

Leeds Diocesan Synod

Draft Minutes of the eighteenth meeting of the Synod of the Diocese of Leeds held via Zoom conferencing at 10 am on Saturday, 13 March 2021.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bishop of Leeds had signed a Bishop's Instrument, which permitted the Synod to meet via electronic conferencing. This was the second time the Synod had met with full electronic presence.

Chair: The Bishop of Leeds

Ecumenical observers, Honorary Assistant Bishops, visitors and those in attendance were reminded that they were not entitled to vote and that they must seek the Chair's permission to speak. The voting period for electronic polling would be thirty seconds from the launch of the poll. Any technical issues were to be emailed to Jonathan Wood, Diocesan Secretary.

1. Opening worship.

The opening worship was led by The Revd Lindsay Southern, Incumbent of Catterick benefice and Assistant Diocesan Director of Ordinands, Ripon Episcopal Area.

2. Welcome.

The following were welcomed and given the Chair's permission to speak (SO3):
Items 12 QI Scheme and Item 13 DAC Constitution, Lisa McIntyre, Team Leader (Church Buildings and Pastoral Reorganisation) and DAC Secretary.

Announcement: Canon Mr Malcolm Halliday, General Synod and Diocesan Synod member and a past Diocesan Secretary of the former Bradford diocese, died earlier this year. Synod is asked to pray for his widow, Di.

3. Apologies.

9 apologies had been received.

4. Declarations of interest – Members are reminded of the need to declare any conflict of interest on matters on this agenda.

No declarations of interest were given.

Chair: Matthew Ambler (Chair of the House of Laity, Huddersfield)

5. Minutes of the last Meeting on 14 November 2020.

Circulated paper: DS 21 03 01

The Chair moved:

“That the draft minutes of the last meeting held on 14 November 2020 contained in DS 21 03 01 be approved as a correct record.”

Voting

For: 99

Against: 0

Abstain: 12

The minutes were approved.

6. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the Agenda (if any).

There were no matters arising.

7. Presidential Address.

The Bishop of Leeds gave his Presidential Address. A copy of the address is attached to these minutes.

8. Questions to Synod

One question had been received from Jonathan Bolton (Headingley Deanery). The question and response had been emailed to Synod members. (A copy is attached to these Minutes.)

Jonathan Bolton asked a supplementary question. Does the Synod have the power to change policy.

The Bishop of Leeds responded that if there was agreement to follow the policies of the Church of England Ethical Investment Advisory Group then there were potential consequences. One way to seek a change to the EIAG’s policy would be to bring a deanery motion to the Diocesan Synod seeking for the motion to go to General Synod for debate, asking for a change to the EIAG’s policy. The Leeds Diocesan Synod would then have the opportunity to debate the matter and would secure a way to build the proposals before it went to General Synod.

There were no further questions.

9. General Synod reports (November 2020 & February 2021)

Synod members had been circulated with reports DS 21 03 02 & DS 21 03 02 01 from Professor Joyce Hill (November 2020 General Synod) and The Ven Paul Ayers (February 2021 General Synod). Professor Hill said she had nothing further to add to her report but was happy to answer questions. Archdeacon Paul Ayers highlighted from his report that the February 2021 General Synod had been an informal meeting in webinar which had been recorded if members wished to

view it.

There were no questions.

10. Presentation & Discussion: Post Covid-19

Jonathan Wood, CEO and Diocesan Secretary (JW) gave a PowerPoint presentation on this item. He explained that the aim of item was to prompt and provoke and then enable a lot of time for discussion both in small groups and then collectively.

Pandemic had been more than could be imagined and impacted on every aspect of life. He acknowledged the grave number of deaths.

Response has been impressive across the diocese. JW shared photos of some of the initiatives which had been taking place in the diocese during Covid and which embodied the diocesan vision of Living Loving and Learning.

It was important to think about the future. What was next? This was to be the focus for discussion and energies going forward. JW shared a quadrant specifically to review what had been done before/in the crisis and what could be taken forward or stopped or amplified. In carrying out this review it would be useful to use the diocesan Strategy as a frame or guide to identify what should be prioritized as the strategic goals and vision remain the same. However the pandemic has provided some new understanding of ways the Strategy can be achieved. Synod members were reminded of the Strategy toolkit and JW suggested that the toolkit could also be a useful resource in the forward planning.

