

**Minutes of a meeting
of
Blackburn Diocesan Synod
Saturday 17 October 2020**

Present

3 Members of the House of Bishops
31 Members of the House of Clergy
42 Members of the House of Laity

Apologies

8 Members of the House of Clergy
6 Members of the House of Laity

1. Opening Worship and Address

The meeting was opened with worship led by **Bishop Julian** who chaired the meeting.

Bishop Julian welcomed Canon Alastair McHaffie as the new Chair of the House of Clergy and Rev Marc Wolverson as the new Vice Chair of the House of Clergy.

Bishop Julian spoke about the Lord's sovereignty. Where is God in times of hardship? It doesn't seem that the Lord is reigning at the time of this Covid pandemic which only seems to become more of a challenge despite our prayers and efforts, or for the victims of abuse in the recent IICSA inquiry. So what is the nature of His reign?

It is not right to believe that hard times and suffering will be overridden. These are all part of the reality of the world we live in. However, God doesn't allow these times to be without value. These are incorporated into His eternal purposes. All things do work together for good. This is demonstrated clearly in the cross; a massive human tragedy that God turned into a triumph.

An example of His Kingdom coming near is that our application for sustainability funding has been successful; the Church Commissioners have given the Diocese a gift of £1.1m to assist with our finances. The Homegrown conference has showcased the wonderful things we can do in these difficult times. The Deanery Synod consultations for the Vision Implementation Plan were another sign of his goodness.

Bishop Julian announced there will be 'A Call to Pray' taking place in November followed by a 'Gift Day' for parish funds. This will be for the benefit of each parish in the Diocese to help fill the shortfalls in finances this year. The intention is to gather the information from the Gift Day and announce the total a few weeks later. It is hoped this will be a big glimpse of God's goodness.

2. AGM

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.

3. Update on Parish Share Budget

Mr Nick Aves, Vice-Chair of the Board of Finance, presented a report on the preparation of the 2021 Budget and the arrangements for holding a Special Synod meeting on 30 November to approve the Budget.

A decision was needed at this meeting regarding next year's Parish Share.

He explained that last year, it was envisaged that there would be an uplift of 3% on Parish Share for 2021, plus a further amount of up to 3% to cover the gradual withdrawal of LICF money from those parishes affected by the decision taken in 2020 regarding allocation of those funds. However, because of the pandemic many parishes were having to sell investments and reduce reserves in order to maintain Share contributions. Even so share could be as much as 20% lower this year.

As the situation was unlikely to improve in 2021, the Board felt it was unrealistic to go ahead with the 3% increase and were recommending a freeze on the overall Share request at the current year's level. At parish level, this will vary to reflect changes in RWA and ministry. The withdrawal of LICF support should continue which will mean a further 3% increase for some parishes. To fail to do this would require a withdrawal of £180k from reserves.

Bishop Julian invited questions.

Canon Chris Newlands (General Synod and Lancaster & Morecambe Deanery) spoke about many churches needing to make redundancies. He asked what cuts were being made at diocesan level and whether some posts and expenditure could be removed.

Mr Aves explained this was being looked at carefully. Because a large proportion of the Parish Share budget goes towards clergy stipends, it is a difficult budget to reduce.

Bishop Julian emphasised it is not our policy to reduce clergy numbers.

Rev Stephen Cooper (Garstang Deanery) asked about the arrangements for counting RWA this year. He also asked how the £1.1m sustainability funding from National Church would be used.

Canon Graeme Pollard, Diocesan Secretary explained the funding had been granted specifically to assist the DBF with its shortfall in finances in 2020, therefore stabilising the DBF and allowing it to support parishes going forward.

Archdeacon Mark explained that next year's Parish Share will be calculated on the basis of last year's RWA figures. Some careful thinking will need to take place around using 2020 RWA figures in the longer term.

Rev Cooper felt that if the sustainability grant was not going to be filtered through to parishes, there would be little incentive for them to contribute Parish Share. Many parishes were using their reserves in order to do so in the current circumstances..

Canon Pollard explained the grant will only cover part of the DBF's deficit and that further information will be available at the next meeting on 30 November.

Canon Andrew Sage (Blackpool Deanery and Chair of the Property Committee) stated that the Property Budget was being carefully looked at to ensure clergy homes are kept in good repair. After clergy stipends, the largest proportion of the Parish Share budget goes towards ensuring clergy homes are kept in good repair. He highlighted that the Diocese is the parishes and the income of both are closely joined.

