

LICHFIELD DIOCESAN SYNOD – 18th November 2023

QUESTION TIME

*** question to be passed to Bishop Michael for response on his return**

1. *The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) has asked:*

Given the strategy of DVE for the Diocese, what is the mechanism whereby parishes may know about tools designed to assist their mission such as the recently released “Thrive” course for Multi Parish Benefices?

The Head of the Mission Team replied:

Thank you for this question which is a really helpful one. There is a huge range of resources available for discipleship, vocation and evangelism as well as for the mission and maintenance of church in all its settings. The question of how parishes hear about and evaluate them is an important one. Perhaps there is a general question (about resources) and a specific one (about Thrive) and I try to answer both below.

In general, there are several ways that ministers in parish could hear about new tools, each useful in its own way:

- Through conversations with others in ministry, chapter meetings, at clergy conference, at training events, the diocesan Facebook community page;
- Through the work of diocesan officers and senior clergy e.g. through the Bulletin, training sessions and events, parish/deanery visits etc;
- Through their own research (nowadays much easier especially online);
- Through their own connections and networks (e.g. cell groups, parachurch networks, etc).

Ultimately parishes, (like schools, fresh expressions and chaplaincies) are responsible for discerning their own next steps in mission. However, diocesan colleagues seek to provide as much support as possible, and they can often help network clergy and lay ministers across the diocese.

Diocesan officers may bring specialist knowledge in their own areas (such as schools, fresh expressions, children’s and families work). Sometimes diocesan colleagues do not have expertise, but a missional challenge still needs addressing (e.g. New Housing). Where a concern like New Housing has been identified as a priority, e.g. through Shaping for Mission Deanery Visions, we offer forums and bring expertise in from outside.

In specific relation to Thrive – this does not fall into either of those categories (we haven’t employed diocesan expertise on mission in multi-parish benefices, and also it didn’t seem to emerge as a priority from Shaping for Mission). Nonetheless where parishes have used and tested resources such as Thrive and found it effective, our Mission Team seeks to find ways to share good practice if it will help others in their own contexts. We recognise that in situations like this, the real expertise comes from the ground and that our role is to facilitate and support learning that happens elsewhere.

2. *The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Utttoxeter) has asked:*

What update can the bishops give on the strategy for clergy wellbeing in the diocese?

The Bishop of Stafford has replied:

The bishops and all members of the Bishop's staff team are keenly aware of the pressures on clergy in recent times, pressures exacerbated, but not necessarily caused, by the Covid 19 pandemic and its aftermath. The Diocese continues to offer a range of resources designed to support clergy through more stressful times or to offer strategic, reflective, and spiritual accompaniment. To this end we offer support through the Listening Ear counselling service, supported and facilitated conversations, pastoral supervision, reflective practice groups and spiritual accompaniment. Full details can be found on the Pastoral Care and Wellbeing page on the Diocesan website.

The "brief" for clergy wellbeing was previously held by Bishop Clive and I have now taken this on in recent months. There was an extensive discussion at the Bishop's Staff Residential last month and it will be an agenda item on the next Bishop's Staff Meeting. Alongside this, I am very glad to hear from all those concerned with clergy wellbeing (and that is not just the clergy themselves!) about ways in which we develop this area.

In terms of a strategy, this is a matter for the whole church, not just clergy or the senior staff. I suspect we will need to think about how we understand the changing role of clergy and what are appropriate expectations. We need to look at how we can offer high quality support that enables clergy to build resilience so that they can flourish in their vocation and ministry. We will also have to ask questions about the structures and shape of parochial ministry.

3. *The Revd Preb Brian Leathers (Utttoxeter) has asked:*

Can our bishops confirm they will maintain the doctrine of the Church of England contained in Canon B30 until such time as it is legally changed?

The Bishop of Shrewsbury has replied:

Yes, we can confirm.

4. *The Revd Dr Abbie Walsh (Lichfield) has asked:*

As a member of the diocesan green team, I am conscious of the diocesan synod's commitment in March 2021 to become net zero by 2030. What steps have been taken, and what are the immediate next steps for the diocese and parishes?

