

The second ‘virtual’ meeting of York Diocesan Synod took place during the second national ‘lockdown’ caused by the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating participation from members’ and officers’ own homes.

The meeting began with a substantial Presidential Address by Archbishop Stephen. He began with the last words of John’s Gospel:

“There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21. 25)

I don’t think John is just referring to all the things that Jesus said and did during his earthly ministry that didn’t get written down; he is thinking about all the things that Jesus continues to do through the life of his church. Through us.

The Archbishop invited us to look afresh at the task entrusted to us as the church in our part of the world, the ways that we live out that vision, and particularly the ways we express our vision to ourselves and the world.

He suggested a re-focusing of the vision we have come to express in the words Reach, Grow, Sustain along the following lines:

In the York diocese we are putting our energy into ‘Living Christ’s Story’; sharing a narrative of hope.

We will do this in four ways -

1. **Becoming more like Christ** – which means receiving and knowing the story ourselves. Before we do anything else we remember who we are: God’s beloved children, those whom he came to seek and save. We also remember that we know this story by prayer and service as well as by bible study and learning (we will also start to use the Christ centred and Jesus shaped language of the national vision and strategy).
2. **Reaching people we currently don’t** – by living and telling this story, remembering that the story we share is those two stories of what God has done in Christ and what God is doing through the Church down through the centuries and in us.
3. **Growing churches of missionary disciples** - which will be the best way of reaching new people and is the way we’ll grow those we reach, but also to strive to be younger and more diverse and to take on board what the national vision says about becoming a mixed ecology church. In every community we want our churches to be places where the story of Christ is known and lived out, and where we let those stories lead us in the ways we have seen in the Mustard Seed and Multiply initiatives.
4. **Transforming our finances and structures** so that together we can support a presence in all the neighbourhoods and networks of the diocese – to find a new story that will not just be about sustaining our life, but recognising that our life needs to be transformed in order to be an agent of God’s transformation in the world.

Following further discussion and amendment, particularly at Deanery level, Archbishop Stephen will be inviting the April 2021 meeting of Diocesan Synod to commit ourselves together to all this.

You can read the Archbishop’s full Address at bit.ly/ydsynodaddress201128

FINANCIAL REPORT AND 2021 BUDGET

Director of Finance Kathryn Rose spoke to a paper outlining both long-term trends in Diocesan finances and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and possibly beyond.

Due to major efforts and commitment from parishes, 2020’s Free Will Offers (FWO—the contributions made by parishes to the Common Fund which pays to support parochial ministry) have held up better during the pandemic than was initially feared; however this still entails an anticipated shortfall of 8% to 9% or £700,000

by the end of the year. It remains to be seen how or if this recovers as the pandemic eases.

As previous Synods have noted, Free Will Offers to the Common Fund have broadly remained static since the system was introduced in 2014, and even without the pandemic the Synod would be considering ways to ensure the long-term financial viability of our mission and ministry in the light of this.

Projections suggest that by 2023 the available funds held by the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) will have fallen to the threshold of four months’ working capital

(approximately £5m), set as the safe minimum sum to held in reserve.

Accordingly Synod heard that future planning must now include developing a picture for financial sustainability, as well as reviewing the vision and developing a ministry strategy. The timescale now requires us to consider reductions in the number of paid staff and office holders and a number of different scenarios are being modelled to support the consultations that will take place next year.

Synod approved the draft Diocesan Budget for 2021 contained in the motion, "**This Synod approves the Budget for 2021 and authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend a sum of £14,699,000 with the facility to draw up to £250,000 of contingency in addition from reserves.**"

TRANSFORMATION & STRATEGY; GENEROUS CHURCHES MAKING & NURTURING DISCIPLES

Bishop of Whitby Paul Ferguson introduced a brief update on some aspects of our programme of transformation and strategy, noting that much good work continues despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

• Multiply: Reaching those in their 20s to 40s

The team of 'Multiply Ministers' is now complete with all those funded by the national Church now in place. The Church Commissioners' Strategy & Development Unit (SDU) has conducted its first formal review of the project and confirmed that its original 'missional design' remains fit for purpose, although the pandemic is likely to slow the prayed-for development of new worshipping communities in many locations. It was acknowledged that additional national funding might be sought to help address this. multiplyreach.org

• Mustard Seed:

Growing disciples in places where life is tough

Despite the pandemic, the 'Stepping Up' programme of developing and discipling local leaders in selected communities is now under way and already bearing fruit, with further locations due to launch in the new year. Team Leader Heather Black has been joined by part-time Associate Team Leaders Liz Holdsworth and Canon Angela Bailey who bring skills of their own to the team. A review of progress of the nationally-funded project suggests that the pandemic is likely to slow progress in ways yet to be understood, but planning will take this into account and may involve seeking additional funding. Many individual stories of those already touched by Mustard Seed can be found at mseed.org

• Generous Giving and Stewardship

Anticipating that parishes' short-term priority is likely to be recovery from the downward pressure on giving from the COVID-19 pandemic, the team is shifting its focus for the present from the wider nurture of a culture of generosity and gratitude to God to the promotion of practical giving mechanisms including the Parish Giving Scheme, trailed at previous Synods and now up and running in the Diocese. One of the team of three, David Smallwood, retired in September and time is being taken to identify what skills are required in the changed situation before recruiting a replacement.

Team Leader Jo Beacroft-Mitchell and Adviser Sammi Tooze gave a presentation of the resources, advice and (currently online) training offered by the GGS team, targeted on the real and changing needs of parishes to promote generous giving in support of ministry and mission; these can be explored and engaged with at dioceseofyork.org.uk/generosity.

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Diocesan Director of Education Andrew Smith updated Synod on implementing strategy for Children and Young People, linked to Growing Faith. Of its stated priorities of engaging with families in churches, schools and households, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant a greater focus on households during 2020 and into 2021 and a consequent focus on developing resources and online events and support mechanisms. Meanwhile the particular needs of schools and teachers during the periods in which they have continued to work through the COVID-19 'lockdown' have been addressed with further online support, training and forums. Assistant Director Olivia Seymour reported on the Children of Light Festival planned for 20 March 2021 and the Easter Pilgrimage project.

CLERGY COVENANT FOR WELLBEING

Synod heard a presentation on the new national Covenant from Archdeacon of Cleveland the Ven Dr Amanda Bloor, who has undertaken her own research into clergy wellbeing, and then split into groups to consider ways in which the recommendations of the Covenant can be translated into improved care for the wellbeing and mental health of those ministering in the Diocese of York.

BUSINESS WITH BISHOPS

The Synod approved Archbishop Stephen's proposal to delegate certain functions to the Bishop of Beverley, the Rt Revd Glyn Webster, and to appoint the Rt Revd Richard Frith, a former Bishop of Hull who has moved to York following his retirement as Bishop of Hereford, as an Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of York.

- NEXT MEETING:** Saturday 17th April 2021