

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod
18th March 2023, 9.30am, Telford Minster**

Present: The Bishop of Lichfield (President)
The Bishop of Shrewsbury
The Bishop of Stafford
36 clergy members
37 lay members

In attendance: Mrs Julie Jones (Diocesan Secretary)
Mrs Lucy Pope (Head, Growing Faith Foundation)
Mrs Claire Shaw (Director of Education)
Mr Matthew Welton (Assistant Director of Education)
Mrs Alex Wolvers (Mission in Schools Enabler)
The Revd Simon Foster (Mission Team Leader)
The Revd Jeanette Hartwell (Ministry Training Enabler)

Apologies: The Bishop of Wolverhampton
The Bishop of Oswestry
12 clergy members
14 lay members

The President assumed the Chair

1. Welcome and Opening Prayers

Opening worship was led by the Revd Matt Beer. The President welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting (DS23/03/01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2022 were approved and signed by the President accordingly. There were no Matters Arising.

3. Presidential Address

In his presidential address, Bishop Michael spoke about his own reflections on Living in Love and Faith. He focussed on four areas: firstly, what had been agreed and what had not been agreed; secondly, his own position on this issue; thirdly, how this had been received within the diocese; and fourthly, support for people in what were unsettled times. He added that he had been working with colleagues across a range of views and experiences to put in place a pilot scheme for chaplaincy support providing a confidential safe space for listening, encouragement, spiritual and pastoral care, and signposting to other opportunities for support. This support would be made available for anyone in the diocese, both within the LGBT+ community and outside of it, who held different convictions on this issue. He asked members to pray for this pilot provision as it got underway, and also to keep praying for one another as we all sought to find the mind of Christ and to follow in his way.

Click [here](#) for the address in full.

Bishop Michael then spoke about the main business of the meeting, the Growing Faith vision and commitment to build up partnerships between our churches, schools and households in order to

help children and young people come to faith and grow in faith. This sat at the heart of our diocesan priorities and the Church's goals nationally. The 207 church schools and academies in the diocese were uniquely well placed to carry the faith forward to new generations. He was delighted to welcome Lucy Moore, Head of the Growing Faith Foundation to speak to Synod about this.

He noted that this was the final Synod meeting before the retirement of Bishop Clive and that a farewell service was to be held on 2nd April at St Matthew's Church, Walsall. On Synod's behalf he expressed blessings on +Clive and Jenny as they moved on.

He then also noted that this was the last Synod meeting for Claire Shaw, the Diocesan Director of Education who was leaving the diocese' employment in April. He added that Claire had championed the building of links between schools and churches throughout her time with the diocese and he was glad that Growing Faith was being discussed at this meeting. He added our gratitude for Claire's work through several strategic changes and challenges.

The Revd Preb Michael Metcalf, Chair of the DBE Committee, then paid a warm tribute to Claire, congratulating her on her new appointment and commented on how Claire had lived up to the demands of the role. He expressed sincere thanks to Claire for all she had done during her 7 years with us and wished her God's blessing for the future. +Michael then led Synod in prayer for Claire.

The Chair of the House of Clergy assumed the Chair

4. Growing Faith (DS23/03/02 and 03)

Mrs Lucy Moore, Head of the Growing Faith Foundation introduced this item, and the paper GS2121, a summary of Growing Faith, had been circulated. Lucy spoke about the objective of culture change that Growing Faith was aiming for, that all instinctively put children and young people at the heart of all that we did as a Church. Making this happen required profound change for the Church to provide what was needed by families, children and young people. The intersection of church, school and home was vital if the spirituality of young people was to flourish. She felt that now was a moment of opportunity to make a difference

Mrs Claire Shaw, Diocesan Director of Education, Mrs Alex Wolvers, Mission in Schools Enabler, Mr Matthew Welton, Assistant Director of Education, and the Revd Simon Foster, Head of the Mission Team gave a presentation (available [here](#)) on Growing Faith. A video ([here](#)) about Growing Faith in action in the Diocese was also shown.

Members were encouraged to look at the "resources" section on the DBE website [here](#).

Members then held small group discussions around where engagement opportunities, strengths and influence lay in their own parishes, and secondly to explore how churches currently cultivated relationships with children and young people and how we could engage together in taking this forward. Following the discussion groups written feedback was collected.