The diocese had created a small survey for parishes to complete. This would help to understand where the parishes felt they were. The survey had been developed with the Church Army. The response was to be PCC response rather than an individual response. Using the grid shown in JW's presentation and the Strategy toolkit PCCs were asked to respond by the end of April 2021.

The Synod members were asked to consider the following questions in break out groups:

Loving

How has the last year been for you and your church?

Living

Where have you been able to serve your community?

Learning

What has your Church learnt?

Which areas of the strategy will be important to your church as we emerge?

There was a refreshment break and Synod members returned directly to break out groups to discuss the above questions.

Chair: The Revd Canon Sam Corley (Chair of the House of Clergy, Allerton)

Members were asked to feedback from their small group discussions on what they had learnt as individual churches over the last year.

The Revd Chris Lawton (Wensley)

Most important thing learnt was how the church had been able to reintegrate the members of the congregation who had been housebound. With digital and telephone church they've been able to be part of the worshipping community again. This mustn't be lost.

Kay Brown (Allerton)

Echoed what had been said by the last speaker but acknowledged it didn't always work perfectly. Kay emphasized the great diversity of experience within her break out group and that they had all been tackling issues and opportunities in different ways. A member of her group had said, "We just need to be bold and do stuff and see what happens and not be afraid of that going forwards".

The Revd Jonathan Bish (Wakefield)

The Spectator had had some negative coverage to the Church of England's response to Covid. His group had reflected on this, particularly the in person v online debate. The broadening of who regarded themselves as part of the congregations via online and streamed services but also the valuing of in person sacramental worship but that it was "both and". It was good to have a discussion which recognized that people were valuing what was being done.

The Revd Jeff Payne (Wensley)

We considered closing churches for private prayer. Feedback was that even if people don't go in to the churches for private prayer it's still important to them that the church is open.

Professor Joyce Hill (General Synod)

Her group had discussed that parishes had done all kinds of new things and these need to be captured. They need to be celebrated as parishes have discovered they have got skills they didn't know they had across a wider range of people. This was an opportunity for others who may not have been so involved to know that there was a new creative capacity and people were being forced in to new patterns of thinking which was a good thing.

Ian Grange (Dewsbury & Birstall)

Agreed entirely with Professor Joyce Hill's comments.

The Revd Lindsay Pearson (Armley)

Her group had many different contexts and were only just beginning to look at what they had learnt. She thought that the churches didn't really know what they had learnt yet and it would take some time to know what has been learnt about the Church's strengths and weaknesses. She asked for a framework of questions for churches to use as they began to reflect on what they have learnt and asked anyone who had any or would like to work on them to get in touch.

The Chair suggested that Jonathan Wood would be a central point for collecting any such questions.

The Revd John Bavington (Inner Bradford)

Range of churches represented in discussion group. His own context included diverse race and ages. Fracturing was also along language groups not just who could and could not access online. He had been reflecting on the enabling of lay ministry being much more effective in Covid as it enabled access to contexts which he personally may not be able to reach in a diverse congregation. So raising up diverse leadership was one of the lessons of Covid for him.

The Revd Canon Paul Cartwright, General Synod)

His breakout group hadn't had much time to look at this question. Two key thoughts from his group was "Keep going and rebuild" and not to have a diary full of stuff because space led to being more creative and more quick to respond.

Canon Mrs Jane Evans (Halifax & Calder Valley)

There seemed to be an immense diversity of experience between the clergy and the laity. In her group there were three lay people who were fired up and ready to go and asking what the next step would be and several clergy who were exhausted. She was concerned about the difference and the challenges some clergy had in raising up the laity - eg if they were elderly or shielding and the energy it took to lead in this and the challenge this presented as the diocese looked at the strategy goal of developing lay leadership. There was a recognition of clergy exhaustion and a question therefore whether we rebuild from September rather than May?

The Ven Dr Anne Dawtry (Archdeacon of Halifax and General Synod)

Group discussed online worship and how many lay people had recorded items and sent them in. People didn't want to lose this engagement of the laity.

John Beal (Allerton)

Endorse the comments made about the use of digital there were issues. Health Watch Leeds has looked at various communities and use of digital has the danger of increasing inequality for those not able to access it. This could be because of poverty, disability, age. So we must be aware not to increase inequalities by excluding people.

