

Leeds Diocesan Synod

DRAFT Minutes of the twenty eighth meeting of the Synod of the diocese held at 9.30 am on Saturday, 15 June 2024 at St George's Church, Great George St, Leeds LS1 3BR.

Chair: The Bishop of Leeds

1. Welcome, apologies and notices.

Jonathan Wood gave the Health & Safety, social media and Report Summary notices.

1.2 Welcomes

The Chair welcomed:

1. Archdeacon Cat Thatcher was welcomed attending first Diocesan Synod as Archdeacon of Pontefract.
2. Diocesan Interns and Mission Apprentice who were welcomers and stewards at the Synod: Briony Shutt, Eli Miller, Joshua Faulkner, Patrick Lennon and Catherine Ilegbedion-Kyoon.
3. Those who staffed information stands at the Synod
 - Members of the Children, Young People and Families Team who had brought an information stand about their work to the Diocesan Synod.
 - Elaine Swinhoe, (MU President for the Diocese of Leeds and Bishop's Nominee on the Diocesan Synod) and Jenni Wohlman, (Diocesan Synod member for Almondbury and Kirkburton deanery) who staffed an MU information stand.
4. The Chair also welcomed and gave the Chair's permission to speak (SO3) to:

Item 7 - "Presentation from the Children, Young People and Families Team" and also facilitation of Item 12 Barnabas update item: Canon Liz Morton, Children, Young People and Families Team Leader.

Item 10 - "Presentation and discussion: 2023 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements" and for Item 11 - "Motion: 2023 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements": Geoff Park, Chief Finance Officer.

Item 12 – "Barnabas update": The Revd Jude Smith, Director of Church Revitalisation. Facilitation of Barnabas update item: Ben Walker – Strategic Portfolio Manager, Lucinda Cook – Mission Apprentice (Job shadowing The Revd Jude Smith, Director of Church Revitalisation), Aimi King, Mission Support Lead, Alex Burbidge, Growing Faith Lead, Jo Young, Children, Young People and Families Team Member

Apologies

37 Apologies had been received.

Chair: The Revd Canon Rachel Firth (Chair of the House of Clergy)

2. Promulgation of Amending Canon No 43.

Papers: DS24 06 01, DS24 06 01 01, DS24 06 01 02, DS24 06 01 03

The Chair read out:

"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."

3. Motion: Draft Minutes of the last Meeting on 16 March 2024. DS24 06 02

The Chair proposed:

"That the draft minutes contained in DS24 06 02 be accepted as a true record of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 16 March 2024".

There were no notified amendments.

The motion was approved.

4. Presidential Address.

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

5. Consultation by the Bishop of Leeds on Vacancy (Consultation in respect of a see of a suffragan bishop) - Bishop of Wakefield.

Papers: None.

Speaker: The Bishop of Leeds.

The Bishop of Leeds confirmed that there was a process for the appointment of a suffragan bishop which involved seeking the Dioceses Commission's permission to fill the vacancy. The required paperwork was being prepared for a meeting with the Dioceses Commission on 23 September 2024. If the Dioceses Commission gave approval the next steps would involve a

notice in the Church Times, assembly of a panel with broad representation to advise on the appointment and assist with the interviewing of candidates in November. The appointment itself was a Bishop of Leeds appointment. This time frame could mean a consecration in Spring 2025.

As part of the process for the appointment, the Bishop of Leeds was required to consult with the Diocesan Synod on the proposal to appoint a new Bishop of Wakefield. The Synod's consent wasn't required. In overview, arguably ten years was not long enough to change after the radical scheme of the new diocese. The only way to change would be to absorb the episcopal area into another one, which wouldn't make sense as the coherence for the new diocese was that it aligned to civic arrangements.

Synod members were asked if there were any questions.

Kay Brown (North West Leeds deanery)
Thanked the Bishop of Leeds for the presentation.

There were no further comments or questions.

The Bishop of Leeds invited Synod members to email him with any ideas/comments.

Graham Foster (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery)
Invited Synod members to join him in a round of applause for Bishop Tony Robinson, Bishop of Wakefield.

Synod gave a round of applause for Bishop Tony Robinson.

The Chair commented that there would be a farewell service for Bishop Tony at Wakefield cathedral.

6. Questions to Synod.

No Questions to Synod had been received.

