

## Bristol Diocesan Synod Minutes

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**Date:** Saturday, 23 November 2024

**Time:** 9.30am to 3.00pm

**Venue:** Pattern Church, Penzance Drive, Swindon, SN5 7JL

The agenda and papers for this meeting can be found on the Diocese of Bristol website at: [Diocesan Synod - Diocese of Bristol](#)

<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome</b>
<p>Mr Bruce Finnamore in the Chair.</p> <p>Bruce explained that following the independent report about John Smyth's prolific abuse of children and the failure of senior Church of England Clergy and Officers to take appropriate action to protect the vulnerable and bring Mr Smyth to justice, the Diocesan Synod agenda for today had been amended to allow time to discuss safeguarding, and for members to express their thoughts, feelings, concerns and ideas.</p>	
<b>2.</b>	<p><b>Safeguarding</b></p> <p><b>2.1 Address from Bishop Viv</b></p> <p><b>2.2 Table discussion</b></p> <p><b>2.3 Feedback</b></p>
<p>Bishop Neil explained the safeguarding discussions would be facilitated and that each facilitator would transcribe their table's conversation. At the end of the discussion the facilitators would feedback key points to Diocesan Synod, however, all their notes would be shared with Adam Bond (Diocesan Safeguarding Officer) who would, in turn, discuss the notes with the Bishops and Archdeacons.</p> <p>Bishop Neil acknowledged that there might be survivors in the room, so encouraged Diocesan Synod members to be sensitive to this.</p> <p>Bishop Viv addressed Diocesan Synod. A full copy of her address can be found in Appendix 1.</p> <p>Bruce invited Diocesan to consider the following questions:</p>	

- What are your thoughts and feelings about these safeguarding events?
- What do you want to see happen at national church level?
- What should we do within the Diocese of Bristol to ensure we meet the necessary safeguarding standards?
- What should I do as an individual or member of my local church leadership team to ensure we meet the necessary safeguarding standards?

Some tables were brought together so that the nine facilitators (The Ven Christopher Bryan, Archdeacon of Malmesbury; The Ven Becky Waring, Archdeacon of Bristol; The Revd Adam Beaumont, Associate Archdeacon; The Revd Trudie Wigley, Chair of the House of Clergy; Mr Bruce Finnamore, Chair of the House of Laity; Mr Richard Bacon, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance; Mr Richard Leaman, CEO/Diocesan Secretary; and Mr John Sunderland, Bishop's Council Member; Miss Helen Clifton, Deanery Lay Chair for Bristol West) might ensure that every member of Diocesan Synod had access to a facilitated discussion, and that quieter voices were heard.

**Feedback from table discussion:**

**The Ven Christopher Bryan (Archdeacon of Malmesbury)** - there had been many different emotional responses. The key points raised were to get the Redress Scheme in place and to actively promote National Safeguarding Sunday. There was also a request for support and authority to remove PCC members who would not comply with safeguarding requirements from their posts.

**The Ven Becky Waring (Archdeacon of Bristol)** - felt that the Diocesan Safeguarding Steering Group should have more independent oversight, and safeguarding training should be simpler to understand.

**The Ven Adam Beaumont (Associate Archdeacon)** - horrified, ashamed and shocked by recent events. There was a need to increase capacity and understanding of how to care for survivors.

**Mr Bruce Finnamore (Chair of the House of Laity)** – Disappointment, anger, sadness. Exasperation that the church had learnt nothing. There was a view that the hierarchy was not accountable, overprotected and overprotective.

**The Revd Trudie Wigley (Chair of the House of Clergy)** – Attention to communication was a thread throughout discussion, including:

- messaging to National Church to “get their house in order”
- at Diocesan level, there was gratitude for the communication sent out by Bishop Viv yet some confusion with regards to whom the communication was sent to and advice on what should be said on the Sunday after the news was published (particularly from the churches who were in vacancy)
- At parish level, grateful thanks for the work of all PSOs and their teams

**Miss Helen Clifton (Deanery Lay Chair for Bristol West)** – lots of feelings, soul searching and worry. There were questions about whether we were doing enough

and were we following the procedures correctly. Were those who reported a safeguarding concern required to chase it up or should they assume it was being handled once it was reported? Real concern about the transparency of the National Church. People must be able to whistle blow without negative consequences.

**Mr John Sunderland (Bishop's Council member)** – Proper independence and accountability. Stark reminder that the worst can happen in plain sight. Concern about the power of personalities and unrestrained charisma.