The Revd Joanna Seabourne (Headingley)

Followed up the comments of Jane Evans. There has been a mixture of experience of Lockdown amongst the laity too, also ranging from finding it energizing to being exhausted. Her group had also talked about the different experiences of grief. Some have had space for grief. For others, where small or no funeral, some have put grief on hold. So need to learn how to pastorally attend to this diversity.

Johnny Bolton (Headingley)

His church had invested in some good quality equipment. Going forward, when there would be in person services, the digital option would enable those to join in who would otherwise find in person services difficult to attend.

The Revd Abbie Palmer (Harrogate)

As well as digital, her group had discussed the use of telephone services in rural areas where digital may be challenging. Telephone services could be a new and creative way to create a community. Reaching out using service sheets has also been of enormous comfort to people. She commended learning from each other.

The Revd Anne Russell (Bowland & Ewecross)

Concerned about what wasn't being mentioned, for example social engagement projects (eg partnering with non-church organisations) and in her group they had discussed wanting to empower the laity.

Robert Haskins (Harrogate)

He was concerned about how youth and young families would be re-engaged. How can people address this particularly if not doing well? In his group someone had said they didn't know how many people were in their church anymore because they couldn't count them.

JW responded to the feedback.

Question about to how support learning – JW recommended that starting point being the grid shown in his presentation: “Starting, stopping, amplifying and letting go” and the Strategy Toolkit particularly the “Taking Stock” section. This section would also assist with looking at what can be provided for children and young people. If there were reflections from groups, JW asked that they be sent to him and he would look at how these could be shared. He would take away from the Synod that the overarching theme was that learning from the pandemic should be shared.

The Bishop of Leeds

The conversation had been really interesting.

Early on in the pandemic, he had written to the clergy (and had repeated the message a number of times) that one of the gifts of the pandemic was to reinforce that the clergy were colleagues not competitors and “in this together”. Some of the defences had come down. So for example, just because a church down the road was good at doing foodbanks, shouldn't mean another church, which wasn't, should feel it had failed. People were doing different things.

He hoped there wouldn't be a drop in confidence as the church emerges from the pandemic. Whether people (clergy and laity) were exhausted or raring to go was a lot to do with personality. Some respond really well to challenge and opportunity and others get beaten down by it.

The question to address was “How do we bear one another's burdens?” That is, thanking God for the great creative energy and ideas and supporting our neighbours who are struggling. There was a fantastic opportunity to do this.

In the presidential address he had used Brueggemann's phrase “being freshly faithful” and as we restore confidence and look creatively at what we do in the future, the Church needed to consider what for example a hybrid digital/in person environment would be like. Experience of digital worship had accentuated that language can be a barrier. An example was using “we” when there may be people who aren't “we” joining in? Instead the Church should be seeking to enable rather than alienate.

There was a lot to be learned from the pandemic, not as critics but with enjoyment.

He counselled Synod not to be anxious. Though there would be bad lessons as well as good ones, the Church is a big group with lots of ideas and experience and creativity. Synod members should take away from the discussion that “We’re in it together - so don’t be anxious”.

A five minutes break was taken.

Chair: Matthew Ambler (Chair of the House of Laity, Huddersfield)

11. Presentation and Discussion: Covenant for the Care & Wellbeing of Clergy

Members had been circulated with Clergy Covenant update report (DS 21 03 03). The Revd Canon Sam Corley (SC) spoke to the item using a PowerPoint presentation.

An update had been circulated to the Synod members giving the background about where the Covenant had come from and its relationship with General Synod and how the Diocesan Synod had looked at it. Since the Diocesan Synod considered the Covenant, a working group had met three times to work out the application of the national covenant in the diocese.

Section two of the update gave an overview of the findings of the working group. The support by the diocese was good. Given the huge demands being made on individuals at the current time it was perhaps an opportune time to be looking at everyone’s wellbeing. The Covenant was an opportunity to focus on clergy wellbeing within that. The working group had identified that whilst the provision by the diocese was good, there could be better communication about what was available and how they relate to the diocesan strategy.

