

Diocesan Synod - 2 July 2019

St James, Welland

The meeting was opened with a prayer from the Revd Barry Unwin, Vicar of Welland Church.



There was one **question under Standing Orders**:

Robert Barbour (Kidderminster Deanery) asked: “Can the Diocesan Secretary explain the demographic evidence that underlies a) the optimistic scenario and b) the pessimistic scenario in Section A of Document DS 19/5”

Diocesan Secretary, John Preston provided a [written response which can be found here](#).

There was a change to Amending Canon 38, which was read by John Preston.

Bishop John offered his **Presidential address**. He said:



“There are serious matters to be discussed at this evening’s synod and the agenda reflects a worrying time in the life of the Diocese. There is significant pressure on the accounts and although action is being taken, it means that difficult decisions need to be made – there has already been more than one redundancy in the diocesan office.

“We need to commend the situation to prayer and to one another as we wrestle with the issues. We are in choppy waters and it will be some time until we emerge from them. It is not just this diocese, others are struggling with similar challenges. The next review of the Church of England by IICSA is currently taking place – some shameful things are emerging. Worcester is

one of four dioceses chosen at random for our safeguarding practise to be looked at. The SCIE audit of our safeguarding provision was very positive, but this is still a very stressful time – please pray for Hilary and Delia.

“We meet on the eve of St Thomas’ day and on Saturday the church celebrated St Peter’s day. Two people who doubted and betrayed Jesus – but the church was built on their foundations. From the motley crew of disciples, the world was changed. God can and does bring good out of bad – resurrection out of crucifixion. Need to hold on to that fact. Our USP is hope, specifically Christian hope. God has used ordinary, fallible human beings to bring about great good. Throughout our deliberations and painful discussions, we will always be able to remember the Christian truth that God brings good out of bad and should proclaim it for all we are worth.”

Bishop John explained process of finding a **new Bishop of Dudley**. It is hoped that interviews will take place in late September for someone to be in post at the beginning of 2020.

The synod unanimously agreed the role description and person specification.

Chair of the DBF, Alastair Findlay presented the **Annual Report and Accounts** explaining that the prediction of £1m loss has become reality. Although there are things already happening to redress the balance, it is a difficult time. We must tackle the issue and we are tackling it.



However, we shouldn’t be feeling hopeless about the situation. We are still serving the people of the diocese with the £9m we are collecting and spending and this must be seen as good news. People are faithful and will continue to offer financial gifts and we will continue to be able to spend that money. Therefore we mustn’t lose hope.

Alastair moved the following two resolutions, which were carried unanimously:

Resolution No.1: “That the Annual Report and Accounts for 2018 of The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited be received.”

Resolution No.2: “That haysmacintyre be reappointed as Auditors to The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited”

Diocesan Secretary, John Preston, presented the action plan that Bishop's Council has commissioned to address the **medium term financial challenges**. [See his slides here](#). John explained that since 2018, diocesan income has been static, so has declined in real terms, and parish income is in exactly the same situation, so we are in it together as a diocese.



A group had been commissioned to make some predictions, looking ahead to 2025 and 2030. These show an optimistic prediction of at least 5% decline by 2030 and a pessimistic prediction of up to 30% decline. It is important to do all that we can to make sure we're nearer the optimistic end of these predictions.

Four task groups have been established, looking at: central diocesan costs, wider ministry costs, carrying out a review of the parish share system, and managing reserves to meet cash needs. It is hoped that £550,000 of savings will be found through reducing central costs and savings of £1m through wider ministry costs. However, our costs won't come down quickly so we also need to make sure we have reserves available to meet some deficits over the next few years.

John was asked whether we are learning from the experience of other dioceses. He explained that conversations have happened and will continue to happen to benchmark the service we provide compared to others. Just because we're no longer able to allocate officer time in a particular area, doesn't mean we're not taking it seriously.

Changes are being communicated via the diocesan website whenever new information is available.

Alastair Findlay introduced an item on the **parish share review**, giving some background to the current system and why change is necessary. It is suggested that a group should be put together which will consult widely so that any new parish share system is one that will be widely accepted. Alastair then moved the following motion which was carried unanimously.

'This Synod agrees the appointment of a group as suggested by Bishop's Council to review the Parish Share system following the brief contained in DS 19/5 and make recommendations to Synod in time for 2021 share allocations'.

The synod had discussion around individual tables looking at a number of statements relating to parish share and thinking about what was most important in a new system. This will be fed into the group as part of the initial consultation.



The Synod discussed the **DBF's tenancy of the Old Palace** with the subject introduced by John Preston. He explained that the Old Palace is a wonderful building but it is expensive. It requires a heavy staffing level – caretakers/ cleaners etc to support it and the building itself is expensive to maintain. The DBF has already invested a significant amount in the building and there are more repairs to be made.

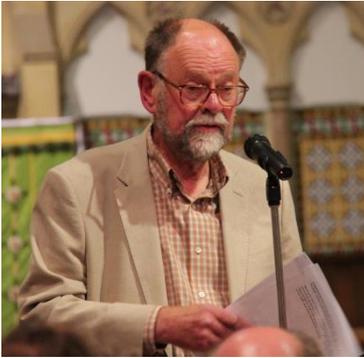
The DBF not particularly well placed to grow income or gain grants to offset the costs associated with the Old Palace. John explained that he has compared our diocesan office costs with those of other dioceses and has looked at other properties around Worcester. An independent survey that has suggested a saving of at least £160k and possibly more. It would only be appropriate to consider a move if there is a significant saving and this seems to be the case.

Bishop John reiterated that this is a significant decision to make. The Old Palace building belongs to the Dean and Chapter and by moving, there would be an impact on them. It is right that this decision should be made by Synod.

The Dean of Worcester, Peter Atkinson spoke of the impact of the diocesan financial situation on the Cathedral. If synod approves this motion then the financial problem is not solved, but simply shifted. There is no certainty that Cathedral will be successful in gaining a lottery grant and it doesn't have large reserves – it is not easy to raise the

£2m to keep the Cathedral going. If the DBF leave the Old Palace, there is no guarantee that the building will be able to be kept in the ownership of the church, although the Chapter will try to do that. The primary purpose of the Chapter is to ensure the Cathedral remains open as a place of worship.

There was considerable debate with members of synod speaking passionately on both sides of the argument. Members were particularly concerned about passing the financial responsibility to the Cathedral and wondered if there was a compromise way forward. Concerns were also expressed about the speed the decision was being made (John Preston explained that there was a limited window because of a break clause in the current lease in 2020).



An amendment to the motion was moved by Ian Stainburn, Chair of the DAC and member of Cathedral Advisory Panel. He said that the lease was obviously no longer fit for purpose, but to move out completely seems to be a knee-jerk reaction to the current financial situation which we hope to be temporary. The Old Palace is at the centre of diocese and close to the Cathedral/ Dean and Chapter. It is also well served by public transport and car parks and has been extensively and expensively altered. More information is essential and it is impossible to take a decision in the form of the original motion. He suggested that a new partnership between DBF and Dean and Chapter should be investigated with management business plans developed to benefit both parties as well as the city of Worcester.

There was then further discussion around the amendment.

The Chair of the House of Laity, Hugh Richards, moved that:

'This Synod agrees the recommendation of the Bishop's Council that the DBF should terminate its lease of the Old Palace and seek alternative office accommodation, if it can be expected to make very substantial savings.'

Ian Stainburn moved the following amendment: delete all after 'and seek' and replace with:

'to enter into a new tenancy agreement for those parts of the building occupied by the DBF alone. Alternative office accommodation should only be sought if it can be confirmed that it will benefit the Diocese and realise very substantial savings in the long term.'

This amendment was accepted by Synod (41 votes in favour, 12 against, and 8 abstentions).

Synod then voted on the amended motion:

'This Synod agrees the recommendation of the Bishop's Council that the DBF should terminate its lease of the Old Palace and seek to enter into a new tenancy agreement for those parts of the building occupied by the DBF alone. Alternative office accommodation should only be sought if it can be confirmed that it will benefit the Diocese and realise very substantial savings in the long term.'

The motion was passed, (50 votes in favour, 7 against, and 4 abstentions)

The synod was shown a short film highlighting the **Thy Kingdom Come Pentecost celebrations**. [This can be seen here](#).

Statutory Reports of the Diocesan Board of Education and the Diocesan Mission, Pastoral & Resources Committee were laid before the synod and the Audit Committee report was received.

Bishop John closed the meeting with prayer.



The date of next meeting is Tuesday 19 November, 7pm at St Peter's Church, Ipsley, Redditch