

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod
12th November 2022, at 9.30 am at Staffordshire University Academy**

Present: The Bishop of Lichfield (President)
 The Bishop of Wolverhampton
 The Bishop of Shrewsbury
 The Bishop of Stafford
 45 clergy members
 38 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)

Apologies: 19 clergy members
 24 lay members

The President assumed the Chair

1. Welcome and Opening Worship

The President welcomed all, and the Archdeacon of Lichfield led an opening act of worship. It was noted that David Beswick was unwell, and members were asked to keep him in their prayers. The Diocesan Secretary thanked members for their support during her recent absence.

The president also was pleased to note the appointment of the Revd Treena Larkin as his Chaplain.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings (DS22/11/01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2022 were approved and signed accordingly. There were no matters arising.

3. Presidential Address

The President gave his address, setting the theme of generosity for the meeting. Generosity, he said must be the norm, by which we learned to live. He spoke about the Generous Hope seminars which had taken place earlier in the year, where the pattern of giving expected by the New Testament of the early church had been considered, and how that might look in the life of our Church today. He noted also that the budget debate on the agenda would highlight the need for us to address a serious and persisting deficit in our diocesan finances. This could mean some difficult decisions which were already being engaged with through the Shaping for Mission process, but how much more fruitfully we could shape our sharing God's mission if we could strengthen our finances through greater generosity in giving. He acknowledged that this was difficult in the current circumstances, but it was in hard times that generosity proved its worth. As well as the individual response, he was encouraged by the stories of churches supporting each other (see the diocesan website [here](#)) but there was some way to go in order for the diocese to become like the family of churches in 2 Corinthians. He noted also the support that was to be put in place for clergy, including a 5% stipend increase, and grants to help with heating and fuel costs. He acknowledged the many in society who were anxious about the cost of living and

particularly energy costs as winter approached, and to show the true face of our generous God, we must find practical ways to reach out in welcome, support and care. Our church buildings were a great means by which to do this and many were already responding to this challenge. He mentioned in particular St Andrew's, Shifnal, Ipstones and St Michael's, Lichfield (see website [here](#)). A generous grant had also been made by the Church Commissioners to assist churches with heating costs, and a proportion of this was in the process of allocation to parishes. Some of this funding was also available to assist churches in using their buildings in creative, imaginative and generous ways to provide welcome and comfort for people in the wider community, which he believed was the right and Christian action to take, and also for a missional reason following the pandemic when churches had had to close. He hoped that churches across the diocese would think about how they might do this imaginatively and practically. He then invited members to discuss in groups to gather wisdom, experiences and suggestions to strengthen us all in responding to the challenging situation we faced.

The Chair of the House of Laity assumed the Chair

4. Table Talk (DS22/11/02)

A paper had been circulated containing verse 4 of the hymn "Christ, be our light" and some questions around this for consideration. Following group discussion, the following feedback was given:

John Naylor (Ex-officio) spoke about the idea of a "blessings cupboard" which could contain items not available at food banks, such as toiletries, gifted by the congregation and available to those attending warm spaces.

Jill Hope (Lichfield) spoke about what churches were already offering, such as hot drinks, warm spaces and transport. There had been a suggestion of providing heated fleeces, which were a low-cost way of keeping a person warm.

The Revd Mary Thomas (Edgmond and Shifnal) said that her group had suggested heated seating pads.

The Revd Kate Watson (Wolverhampton) spoke about the importance of liaising with local social prescribing teams to inform them of what churches were offering so that they could signpost people needing our hospitality.

The Revd Lisa Harper (Telford) said that her group had discussed the differences in needs between deprived and affluent areas, and how the more affluent could support the less well off with time, money and effort.

Ros Clarke (General Synod) said her group had spoken of the importance of contextualising solutions in different places, looking at what was practical in a specific place.

The Revd Tim Vasby-Burnie (Shrewsbury) spoke of the importance of offering a warm welcome alongside a warm space, with volunteers who could talk to and befriend people where appropriate, to ensure a welcome into the warmth of Christ's love.

The Revd John Grice (Tamworth) spoke about using surplus heat, for example after a service when a building had been heated, could we make use of that space?

The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone), said that his group had discussed the importance of partnership, noting that many projects involved links with other organisations, and this could be helpful regarding resources, personnel and funding.

