

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD
the Ninth Session of the Eighteenth Synod
and a general meeting of the
WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED

at St Michael and All Angels Church, Stourbridge
on Monday 24 June 2024



Opening worship was led by the Area Dean of Greater Dudley, Andrew Sillis. As part of the proceedings, Kim Brown was commissioned by Bishop John as New Worshipping Communities Enabler

Three questions were received under **Standing Order 71** and written answers given. [Read them here.](#)

A supplementary question was asked about the light-touch theological formation on the Auxiliary Pathway. This was answered by the Revd Doug Chaplin who explained that there was additional help for any candidates who hadn't previously been Readers (Licensed Lay Ministers).

From the Chair, Bishop John read the following statement:

"I give notice that, at its February 2024 group of sessions, the General Synod resolved that Amending Canon No. 43 be made, promulgated and executed. Amending Canon No. 43 makes miscellaneous amendments to the Canons of the Church of England. It complements the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 2024."

In his **Presidential Address**, Bishop John reflected on the first Presidential Address he had given in March 2008. He said he has found the last 17 years hugely fulfilling and still has huge hope for the Diocese of Worcester. In his Enthronement sermon, Bishop John said that if he has a manifesto, it is to be utterly committed to the mission of God in Christ. He believes that the Diocese is better placed now for mission than it has been for some time and applauded the efforts being made by members of synod and many others in this area. He said:



"We do face challenges, not least financial, but I believe we are well set up to rise to them and that together we can do so. In pursuing them we must all work together, but the clergy and laity will have particular roles. I believe that clergy are being called to become more 'episcopal', in the sense of exercising oversight. Those of you who are ordained are called to lead and you should not be ashamed of that. That leadership should, most of all, be about releasing the gifts of those whom you lead, enabling the laity to recover their priesthood."

Bishop John commented that it is our role to prepare the way of the Lord and in another sense it's our role to catch up with him, and that takes a bit of doing.

As this was the final Synod of the current triennium. Members were invited to **reflect on the work of Synod during the triennium**, with particular focus on the highlights that stood out and any elements which could be improved upon. Synod was also asked what characteristics should be sought in members of the next Synod, and how can membership, representation and participation best be encouraged?



This item was led by Director of Communications, Sam Setchell, who gave a short presentation highlighting some of the issues that Synod had debated during the past three years. There was then a discussion in groups with the opportunity to feed back.

Highlights from synod members included the discussion on the Prayers of Love and Faith, increased financial stability and a real focus on mission. Members also highlighted some challenges including a demographic time bomb, the urgency of becoming net zero, how synod ensures it is representative and how we can encourage people in parishes to stand for synod.

Archdeacon Nikki introduced an item focusing on the **Children and Young People priority** of our Diocesan Transformation Strategy and started by saying that one of the highlights for her in this triennium is that transformation now appears on every agenda.



Transformation Programme Director, Damian Herbert talked more about progress towards our priority to double the number of children and young people, explaining that he is working with a team to think about what God might be calling us to do through this priority.

They have set out the following goals:

- We will increase the number of paid children and youth workers to ensure we have one flourishing children and young people's ministry in each major population centre, and at least two such centres in each deanery
- We will develop intergenerational New Worshipping Communities (NWCs), and some aimed at children and young people, as part of our goal to launch a hundred NWCs by 2030
- We are working closely with the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) to launch Gather congregations in association with our church schools, and to nurture spiritual formation through strong collaboration between our churches and church schools

Damian explained that it is still early days with the priority, but there is already a lot of activity happening, including the creation of a Project Board, 14 children and youth workers employed, with funding approved for another 8 who come together as a network to share ideas, prayers and resources and the Church and School Partnership Award Scheme.

Preliminary data suggests that our interventions are making a difference. In parishes with employed workers, the average weekly attendance of under 18s has increased from 139 to 246.



Synod had the chance to ask any questions about this priority.



The Chair of the DBF, Wadham Dowing presented the **2023 Annual Report and Accounts** to be received by the DBF in general meeting.

Wadham talked through three aspects of the accounts – performance in the year, balance sheet strength at year end and solvency, explaining that the DBF achieved a break-even position in 2023.

Total net assets of the DBF in 2023 were £85.8m with investment property and investment assets of almost £50m. Worcester is in the middle of the pack compared to all dioceses in terms of these assets. We have built up reserves in our unrestricted general fund. The DBF holds about £4m in cash equating to around 6 months of cash flow. [See Wadham's slides.](#)

There was a chance for synod to ask questions and then on behalf of the Bishop's Council and Standing Committee in their capacity as the Directors of the DBF, the Chair of the DBF moved:

Resolution No 1: "That the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023 of The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited be received."

and

Resolution No.2: "That Crowe LLP be reappointed as Auditors to The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited".

Both resolutions were unanimously carried.



Bishop Martin introduced the Synod to **Evie Vernon, Director of the Regional Racial Justice Board** who has been appointed following a joint West Midlands bid for funding, recognising that we can affect more change by working together than on our own.

Evie was also welcomed by Robert Barbour, a member of the diocesan Racial Justice Forum, who said that her appointment is an opportunity to focus on racial justice and also effect real spiritual growth in our parishes.

Evie said that she feels like she's at home because she comes from Worcester in Kingston, Jamaica. She reminded synod that it is important to remember that we live on a small island and everyone's ancestors come from somewhere else, probably on small boats and seeking safety from persecution or economic hardship. Exciting things are happening and by working together we can make a real difference.

Bishop Martin prayed for Evie and the whole of the Racial Justice Board.



Diocesan Director of Education, Tim Reid introduced synod to the new **Church and School Partnership Awards**, which are designed to celebrate the relationship between schools and church. Synod watched a video to launch the awards. [Watch it here.](#)



Duncan Hutchison, Education Adviser, explained that church and school partnerships are his biggest passion. The team have written the award scheme to help bring churches and schools closer together and to celebrate the work that is already happening. The hope is that church and school will be seen as one community, building strong and sustainable relationships, developing new worshipping communities and encouraging a deep mutual flourishing of everyone. The award pack includes lots of different ideas of things that can be done to help develop the relationship.



Duncan encouraged synod to get involved by having a conversation with their local school, register interest with the online form, create an action plan, get started and then apply for the award at three different levels – bronze, silver and gold. The award will be presented to both school and church with a certificate and a badge that can be used on pew sheets and websites.

Diocesan Secretary, Andy Todd, gave Synod an overview of the arrangements being put in place for the **delegation of Bishop John's episcopal functions during the vacancy**, which are governed by the diocesan pastoral and mission measure 2007. He explained that provision for all episcopal functions will be delegated to Bishop Martin from Bishop John and this will be voted on at the next meeting of the Bishop's Council.

Bishop John has also requested that three bishops be commissioned as Assistant Bishops in addition to those already in the Diocese. Anne Hollingshurst, Alan Winton and Olivia Graham all have close links with the diocese or soon will have and it is hoped that they will all be a support to Bishop Martin during the vacancy.

Matters under the Clergy Disciplinary Measure are currently dealt with by Bishop Martin before they come before the Diocesan Bishop. As Acting Diocesan Bishop, this will cause a conflict of interest, so the three new Assistant Bishops will be given rights of delegation in this area. The approval of synod is needed for this to happen. This was approved unanimously.

Bishop Martin closed the meeting with prayer.