Clergy housing was a key to wellbeing. Again the general provision was good but there was an issue around repairs and the Property team were looking at this. With regard to policies the group had identified that there needed to be more scrutiny and clergy involvement in them, particularly where there was inequality at the moment eg paternity and maternity. Also, that the “issues” which were raised were regarded as opportunities for greater and better care of the clergy in better ways

Resourcing the Big Conversation and the timing of this would be key. Resources are available for this but it was important to time this well eg at the Clergy Conference

A form of non-managerial pastoral provision should become accepted practice. For the reasons set out in the circulated documents, this would not be introduced in the diocese until more work had been done looking at the experience of other dioceses. For the time being it would be one of a range of resources for clergy not something that was offered to everyone.

SC asked the Synod members to give feedback to the question: “Are we broadly on the right lines and what have we missed?”

Professor Joyce Hill (General Synod)

Broadly on the right lines. She asked how this was to become intentionally integrated in to everything the diocese did? She said it was easy to gather everything together on the diocesan website as a reference point. This wasn't sufficient for communication. It needed to be integrated in to everything: ministerial development reviews, informal and formal meetings, engaging the parishes or deaneries and not just an item at the clergy conference. It needed to be embedded right from the beginning, for example in the work of the DDOs and the managing of expectations and context of ministry.

The Revd Canon Joyce Jones (General Synod)

Reiterated Professor Joyce Hill's point that this needed reiterating constantly. Clergy don't seem to know what is available. We need to know that what is available works. She heard that someone tried to access the counselling service. Someone said they would get back to them and never did. The person in need found help elsewhere but need to ensure what's on offer works

The Revd Rosie Fairhurst (Inner Bradford)

Pastoral supervision is important and she saw this as a positive. She asked if for certain identified circumstances (eg for clergy who have been involved in a lot of Covid funerals or work with asylum seekers and the great trauma they have experienced) pastoral support could be guaranteed?

A negative was the experience she had had with regard to property. She realised there were a number of factors involved, such as diocesan finances and staff retention and she also acknowledged that those who had worked on it had worked very hard. However, she was still waiting for incoming works to be carried out two and a half years after arriving in the diocese. She wondered after 20 years plus in ministry if there was an unconscious bias which goes on anecdotally about a number of other single women who have had difficult experiences in this area.

Roger Lazenby (Headingley)

Referred back to the previous meeting of Synod. The laity have a lot to offer on this and he understood that a lay focus group was to be formed. He asked for an update on this.

Canon Ann Nicholl (Allerton)

Asked if any thought had been given to lay involvement in MDR. In the past a number of clergy have appreciated being able to share their MDR with a lay person over a three years period. Would the possible involvement of laity in MDR be included as part of the review of MDR?

The Revd Canon Ruth Firth (Huddersfield and Adviser for Women's Ministry, Huddersfield Episcopal Area)

Delighted to see programmes around HR policies which are tailored to the lives clergy are living.

The Revd Lindsay Pearson (Armley)

Referred to the provision of non-managerial pastoral supervision. She acknowledged that the working group were waiting to hear from the General Synod working group. However, anxious that clergy can be isolated in roles and sometimes there's a perception that help should only be sought when there's a problem. There needed to be a way of normalising support when clergy have had to deal with difficult pastoral issues. Other areas of life would have a support structure in place.

The Ven Paul Ayers (Archdeacon of Leeds)

Now this Covenant had been introduced, the question which arose was who is going to do the further work, how much will it cost and who will pay for it. Particularly the pastoral supervision: who will pay for the cost of training? Similarly with regard to Clergy Housing, there were questions about how much this should cost and the Synod needed to consider this. Any increase would be an increase to the diocesan budget.

The Revd Brunel James (Dewsbury & Birstall)

It had been interesting listening to the comments and the lessons learned from the world of HR. He reflected that there was a traditional role of bishops and archdeacons in a fatherly/motherly spiritual role and the clergy need to feel that the bishops and archdeacons they relate to have a human relationship with the clergy person. Everything else brought in to support are only supplementary to clergy feeling they have this right relationship. It was important to build on this traditional pastoral model. We mustn't lose sight of this but build on the best of tradition and expand and make fit for purpose in modern times.

SC responded to the feedback.