Diocesan Environment Officers are a key point for advice, co-ordinating and receiving national initiatives and strategy. In many dioceses these are part- or full-time roles. In the last year, we have lost both our DEO and our lead bishop for the environment. Is there a plan to reappoint to either of these roles, and if not, how will this vital work be progressed?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Thank you for this question. You are right to note we have lost key personnel in this initiative in the last few months and therefore some momentum too.

Last week I had a conversation with the national church team and am in the process of submitting a bid to them for a substantial grant that will enable us to employ a full time net zero project manager. This funding should be with us in early January 2024 and probably give us three to four year's funding. It is also our intention to consider employing a part time DEA to head up the Green Team and help us with the hearts and minds work. Our progress in this area will be a substantive item at the March Synod.

5. Mr Christopher Corbet (Wem and Whitchurch) has asked:

Having regard to

- The possible withholding by parishes of common fund now or as a result of the past and likely future attempts by the House of Bishops to bring in prayers for same sex couples: (There are reports, particularly of London evangelical parishes, withholding parish share or common fund following on proposals by the Bishops of "Prayers of love and faith" and their chosen procedures for introducing them.)
- The dissenting 11 or 12 members of the House of Bishops of General Synod having written about dangers to the stability, mission and unity of the church arising from a number of aspects of the way in which the House of Bishops are proposing to introduce the prayers. (These aspects are summarised in the statement of the dissenting Bishops and more fully explained by Revd Dr Andrew Goddard in <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/another-fine-mess-a-guide-to-where-we-are-with-11f-pre-general-synod/> concluding:

"However, the bishops' attempt to say doctrine remains unchanged while changing liturgy is finally having to acknowledge it has failed. Now it is being stated that the failure here is not "in any essential matter" and can be justified by the new concept of "pastoral provision in a time of uncertainty". The reality is, however, much more a situation of competing and incompatible near-certainties on deep theological questions.

"The bishops' disregard for wise well-established procedures for handling contentious and divisive matters within the church also represents a serious and wide-ranging failure of leadership by the Archbishops and the House and is now creating "another fine mess" up to, through, and likely beyond, General Synod."

- The contradiction between the doctrine and the liturgy referred to above may make the church of England an object of ridicule if it retains a teaching role in relation to sexual morality or if it abandons such a role.
- Church of England is in decline and so is Christian identity.
<https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/is-church-attendance-in-england-and-wales-in-decline/> "Some churches, like the Church of England and Methodists are very good at counting attendance within their churches and these data sets clearly show decline." "It's probable there is also some conflation with decline in Christian identity, which is shown clearly through the Census."

- In the LDBF Budget 2024, there is no mention or apparent consideration of risks of reductions in income in relation to the above matters.

Please state how many parishes have withheld payment of some or all of their common fund payment in connection with the various proposals by the House of Bishops to commend Prayers to be used in relation to Same Sex couples and state how much has so far been withheld.

Please state how many parishes have warned that they will or may be withholding or will go on withholding common fund payments in the future in connection with the proposals by the House of Bishops of Prayers to be used in relation to Same Sex couples and please state what is the annual value of funds likely to be so withheld.

Please state in the light of the above, what allowance has been made and/or needs further to be made in the predicted income for this year 2023 and in a reasonably predicted income for the year 2024.

The Director of Finance and Diocesan Secretary have replied:

We have only officially been told by one parish that they are withholding their Common Fund due to this matter. However, after some discussion they are now contributing £1500 per month towards the stipend and related costs for their minister. We are aware of a second parish that have stopped paying Common Fund but have not been told the reason but do believe it is related to this issue. No other conversations have been had on this subject to date. We always encourage parishes to speak to us when there are any issues around common fund payment.

Despite no overt mention of this risk in the Budget document, please be assured we have taken the issue into consideration. It does appear as a high-risk area in the Diocesan Risk Register which affected our projections when the target receipts for 2024 were set in the budget. We also consider this risk when preparing cash flow forecasts. It is impossible to accurately factor anything in as right now it is an unknown quantity.

6. Mr Christopher Corbet (Wem and Whitchurch) has asked:*

Does the Diocesan Bishop (having publicly declared to the Diocese his support for what the House of Bishops were planning and proposing) have any guidance for the Diocese on the validity or otherwise of the adverse criticisms of the behaviour of the House of Bishops contained in the article by Revd Dr Andrew Goddard to be found at <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/If-will-it-all-now-end-in-tears/> posted 2nd November 2023? Could he please, in any event, identify which criticisms he regards as incorrect or misguided and his basis for that view?

The Bishop of Shrewsbury has replied:

The question asks for a personal analysis and critique from Bishop Michael on an article written by The Revd. Dr. Andrew Goddard. Bishop Michael's personal views on the General Synod votes on Living in Love and Faith were set out at the last Diocesan Synod. However, if this specific question is to be answered, it would need detailed input from Bishop Michael and accordingly can be addressed on his return from sabbatical.

7. Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) has asked:

Thank you so much for updating the Diocesan website with Diocesan Synod papers and notes of meetings.

Please can you indicate what progress has been made on providing the names of committee members for Diocesan committees so people can make contact with appropriate people when they have issues or concerns they wish to raise?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Jo has finished summarising all committee members and their names are now on the website. For ease and for GDPR purposes we have added one contact per committee.

8. Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) has asked:

Thanks to Simon Foster for sending me the most recent figures for the numbers of under 16s in church in 2022.

Can we please have the names of the 12 churches with 26-50 u16s and the 2 with 51+ u16s? And what work is being done to enable other churches to learn about youth mission and discipleship from these 14 churches with larger groups of young people?

The Head of the Mission Team has replied:

The churches which reported these figures are:

26-50 under 16s (October 2022)

St Andrew's Shifnal
Holy Trinity Oswestry
All Saints Wellington
St Mary's Stafford
Holy Trinity Berkswich
St John's Welcome Centre, Abbey Hulton
St James' Barton-under-Needwood
St John's Community Church, Chase Terrace
St Joseph's Merry Hill (Penn Fields)
St James' West Bromwich (including St Paul's)
St Martin's Bradley
St Matthew's Wolverhampton
St Peter's Collegiate Church, Wolverhampton

51+ under 16s (October 2022)

Trinity Churches Meole Brace
Trentham Parish Church (St Mary and All Saints)

Laura Edwards, Children and Families Evangelism Enabler, is working on a number of case studies learning from churches which we aim to publish in the new year. She has visited the majority of these churches and often signposts churches seeking to develop their children's provision to them.

9. *The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) has asked:*

In the last three years how many curates trained in the Lichfield Diocese have remained within the Diocese and have there been any common themes as to why curates have not remained within the Diocese?

The Ministry Training Enabler has replied:

As background information, Stipendiary Incumbent curates are granted a license at ordination to the diaconate for a period of up to 4 years although they can move on after 3 years. They can begin to apply from the January in their 3rd year, leaving them effectively 18 months to secure a first post of responsibility. 3D Coaching 'Moving on' material and training is provided for all curates at the beginning of their 3rd year of curacy to help equip them in finding the right post and I liaise with archdeacons and bishops about curates seeking posts and current vacancies.

Details of the current and previous 3 cohorts are as follows:

Cohort (Year ordained Deacon)	Number of Stipendiary Incumbents	Remained in the Diocese	Moved Elsewhere	Still serving curacy
2020	12	4	6	2
2019	9	4	5	-
2018	9	6	3	-
2017	15	11	4	-

Informal feedback suggests that generally curates would like to stay within the diocese but in recent years some general reasons for moving include:

- Moving back to family support networks (likely to increase the more we import candidates from other dioceses)
- Lack of suitable vacancy in a particular tradition
- Moving into chaplaincy role outside the diocese

10. *Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) has asked:*

Has the Diocese ever used settlement agreements to remove a member of clergy or a lay employee from post?

- a. Please could we know the numbers and the total cost for each of the years 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 so far
- b. How many of these were for allegations of pastoral breakdown and what were the reasons cited?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

As part of our Shaping for Mission initiative, the Bishop of Lichfield Diocese set out to offer all clergy over 63 a pastoral conversation about their future ministry. For some this gave a new injection of energy, others reflected on looking at alternative ministry in different parishes/chaplaincies and a number (8) opted for a more formal protected conversation that might lead to early retirement via a settlement agreement. Total cost has been £277,362 of which £125,00 was covered by a grant from the national church. All of these agreements were signed in 2022-23.

11. *Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) has asked:**

At the Diocesan Synod on the 18th March, Bishop Michael, in his presidential address, offered some thoughts on the LLF debate that had taken place at February's General Synod. In setting out where he stood on the issues, he said, inter alia, "I have also made it clear throughout my time in Lichfield that I accept and uphold the Church of England's teaching (as expressed in Canon B30) that holy matrimony is a lifelong union between one man and one woman, and I am not looking for a change in that teaching." On Wednesday 1st November the Church Times published a letter from a number of Bishops, apparently including Bishop Michael, which includes the following statement, "We look forward to Guidance being issued without delay that includes the removal of all restrictions on clergy entering same-sex civil marriages, and on bishops ordaining and licensing such clergy, as well as granting permissions to officiate."

Given that Bishop Michael is currently on sabbatical, is anyone able to confirm whether he has personally added his name to this letter and, if so, why has he changed his mind on this matter?

12. *Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) has asked:*

At the March Diocesan Synod, I asked what sympathetic episcopal oversight would be available to clergy in the light of all three Bishops maintaining the same line on the proposals arising from Prayers of Love and Faith. Bishop Michael agreed to consider that further and I wonder whether there is any progress to report.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury has replied:

I'm afraid that I am not aware of + Michael's thinking on this but Matthew and I have already talked about putting together a letter to the clergy to go out as soon as possible next week re: care for their wellbeing at this time and the offer of pastoral conversation.

13. *The Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) has asked:*

We note that in the recent letter to the Church Times from 44 bishops, signed by all serving bishops in our diocese, that it was noted that "Many of us regret that the authorisation of the separate Service Structures and Sample Services has been delayed". Could our bishops confirm whether or not they are included in this 'many'?

The Bishop of Shrewsbury has replied:

As reported in a Church Times article dated 1st November 2023, 44 bishops (including the bishops of Lichfield, Shrewsbury and Stafford) signed a joint statement which included a sentence expressing "regret that the authorisation of the separate Service Structure and Sample Services has been delayed". The three bishops from this diocese agreed with that sentiment. I would encourage all to read through the whole statement in full so that this sentence can be read in context. The overall statement was designed to sensitively and carefully reflect on how the out workings of LLF, requested by the General Synod in February of this year, can be taken forward with proper regard to differing convictions.

14. *The Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) has asked:*

What progress has been made in ensuring the remains of St Chad interred in the cathedral are signposted in an inclusive manner to enable all members of the diocese to be able to worship in the building?

The Acting Dean has replied:

Come and see! Members of the Chapter worked with members of the Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship on the wording of the notice at the entrance to the Lady Chapel where the remains of St Chad are interred, and reached wording we could all embrace. In the run up to Christmas last year, over 5000 requests for prayer were left in that area of the Cathedral and we distributed over 1800 free copies of Luke's Gospel.

15. *The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) has asked:*

What is the current parish vacancy rate for the Diocese? What strategies have the bishops considered for filling current vacancies?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

The vacancy rate has not materially changed since the June Synod and stands at around 19% at present. We have made some good recent appointments which will marginally impact on this stat as the year ends. Recruitment is not easy nation-wide at present but is worse in the North Midlands and the Northern province. We are making every effort to ensure our advertisements and parish profiles are of good quality and appearing in both newspapers and digital platforms and Bishops are seeking to pro-actively "headhunt" to vacancies using their own networks.

16. *The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) has asked:*

What work has the Diocese done to ascertain which clergy families will be adversely affected by the migration of Child Tax Credit to Universal Credit? How many families in the Diocese are likely to be affected and what mitigations are being considered?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

To be honest no work has been done on this. The Diocese does not have any formal records of personal financial circumstances, so I am unable to give you an accurate answer as to how many families are affected. Clergy should always feel able to discuss such issues with their Archdeacons who in turn have access to some extraneous funds that may help. The clergy support fund also offers independent and confidential advice and help.

17. *The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) has asked:*

Historically Lichfield Diocese has had important companion links in the worldwide Anglican Communion. Could you please give an update on the state of the relationship with the Diocese of SE Asia (Singapore, W.Malaysia, Kuching and Sabah)?

The Bishop of Stafford has replied:

Working Groups for Global Partnerships 2023

At the February meeting of the working group leaders, Wendy Ford reported that the link with both Kuching and West Malaysia had been lost. However, she reported in September that, with encouragement from +Michael, she had again emailed +Moon Hing, who put her in touch with Revd David Rajiah, prayer coordinator for West Malaysia. He now sends his detailed monthly prayer diary to both Wendy and Denise, which is used in our prayer diary and shared with Wendy's two prayer support groups. As the Diocese of Malaysia circulated a statement in July 2023, saying they will not be working or sharing fellowship with dioceses which perform blessings of same sex marriages, the future of this link is still in doubt. However, Wendy has been encouraged by +Michael to continue to persevere for as long as the link continues.

18. *The Revd Mark Wilson (West Bromwich) has asked:*

How is the diocese going to redress the balance in the leadership of the diocese, given that it has been perhaps 30 or more years since any card carrying traditional catholic or conservative evangelical has held any senior leadership role in the diocese.

The Bishop of Shrewsbury has replied:

It is not easy to arrive at a wholly agreed definition of what "a card carrying traditional catholic or conservative evangelical" is. However, I strongly believe that over the last 30 years the varying traditions of the Church of England have been represented at episcopal level within this diocese. The question refers to "senior leadership role" - I believe honorary and assistant bishops, archdeacons and the Chief Executive exercise "senior leadership roles" within the Lichfield diocese. In this broader category, the representation of the diverse traditions within Anglicanism is historically (and currently) clearly evident.

19. *The Revd Mark Wilson (West Bromwich) has asked:*

Given that In the UK, 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent, of which up to 10 percent of people who are diagnosed with dyslexia, 6 percent with dyspraxia, 5 percent with ADHD and 1-2 percent with autism. Has the leadership of Diocese had neurodiversity training, to help them understand what a sizeable proportion of their Clergy and Lay Leadership are coping with?

If not, if it was offered to them for free, would the Diocesan Secretary and Diocesan Bishop be willing to take up that training?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Our Enabling Church Officer has recently been emphasising this issue, but I am not aware the senior leadership of the Diocese have received such training. Speaking personally, I would be most willing to attend training on this. We can ask Bishop Michael to join me on his return.

20. *The Revd Graham Adamson (Stafford) has asked:*

Given the role of Dioceses in consulting on LLF, how will the Diocese ensure that elections to Diocesan Synod are publicised prominently enough to ensure full diversity of views within the electorate? What will be done to encourage Deaneries to provide voters, and potential candidates, with the 'enthusiasm' and knowledge to fully engage with the election and nominations process?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

Jo Durber and I have already started to give this matter some thought and are planning a more pro-active approach to the next round of elections. We are currently working on an election sheet which we can bring to the March Synod for comment and then intentionally share it around the Deaneries to promote interest and awareness.

21. *The Revd Zoe Heming (General Synod) has asked:*

Question to the DVE/Mission team: With grateful thanks to the Bishops for encouraging us, in their recent Ad Clerum, to seek "to model a culture of speaking respectfully and lovingly about and to one another", has any strategy been considered to provide missional outreach to the LGBTQ+ community in the Diocese in order to encourage the calling of that community to discipleship, vocation and evangelism?