Bishop Jill explained that 80% of the Parish Share budget is used to pay clergy stipends and the Diocese is not planning to cut clergy numbers.

Rev Marc Wolverson (Vice-Chair of the House of Clergy) pointed out that many parishes who are unable contribute their Parish Share in full are still working hard to ensure congregations are giving sacrificially in very difficult circumstances.

Bishop Julian expressed his gratitude all round for the way people have stepped up this year. He encouraged those parishes that have not yet arranged a discussion regarding their finances to do so. He highlighted the importance of working well with one another to get through this difficult time..

Canon Andrew Sage moved:

"This Synod approves the Parish Share request increase for 2021 be limited to the ongoing impact of the LICF distribution, changes in ministry and in RWA."

This was seconded by **Mr Andrew Collier (Garstang Deanery)**.

Synod voted **in favour** and the motion was **carried**.

4. Clergy Care and Wellbeing

Bishop Jill introduced the paper and expressed her gratitude for the agility of clergy at this particular time.

Ms Jacqueline Stamper (General Synod and Lancaster & Morecambe Deanery) explained the Clergy Covenant for Wellbeing would be formerly proclaimed under Item 9 of the agenda. She asked Synod to adopt the Covenant and to commit together to promote the wellbeing of our clergy and their households. This is not intended as a prescription and how this is implemented will be different in every parish.

There are three documents to help start conversations available on the CofE website; one for clergy, one for local congregations and one for bishops and the wider church. Ms Stamper pointed out that clergy are not more important than everyone else, but if they feel cared for they will work best for our communities.

Views and suggestions on the Covenant were invited.

Mr Tim Cox (Vice Chair of the House of Laity and Preston Deanery) was unclear as to whether this was a formal motion or not.

Ms Stamper requested permission to formally move that the Clergy Covenant for Wellbeing be adopted by the Synod after the debate.

Bishop Julian accepted the motion.

Bishop Julian felt that the inclusion to care for our laity as well as for our clergy was welcome.

Canon Chris Newlands (General Synod and Lancaster & Morecambe Deanery) would like the Covenant to be supported at all levels, including deanery synods. He highlighted that many clergy that were finding themselves isolated now that the County is in Tier 3 of lockdown. Clergy care needs to be a priority for all to ensure that ministry continues.

Rev Nancy Goodrich (Tunstall Deanery) commended the document as a trustee of the Clergy Support Trust. The Trust helps clergy when they are struggling and provides grants to support clergy in times of need. She suggested that clergy contact the Trust if help is needed.

Dean Peter Howell-Jones explained that we have a specific responsibility to care for the clergy. Whilst we still need to care for the laity he felt the Covenant should be specifically about the clergy. He emphasised that delivery of it is critical.

Rev Marc Wolverson (Vice Chair of the House of Clergy and Leyland Deanery) reminded Synod of the non-stipendiary ministers within the Diocese that also need support. He asked that they are included and their contributions are recognised

Mr Andrew Collier (Garstang Deanery) felt the parishes would need some guidance about how to provide support without cutting across employer responsibilities dealt with by the Diocese.

Ms Stamper clarified that the General Synod had asked Diocesan Synods to adopt the Covenant and points (a) - (e) within the paper on block, although there is nothing prescriptive as to how this is carried out.

Mr Tim Cox would like Clergy Study Days to occur more regularly although he had no issues with supporting the principle of points (a) - (e) in general.

Ms Stamper moved:

“That this Synod adopt the Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing and points (a) – (e) set out in Paper DS 1005”.

This was seconded by **Canon Chris Newlands**.

Diocesan Synod voted **in favour** and the motion was **carried**.

The Bishop’s Leadership Team will look at how principles (a) – (e) will be implemented.

5. General Synod Report

Canon Chris Newlands (General Synod and Lancaster & Morecambe Deanery) presented his report for information. Questions were invited.

Rev Stephen Corbett (General Synod and Blackburn with Darwen Deanery) asked about the time limit regarding General Synod meeting remotely.

Canon Newlands confirmed that the General Synod wants to go back to meeting in person as soon as this is possible but they will meet remotely for as long as they have to.

Prayers for Father John Paul, the priest that had been attacked in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Lancaster on 16 October followed. It was suggested that all should be on high alert.

6. Update on the Vision 2026 Implementation Plan

Mrs Carolyn Barton (Vision Co-ordinator) presented her paper.

Consultations on the draft Implementation Plan had taken place at the majority of deanery synods with two still to visit. The engagement by deanery synods had been encouraging. The intention is to draw up the final plan by the end of the year and to launch next phase of Vision 2026 in early 2021.

