

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod  
28<sup>th</sup> June 2023, 6.30 pm, St John's Church, Barlaston**

Present:                   The Bishop of Lichfield (President)  
                              The Bishop of Shrewsbury  
                              The Bishop of Stafford  
                              38 clergy members  
                              33 lay members

In attendance:       Mrs Julie Jones (Diocesan Secretary)  
                              Mr Jonathan Hill (Director of Finance)  
                              Mrs Jess Dace (Deputy to the Director of Finance)  
                              The Revd Simon Foster (Chaplaincy and Mission Team leader)  
                              The Revd Ray Gaston (Team Vicar, Wolverhampton S.Chad and S.Mark)

Apologies:             19 clergy members  
                              20 lay members

*The President assumed the Chair*

**1. Welcome and Opening Prayers**

The Revd Stewart Jones welcomed all and led opening worship.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising (DS23/06/01)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were approved and signed by the President accordingly.

Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) asked about the promotion of the Clergy Spouse and Partner Officer profile, referred to under Question Time at the last meeting, and asked if this could be actioned as soon as possible. This was noted.

She also asked about statistical information on numbers of under 16s in churches mentioned in question 20 on the Question Time paper. The Diocesan Secretary said that this information was being collated and would be available soon.

She was grateful for the inclusion on the diocesan website of Diocesan Synod information, and asked if it was possible for Deanery Synod Standing Orders to also be included. This was noted.

It was also noted that the process of formulating a policy on vexatious complaints was advanced and the matter would be brought to the next meeting of Diocesan Synod.

**3. Episcopal Ministry in the Diocese – The See of Wolverhampton**

Bishop Michael explained the process of making a submission to the Dioceses Commission for permission to nominate a new Bishop of Wolverhampton. The size of the Episcopal Area was noted.

Penny Allen (General Synod) was very much in support of the proposal, citing the considerable workload of the previous bishop, including many miles of travel to make many visits, deal with many pastoral concerns deal with a wide variety of issues and problems. She supported the comment made regarding the large size of the Area, and the amount of time needed to be devoted

to the task of looking after the number of priests and churches within it. She spoke of Bishop Clive's much missed passion and care for the many areas in which he had been involved.

Dr Michael Davie (Oswestry) asked whether any consideration had been given to amalgamating a Suffragan Bishop's role with that of an Archdeacon.

Gilbert David (Wednesbury) spoke about the support shown by Bishop Clive for Cricket in the diocese and hoped that the new Bishop would also support sport and social matters in this way.

The Archdeacons of Walsall and of Lichfield were delighted to support the proposal. Bishop Michael noted the comments, and then moved that:

*This Synod supports the Bishop of Lichfield in making a submission to the Dioceses Commission for permission to nominate a new Bishop of Wolverhampton*

This was overwhelmingly carried with 2 abstentions.

*The Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance assumed the Chair*

#### **4. Farewell Comments from the Chair**

The Chair of the Board of Finance gave some reflections on his eleven years in the role, which he would be relinquishing at the conclusion of the meeting. He spoke about work that had taken place such as Plain Speaking, the revision of the Parish Share formula, the purchase of St Mary's House and Three Spires House, and the establishment of the "Resourcing the Future" fund. All these and many other achievements had been a team effort with senior diocesan staff. He particularly highlighted achievements such as a move towards more "joined up thinking", the creation of Three Spires Trust, and the work done by the Core Finance Group during the pandemic to closely monitor finances and take any necessary action. He thanked the vice-chairs who had served with him – The Ven Chris Simms, the Bishop of Stafford and most recently Preb Terry Bloor, and particularly Juie Jones and Jonathan Hill. He was grateful too for his good relationships with Bishops Jonathan and Michael.

He then spoke about the current financial situation, foremost the £1.5 million funding gap we faced, mainly due to a drop in Common Fund receipts in recent years. Action was urgently required to ameliorate the impact of this.

He ended expressing his honour and privilege to serve as Chair and wished all well for the future.

#### **5. Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022 (DS23/06/03)**

The Director of Finance presented the report, which had been circulated to members in advance. The accounts had been approved by Bishop's Council on 25<sup>th</sup> May. He explained they were consolidated and were produced in accordance with the Charities Act and the Companies Act. He also explained the format of the document. He then presented the accounts in detail, noting again that the DBF was showing a surplus of around £20 million despite the struggles of recent years. Although there was substantial growth in capital, it was income that remained the major concern, and this very much linked with the upcoming discussion on Total Return Approach. Unrestricted funds (the budget) continued to show a deficit of around £1.5 million, mainly due to a fall in income (Common Fund receipts) of this amount. Following the introduction of the Common Fund, the rate of increase in arrears had slowed and there were signs of a steady recovery in receipts which was pleasing. In 2022 350 parishes had paid their Common Fund

request in full (up from 313), and he sincerely thanked the parishes for their effort in achieving this. He also thanked parishes for fee income which had significantly recovered and was outstanding in terms of the national trend. He wished also to thank Simon Ray in the Property Department whose efforts had brought in £565,000 in rental income.