The Revd Simon Foster (Mission Team Leader) said that his group had noted that the emerging model of warm spaces was gaining momentum but had asked how we could find out what people needed, rather than assuming this and also what people would participate in. Also they had discussed partnership with schools, as they had very strong community links and awareness of needs.

Michael Davie (Oswestry) said that his group had talked about the differences between urban, suburban and rural communities, and the importance of engaging with other providers such as food banks.

The Revd Matthew Lefroy (Edgmond and Shifnal) added that his group had discussed how to reach those who did not feel able to access what was being offered, and also about how to help people outside of daytime hours.

All written comments were collected by the Diocesan Secretary.

5. Approving the 2023 Budget (DS22/11/03)

The Chair of the Board of Finance introduced the budget for 2023, which, he said was the most difficult in his time as chair, as that it showed an operating deficit of £1.65 million. The main underlying reason for this was the decline in Common Fund contributions, which had been £11.4 million in 2015 and were expected to be £9.5 million in 2023. As illustrated in the circulated document, the subsidised cost of deployment had been frozen at £56,500, but the real cost was now £63,597 per full time post. It was proposed to increase clergy stipends by 5% from January 2023, and total deployment would be reduced by 10.05 posts, retaining the vacancy factor at 11%. For lay staff a salary increase of 2% was proposed, and a £1200 payment in recognition of the current circumstances. Overall budget expenditure would be reduced by 2.76%. We could draw on reserves, but these could be exhausted in around four years if action was not taken.

The Director of Finance then presented the 2023 budget, which had been approved by Bishop's Council in its capacity as Directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance. He agreed with the Chairman's comments but hoped that this budget was a starting point from which to move forward over the following years. It was likely that the deficit illustrated would remain for some years to come, and management of this would be the key, along with the careful monitoring of cashflow. He then presented the budget in detail, speaking to the previously circulated document.

Michael Davie (Oswestry) asked whether the clergy pension scheme was contributory, and also asked for clarification on "National Church IME" and "National Church Contributions" which were items of expenditure in the budget.

The Director of Finance answered that the clergy pension scheme was non-contributory, other than Additional Voluntary Contributions, and the figure in the budget was what we were legally required to pay.

He then explained that IME was related to curates, training and ordinands.

The Chairman added that what we received from the National Church considerably exceeded what we paid into it.

Ros Clarke (General Synod) asked for clarification of the stipends figure illustrated, as it appeared to indicate a reduction rather than an increase.

The Finance Director explained that this was because it included pension contribution and National Insurance and these two elements had both decreased.

The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) asked for clarification on “General Synod Contributions”.

The Finance Director Explained that over several years this cost had remained stable, with the only adjustment being related to “pooling” which involved the number of ordinands a diocese put forward for training.

Bishop Michael added that this was not for the running of General Synod, but a number of services and support provided by the National Church. The Diocesan Secretary offered to provide a breakdown of this.

In response to a question from Stephen Clifford (Newcastle), the Finance Director confirmed that Common Fund requests would now include the real cost of deployment so that parishes were aware of the subsidy currently be contributed by the Diocese.

The Chair of the Board of Finance moved that:

the Board be authorised to expend in 2023 a sum not exceeding £16,051,744 as representing the net unrestricted expenditure for the year ending 31.12.23.

The motion was carried unanimously.

The Chair of the Board of Finance moved that:

The Board of Finance Budget for 2023 be received

This was carried unanimously.

The Chair thanked Synod for its support.

Members then divided into groups to discuss some questions on the budget. A summary of the questions and feedback is appended to these minutes.

6. Elections to Deanery Synods 2023 (DS22/11/05)

A paper had been circulated setting out the proposed representation on deanery synods for the elections in 2023.

Mrs Lilas Rawling (Lichfield) brought and spoke to an amendment to this, which proposed representation as follows:

- (a) *1 representative for parishes or District Council with under 26 names on the electoral roll;*
- (b) *2 representatives for parishes or District Councils with 26 - 100 names on the electoral roll;*
- (c) *1 additional representative for each further 100 names or part of 100;*

- (d) *1 additional representative from an authorised Team Council if the electoral roll exceeds 200*
(i.e. *District Councils or Team Council set up under a scheme approved by the Bishop's Council under the CRR applying at the time, or created by a Pastoral Scheme*).

