

ELY DIOCESAN SYNOD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ely Diocesan Synod held by video conference on Wednesday 16 June 2021

Canon Simon Kershaw, Chair of the House of Laity, in the Chair

The meeting opened with worship led by the Bishop of Huntingdon

1. **Apologies for Absence received** House of Clergy 12 House of Laity 7
2. Following the addition of “FTE stipendiary clergy numbers will be maintained at 104” the **Minutes** of Diocesan Synod held on 13 March 2021 were signed by the Chair, Canon Simon Kershaw.

Matters Arising: Following the unexpected loss of the Revd Nikki Mann, the Diocesan Secretary confirmed that he would continue working on the Diversity audit with external, already identified assistance. Revd. Mann’s role as Bishop’s Advisor on BAME matters will be re-filled in due course.

Question raised under Standing Order 86 by Revd Canon Nick Moir

“The *Independent Lessons Learned Review concerning Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Church Wimbledon* makes a number of recommendations to the wider church, including those itemised under Theme 8 (see below). What action has been taken by the Diocese to fulfil the ‘duty of care towards those operating under its banner’ to ensure that ‘governance, accountability and safeguarding policy and practice’ are complied with, and how can we be re-assured that such abusive behaviour has not and could not happen on our watch?”

Response from Rebecca Boswell, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (RB), to the paper circulated giving the background to the question:

“Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and the House of Bishops’ practice guidance *Roles and Responsibilities of church officers 2017* details the specific responsibilities of a range of Church Officers in relation to supporting parishes with safeguarding.

The role of all senior staff, the Diocesan Safeguarding Liaison Group and the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (DSA) is to support and monitor the implementation of good safeguarding practice in parishes. The DSA has a further responsibility to challenge PCCs and parishes in relation to what they have done to implement the House of Bishops’ safeguarding guidance and to ensure that they have undertaken the appropriate requirements and responsibilities.

The Diocese does not have a formal regulatory role in relation to parishes, although I should add that all parishes across the Diocese have the same offer of support and monitoring.

The most important tool we have currently is the parish dashboard. We have bought the software licence and this is free to all parishes. It allows for oversight and monitoring, not just by the safeguarding team (as we have viewing rights) so we can see all parishes who have signed up and their current levels of compliance with safeguarding, but also by the Bishops, Archdeacons and the Diocesan Secretary who have recently been given access. Everyone can therefore see the level of compliance across the Diocese. Currently two thirds of our parishes have signed up and we continue to recommend to those parishes who have not signed up, to do so.

Archdeacons’ Visitations annually ask a range of safeguarding audit questions which allow us to scrutinise and monitor the level of compliance within parishes.

We have a comprehensive training programme to support good practice across the Diocese and the Safeguarding Team continues to be available for advice and support during office hours (with the duty officer being available out of hours and at weekends).

There are a number of areas where we challenge safeguarding practice. When referrals come in to the safeguarding team we investigate whether those referrals indicate any deficits in compliance with the House of Bishops' policy guidance. Complaints and whistleblowing procedures are available (via the Diocesan website) to all parishes in order that they may raise concerns if necessary. Parishes can self-refer for further safeguarding support if it is felt to be needed. We have initiated a programme in the Diocese, and perhaps the only Diocese to offer this, which we call Parish Focussed Support. When we become aware that parishes are failing to reach safeguarding compliance, our primary offer is about support. We ensure that the Archdeacons are alerted to specific concerns. This can be for auditing or undertaking specific pieces of work (for example recruiting).

There is clearly a statutory framework in relation to safeguarding within which the Church of England operates. There is a requirement in child protection law that designated professionals (like the Safeguarding Team) report concerns relating to the protection of children and adults who are at risk of harm; we would all have the duty to report abuse of those who are vulnerable in criminal law as well.

Within the church, we use the phrase "due regard" which basically states that House of Bishop's policy and practice guidance must be followed by all Church Officers unless there are cogent reasons for not doing so. Failure by a member of clergy to comply with that duty would fall into potential misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure. If there were failings to which we are alerted, it would be the responsibility of the Safeguarding Team or an Archdeacon to refer that as a complaint under the Measure. More failures by Churchwardens or PCCs to have due regard could result in an investigation by the Charity Commission, with the Churchwardens or other PCC members potentially being disqualified as charity trustees. We also have a responsibility under the Serious Incident Reporting framework to report any serious concerns in relations to safeguarding to the Charity Commission, who have a regulatory function in relation to parishes. Ecclesiastical Insurance have also said that failure to have due regard may invalidate insurance policies.

How can we be reassured that abusive behaviour has not and could not happen on our watch? I refer to the Bichard Report of 2004 when there was the enquiry into the Soham murders. One of the phrases that Bichard used was that if someone is sufficiently devious to perpetrate harm against those who are vulnerable, the harsh reality is that they will do so, but our job is to make it as difficult as possible to succeed. The framework I have described today is how we make it as difficult as possible for people to be hurt and harmed across our parishes."

Question raised under Standing Order 86 by Mrs Rebecca Cowburn, Bourn Deanery

"Can the Bishop please tell us whether the House of Bishops is considering further advise on the use of the common cup, Communion in one kind and individual cups at Holy Communion"

Response from the Bishop of Ely: "The Holy Communion Working Group chaired by the Bishop of Lichfield will issue a report once the doctrinal liturgical work looking at the issues, as requested by the House of Bishops, is completed. In speaking about the receiving of Holy Communion, I should add that the all who receive Holy Communion, even in one species, receive the Body and Blood of the indivisible risen Christ in their fullness. Some have called for the Church of England to encourage the introduction of individual cups from which the consecrated wine would be received. This desire is recognised, but various processes are required to permit their use in the Church of England. It is not permissible for individual Bishops to authorise the use of such cups whether permanently or for a limited period, nor is it possible for the House of Bishops to do so other than by appropriate legislative business in the General Synod."