The 'Presence and Engagement' and 'Aspiration' sections of the plan were missing from the paper. Mrs Barton shared a brief overview regarding these sections.

With regard to the former, the two key commitments are engaging with our multi-faith neighbours and maintaining a Christian presence in areas where the local population is predominantly of other faiths. This will be carried out through:

- engaging and praying for those of other faiths
- offering training to both clergy and lay
- offering advice and support to schools
- encouraging networks of support and closer cooperation between Presence and Engagement parishes
- supporting parishes in providing multi-lingual and online resources

The overview of the 'Aspirations' section is attached.

Questions and comments were invited.

Mr Joseph Brookfield (Preston Deanery) – Asked who the Parish Vision Surveys were sent to. He felt the reset of the Vision is an improvement on the previous version

Mrs Barton stated that it was circulated to all incumbents, wardens and vision champions with the recommendation that it was discussed with PCCs. Representation was received from most parishes.

Canon Alastair McHaffie (Chair of the House of Clergy and Preston Deanery) commented about National Church's target to become carbon neutral by 2030 and how this would be difficult to achieve in parishes with large, old buildings.

Mrs Barton explained that the Diocese wants to collaborate and has a responsibility to work at this. There is an environmental working group to help us move this forward within the Diocese. It is important to work at this even if everything is not achieved by 2030.

Mrs Carolyn Johnson (Garstang Deanery) asked about Healthcare Chaplains and why pastoral care teams are not available in our major hospitals.

Bishop Jill explained that we have a fleet of chaplains in our hospitals who work together although there is a long running issue at Preston Hospital. She is working with senior members of staff there to take this forward and has set up a faith forum there. Our strategy is being looked at.

Mrs Johnson and Bishop Jill will speak further about this outside the meeting..

Rev Stephen Cooper (Garstang Deanery) expressed concern for the Lancashire Care Hospitals Trust which has 18 psychiatric units across Lancashire and no chaplain. The local incumbents do not have the resources to fill the level of care needed.

Bishop Julian asked that Section C on Page 32 of the Implementation Plan is expanded upon for the final version.

The next phase of the Vision will run from 2021-2024 as 3 years is a realistic and achievable timeframe.

Mrs Barton was thanked for her hard work. Synod were encouraged to feed in any further ideas to her.

7. Update on SDF 3

Bishop Philip gave an update on the first two Strategic Development Fund (SDF) projects. The main points are included in the attached slides.

Questions were invited but none were asked.

Synod was asked to pray for the SDF 1 and 2 projects at this time.

Mrs Barton provided an overview of the SDF 3 application.

The deadline for submitting the Stage 1 application was 1 November. The Directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance had given their approval to commit £188,112 from the Diocesan Vision Fund to the project over 5 years.

Mrs Barton's slides are attached.

Bishop Jill presented on the financial assumptions for the project which are detailed in paper DS 1008. It is hoped that the amount committed from the Diocesan Vision Fund will leverage £3m from the Church Commissioners.

The Stage 1 application does not involve making a commitment at this point.

Questions were invited.

Canon Andrew Sage (Blackpool Deanery) highlighted the importance of working across the traditions. He pointed out that the entertainments industry in Blackpool needs to be on board with the project and he was concerned that this had not been factored in.

Bishop Jill agreed and explained that these will be big developments at Stage 2 of the application.

Canon Sage stated that he would like to bring his PCC on board but feels this will be difficult if they are not included at the beginning.

Rev Stephen Corbett (General Synod and Blackburn with Darwen Deanery) spoke about the Blackburn element of the project. He felt that communication on the ground could be improved.

Bishop Jill encouraged Rev Corbett to provide more details.

Mr Tim Cox (Vice Chair of the House of Laity) would like to support the project but expressed concern about giving and whether it would rise sufficiently to meet the needs of the parishes involved.

Rev Martin Keighley (Poulton Deanery) felt the way in which this will be a resource across the whole diocese is important.

Canon Chis Newlands (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery) hoped that all traditions would be recognised for their potential. He felt that many churches could enable growth with small levels of investment.

Bishop Jill would like to see resourcing taking place in different traditions. She asked for anyone with thoughts on this to get in touch.

Canon Alastair McHaffie (Chair of the House of Clergy and Preston Deanery) spoke about good leadership being important. He asked how well the theological training institutions were set up to prepare leaders who are mission minded.

Bishop Philip explained that St Mellitus North West has been doing this and that Emmanuel Theological College will be doing this and training across the traditions.