7. Presentation Motion: Receive the Annual Reports from the Diocesan Boards and Committees

Motion:

"That the annual reports contained in DS24 06 03 and DS24 06 03 01 are received."

Proposer: The Ven Bill Braviner (Archdeacon of Halifax)

Papers: DS24 06 03 Annual Reports from the Diocesan Boards and Committees (Church House Teams)

DS24 06 03 01 Annual Reports from the Diocesan Boards and Committees (Statutory

content)

Proposer of the motion: Ven Bill Braviner (Archdeacon of Halifax).

Presenter: Canon Liz Morton, Children, Young People and Families Team Leader (“LM”).

LM spoke about the Children, Young People and Families Team (“the Team”). There were seven members of the Team (including one administrator): one full time member and five part time. Two roles were funded within Barnabas funding (One being full time and the other 2.5 days per week role). The focus of the Team was to support parishes in ministry and mission.

LM gave an overview of the Team’s highlights of 2023 and 2024 to date:

- The Team had worked with parishes in respect of ministry to children and young people. The Team have facilitated courses for leaders and volunteers in all episcopal areas by the end of this year. LM said the Team were grateful to the bishops for supporting these events.
- In 2023 the Team met over 400 people across all deaneries and have met 200 people in 2024.
- The Team have worked collaboratively with Church House colleagues, particularly Lay Training, Education, DAC and Barnabas.
- In 2023, individual support had been given to 15% of parishes in the diocese and in 2024 to 12% of parishes to date.
- Learning communities across the diocese were being supported by the Team. These were for Messy Church best practice, Best Practice for Children, Young People and Families ministry and mission and Additional Needs in parish context.
- Mission Toolkit: this was to help parishes to intentionally create pathways for children and young people.

LM asked the Synod to pray for the children and young people in all the diocese’s parishes and to contact the CYPF team either at the stand during the Synod or by email.

The Chair asked if there were any questions of clarification of the motion on the agenda. There were no questions for clarification of the motion.

Archdeacon Bill Braviner (Archdeacon of Halifax)

Commented that annual reports could sometimes seem dry. He asked Synod to be aware that they tell the story of what the diocese had done with regard to ministry, mission and prayer. He thanked all the diocesan teams.

Archdeacon Bill proposed the motion:

“That the annual reports contained in DS24 06 03 and DS24 06 03 01 are received.”

Debate

Graham Foster (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery)

In the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Report mentioned that the parish of Halifax, St Hilda had been dissolved. In an answer to a Question to Synod it was said that St Hilda was closed on health and safety grounds. If the parish was dissolved how could parish share still be attached to it as the parish didn't exist only the building.

Jonathan Wood (Secretary to the Synod)

Assured Graham Foster that this would be looked in to and a reply provided to the whole of the Synod.

The Revd Caroline Greenwood (Halifax and Calder Valley deanery)

Caroline, the Incumbent of Warley and Halifax St Hilda benefice, told Synod that the parish was in an interim period. The church was closed for public worship but there was still a PCC responsible for the building and so potential to still pray in the building.

WE NEED TO INSERT THE ANSWER I SENT TO GF – so can we add with the following text.

This answer was subsequently sent to GF on X date and is reproduced below for all members of synod.

Archdeacon Paul Ayers (Archdeacon of Leeds)

Thanked the diocesan teams for their reports and particularly resonant was LM's presentation about the work of the Children, Young People and Families team. This had reminded Archdeacon Paul of striking artwork he had seen at a Sixth Form college. These were self-portraits by young black women of themselves sitting in front of a mirror with the Bible text "Fearfully and wonderfully made". Archdeacon Paul commended such confidence in their Faith and hoped that this would be seen in churches as they encouraged confidence in young people.

Kay Brown (North West Leeds deanery)

Thought the reports were encouraging and also offered a vote of thanks for all the Synod in lay and clergy working together and to say thank you to all people who offer voluntary time to further the work of everyone in the diocese.

Synod voted on the motion.

Approved – no abstentions and none against.

10.35 am

8. Presentation: Work of the Mothers' Union.

Paper: None.