Following initial comments, it was felt that further details of the implications of the amendment were needed in order for a decision to be made.

The Diocesan Secretary explained that Synod was required to approve representation by 31st December, and she offered to defer a vote pending further details being sent out to members.

After further discussion the Revd Richard Merrick (Wolverhampton) proposed that the current representation be approved for the 2023 elections, but that a review of the formulation of our deanery synods, including in the light of Shaping for Mission, should take place prior to the next elections.

Lilas Rawling (Lichfield) withdrew the amendment but asked Team Ministries to look at their constitutions and consider the issues before the elections in 2026.

The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod) proposed, and the Revd Martin Ennis (Wednesbury) seconded an amendment as follows:

The need for a review of representation, in the light of both Shaping for Mission and the issues raised by Lilas Rawling, has been noted. We will carry out detailed work in the next triennium to be as helpful as possible to parishes and to the wider scheme of representation.

Subject to this amendment, the current representation was approved with two abstentions.

7. General Synod Report (DS22/11/06)

Ros Clarke (General Synod) had provided a previously circulated report. She added that the matter of safer recruitment to PCCs which had been discussed at our Synod in March 2022 and were to be put forward to General Synod, had been progressed at the July sessions. She also noted that elections to the Crown Nominations Commission had taken place.

Members voted unanimously to receive the report of the July sessions.

8. Question Time

A paper had been circulated containing ten questions, six of which related to the recent installation of a relic at Lichfield Cathedral. Written answers had been provided and supplementary questions were asked as follows regarding these particular questions:

Josephine Locke (Newcastle) appreciated Bishop Michael's warm words about St Chad himself, but questioned whether it was appropriate to express this through the veneration of a relic, referring to points made in her original question. Following a Point of Order raised by Kate Cottrell (Rugeley) she added that she was concerned that people may venerate the relic over Jesus Christ, which, according to our articles, should not happen. She asked what Bishop Michael would do about this.

The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) thanked Bishop Michael for his written response. He asked for the advice of the Church of England's National Liturgical Adviser, referred to in the response, to be published.

The Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) thanked Bishop Michael for his acknowledgement that some people may find the installation of the relic objectionable, although it had gone ahead, which would cause objection and division. He felt that there had been no consultation in the diocese, so there had been no forum for objection, and now some clergy and laity in the dioceses, including himself, felt unable worship in the Cathedral due to the presence of the relic. He found this personally devastating. He asked Bishop Michael whether the benefits of having the relic were worth the distress and disunity it had caused?

Bishop Michael responded by thanking all who had raised questions and supplementaries. He added that the services marking the installation of the relic had taken place in the last week and he had found them to be powerful expressions of Christian unity, pointing us forward to the hope that we have in Christ. He fully appreciated though that some had found this a difficult decision on the part of the Cathedral. He added that the Dean wished to open up a conversation with himself and colleagues for anyone who had concerns about the installation of the relic. This would probably be in the new year, and he hoped it would be a forum to aid understanding on both sides of some of the issues at stake. He added that the relic was not placed in the Cathedral for veneration, but was a re-placing of part of the mortal remains of our first Bishop who was originally buried there. He acknowledged that visitors responded in different ways, but in his experience in the last few days the shrine had been a focus of prayer, which he hoped would continue. He referred to his written answer regarding the wording of the articles, and offered to speak to the National Liturgical Adviser regarding the sharing of the advice given.

Regarding question 8, Cyril Randles (Trysull) asked whether there was a commitment to the Finance Core Group not to use emergency powers.

Bishop Michael referred to previous discussion on this, adding that the matter was for Bishop's Council decision and would likely be discussed at the next meeting of that body.

Regarding question 9, The Revd Paul Darlington (Oswestry) was grateful for the written answer provided. However he felt that it allowed for a minister to teach in a way that contradicted Canon Law.

The Diocesan Secretary felt that this matter needed further consideration and possibly discussion and it was agreed that this would be arranged outside of the meeting.

+Michael thanked all for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting in prayer.

The following items were deemed to have been noted:

Standing Committee Reports (DS22/11/07)

Annual Report of the DMPC (DS22/11/08)