Thanked Synod for the feedback. He acknowledged the need for integration and for what was available being communicated. He confirmed JW would look in to the comments made about Property issues and highlighted that trauma workshops were available. The Lay focus group hadn't happened but he had tried to have individual conversations with lay people. He acknowledged that benefit of lay professional help and the valued relationship with bishops and archdeacons as colleagues.

12. Motion: QI Scheme

Synod members had been circulated with DS 21 03 04 Updated QI Scheme showing amendments and DS 21 03 04 01 Note on amendments to QI Scheme.

Archdeacon Peter Townley outlined to the Synod that the proposal in this item and the following item were a response to legislation and were essentially a tidying up motions.

Archdeacon Peter Townley proposed the motion that:

“That this Synod approves the Quinquennial Inspection Scheme contained within paper DS 21 03 04”.

Lisa McIntyre (LM) outlined for Synod that the changes being proposed were minor changes to bring the QI Scheme in line with legislation. All dioceses have to have a QI Scheme which outlines what parishes have to do with regard to inspections. There used to be a system where there was a list of approved architects in each diocese. The Leeds diocesan scheme had anticipated that this would be abandoned and had not had a list of approved inspectors for some time.

The main change to the current QI Scheme was section 11. The legislation now requires PCCs to have due regard to the advice of the DAC. PCCs have more authority to select who they want to have as an inspector but they have to seek the DACs advice to protect the parish ie to ensure the person they have selected will be able to fulfil the PCC’s needs and protect the building. All other changes have been highlighted in red and these are quite minor.

There were no questions of clarification.

Debate

The Revd Chris Lawton (Wensley)

With regard to Section 9 of the Report, PCCs were asked to consult on List A matters. Wasn’t it the case that for List A matters PCC’s didn’t need to consult?

LM responded that PCCs were encouraged to double check items on List A but details don’t need to be submitted to the DAC. It would protect the PCC to check with regard to List A ie to make sure it is a List A item. Thank you for the clarification.

Steve Jackson (Richmond)

If there were no architects on a PCC, how could a PCC find an architect for a QI without a list of architects?

LM responded that the DAC do have a list of people they know work on churches in the diocese and who have the relevant expertise. This is a list a PCC can start from but it isn’t an approved list. Most PCCs use this if they need help but PCCs are not restricted to this list.

Robert Haskins (Harrogate)

Asked that the architects list be available online to save the DAC time.

LM responded that the list wasn’t available online to prevent spamming to the architects. However, the DAC could easily send it to PCCs who requested.

Archdeacon Peter Townley responded to the debate

He thanked everyone who contributed to the debate and everyone who worked to look after the church buildings and the QI inspectors who carried out the inspections. He moved the motion standing in his name:

“That this Synod approves the Quinquennial Inspection Scheme contained within paper DS 21 03 04”.

Synod voted on the motion using the Zoom poll function:

For: 109

Against: 0

Abstain: 1

The motion was carried.

13. Motion: DAC Constitution

Synod members had been circulated with DS 21 03 05 Updated DAC Constitution showing amendments DS 21 03 05 01 Note on amendments to DAC Constitution.

Archdeacon Peter Townley had outlined to the Synod that the proposal was a response to legislation and was essentially a tidying up motion.

Archdeacon Peter Townley proposed the motion that:

“This Synod approves the constitution for the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches contained within paper DS 21 03 05”

LM spoke to the motion. The current DAC constitution had been based on a schedule attached to legislation. There had been legislative changes. There had been no restriction on the amount of time a member could serve on a DAC. Now the period is limited to two terms of six years. The intention was to ensure the DAC didn't become fossilized. To incorporate this new provision the amendment to the constitution needed Synod approval.

There were no questions of clarification.

Debate

Johnny Bolton (Headingley)

Why aren't the changes affecting previous terms?

LM the legislation is not retrospective. The legislation came in to effect on 1 September 2020 and so won't affect any current members of the DAC for the time being ie they could continue for a while.

The Revd Vaughan Pollard (Outer Bradford)

Was concerned that with regard to the Measure and section 4 (b) and the appointment of outside

agencies – he was aware of the amount of say that Historic Building England and Amenities Societies have on faculty applications. Also in section 5, there was no mention of mission and evangelism. It was important that our buildings were fit for purpose and not museums.