Bishop Stephen also confirmed that Bishop Michael (Lichfield) would likely be considering the use of individual cups in the working group report to General Synod.

Business of **Bishop's Council** - the Diocesan Secretary had circulated a summary of the recent Bishop's Council meetings. There were no questions.

Business of the **Ely Diocesan Board of Finance - Revd Canon Brian Atling**. The Annual Accounts have been approved by Bishop's Council (the Directors). Auditors addressed Bishop's Council to answer questions raised. Haysmactintyre (Ely's auditors) have declared a clean audit with no queries. Their Senior Partner (Adam Halsey) confirmed to Bishop's Council that Diocese of Ely finances were in a good state, confirmed that the Diocese is a viable entity/going concern and signed the required certificate. Mr Halsey also confirmed that we maintain sufficient cash reserves which support the EDBF view that our cash flow position is acceptable.

Synod members unanimously accepted the **2020 Annual Accounts**

BA introduced a very early budget for 2022 advising that the figures will be adjusting until later in the year when a final budget will be produced. National Church has announced early a stipend increase for 2022 (recommended 1%). Ely have included an uplift of 1.5% (due to no uplift in 2021) supported by the Deanery Treasurers. BA confirmed that the Diocese of Ely was in a position to weather a further year of deficit budget, and also confirmed that a structural deficit would not be acceptable going forward. This would have to be remedied by either an increase in Ministry Share or a reduction in clergy posts.

The Diocese's Risk Register, updated by the Audit Committee, was presented to Diocesan Synod. There were no questions.

Breakout Rooms discussed the Budget for 2022, clergy stipends, ministry share, taking note that a reduction in Diocesan costs or clergy would be required to offset any smaller uplift in Ministry Share.

Revd Canon Alison Myers, Chair of the House of Clergy, in the Chair

The 2020 Annual Report was formally received by Diocesan Synod by a majority

Rebecca Boswell (RB) gave an update to Synod on the current work of the Safeguarding Team: she focussed on DBS checks, safeguarding training, Service Level Agreement with Ely Cathedral, Past Cases Review 2 and parish focussed support. Additional safeguarding training dates will be added to the calendar. Some courses currently led by the Diocese will be moved to being centrally led training course online, which may reduce the pressure on Diocesan training dates. Priorities for 2021/22 are to quality assure practices across the Diocese and response to survivors.

Thanks were formally noted to RB and the Safeguarding Team for the quality of their training

A presentation by **Diocesan Environmental Task Group (DETG)** member, Revd Dr Jenny Gage, was made, supported by fellow members from the Group (slides attached) - followed by a formal debate in plenary session

Geoffrey Hunter, coordinator of DETG, advised that a member of the Diocese's Assets Sub-Committee is to be invited to join DETG, and that person will be able to advise on Diocese-owned glebe land.

A costed report under the Action Plan is to be presented. Any financial spending must be included in the Budgetary process. Any costs to be incurred should be considered against a corresponding reduction in spending.

Any approach to parishes or deaneries should be carefully considered as there are several requests in the pipeline and it was thought that volunteers and input might receive a more positive response if they were spread through the year.

Motion: 'This Synod endorses the work of the Diocesan Environmental Task Group and their proposal that the Diocese of Ely become carbon neutral by 2030, in line with the decision of General Synod, and requires that work be planned and executed to effect this within the Diocese and parishes.'

Proposed: Hilary Clark, Lay Chair, Ely Deanery Synod

Seconded: Revd Eleanor Whalley, clergy member, Ely Deanery Synod

Passed by a majority

There were 5 abstentions

'This Synod requires that the Diocese be registered with ARocha as soon as possible as a first step towards becoming an EcoDiocese'.

Proposed and seconded as above.

Passed by a majority

There were 9 abstentions

'This Synod asks that regular reports on progress are provided on the above motions'

Proposed and seconded as above.

Passed by a majority

1 abstention - Revd Martin Dale

Diocesan Synod **elections** are almost concluded. A paper relating to the General Synod elections has been circulated

Forthcoming Business of Synod: The first formal session of the new Diocesan Synod will take place in November 2021, preceded by an informal meeting in September of the new members for a study evening on Living in Love and Faith. The November meeting will discuss the 2022 Budget, and the Safeguarding Annual Report; engagement with the Ministerial Wellbeing and Clergy Covenant Report. The next report from DETG will also be presented plus an item around engagement with the Deanery Development Plans. In March, safeguarding and finance will be standing items, an item will be included on our vision for the later 2020s, a report on Pioneer Ministry in the Diocese and mixed ecologies in terms of ministry in every locality. The Church School Covenant will also be discussed alongside further detailed dialogue about Deanery Development Planning. The June Synod is customarily devoted to finance and receiving the Annual Report and Accounts, plus contemplation at some stage of the Archbishop's Commission on Racism plus the Diocese of Ely diversity audit. The issues relating to transforming the effectiveness of central institutions in the Church of England, once the work by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich has been completed.

This meeting is the last session of Diocesan Synod of the extended triennium - thanks were given from both Chairs for members' patience during the pandemic year, and for their participation, engagement and involvement. Bishop Stephen thanked all outgoing members of Diocesan Synod with particular reference to the retiring Chair, Revd Canon Alison Myers, as she moves to a new role as Warden of Launde Abbey.

The meeting closed with prayer and blessing from the Bishop of Huntingdon. 9.04pm