Mrs Vivienne Goddard (General Synod and Leyland Deanery) pointed out that it is not just the TEI but also training the curate within the parish that is important.

Bishop Philip explained that the Growing Leaders Team are considering how to include a strong leadership component within curacies.

Bishop Julian asked Synod to indicate their support for submitting the Stage 1 SDF 3 application.

Synod expressed its support for the first stage of the application.

8. Review of the Diocesan Synod Election Process

Archdeacon Mark introduced his paper.

He explained that the Diocese is smaller than in previous years and this should be reflected in the size of Diocesan Synod. A better communication strategy is also needed to encourage a broader range of candidates to stand.

He thanked all those that had been involved in producing the paper.

Comments were invited.

Mr Joseph Brookfield (Preston Deanery) was concerned about the large number of vacancies but there is a larger problem that needs to be resolved before looking at reducing the numbers. He felt that the Synod agenda needs to be more interesting. If the size of Synod is to be reviewed, then wider consultation needs to take place.

Mrs Vivienne Goddard (General Synod and Leyland Deanery) agreed that the Synod agenda needs to change to include more debate and decision making in order to encourage people to stand.

Dr Awena Carter (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery) would like the agenda to be more stimulating and to include more speakers from outside the Diocese to encourage more engagement.

Rev Nancy Goodrich (Tunstall Deanery) felt that reducing places would not go hand in hand with diversity as people on the extremes would be squeezed out. She felt that the agenda should include more items for discussion to encourage more representative voices.

Archdeacon Mark stated that reducing the size of Synod should make it more representative. Some deaneries are very unrepresented because they cannot find enough candidates to stand. Currently, no members of the House of Clergy or Laity had been voted for because there are so many unfilled places, which is very undemocratic. He agreed there should be more debates and fewer presentations on the agenda and acknowledged the point about inviting outside speakers.

Mrs Natalie Cox (Preston Deanery) would like Synod to be more representative with a more accurate distribution of ages and traditions, and to look at why people, particularly younger people are not standing.

Mr Tim Cox (Vice Chair of the House of Laity and Preston Deanery) was not convinced about the case for reducing the Synod although he could support a small reduction. He explained there are reduced electoral rolls and clergy across the deaneries and pointed out that that it might be more relevant to look at the size of deanery synods. He would also like to look at why people are not standing.

Mr Andrew Collier (Garstang Deanery) was in favour of a reduction in numbers. He felt that lot of the issues raised were positive and could be dealt with alongside a reduced Synod.

Canon Chris Newlands (General Synod and Lancaster & Morecambe Deanery) hoped that Synod could play an important part in the life of the Diocese as there would be many important topics coming up. He would like to see diversity in material and good news stories from around the Diocese on the agenda.

Canon Andrew Horsfall (Blackburn with Darwen Deanery) explained it is about enticing people to attend and not about reducing numbers.

Rev Paul Benfield (General Synod and Burnley Deanery) was opposed reducing the numbers. He explained there are topics coming up that might make Synod more interesting.

Archdeacon Mark would like to see more young people on Synod but felt that having a large synod with unfilled places has not been an effective way of achieving this. He acknowledged there are big decisions facing the Diocese and felt this is why there needs to be a greater demographic mandate in the Synod.

Archdeacon Mark moved Motion A: "That the overall number of elected places on Synod be reduced."

In the vote:

20 members voted in favour
22 members voted against
2 abstentions

As motion A fell, **Archdeacon Mark moved** Motion D: "That the allocation of seats to deaneries for the 2021 elections be according to table 2."

In the vote:

53 members voted in favour
3 members voted against
2 abstentions

Motion D was **carried**.

9. Proclamation of Canons

Canon Graeme Pollard, Diocesan Secretary proclaimed the Clergy Covenant for Wellbeing.

10. Questions

The following question had been received from **Mr Joseph Brookfield (Preston Deanery)**:

"How is the Diocese planning to measure progress towards meeting the Church of England's commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2030? Noting that the General Synod has called on each diocesan synod to address progress towards net zero emissions every three years."

Bishop Jill had written a paper in response to the question which she will share with the Synod. This is not a trivial goal to reach and the key aspects are being looked at, including the energy used in our buildings and the petrol/diesel we use for work related travel. More details will be brought to a future Synod meeting.

Mr Brookfield pointed out that we need to look at how this will be measured..

11. Motions

None.

The meeting closed with a prayer led by Bishop Julian.

Signed:

Dated: