

Synod met at Manor Church of England Academy, York, on a chilly but bright Feast of St Andrew, Saturday 30th November.



NEW TRIENNIUM

This was the first meeting of the newly-elected Diocesan Synod for its three-year term or 'triennium'. The Houses of Laity and Clergy met to elect their new Chairs for the triennium: the Laity elected **Daniel Brookes**, long-serving Churchwarden at St Michael-le-Belfrey, York, in succession to General Synod Member Dr Nick Land, while the clergy re-elected **the Revd Becky Lumley**, Vicar of St Mary's, Beverley.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Archbishop Stephen spoke during a celebration of the Eucharist to begin the Synod.



*As soon as Judas had taken the bread,
he went out.
And it was night.
(John 13. 30)*

"In the Gospel of John, 'night' often represents spiritual darkness and separation from the light of Christ, the very opposite of what we read in the Book of Revelation where we are told that there will be no more night... no need for lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light, reigning forever.

"There are times in our own lives and in our life as the Church when it seems we have become separated from the light of Christ, where we have journeyed to places which seem incapable of illumination, where it feels like the darkness has won.

"And yet, we know from the opening verses of John's Gospel, that 'in him – (in Jesus) – God's word made flesh – was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' (John 1. 4-5)

"The Makin Review has brought our historic safeguarding failings and poor support for survivors into sharp focus.

"It reads as if night has fallen.

"No words, not even heartfelt words of sorrow and apology, can undo the damage done to people's lives both by one man and by

the failure of other individuals in the Church and other institutions to respond appropriately. The time the review has taken, as well as the details now in the public domain have been deeply retraumatizing for survivors. This as we know has led to the unprecedented resignation of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury—in my view, an honourable act of leadership for which I thank him. Please pray for him; but as I've already said, most of all pray for the victims and survivors of this abuse and that we, God's Church, may learn from this and change."

- **Read the full Presidential Address at www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/srb6**

LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

Following an introduction to Synod procedures by Diocesan Secretary Canon Peter Warry, Provincial Vicar General HH Canon Peter Collier reported on the current processes at General Synod arising from the introduction of Prayers of Love & Faith, and the likely consultations to follow with Diocesan Synods. He anticipated that supporting material will be available in good time for the 15 March 2025 meeting of Diocesan Synod.

- **Read Peter Collier's full report at <https://tinyurl.com/collier-llf>**

LIVING CHRIST'S STORY (STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT)

Archbishop Stephen and Diocesan Secretary Canon Peter Warry updated Synod on work done to re-frame the LCS process over the summer of 2024 and agreed by Archbishop's Council in October.

A revised structure will be overseen by a Project Board directly accountable to the Diocesan Leadership Team and including both those with responsibility for workstreams and representatives from across the diocese. Principal activity will be grouped broadly into Mission, Ministry and Discipleship; Parish Support; Deployment of People and Enabling Activity (such as Finance, Data and Communications). Peter outlined a number of posts to be filled in the coming months, some of which will be externally-funded to help enact and secure strategic developments (which in some cases it is hoped will attract further grants); others will be replacements for existing posts falling vacant, which are within existing budgets and enable the diocese to carry out its responsibilities and enact the wishes of Synod.

Short presentations followed on areas of activity now starting or re-starting, including by new Bishop of Selby the Rt Revd Dr Flora Winfield who will oversee the overall governance of the LCS programme ("Good governance and administration is a New Testament charism—the new Project Board will bring appropriate governance and challenge"), by new Bishop of Whitby the Rt Revd Barry Hill who will oversee activity around growing younger and more inclusive, Bishop of Hull the Rt Revd Dr Eleanor Sanderson who oversees development of spirituality and discipleship, and Archdeacon of the East Riding the Ven Andy Broom who continues to lead work with deaneries to implement the plans they began to develop in 2022.

FINANCE AND 2025 BUDGET

In introducing this item, Diocesan Board of Finance Chair Rodney Barton noted that Synod must take note of the gravity of passing another annual budget with a substantial deficit; this can be sustained for this year but not into the future.