Mrs Claire Shaw then moved the following motion:

In view of the demographic age profile of the life of the diocese, this synod endorses the call for church schools and churches to work collaboratively in partnership to bring the gospel to families. As a synod we believe that strong partnerships between church (and community) schools and churches can develop discipleship, encourage vocation and inspire evangelism.

We recognise the strength, vitality and centrality of schools in many of our communities and their need for recognition and support in their mission. We aspire to a doubling of youth and children's work and the emergence of new worshipping communities in connection with schools.

Dr Ros Clarke (General Synod) said that she had requested to speak on this item but had not been called. She went on to speak against the motion, saying that churches grew through prayer, not through such initiatives, and challenged the idea that bringing children and young people into churches would also bring in the parents, and that relationships with schools led to an increase in children attending church. She supported these relationships but as a strategy for growth she felt it would not be effective. She believed that Christ was our past, present and future, and that church growth did not need a strategy but needed us to be faithfully praying and preaching the Gospel.

The motion was then voted upon and clearly carried with 2 against and 2 abstentions.

The Chair thanked all who had taken part in the presentation and discussions.

The Chair of the House of Laity assumed the Chair

5. General Synod Report (DS23/03/04)

The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod), spoke to the previously circulated report of the February sessions of General Synod, written by Matthew Edwards. The main item of business had been the discussion and decision on Living in Love and Faith.

The Chair then moved that:

This synod receives the report of the February Sessions

This was voted upon and clearly carried.

6. Question Time

A paper had been circulated containing 23 questions from members to which written answers had been provided by Bishop Michael and relevant diocesan officers. Twelve of these questions related to Living in Love and Faith.

Responding to question 2, The Revd Mark Wilson (West Bromwich) asked whether the diocese would encourage those who did not wish to use Prayers of Love and Faith to seek senior positions.

Bishop Michael answered that there would be no discouragement to people for this reason.

Responding to question 5, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) asked whether there was a "plan B" as he felt the church was so divided on this matter that the aim of unity was not realistic.

Bishop Michael answered that this was a period of discernment with conversations taking place nationally, but he could not give more clarity at this stage.

Responding to question 6, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) asked about the reporting structure regarding the Bishop of Ebbsfleet's role.

Bishop Michael explained the brief of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet, and confirmed that the Bishop would be answerable to him as an Assistant Bishop.

In response to Question 9, Josephine Locke (Newcastle) thanked Bishop Michael for his answer but was greatly saddened by it. This was acknowledged by Bishop Michael.

In response to Question 13, Mr John Wardle (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) requested that Synod receive reports on the progress of the Archdeacons in trying to increase the number of clergy school governors. The Diocesan Secretary agreed to liaise with the Chair of the DBE Committee on this and provide a response.

In response to Question 14, Mr John Wardle (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) asked for it to be made clear to Diocesan Synod that its role is to approve the Diocesan Budget.

Responding to Question 15, Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) asked for details of which “colleagues from other dioceses” might act as advisers during recruitment of senior staff.

The Diocesan Secretary gave the example of the recruitment of the Archdeacon of Stoke when an Archdeacon from another diocese had been asked to advise. When this was done it was to ensure that we were dealing with structural matters properly, understanding the national picture, and making sure that our perspective on senior ministries was rooted in the wider church, and not just in our own diocese.

Responding to Question 16, Amanda Robbie (General Synod) was pleased that benchmarking was taking place. She asked whether this was against particular dioceses of a similar size or was it more general. She asked if the detailed results could be made available to Synod members.

The Diocesan Secretary said it was possible to share the information on how Lichfield compared to other dioceses without divulging information inappropriately. She added that the survey currently did not take account of the sizes of dioceses and other factors such as geographical position had an impact on the data.

Responding to Question 18, the Revd Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter), asked how many diocesan homes had housed Ukrainian refugees.

The Diocesan Secretary did not have this information to hand but would supply a written answer.

Responding to Question 19, the Revd Brian Leathers (Uttoxeter) asked about the term “Clergy Spouse and Partner Officer”.

The Bishop of Stafford replied that there were some clergy who were in Civil Partnerships.

The Revd Brian Leathers also asked when the Clergy Spouse and Partner Officer had been appointed, what measures were in place to ensure that clergy spouses were aware of this and had a spouses’ network been considered.

The Bishop of Stafford agreed that the profile of the role needed to be promoted, regarding networking he said that this varied from place to place.

Responding to Question 20, Mrs Amanda Robbie (General Synod) was grateful for the information provided and asked if figures for 2022 were available yet, and also if the diocese could publish the names of the churches in the 3 largest categories, in order that they might be exemplars for others.

The Diocesan Secretary said that the 2022 figures were not yet available and would look into the publication of the information requested.

Responding to Question 21, Mrs Amanda Robbie was grateful for the answer provided. She asked if additionally, the minutes and question time papers from diocesan synods could be published so those outside of synod could access them.

The Diocesan Secretary said that this was possible and would be actioned. It was noted that Synod meetings were public and therefore others were welcome to attend as observers.

Responding to Question 22, Mr Chris Gill (General Synod) was grateful for the answer provided and assured Bishop Michael of his prayers as he took up the new role, noting also that it may be some time before a new Bishop of Wolverhampton was appointed, which also would have an impact on demands on Bishop Michael.

Bishop Michael noted this concern with thanks.

Responding to Question 23, The Revd Matt Beer (General Synod) asked, given the national strategy asking for 10,000 new churches to be placed across the Church of England, could we have a discussion at Bishop's Council on church planting, informed by a group of people passionate about the matter.

The Revd Simon Foster (Mission Team Enabler) said that he would be happy to frame such as discussion, and the Diocesan Secretary suggested the point should be taken to the Agenda Planning Committee for consideration.

7. West Bromwich Deanery Motion – Vexatious Complaints

The Revd Neil Robbie introduced a motion on behalf of West Bromwich deanery regarding provision for dealing with vexatious and malicious complaints. He spoke of his own very difficult experience of being subject to vexatious complaints by one individual for around ten years. The emotional and psychological pressure of this and he felt, the lack of a policy to enable this to be dealt with, had been immense. The motion proposed that the diocese should be asked to develop a policy for dealing with vexatious, malicious and querulant complaints, which was fair to both the complainant and the respondent, as many large organisations had done. In GS2277 the Church of England Clergy Conduct Measure Implementation Group had also identified the need for such a policy, and initial proposals would be put to General Synod in July. The issue was contained within the diocesan complaints policy in the clergy guidelines, but there was no guidance for the identification or handling of such a complaint. He described the differences in behaviours between a normal and a vexatious complainant, which he felt illustrated the need for a separate policy.

He then moved the motion as follows:

This synod:

a) Review current complaints policies for their suitability regarding complaints of a vexatious, malicious, querulant nature.

b) Bring forward policies which incorporate best practice to ensure complaints are handled on merit, with provision and guidance on how to recognise and deal with vexatious, malicious and querulant grievances.

Bishop Michael supported the motion and was very grateful to the Revd Neil Robbie for bringing it. He expressed his regret for the distress that had been caused to Neil, his family and the parish due to what had taken place. He acknowledged that our diocesan procedure needed to find a way of addressing such complaints which could be complex, particularly in regard to its interface with the Clergy Conduct Measure. He warmly endorsed the motion.

The Revd Abbie Walsh (Lichfield) spoke about the types of complaining behaviour described and felt that some of those described could also be the most vulnerable.

The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) supported the motion, and added that the support of the minister involved should be a priority.

The Archdeacon of Walsall added his thanks to Neil for bringing the motion. He endorsed Bishop Michael's comments about the lack of provision for dealing with these matters.

The motion was voted upon and clearly carried.

The Diocesan Secretary would continue work on this and it would be brought back to a future meeting.

8. Warm Spaces/Places of Welcome

The Diocesan Secretary was pleased to report that there were over 150 Places of Welcome in the diocese (almost 25% of the total number). She congratulated the team who had worked on this who had been part of Transforming Communities Together but were now to be brought back into the Diocesan Board of Finance. The work would continue under the new arrangements.

Mrs Hazel Bloxham (West Bromwich) wished to pass on praise to Carrie Blount for the work she had done as she moved on to a new role.

Bishop Michael closed the meeting in prayer.

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

- Standing Committee Reports (DS23/03/05)