Archdeacon Peter Townley responded

The opening paragraph of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018 in the first sentence speaks powerfully about church's mission ie there right at the start.

LM also responded

That the DAC had a duty to have regard to the building as a place of worship. If churches weren't under the ecclesiastical exemption, then the heritage bodies would have all the say. Having someone elected by the heritage bodies makes it more robust and less likely to be challenged under the planning system. So this ensures that these bodies are kept in the conversation but section 5 does require knowledge of church matters.

Vaughan Pollard explained his concern was that whilst worship and liturgy were included, mission wasn't.

The Ven Dr Anne Dawtry (Archdeacon of Halifax and General Synod)

Was a member of the rules committee before it went to General Synod and there was an intention that the new rules about two terms would apply to current members of DACs. However, there was so much vociferous opposition to this at the revision stage it was dropped.

Archdeacon Peter Townley responded to the debate

He thanked everyone who contributed to the debate and to the DAC officers and advisers for all that they did. He moved the motion standing in his name:

"This Synod approves the constitution for the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches contained within paper DS 21 03 05"

Synod voted on the motion using the Zoom poll function:

For: 111

Against: 1

Abstain: 1

The motion was carried.

14. Presentation: Introduction to "Living in Love & Faith"

Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley gave a brief introductory presentation using PowerPoint on "Living in Love and Faith" (LLF) which was to be discussed in more detail at the 12 June 2021 Synod.

LLF had been launched by the House of Bishops in 2017 to help the Church of England move forward in its conversations about identity, sexuality and relationships and marriage. Set with in

wider framework of Christian understanding of what it is to be human. It's not about campaigning but about learning together acknowledging complexity and understanding different perspectives together. It sought to engage the whole church in learning and was not another round of shared conversations.

There is a suite of LLF resources, podcasts, books and a course.

To encourage engagement there is a national Next Steps group nationally which works alongside a reference group. Each diocese has one or more LLF advocates. Leeds Diocese has five convened by Bishop Helen-Ann. Their role was to answer questions about the LLF course, receive feedback and to promote and advocate good engagement with the process. For many the issues were personal and so engagement was within the pastoral guidance principles – it was important that there was a safe space for people to engage.

Bishop's Staff spent an hour as part of its non-residential engaging with the LLF material. Pilot courses have been running or are running by three cathedrals and a deanery in the Bradford EA. There was also an introductory morning for clergy on 17 April 2021.

June Diocesan Synod will have session on LLF. There will be a session on listening well together and a sample session from the LLF course and some time in plenary.

Synod members were encouraged to look at the LLF resources and to join a course.

15. Bishop of Leeds Blessing and Close

The Bishop of Leeds thanked everyone who had taken part in the Synod and gave the blessing.

Diocese of Leeds

Eighteenth Diocesan Synod, Saturday 13 March 2021

Presidential Address

Sometimes there is no ending. We are just left hanging there, wondering what happens next and who might be responsible for deciding.

Think of Jonah who tries to run from a God in whom he believes, but whom he also resents for maintaining an inconvenient generosity towards dodgy people. The prophet, in hiding from the God who calls him to a personally uncomfortable ministry, finds himself vomited onto a beach and into a reluctant agreement to obey the call to preach repentance and mercy to a recalcitrant people in Nineveh. He does the bare minimum and retreats from the market square to lick his spiritual wounds while, to his horror, the people actually do repent and change their ways. Why can't God be more like him and feel justified venom towards the sinning people? Why can't God be just and consistent and blow these people away? (Echoes of the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son?)

He finds himself taking shelter under a tree ... which God then causes to shrivel and die, exposing Jonah to the wild sun. Why, asks God, should I not also be free to forgive and set free the people I love anyway? It is about grace. And Jonah the prophet doesn't like grace when applied to the wrong people - though he wants it for himself.

And then the story ends. What did Jonah do next? What happened - did he get converted? We don't know. Some biblical academics have suggested that the ending is missing. I tend to agree with the scholars who have concluded that the story deliberately ends there - leaving the reader hanging - because it compels us to use our own imagination and see whether the ending we imagine (or would like) is faithful to the character of Jonah or the character of God.

We could look elsewhere in the Bible and find other cases of (what I sadly might call) endinglessness. Poor Moses, having endured the miserable behaviour and ingratitude of his own liberated people, meets his own end on the edge of getting his reward - leading the people into the Land of Promise. Jeremiah, faithful despite his own misery, disappears into exile and silence. The ending of Mark's gospel is, according to some scholars, missing. People bump into and glance off Jesus, and we don't know what happened next: did the rich young man ever come back and say, "OK, I've got rid of my securities; *now* can I come with you?"

But, the people of God, who have been grasped by grace and captured by love, are not dependent on the endings or the ends being tied up. We can live with uncertainty and without fear in the conviction that an ending is the gateway to a new beginning. As Easter will demonstrate, the death and loss of Good Friday do not spell the end of the story; but, Sunday won't come before we have walked through Friday and the emptiness of Saturday. And that means leaving stuff behind.

Now, this is supposed to be a presidential address to a synod, not a sermon. But, the business of our agenda today, as we deliberate together in grace and love, avoiding either nostalgia or wishful thinking, has to be rooted in a biblical theology that helps us imagine our own future. And that means taking seriously the context in which we meet and do our work together.

The Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann, decades before any pandemic erupted on the world, encouraged the church to be bold in rejecting the dominant narratives of what he calls the empire - those

assumptions that explain why the world is the way it appears to be, and insists that everybody thinks the same way. He urges Christians to “re-describe reality” in order for us then to re-orientate towards a different future. That is to say, we don’t accept that today is the end or that death and fear have the last word in this world. We refuse to accept that people are economic cogs whose major function is to consume material stuff in the hope of clouding out the questions about meaning and value. We decline the pressure to think that competition over vaccines is either noble or good. What does “world-beating” imply?

In other words, we are called back to discover the grace of God amid the moral and material complexities of being human in today’s world. Like Jesus looking out from his cross, we look reality in the eye and don’t claim any exemption from the cost of grace and love. We certainly don’t look out in order to claim ownership of the territory from the one on that cross who is there precisely for having given up claims in the interests of love.

This morning we will spend time asking about our experience of a year of lockdowns and pandemic. We will have an opportunity to speak and think honestly about what that experience (and how we think about it) has - or ought to - change us. In his excellent little book *Virus as a Summons to Faith* Brueggemann writes of Jeremiah: “... the prophetic promise does not intend a return to ‘the good old days’ or a restoration of a previous ... arrangement ... [It] rather intends a return to the land of promise that will be ordered, organised and lived out in freshly faithful ways.”

In other words, as we confer together the question we face is this: are we open to a future - and an ordering of that future - in which our relationship with one another in the Body of Christ is the holding context and content, and not a fixation on our pet securities, nostalgias or inherited models? Freshly faithful.

Therefore, we join together in considering our future, cognisant of our faithfulness to the past and the biblical narrative of courageous leaving and journeying. The biblical story has not changed, but we might gain fresh insight from our new experience. As I wrote to the clergy at the beginning of the first lockdown last year, having our diaries destroyed has allowed us to inhabit something of the normal life of people in some of our partner/link dioceses in places like Sudan, Tanzania and Pakistan. So, what can we learn? How can we change?

Or, in the quadrant of questions I suggested as a simple framework for planning ahead post-pandemic, (a) what have we lost that needs to stay lost? (b) what has been lost that we need to regain? (c) what have we gained that was OK for this time, but needs to be lost? (d) what have we gained that must be retained and built upon if we are to be freshly faithful?

Across the Diocese of Leeds we will have different perspectives and have enjoyed or endured varying experiences during the last year. But, we now find ourselves moving towards a re-emergence and an honest evaluation of how we might be in and for the future. And we do this not with fear, but with hope, determination and generosity. The pandemic is not the end. The challenge to our churches, not least financially, is not the end. The loss of some familiar routines or practices is not the end. As I have said many times, you can’t argue with reality. But, we needn’t be cowed by reality. Because, as Brueggemann says, we are called to reframe reality - to find ways and words to tell a different story, to read our present circumstances differently, through the eyes of a God who is faithful. Working hard at this will help us in our own churches and communities to live, worship and serve as people of hope and people of joy.

Joy? Really? Yes, unequivocally. Because Christians are not surprised by fear or mortality or uncertainty. They are the raw stuff of Christian living and thinking and praying. For our trust is in the person of a faithful God, not in the outworking of a formula or a convenient bargain with God that ensures our own security.