Presenter: Elaine Swinhoe (MU President for the Diocese of Leeds and Bishop's Nominee on the Diocesan Synod)

Elaine Swinhoe (MU President for the Diocese of Leeds and Bishop's Nominee on the Diocesan

Synod) gave a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the work of the Mothers' Union (MU). There were 4 million MU members across 83 countries. Elaine showed a video of the work of the MU's work worldwide: in Burundi 2.5% of the population had been taught to read through MU projects. Teaching women to read raised their profile in their communities.

Each year, in the UK, the MU joins 16 days of activism against gender based abuse. The MU had held a prayer vigil outside Halifax Minster. Elaine mentioned that a poster was available which had a tear off slip with phone numbers for a domestic abuse helpline and information about where to access help. The MU also have a holiday scheme for those in need which provide free holidays for those who qualify for help. The MU do work in prisons, with hospitals and run a teenage mums project in Wakefield.

Elaine asked the Synod to pray for the work of the MU and its diocesan links. For more information Synod were pointed to the mothersunion.org website.

Synod took a refreshment break

Chair: Canon Matthew Ambler (Chair of the House of Laity)

9. AMPCs constitution update DS24 06 04

Motion:

"That the revised constitution for the Area Mission and Pastoral Committees contained in appendix 3 of DS24 06 04 be approved."

Proposer: The Ven Andy Jolley (Archdeacon of Bradford)

Paper:

DS24 06 04 Report on AMPCs constitution update

Proposer of the motion: The Ven Andy Jolley

Presenter: The Ven Andy Jolley

Archdeacon Andy Jolley outlined the work of the Area Mission and Pastoral committees: considering proposals for deployment, the pastoral reorganization of churches and the better cure of souls. There is also a Diocesan Mission and Pastoral committee which delegates functions to the Area Mission and Pastoral committees. A problem has been getting members to join the committees to discuss the proposals. The motion proposes a change to the way people are elected to the Area Mission and Pastoral committees: clergy electing clergy and laity electing laity at meetings of the respective houses of the deanery synods. It was hoped that members could be more easily elected and get more people with appropriate knowledge in the committees.

There were now questions of clarification.

Debate

John Beal (East Leeds deanery)

Commented that with regard to both online and physical meetings it was important to ensure that the building was accessible and that people could hear and not excluded because of IT use.

Response to the debate

Archdeacon Andy Jolley confirmed that it was intended that the meetings should be permissive and the area deans and deanery lay chairs should be aware of the point that had been made.

Synod voted on the motion proposed by Archdeacon Andy Jolley:

“That the revised constitution for the Area Mission and Pastoral Committees contained in appendix 3 of DS24 06 04 be approved.”

Voting

For: Majority

Against: None

Abstain: 1

The motion was approved.

10. Presentation and discussion: 2023 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements DS24 06 05, DS24 06 05 01

Papers:

DS24 06 05 2023 Leeds DBF Annual report and financial statements

DS24 06 05 01 Report from the Chief Finance Officer.

Speakers: Canon Irving Warnett (Bishop’s Nominee) and Geoff Park.

Canon Irving Warnett (“IW”) gave an overview of the 2023 Leeds DBF Annual report and financial statements, highlighting:

- It was easy to look at the headlines in the accounts and miss the detail. The unrestricted reserves were £5.6m but this masks the long term issues around sustainability.
- In the core operation, there was a cash deficit of £1.3m £15.0m was used for clergy stipends, housing and pension costs in 2023. However, £12.1m was received from the parishes in share. For context, in 2019, Parish Share receipts were £13.9m. If that £13.9m had increased annually with inflation of around 3%, share would be £1.6m higher today and this would fully cover the costs of the clergy.
- An annual increase of 3% had been included in the parish share to keep pace with inflation. However, Parish Share receipts this year had not increased by 3%. So, there was concern for the direction of travel. The diocese has some surplus houses that were being sold to cover shortfalls but this obscured the picture and, each time a property was sold this reduced future rental income.

- The diocese wanted to make the right decisions for the future with the parishes input to understand where everyone was heading. Forecasting parish share was difficult. It can't be done in isolation by the Leeds Board, Bishop's Staff or the Finance Assets and Investments Committee. Synod and parishes input was needed to strengthen and understand with better and wider engagement. A 3% increase isn't unrealistic in the current economic climate where all other costs are increasing. However, IW believed that too many parishes were not feeling confident to have realistic giving conversations in the parish. The diocesan Stewardship and Barnabas teams could provide excellent support to parishes to enable them to do this. IW encouraged all parishes to get in touch with them.
- All Archdeacons would be having conversations with parishes and there was communication with deaneries and the larger paying parishes to get a clear understanding of the likely parish share payments this year. This wasn't a one-off exercise as it was good to deepen understanding to assess what the options were for diocesan strategy and the shape of mission and growing the diocese.

Geoff Park (GP) spoke to the circulated Accounts providing detail of the underlying financial position:

- The movement of Parish Share over the last four years had been to the diocese now spending £130 on Parish Ministry for every £100 received in Parish Share. The books were being balanced through the sale of properties and by transferring monies from restricted reserves.
- The next Synod would consider the proposed Budget for 2025 and the five-year plan. It was currently expected that there would be a deficit for some while.
- Looking at income over the previous seven years, Parish Share peaked in 2019 and dropped to its lowest in 2020. There was a mild recovery but the cost-of-living increase had an impact on this. National church funding had changed from broadly unrestricted funding to restricted funding focused on investing in strategic projects. There was £1.7m restricted funding in 2023 from the national church. The revaluation of properties means that going forward if they are sold the gain on our balance sheet is lower, although selling properties has meant that the financial position is better than it would have been otherwise.
- Expenditure fell in 2019 following redundancies and pension costs falling.
- GP thanked the Synod members, deaneries and parishes for the support they give and emphasizes that Parish Share payments needed to increase. People do give generously and the diocese places great value on every contribution to parish share.
- Inflation had had an impact on Parish Share [This was outlined in the PowerPoint presentation].
- Closing unrestricted free reserves of £5.9m were a little above the top of the range set at £5.6m.
- Restricted funds increased by £1.85m. There had been the sale of a number of closed churches. Two thirds of the proceeds are remitted to the DBF for the support of the work of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and, if this has been satisfied, other areas which the DBF may approve. Some of these funds had been transferred to unrestricted where possible.
- Looking at the Notes to the Accounts, as well as the revaluation of properties and land mentioned, development projects were being pursued with regard to land held by the diocese.

- The Linda Box legal case concerning fraud by the former Registrar of the Diocese of Wakefield had reached a settlement in 2023. It was hoped that the costs settlement of the case would occur before the end of 2024.
- For 2024 – the finances seemed a continuation of what had been seen in previous years. Currently the DBF was behind Budget and not keeping to the Parish Share expectation, with £3.3m received so far. There was a positive from rental incomes as rental markets were strong. Costs were on track as there were a number of vacancies.
- GP would be happy to provide the PowerPoint slides to Synod members if they wanted the detail.

Discussion and Questions

The Revd John Bavington (Inner Bradford deanery and General Synod)

Selling properties could be seen as selling the family silver. What was the alternative when there were no longer properties to use to offset the deficits?

The Revd Peter Gunstone (Inner Bradford deanery)

The parish share summary was impressive but bewildering document - could Synod have some interpretation around that please. If parish share is the engine and is spluttering, this would help have detailed conversations in the deaneries and understanding and involvement in the decision making of the finance board.

The Revd David Gerrard (Wakefield deanery)

Other than the matters listed how else can the issues be tackled? Presumably by reducing operational costs? If parish share goes up what is the plan for the future?

Roger Lazenby (North West Leeds deanery)

The Finance Team gave a presentation at the North West Leeds deanery synod which was brilliant and appreciated by the members as it communicated in a way that parishioners and PCCs could understand in small chunks. Roger would recommend all deaneries should invite the Finance Team to come and do a presentation.

Chris Thompson (Almondbury and Kirkburton deanery)

The Budget shows a full complement of posts and assumes vacancies will continue?

Archdeacon Paul Ayers (Archdeacon of Leeds)

Thanked IW and GP for their presentation and work. With regard to the parish share report, Archdeacon Paul said with regard to a conversation about a parish not paying in full as they said they couldn't afford to, there were three things to consider:

- i) The key messages were on the first slide of GP's presentation. Talk about these with parishes and deaneries as this helps communicate the information
- ii) We need to be realistic and faith-filled with regard to giving and parish share. (See 1 Corinthians about churches supporting each other).
- iii) Think seriously about deployment. Multi church ministry is increasing and one clergy parish needs to be thought about.

Marilyn Banister (South Craven and Wharfedale deanery)

Although only a PCC Treasurer usually knows what people give as giving is confidential, would it be possible to gather data from parishes about what bands of giving are happening? Would that act as a nudge to people to know what the giving in the parish is. If people know this increasing giving may be an easier conversation?

GP replied to the discussion

- Work was in hand about the sustainability of the level of costs. The results of this would be brought to the autumn Synod. GP agreed that selling properties wasn't a long-term solution.
- Deployment had been reducing over a long period of time and as properties become available, they could be either sold or generate rental income.
- Regarding income, there is longer term development around property and land development. This would take forward schemes and land sales for eg housing for supported living accommodation at a site of an old vicarage. This would generate an income stream for thirty years.
- With regard to costs – the number of clergy the diocese is able to support is reducing and operational costs are smaller than before. However, costs will also need to be reviewed in the future as it won't be possible to keep selling properties.
- There is a national report on what makes the difference to why parish share is paid or not. Communications differ across dioceses as do the parish share schemes. The report says it's about engagement and a collective buy in to the concept and this applies to whatever system a diocese adopts.
- The Budget figure is slightly higher than the vacancy rate, hence the saving.
- It is important that all communications are in context. Finance is one side of personal discipleship and growth and communities.

IW thanked Marilyn for the point she had made, particularly that the PCC Treasurer knows the bands who could give more. This was key to having directed conversations about giving.

11. Motion: 2023 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements DS24 06 05, DS24 06 05 01

Motion:

"That the 2023 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements contained in DS24 06 05 are received."

Proposer: Canon Mr Irving Warnett (Bishop's Nominee)

Papers

DS24 06 05, DS24 06 05 01 (as for item 10).

Proposer: Canon Mr Irving Warnett (Bishop's Nominee).

Irving Warnett (Bishop's Nominee) proposed the motion:

"That the 2023 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements contained in DS24 06 05 are received."

Questions of clarification

None.

Debate

None.

Voting

For – All.

Against – None.

Abstain – None.

The motion was approved.

12. Presentation: Barnabas update

Paper: None

Presenter: The Revd Jude Smith, Director of Church Revitalisation.

PPT presentation: The Revd Jude Smith.

Facilitators for small group work:

Ben Walker – Strategic Portfolio Manager

Lucinda Cook – Mission Apprentice at St John Clayton and Job shadowing The Revd Jude Smith,
Director of Church Revitalisation

Canon Liz Morton - Children, Young People and Families Team Leader

Aimi King - Mission Support Lead

Alex Burbidge - Growing Faith Lead

Jo Young - Children, Young People and Families Team Member.

The Revd Jude Smith (JS) gave a presentation to the Synod on Barnabas. There were encouraging signs that parishes were already getting involved with Barnabas. A new diagnostic tool "Compass" was being launched at the Synod. This would help parishes work out the direction they need to go. This takes on four key things: Where they are; What the right direction will be; Any barriers to taking the next step; Support available from the diocese. The diagnostic tool is self-run with a video and also paper-based resources. Working through the tool takes around 2 hours.

Synod were to have a go at using Compass. It was recognized that churches may not want to have a three year action plan for example but do need to identify what to do next, ie where it's strong and where it needs to develop to reach its goal. Compass encourages the parish to think

about relative strengths in nurture, discipleship, and leadership.

Synod looked at Compass in small groups.

The Synod small groups reported what scores they had identified using Compass. JS commented that many churches were good at engaging but not at then having conversations about a relationship with God.

Ben Walker spoke about the Personal Growth and Leadership course we have been running. This involved six sessions of three hours on a Saturday starting in September. This was for those with potential for leadership and includes how to have faith conversations.

For those who had identified that children and young people mission is a challenge, the national church has invested in children and young people engagement. Alex Burbidge can offer support to enable engagement with schools.

Synod members were asked to leave cards with their details if they were interested in support for Compass conversations.

Chair: The Bishop of Leeds

The Bishop of Leeds thanked the Synod members for all their work during the Diocesan Synod triennium. He also thanked the two Chairs, The Revd Canon Rachel Firth and Canon Matthew Ambler and presented them each with a gift of thanks from the Synod.

13. Eucharist – closing of the Synod triennium

The Bishop of Leeds presided at a Eucharist service for the end of the Synod Triennium.

14. Bishop of Leeds Blessing and Close.

The Synod closed with a blessing from the Bishop of Leeds.

Presidential Address

Way out on the rim of the galaxy
The gifts of the Lord lie torn
Into whose charge the gifts were given
Have made it a curse for so many to be born
This is my trouble
These were my fathers
So how am I supposed to feel?
Way out on the rim of the broken wheel

Water of life is going to flow again
Changed from the blood of heroes and knaves
The word mercy's going to have a new meaning
When we are judged by the children of our slaves
No adult of sound mind
Can be an innocent bystander
Trial comes before truth's revealed
Out here on the rim of the broken wheel

You and me -- we are the break in the broken wheel
Bleeding wound that will not heal

Lord, spit on our eyes so we can see
How to wake up from this tragedy

Any guesses who wrote that? No, it wasn't Taylor Swift. You will be shocked to hear it is Bruce Cockburn and comes from his 1981 album Inner City Front. It has always seemed to me to put into words the sense of human unease at holding together what the universe is for ... and how we live with the mess we have made of it. A broken wheel might still turn, but it will jar at every rotation. And Cockburn is uncomfortably wise about our need for a renewed perspective: "The word mercy's going to have a new meaning when we are judged by the children of our slaves."

How are we, caught up in the struggles of the present world, supposed to hold together in our heads and hearts the competing claims on our commitments? I get criticised on social media for not going on Gaza marches in Leeds, but I am wondering why people aren't marching for Sudan ... and where Sudan's genocides appear on other people's hierarchies of violence. There's too much to take in. So, for many people, there is little alternative to screening out the sights and sounds of the evident brokenness in the world out there.

I think this matters if we are to be honest about our failing to wake up to both (a) the urgency of so many global and local disasters and threats, and (b) our lack of realism with regard to prioritising our energies and engagements. Which 'issues' do I commit to without condemning the choices made by others who don't seem to share my own?

Well, this is a big set of questions and we don't have time to address them here. But, I raise them because we live at a time when we have to be honest about the impact of information and data flood – via screens and social media – on our ability to live and think and choose wisely. And we have a vital need to keep alive a sense of perspective that keeps us steady when all around us seems to be getting a good shaking.

Two things illustrate this: (a) looking through the eyes of people who are not like us and do not share our cultural or geographical circumstances, and (b) the choices we face in a domestic general election in less than three weeks' time.

It's a bit of a shock leaving an airport at around 40C and landing at another one at around 11C. Yet, when Bishop Toby and I returned ten days ago from a week in Sudan, there was a certain metaphorical symmetry to this as well. We left the heat of a country deep in conflict and suffering and emerged into one that is feeling a bit more than a chill as the general election campaign exposes social and economic challenges not seen for several generations in the UK. Nobody is pretending that nothing is shaken and nothing is broken in the UK.

We went to Sudan to visit our sisters and brothers who, caught up in the destructive cycle of violence launched by rebel forces against the people of Sudan, face a very uncertain and not very promising future. Our meetings with displaced people and refugees, with senior politicians and intelligence personnel, with Christians and Muslims, brought home to us some of the realities which cannot be learned from a Zoom conversation or an email trail. If noticed by western media at all, Sudan's conflict is normally presented as a fight between two power-crazed generals; the reality is that the Rapid Support Forces, stacked with mercenaries and soldiers from surrounding countries and funded and armed by countries such as the United Arab Emirates, is indiscriminately murdering and destroying anything that comes across their path in an attempt to take over the country. This is not a conflict of equals – in any sense.

And the Episcopal Church of Sudan seeks to be faithful to the call of God to serve people and communities – whoever they are – because the Christian story is one of God's people laying down their life in order that the character and purposes of God can be seen and known in the world. Easy for me to say, but hard to understand when listening to a pastor who, having been beaten up by soldiers several times, was then asked how he wanted to die.

I won't go into the complexities of the situation here and now, but suffice it to say that the need of our sister church for our support – in prayer, finance, solidarity and hope – has never been greater. In conversations with Archbishop Ezekiel, who now runs the whole province from a small desk in the corner of his bare bedroom in Port Sudan, we pledged our continuing support – our love and commitment to him

and his people. Thank you to all in this diocese who have given money in order to keep besieged clergy paid, fed and resourced to feed and serve others.

But, sitting with and listening to the stories of displaced people – including the Archbishop and his family – it is painfully clear just how fragile life and civilised society is. It did not take long for this conflict to ignite and for people's suffering to explode. Some of the stories we were told were hard to hear. I am grateful to Bishop Toby for the way he has been able to tell some of these in the UK media in order to get Sudan back onto the world's attention radar. I continue to represent our commitment to Sudan in Parliament and other spheres of influence, and this will continue once a new Parliament is in place in July.

Sitting in Port Sudan, listening to stories and hearing a different perspective (filtered through a different way of seeing and experiencing the world), one can understand the impatience of those who suffer that we in the Western Church are so preoccupied by matters that are not the burning priority in the cauldron of imminent violence. Having houses, goods and people burned shines a different light on some of our other passions.

Which sets in clear relief the situation faced by our own nation. The general election on 4 July this year presents all citizens with a responsibility to think, to vote and to engage properly in a participative parliamentary democracy ... for the sake of the common good. I struggle when I hear voices in the media which assume - as the only criterion for choosing which box to put a cross in – whether this will benefit my material wealth, my own security, my own pension or financial wellbeing.

As a Christian I can't go along with this. This cannot be about choosing a government which will make me feel better or have more; it must take us beyond consumerist self-interest into considering what will best enable all in our society to flourish. It used to be called 'the common good', seeing taxes, for example, as a 'good' and not a burden. In order to help Christians approach the election in a Christian way, the bishops have put together resources that face us with Scripture and encourage us to 'Pray Your Part' in this electoral process. Even the Daily Mail can't complain about bishops urging renewed prayer and study of the scriptures as they take their responsibility seriously for choosing what our country should be like in the future.

What brings these things together – Sudan and the UK general election – is precisely the point articulated by Bruce Cockburn. Our starting point cannot be just the here and now. As the Apostle Paul put it in his letter to the Romans (chapter 12), we must be willing to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds" – which involves being willing to have our mind and perspective changed by exposure in prayer and the reading of scripture – that we might increasingly see through the eyes of God who has bumped along the rim of a broken wheel.

This means starting with a Christian theological anthropology: all people are made in the image of God; the created order belongs to the God who shows himself incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth; Christian discipleship means shaping our individual and common life in such a way that when people touch the church - at

whatever level – they meet something of the Jesus we read about in the gospels. Let's at least keep this dynamic simple amid the complexities of everything else.

So, our agenda today has to be seen not as a series of items of business that exist for their own sake. No, rather, they are part of our way of ordering our common life and priorities so that the church in the Diocese of Leeds plays its part – however small or limited – in exposing the world around us (in Sudan and here in England) to the self-sacrificial love, mercy, grace, justice and generosity of God who, to use Cockburn's language, entrusted the gifts of his creation to our charge.

We will discuss money and finance and annual reports. These do not exist for their own sakes. They tell a story of our life and how we are meeting our obligations as stewards of the gifts of the creator. Let's not forget the bigger story into which they fit.

Today we say good bye to Bishop Tony who will retire at the end of August, having finished his public ministry in Wakefield and the diocese early in July. Ordained for 43 years and ministering in West Yorkshire as an archdeacon and suffragan bishop (in Wakefield) played an indispensable part in creating and shaping our now-ten-year-old diocese from 2014. He bears some of the scars of this, but has been faithful, generous and collegial throughout – never losing sight of the bigger picture as I described it earlier. Tony can go into a well-earned retirement knowing that he has served well and fruitfully. Tony, we owe you a large debt of gratitude for your ministry and service among us through so many years of change. We will miss you (but I have begun the process for your replacement and will petition the Dioceses Commission on 23 September!).

Towards the end of our agenda today we will have an update on our Barnabas project which is a vehicle for enabling 'the diocese' to support, encourage, resource and accompany our parishes as they seek a confident and never-boring future. Confidence, however, will emerge only if first our mind, heart and imagination are grasped by the God who has created and called us. Our diocesan dynamic has not changed: confident Christians who grow churches that help to transform our local communities.

The rim of the wheel is broken. But, brokenness – what the Czech philosopher Jan Patocka called 'the solidarity of the shaken' – is what holds us together in bold humility. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24). Which is why, later, we can go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**The Rt Revd Nicholas Baines,
Bishop of Leeds**

15 June 2024