Regarding the overall surplus he commented that the merging of the Diocesan Board of Education with the Board of Finance in June 2022 had resulted in a £9.5 million increase, and the ceasing of pension liabilities also meant a gain of around £350,000. There had also been grants from the national church amounting to £4 million. Although there had been a significant fall in investment value in 2022, property had again increased by around £7.5 million, and a further £6 million following the revaluation of glebe land. The “on paper” surplus was in great contrast to the available Unrestricted funds.

The Unrestricted reserves remained the biggest concern, along with cashflow and the deficit budget and careful balancing of policies was required. The nurturing of the fragile recovery was key, and the discussions to come on Total Return Accounting had a part to play in this.

The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) asked if there was any income expected following the Bishop of Sheffield’s proposal for the fairer sharing of equity between better off dioceses and those less well off.

The Finance Director answered that he did not anticipate that Lichfield would be in receipt of such income.

The Chairman commented that fees were a very important income stream in our diocese, and he urged members of General Synod to be robust, should a proposal to abolish fees be raised again.

The Finance Director then moved that:

*The Summary Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Diocesan Board of Finance for the year ending 31st December 2022 be received.*

This was voted upon and unanimously carried.

## **6. Total Return Approach (DS23/06/02a /b)**

The Finance Director spoke to the previously circulated papers and gave a presentation on Total Return Approach (TRA). He began by thanking those who had attended a “Q and A” session the previous evening where a detailed discussion on TRA had taken place. He reiterated the problem we faced in bridging the £1.5 million funding gap caused mainly by the drop in income. He explained that Boards of Finance had been allowed to adopt TRA since 2013. In simple terms, this allowed the increase in value of an investment, e.g., land, property, stocks and shares, to be used as income, and this applied to endowment funds only.

He explained that the proposal now brought was the result of two years of work and deliberation involving the Finance and Assets Management Committee, Diocesan Investment Group and the Risk and Audit Committee including many robust conversations. The overarching principle was that the DBF’s needs now must be balanced with its needs for the future. He illustrated how this could be achieved through TRA allowing pressure on parishes to be alleviated. He noted also that the required funds could not be found through cuts alone (e.g., through Shaping for Mission). There had been significant capital gains and it was noted also that TRA was used by the National Church, around 50% of dioceses and the CCLA. The need to protect capital was paramount though and built into the policy would be protection against inflation. A capital gain would be set

by the Investment Group, estimated at 4% per year. He ended by showing a worked example of how TRA would work in practice, adding that the approach would allow us to use our resources as we wished, alleviating the pressure on parishes and the need for cuts. He felt very strongly that this was the right solution at this time, and perhaps the only solution.

The Chairman pointed out that the adoption of TRA, whilst boosting reserves, did not improve the cashflow situation. The Finance Director endorsed this comment, adding that the measures in place to manage and improve cashflow would be ongoing.

Dr Michael Davie (Oswestry) thanked the Finance Director for the previous evening's meeting, which had been helpful. He then asked if the recommended 4% per year for capital growth had been recommended by the Charity Commission, or was to be set by Synod, and could it be changed year by year.

The Finance Director answered that there was no recommendation on this from the Charity Commission, and many charities did not make this provision. The figure of 4% had been decided by the Diocesan Investment Group, who believed it was a fair view of historical growth required to beat inflation over a long period of time. It was possible to build in the option to change this but he felt that the minimum should be 4%.

The Chairman then commended and moved the following:

*This synod approves the proposal set out for the Diocese to proceed with the adoption of a Total Return Approach*

This was voted upon and was clearly carried with 4 abstentions.

## **7. The Appointment of Auditors**

The Chair of the Board of Finance moved that:

*on the recommendation of the Bishop's Council, Hays McIntyre be reappointed as Auditors until the next AGM, and that the Chairman and Secretary be authorised to determine their remuneration within the budget*

This was voted upon and unanimously carried.

*The Chair of the House of Laity assumed the Chair*

## **8. Thanks to John Naylor**

The President then paid tribute to the Chair and all that he had given during his time in the role, reflecting on the 7 years they had worked together. He spoke about John's wide-ranging skills and attributes and particularly about his contribution to dealing with the financial impact of the pandemic, worth with Education in the diocese and ministry in his own parish. He expressed synod's heartfelt gratitude to John, and this was greeted with warm applause.

## **9. Shaping for Mission**

The Diocesan Secretary introduced this item, saying that she felt there was a perception that the process had stalled. She reiterated this certainly was not the case, and the process was essential to our mission. She accepted though that communications on the matter had been quieter recently. Many of the recommendations coming from deaneries were now progressing, however legal processes could be extremely slow and laborious. The process had been about encouraging deaneries to think innovatively about the mission offered, and also to address some of the financial challenges outlined earlier. The focus of this item was missional initiative and

creativity, and speakers from each Episcopal Area and the Central Sector would be speaking about initiatives, work and actions taking place in their respective Areas.

The Revd Ray Gaston, of Wolverhampton S.Chad and S.Mark, spoke about its extensive work with asylum seekers, many of whom were accommodated in the local area. He told how the work had been inspired and was carried out, including “Sanctuary Socials”, celebrations, a mental health project and a sanctuary garden with varied wildlife. Support was also offered in terms of taking part in demonstrations and fighting deportations, as well as practical and moral support and prayer. Sacramental worship was central to all that was done, with several outward facing events and processions and engagement with intercultural worship, music, signs and symbols. Also central was sanctuary in Christ for all.

The Diocesan Secretary thanked Ray for his presentation and led prayers for this important work.

The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent then spoke about reorganisation that was taking place in Hartshill, Penkhull and Trent Vale, and Trentham church. She spoke about the priorities that had emerged from Stoke-on-Trent Deanery’s Shaping for Mission discussions - help people flourish in Christlikeness; grow healthy congregations and inspire leaders to lead; with the aim of allowing all churches to thrive. A range of practical measures to achieve this aim had also been produced. She then spoke about the Benefice of Hartshill, Penkhull and Trent Vale, where there had been a vacancy for some time. Two of the congregations had been in significant decline, one to single figures, one congregation had grown through regular prayer and work on community connections, there were poor relationships between one parish and the others, and a feeling of disempowerment amongst local leaders. She explained that there had been discussions with each parish about their own sense of mission and identity, where natural partnerships would lie, and whether rearrangement of the benefice would be helpful, along with encouragement to engage in regular prayer. The outcome had evidenced little sense of ownership of the current arrangements but a desire for the benefice to remain together. There had also been sense that Hanford and Trentham seemed natural potential partners, despite a difference in tradition. This had led to the establishment of a new network based on shared values, with no pastoral reorganisation, with the Vicar of Trentham also becoming Team Leader and Priest in Charge of the benefice. There would also be two Associate Ministers (one with central funding), and potentially an additional Self-Supporting Associate Minister. This was supported by a five-year plan for growth and sustainability. As a result, two of the churches were growing, there was a sense of anticipation and excitement, with cooperation between parishes over governance. Trentham’s vision of its role in resourcing others continued to grow, and this progress continued despite last year’s serious fire at Trent Vale.

The Archdeacon of Salop then spoke about St Peter’s Monkmoor, the daughter church of Shrewsbury Abbey. Historically the two had been served by the Vicar of the Abbey. In the last decade the congregation of the Abbey had been declining and ageing, and so financially the parish with the two churches could no longer sustain a full-time priest. Also, the Abbey needed some focussed work to clarify its role, and it would not be possible for a 0.5 priest to do this whilst also looking after St Peter’s. Therefore, a decision had been taken to split the parish in two, with a 0.2 House for Duty Priest for St Peter’s. The two churches saw this as an opportunity to explore the particular mission imperative presented to them by their own context. For St Peter’s this meant finding effective ways to connect with the large population living in the housing estate that surrounded it. This had already begun to bear fruit, and the church no longer saw itself as an “add-on” to the Abbey, but standing in its own context. The developments had been led and sustained by lay people. He spoke about the services and events taking place on a weekly basis, several of which were attended by non-church goers, and groups for parents and carers of toddlers and babies, which had led to several baptisms. It was also a dementia friendly

church with a weekly event for dementia sufferers and carers, and warm spaces had welcomed people from November 22 until March this year. There were weekly Bible Study and prayer groups, and a monthly overnight prayer vigil. The first Messy Church held earlier this year had ended with seventy-nine people attending tea in the church hall. The sense of excitement coming from the developments since the new arrangements was evident and he felt that this underlined three important principles to guide the ongoing process of Shaping for Mission:

- Lay members of the congregation have found a voice and a vitality which is rejuvenating the church.
- Worship and prayer are the heartbeat of the church's life and mission – resulting in confidence and joy.
- Awareness of this church's context has been the key to engaging missionally with the community reaching people of all ages.

The Archdeacon of Lichfield spoke about how support from the centre came through, in the Mission Team's priorities linking to the themes emerging from deaneries. These included a focus on training, children and families and schools, particularly on simple, doable, practical actions such as training for "Open the Book", mission and welcome, payer and making statistics serve a purpose. The links between schools, homes and churches, which had been supported by Synod through Growing Faith, was bearing fruit across the diocese. There was a noticeable sense of cooperation and collaboration which had come from many of the deanery visions, and this was being worked out in helping deaneries to network. There was also work to find Mission Champions in each deanery who would encourage and empower each other and enable others. These were just some of the ways in which deanery visions were being out into practice. A new Mission for Ministry Development post was in the process of recruitment which would link in with the lay ministry work carried out by Clare Whitney. She ended by saying that the Mission Team's role was to encourage, through practical support, the living out of faith, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to put God's visions for our deaneries into practice.

The Diocesan Secretary then gave an update on the deployment and financial changes that had resulted from Shaping for Mission so far. At this point twenty full time equivalent posts had come out of the budget, and by the end of 2024 it was expected that the figure would be twenty-four. There had also been cuts of £350,000 to the central budget. Although the process of cuts was painful, she hoped what had been said illustrated that the process was bearing fruit and was very much ongoing.

Mr John Clark (Stafford) asked the Agenda Planning Committee to consider including a further item on this at a future meeting, as he felt this very important matter required a more detailed discussion.

Dr Ros Clarke (General Synod) noted the current vacancy rate in the diocese of 19%. She asked how this was being dealt with, whether it was a policy, a recruitment problem, whether efforts were being made to change it, and what was its impact of Shaping for Mission. The Diocesan Secretary replied that this was a matter of great concern and was certainly not a policy. There was a serious recruitment problem, which was possibly worse in the Stafford and Wolverhampton Episcopal Areas. Every effort was being made to recruit where possible, but the situation was reflected nationally. She asked for members' prayers for this very concerning issue. The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod) commented on the power of storytelling as a tool for revitalisation, as had been illustrated earlier. She then reflected on the experience in her own deanery of feeling that the SfM process itself had been centrally driven and quite constrained, and it had been difficult to connect the process to the questions that needed to be asked.

Mr Mike Whittaker (Stoke-on-Trent) thanked the Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent and the Bishop of Stafford for their support in the changes at Hartshill, Penkhull and Trent Vale. He spoke of the enthusiasm and excitement in the benefice and also in Trentham, and this continued as the licencings for the new roles approached.

The Chair thanked all who had spoken, reiterating the importance of these stories.

## **10. Question Time**

A paper had been circulated containing nineteen questions and written answers. The following supplementaries were then raised:

Referring to question 1, Ros Clarke (General Synod) asked for clarification of the precise language of the proposals from the House of Bishops in respect of Living in Love and Faith. Bishop Michael confirmed that the proposals were to make available for those who wished to use them, prayers for the blessing of people in certain kinds of same sex relationships.

Referring to question 4, The Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) asked who the members of the Risk and Audit Committee were. The Diocesan Secretary agreed to provide him with this information.

Referring to question 8, the Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) added that there was a second Chaplain for the LGBTQ+ community in the diocese who wished to live celibate lifestyles, and asked if this ministry could also be affirmed. Bishop Michael concurred that the Revd James Gandon had been appointed in this role alongside the appointment of Matthew Edwards referred to in the paper.

Referring to Question 12 (and the answer given to Question 11), Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) thanked Bishop Michael for the answer given, but asked, given the desire for transparency, whether as part of the vacancy process there would be a requirement for parishes to consider whether or not they wished to recruit a priest who would conduct Prayers of Love and Faith, despite the division this was likely to cause in many churches, and how would a scenario whereby an appointee held opposing views to that of the parish be managed, given the desire to honour the conscience of the priest.

Bishop Michael replied firstly by saying that the prayers, their form, the authority on which they were offered and the basis of decision as to whether they were offered was still under discussion, so it was not known at this point exactly how they would look when offered to parishes. Secondly, he said that appointment processes varied, and many were carried out by patrons and were not directed by the Bishop. He felt that the third part of the question was hypothetical, and therefore was unable to answer it.

Referring to Question 14, Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) asked about the work being done by Bishop Jonathan Clark, as to whether it was a full-time paid role.

Bishop Michael answered that it was a 50% role for which the remuneration would be provided by Church Commissioners.

In response to Question 15, Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) what were the reasons for the difficulty in recruiting clergy.

The Diocesan Secretary said that she was unable to fully answer this question, but there were fewer ordinands nationally, and the diocese was perceived as less attractive than others such as

London and those in the Home Counties, and some of our poorer parishes were less popular. She did not feel there were reasons connected to parish profiles or what the diocese was doing, but scarcity was the main problem.

Mrs Locke said she felt that there was a lack of coherent vision in the Church of England currently.

The President closed the meeting in prayer.

The following items were deemed to have been noted by the Synod:

- Standing Committee Report (DS23/06/04)