Our diocese has a strategy derived from three one-word values. *Loving Living Learning* is not a trite slogan designed to make us feel better. But, our deliberations need to be infused with love (for God, the Gospel, and the creation that is loved by God); with an incarnational commitment to the world as it is, but drawn by a vision (of the Kingdom of God) that comes to us from the resurrection future; with the humility that comes from recognising our fallibility, failings and blindnesses, and sees learning as a virtue and not a weakness.

And what might this look like if we embody these three values? Well, when we come to think about the post-COVID future, we will do so with mercy, humility and love. When we consider the well-being of clergy (which is not in contradistinction to the well-being of lay people), we will look with generosity and hope and not be defensive about where we might have mixed experiences of them. Matters pertaining to the DAC and quinquennial inspections bring these values down to concrete reality: how do we steward the resources God has given us? However we feel about the hard questions of sexuality and identity, will we approach LLF with the humility that allows us to encounter others, listen genuinely, learn from ... even if we don't agree with the conclusions others draw?

It's a bit like when people say "I love everyone" or "I love the whole world", but really struggle to love the awkward so-and-so next to me. I call us back to a simple truth: that Jesus did the calling of his disciples and their witness was to follow Jesus together despite their differences of personality, experience and vision. No one was given a veto over who else Jesus could invite on the journey. One of the glories and gifts of Anglicanism is the fact that we are thrown together with other Anglicans, regardless of whether I approve of them or not. That is what deanery synods and clergy chapters are for.

I need to conclude. The days ahead are full of opportunities, some of which we wouldn't have invited and which we don't welcome. But, they are the gift we are given, however uncomfortable. The days ahead are full of challenge. But, when has the church (or the human race in any generation) not faced unprecedented challenges? The days ahead are full of promise - the promise of God to be faithful (the "steadfast love" that Brueggemann translates as "tenacious solidarity") as we seek to be faithful to our vocation as a church in and for England.

I do not know what the future holds. But, I do know we can face it together as the gift that God has given for this generation. We can be confident with humility, creative with fidelity to our story, and merciful as we make decisions of which we might be unsure. In the end, we seek to be the people who answer the prayer we say every day: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven."

Amen. Let's get to it.

The Rt Revd Nicholas Baines
Bishop of Leeds

13 March 2021

Diocesan Synod 13 March 2021 – Item 8 Questions for Synod

Question received from Jonathan Bolton (Headingley deanery)

“To the Chair of the Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster wrote a letter dated 12th June 2020 to the former Israeli Ambassador, Mark Regev, and the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, expressing their opposition to any move by the Government of Israel to annex West Bank territory after 1st July 2020 (1). Even though the official annexation has been put on hold, the ongoing destruction of Palestinian properties (2) and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Occupied territories continues, and was condemned by the British Consul General in Occupied Jerusalem in February 2021 (3).

The charity Sabeel-Kairos is running a campaign called ‘Investing for Peace’, which is asking churches to consider their investment policies in relation to the conflict (4). In January 2021, the Methodist Church passed a resolution calling for a review of their policy on the issue (5). The Trustees of the Leeds DBF have a policy to invest in accordance with the ethical investment policy of the Church of England Ethical Investment Advisory Group (6, p.12). Has the EIAG provided advice to the LBDF to enable the Diocese to screen out investments in companies benefitting from the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory?

References

- 1 - <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/archbishop-justin-welby-and-cardinal-vincent-nichols-joint-statement-west-bank-annexation>
- 2 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/west-bank-demolitions-and-displacement-overview-january-2021>
- 3 - <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210215-uk-official-condemns-israel-settlements/>
- 4 - <https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Investing-for-Peace-free-download-June-19.pdf>
- 5 - <https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/campaign-success/#more-8597>
- 6 - <https://www.leeds.anglican.org/sites/default/files/files/LBDF%20Annual%20Report%20%26%20Accounts%202017.pdf>

From The Rt Revd Nick Baines, Bishop of Leeds and Chair of the Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance

The LBDF and our investment manager CCLA follow the policies set by the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/statement-of-ethical-investment-policy-march-2017.pdf>), which at present does not include restrictions that would prevent investment in companies benefitting from the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory.