minutes will be presented at the next Annual General Meeting for approval.

Meeting as Synod

3. Diocesan Board of Education Annual Report and Accounts 2018

Canon Stephen Whittaker, Director of the Board of Education presented the report and accounts. He reported that no major issues of concern were found by the auditors during their audit of the accounts. The main content of his presentation can be found within the slide pack (attached).

Questions and comments were invited but none were received.

Canon Whittaker moved that:

"The summary Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Diocesan Board of Education for the year ending 31 December 2018 be received."

All Members of Synod voted **in favour** and the motion was **carried**.

4. Blackpool Deanery Synod Motion

Canon Andrew Sage (Blackpool Deanery) and Rev Steve Haskett (Blackpool Deanery) presented a report in favour of abolishing marriage fees or reducing them to a minimal amount.

They described how Blackpool Deanery represents some of poorest people in country and how wedding fees are discriminatory against poor couples. The snapshot of the six cases within the report is reflected across the other parishes in the Blackpool Deanery and the other poorer parishes in the country.

The economic and theological arguments were highlighted. Average weekly earnings in Blackpool are £440.61 and the wedding fee alone is higher than this. Furthermore, there should be no charge for marriage as it is a free gift of God.

Questions and comments were invited.

Archdeacon Mark Ireland was sympathetic but felt this would not encourage people to attend church or enhance the poorest people within communities. Free or minimal cost marriages would result in people forgetting about bookings. It would also have a knock-on effect on parish share. He spoke about the potential to reduce wedding fees within our churches without having to change national legislation, eg Valentine's Day promotions to reduce the cost of weddings which would also attract newspaper coverage. Parishes already have the right to waive the DBF fee where the need is appropriate.

Mrs Rosemary Lyon (General Synod and Leyland Deanery) spoke about the particular circumstances in Blackpool linked to the number of marriage venues, although this is not the case in other areas. However, she believes marriage should be promoted and was in favour of the motion.

Rev Ian Enticott (Vice Chair of the House of Clergy and Area Dean of Accrington) was not in favour of the motion. He pointed out that baptisms are free and they are also in decline. The motion would affect the whole country whereas a church can waive the fee if appropriate. The average cost of a wedding is £14k which far outweighs the cost of the church fee. The fee charged by Blackpool Council for a registrar is £310 which he felt was comparable to our fees.

Rev Cindy Rigney (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery) could see the benefit of removing wedding fees in some parts of the Diocese. However, in other areas, they can form a significant part of the parish's income, particularly where there is a small population.

Rev Stephen Cooper (Garstang Deanery) appreciated the idea behind the motion but explained there was not a huge difference between the cost of a hotel wedding and a church wedding.

Rev Peter Lillicrap (Area Dean of Blackburn with Darwen) spoke of the need to provide the poorest in the Diocese with dignity, fairness, care and love. He pointed out how we should not be approaching this from a financial perspective.

Rev Haskett agreed with Rev Lillicrap explaining how this is about the dignity of the poorest people in our country and how there is no justifiable moral argument to maintain the fees.

Canon Sage accepted there was some remit for clergy to waive some of the fee and would like to see further guidance on waiving DBF fees. He did not believe people would book weddings and forget about them. There are so few weddings in his parish that removing the fee would not drastically affect parish share.

The following motion was proposed by **Rev Haskett**:

"That this Synod call on the General Synod to debate a motion in the following terms:

That this Synod call on the Archbishop's Council to introduce an order to amend the Parochial Fees and Scheduled Matters Amending Order 2019 so that the fees relating to marriages are set at nil or at a minimal amount in order to demonstrate the Church's commitment to marriage and pastoral care."

Mr Cox explained that the motion would be referred to General Synod for debate.

In the vote:

Members voting in favour = 32

Members voting against = 27

Abstentions = 8

The motion was carried.

5. Use of Lower Income Communities Funding and Parish Share 2020

Mr David Barlow, Chair of the Board of Finance presented the report, explaining that the Lower Income Community Funding (LICF) is given to the Diocese by the National Church to support mission and ministry in our most deprived communities.

The funding had been available since 2016, replacing previous funding distributed under the Darlow formula. Although the LICF had been partially distributed in the past three years, the Board/Bishops Council had recently established a working party to determine how the funding could be distributed in full to the parishes for whom it is intended.

The recommendations were unanimously supported by the Board/Bishop's Council and if accepted, would form part of the 2020 budget process. The method recommended would also meet with the approval of the National Church who will monitor how the funds are distributed to the appropriate parishes more closely in the future.

It was anticipated that funding will be available for the years 2020 – 2022 and probably for 2023 – 2025. There is no guarantee that it will be given to Dioceses beyond that date, highlighting the importance of removing it from Parish Share calculations as soon as possible.

Mr Barlow explained this was about doing what is right, not about the impact it would have on the other parishes.

Questions and comments were invited.

Rev Steve Haskett (Blackpool Deanery) welcomed the proposals. He highlighted the need for some support to help parishes spend the additional money they would be receiving wisely.

Mr Barlow agreed this was something that would need to be given some thought. He suggested that parishes might be able to work together to get more value from the funding.

Rev Martin Keighley (Poulton Deanery) spoke about the redistribution that would occur over the next three years and how this would need to be considered. He pointed out how it is not just the poorer parishes that struggle to pay their parish share. He felt there should be a jubilee for arrears on parish share and he urged the Bishop's Council and Bishop's Leadership Team to give parishes and clergy a new beginning free from past burdens.

Rev Steve Cooper (Garstang Deanery) has a group of five parishes with a range of different circumstances. He explained that contributions to Share can be a large percentage of income already and in the coming years this will be more, but that it is important to do what is right.

Ms Jacqueline Stamper (General Synod and Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery) explained that we are morally obliged to do this. She supports the idea of parishes in receipt of the funding to work together to get more from it and suggested the Diocese could look at providing a mechanism to help with this.

Mr Barlow recognised that other parishes are struggling to pay their Parish Share. He explained that if the motion is passed, a written communication will be sent to all parishes explaining the impact of this on their individual parish.

Bishop Julian gave his thanks to those who had put together the proposal which had involved a large amount of work. He pointed out that the Diocese had no choice in directing the funding to whom it is intended. A phasing in period and a cap on increases had been included to make it as manageable as possible. Whilst conversations regarding a Jubilee had taken place, this would need to be tied in with parishes demonstrating they are striving to contribute Parish Share.

Mr Barlow moved that:

"This Synod approves the recommendations set out in paper DS 985 and their enactment for 2020."

All Members of Synod voted **in favour** with the exception of 1 abstention and the motion was **carried**.

6. Proclamation of Canons

Canon Graeme Pollard promulgated Amending Canon 38.

Amending Canon 38 is concerning relations with other churches and local ecumenical projects.

7. Questions submitted in accordance with Diocesan Synod Standing Orders

None.

8. Motions submitted in accordance with Diocesan Synod Standing Orders

None.

9. Closing Prayer

The meeting concluded with prayers of thanksgiving by Bishop Julian.

The next meeting of Diocesan Synod will be held on Saturday 12 October 2019.

Signed



Dated