The Head of the Mission Team has replied:

Thank you for this question! No such diocesan strategy has been proposed or developed. However mission is often local and specific, and some churches' own mission strategies (along with some fresh expressions) speak directly or indirectly to the LGBTQ+ community or sections of it. There may be learning to gather and share which will strengthen the mission of other churches.

22. *Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) has asked:*

At the institution of a new Incumbent, the Bishop officiating publicly declares to the congregation that the Church bears witness to Christian truth as contained, inter alia, in the Book of Common Prayer. The prayer book affirms that marriage is to join together 'this man and this woman'. What has caused our bishops to depart from this view to include same sex marriage?

The Bishop of Shrewsbury has replied:

The question asks why bishops are departing from a stance that marriage is between a man and a woman "to include same sex marriage". I can confirm that the proposals passed at General Synod do not include or permit same sex marriage. The recent statement from bishops referred to in answer 13, reaffirms the position that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith "should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England".

23. *The Revd Kate Watson (Wolverhampton) has asked:*

How was the new diocesan post of ‘Strategic Ministry Development Officer’ conceived and developed? What involvement did parishes have in shaping the role according to their needs? What consideration was given to reflect the needs identified by Deaneries through Shaping for Mission? What training and resourcing gaps have been identified which are not already available from specialist parachurch organisations? How was the budget agreed and where is the funding coming from?

The Ministry Training Enabler and the Head of the Mission Team have replied:

The post was conceived and developed by the Mission and Ministry Teams, drawing together two half time vacant posts in their respective teams. These posts existed within the staffing provision agreed following the Shaping for Mission review of the Central Sector, and it was felt that a collaboration by the two teams, to be able to offer a full-time position would be expedient and beneficial to the aims of both teams.

Continuing ministerial development provision (CMD) for both clergy and lay ministry within the diocese needs strengthening to be able to offer a wide range of resource across parishes, chaplaincy, schools and Fresh Expressions. The current staffing level within the ministry team means that we might justifiably be seen to be operating in maintenance mode rather than proactively responding to specific and local need within the diocese. The intention is that the role will be fundamentally about supporting and resourcing mission in the diocese, providing a suite of training and development opportunity that is accessible and relevant to the challenges that ministers are facing. We therefore wanted to move away from what might be perceived as a traditional CMD role, focussed largely on solely supporting inherited models of ministry. Hence, the role is envisaged as ‘strategic’ in that it has been shaped to attend to the questions that are being asked; for the postholder to review and respond to the needs of deaneries and parishes that have been identified through the SfM process, and to identify where we might collaborate more effectively with parachurch organisations and plug gaps that are being identified. One such example of work in this area which we have begun is the developing collaboration with CMS in offering resourcing for ‘Pioneering Parishes’ to support parishes to grow in confidence in engaging in missional activity. We envisage that this new role will be able to focus more fully on the tailoring of the diocesan CMD provision to meet specific need and to further identify collaborative working with partner organisations.

24. *Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) has asked:**

Can the Bishop please explain why he chose to sign a controversial public letter to the Church Times whilst he is on sabbatical and not publicly available to explain his decision to clergy or laity in his Diocese?

25. *The Revd Andy Simpson (Tutbury) has asked:*

Given that election to Diocesan Synod is rarely a competitive process, unlike General Synod where people are elected following a manifesto, is it this Synod’s expectation that representatives (Lay and Clergy) have a responsibility to canvas and represent the majority view of the deanery they represent or are they at liberty to voice their own

personal opinions at Diocesan Synod on matters where a Deanery Synod vote has not been required?

The Diocesan Secretary has replied:

The Church Representation Rules 2022 set out the nomination and election process for diocesan synod members. However, there is no legal procedure which requires a diocesan synod member to canvass and represent the majority view of their deanery on a particular vote. Synodical governance, like all representational democracy, rest on robust interaction between the electors and their representatives, where it is incumbent on those holding office to carefully reflect on what their electors' views are on an issue (if they can be discerned), but a deanery synod has no legal standing to mandate a diocesan synod member to vote in a particular way.