Diocesan Finance Director Kathryn Rose reported that the financial deficit for 2024 is likely to be £644,000 less than originally forecast; this is due to un-planned delays in filling a number of vacant posts, improved performance by pension funds resulting in lower contributions from the Diocesan Board of Finance as an employer, and to various delays in carrying out planned property work that will instead take place next year. Free Will Offer received in 2024 has been largely as pledged, although it remains below the amount pledged before the pandemic struck in 2020.

The draft budget for 2025 entails a deficit of £2.3 million which is similar to the 2024 budget passed by Synod a year ago.

Kathryn noted that we are not yet seeing an overall financial impact of the Living Christ's Story growth strategy. It had been assumed that Free Will Offer (FWO) pledges would return to pre-Covid levels by 2023 and rise significantly by 2026; however the trend seen in 2025 pledges received so far suggests 2.1% above 2020 levels and 2.4% above 2024 pledges. Inflation since 2020 has been around 23% and so the shortfall is increasingly significant.

If FWO pledges had increased at the same rate as inflation over this period, the Diocese of York might be achieving a break-even budget in 2025, but this is not the case. LCS plans had originally been predicated on each Mission Unit covering the direct cost of its ministry through its Free Will Offer in 2026; this now seems unlikely.



The budget includes provision for a 3% pay rise for clergy and staff in April 2025, but implementing this is a decision to be taken next year.

It is expected that by the beginning of 2025 our reserves will have fallen to the minimum threshold of four months' expenditure, and if nothing else changes, will remain there until falling further in 2028. Kathryn noted however that funding released by the DBF's adoption of Total Return Accounting, plus the prospect of some sales of un-needed property, could extend this until 2031, while there is a possibility of an award of external funding in late 2025 which could significantly change the situation.

In answer to questions from the floor, Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) Chair Rodney Barton said that if budget cuts become necessary it will be the DBF that must make the final decisions but that all of us would be involved. Kathryn Rose added that every

vacant post is carefully scrutinised before being filled, and that it was important that the diocese take any opportunity to submit external funding bids in 2025.

Archbishop Stephen noted that a number of parishes are in possession of some very large sums in cash reserves, and that conversations may be needed about how this is used for the work of the gospel: "We are responsible for the mission and ministry of God's church; this is the culture change needed in the Church of England.

"If you had any idea that this was someone else's responsibility, cast that demon out—it's ours."

DBF Chair Rodney Barton proposed a motion approving the 2025 draft budget and authorising expenditure of £16,882,000; Synod passed the motion unanimously.

CHILDREN & YOUTH

New Bishop of Whitby the Rt Revd Barry Hill, whose brief encompasses Inclusion and Growing Younger, introduced Angela Brymer who was appointed Diocesan Children & Youth Adviser earlier in 2024, to update Synod on current priorities for developing work in this area, including development of a framework for hearing the voice of Young People in the life of the diocese and building up the network of those committed to this important ministry.

FROM LAMENT TO ACTION

Bishop Barry introduced Co-Chairs of the diocesan Racial Justice Group, Yvonne Bowling and the Revd Rob Suekarran who described the work of the Racial Justice Group since its commissioning by



Diocesan Synod a couple of years ago. Yvonne evoked a very vivid picture of the lives and experience of the Windrush Generation in the UK, from whom she is descended, to illustrate the urgency of the predicament faced by those whose ethnic heritage differs from the UK majority.

Yvonne and Rob introduced Gerald Fox, who began work recently as diocesan Racial Justice Education Enabler, funded by the national church as part of its response to the report 'From Lament to Action'. Gerald is beginning to work with parishes and deaneries in building awareness of unconscious bias and complacency, and why this matters regardless of local demographics.

"We're in this for the long haul—it's hard and difficult work," said Gerald.

NEXT MEETING

Saturday 15th March 2025, probably in person (rather than online) but this to be confirmed.