**Mr Richard Bacon (Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance)** – Outraged and upset. The fact that Mr John Smyth moved to Africa where safeguarding legislation was more relaxed was outrageous. There was a need not to try and do what the institution wants to do but listen to what the survivors want. The following questions were raised:

- When someone leaves church, how do we know that they haven't been subject to something that comes under safeguarding?
- How do we ensure that all church members are aware of safeguarding issues and how they should be dealt with?

**Mr Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)** – The list of emotions being experienced was long and did not make happy reading. There was astonishment that that action was not taken until Makin went public. It was felt that independent oversight - at a national level - was required, but this should not be solely secular. More support needed for PSOs, and more volunteers needed. PSOs must be very carefully selected as they must be relational and approachable.

The Revd Canon Paul Langham (Bristol West Deanery) thanked those who amended the agenda and made the discussion on safeguarding possible.

### **3. Eucharist**

Bishop Viv led Eucharist.

### **Coffee**

### **4. Minutes of last meeting, apologies**

Mr Bruce Finnamore explained that General Synod had requested that Diocesan Synods discuss Living in Love and Faith (LFF) and give feedback before the General Synod meeting in July 2025. To ensure that there was enough time to properly discuss this matter, the Diocesan Synod meeting on 22 March 2025 has been extended and would now meet between 09:30 – 15:00.

Bruce explained that if Diocesan Synod covered any subjects that Diocesan Synod members, visitors or DSS staff members found upsetting or triggering, they might speak with The Revd Dr Simon Taylor (Director of Mission & Ministry) or Mrs Geralyn Meehan (Director of People & Safeguarding) for support.

Mr Bruce Fynamore explained that the remaining part of the meeting was largely formed of three parts.

- **Routine Business:** This included reports from recent meetings of Bishop's Council, Board of Directors, DMPC, and priority Communities.
- **Finance:** This included the proposed 2025 budget and a presentation on encouraging giving.
- **Separate meetings of the House of Clergy and the House of Laity:** As it was a new Diocesan Synod, the Chairs would lead separate informal meetings so that the individual houses might get to know each other better.

Mr Bruce Fynamore explained that in order to discuss safeguarding, the Transforming Church. Together (TC.T) and DBAT update were removed from the November agenda but would be rescheduled to the March 2025 agenda.

### **Diocesan Synod facilitators**

At Diocesan Synod, there were normally Diocesan Synod members who would volunteer as facilitators to help encourage discussion on each table and help ensure that everyone had the chance to speak. This is a very important role to support the development of an inclusive, discursive Synod. Since it was a new Diocesan Synod, a number of the previous facilitators were no longer members. Diocesan Synod members were encouraged to contact The Revd Dr Simon Taylor ([simon.taylor@bristoldiocese.org](mailto:simon.taylor@bristoldiocese.org)), Mr Bruce Fynamore ([bruce@thefynamores.com](mailto:bruce@thefynamores.com)) or The Revd Trudie Wigley ([rev.trudie@wigley.org.uk](mailto:rev.trudie@wigley.org.uk)) if they were interested in taking on this important role.

### **Apologies**

Bruce informed Diocesan Synod that we have received no apologies from the House of Bishops, 5 apologies from the House of Clergy and 8 apologies from the House of Laity

### **Minutes**

No amendments to the minutes were requested so the minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meetings on 15 June and 9 October 2024.

## **5. The appointment of members of Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd**

Mr Fynamore asked anyone who had been appointed by their Deanery Synod as a Diocesan Synod member, since 01/08/2024, to stand, if they were comfortable to do so, and make themselves known to Diocesan Synod.

The following were known to have been elected since 01/08/2024:

<b>Name</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>Deanery</b>
The Revd James Cannan	Clergy	Kingswood & South Gloucestershire

The Revd Bob Cotton	Clergy	City
The Revd Gaby Doherty	Clergy	City
The Revd Dr Adrian Howkins	Clergy	City
The Revd Oliver Ross	Clergy	North Wiltshire
The Revd Christian Saguyan	Clergy	North Wiltshire
The Revd Ian Tomkins	Clergy	City
The Revd Dan Watts	Clergy	Kingswood & South Gloucestershire
Mr Chris Bradley	Laity	Kingswood & South Gloucestershire
Ms Heather Broom	Laity	Kingswood & South Gloucestershire
Dr Steve Fairbairn	Laity	Bristol West
Mr John Gwyther	Laity	Bristol West
Mr Andrew King	Laity	Bristol West
Ms Charley Maidment	Laity	Bristol West
Ms Elizabeth Marks	Laity	Bristol West
Prof Julian Rivers	Laity	Bristol West

Synod welcomed these members and thanked them for their support.

**6. Bishop's Council & Board of Directors report (11 July and 15 October 2024)**

Mr John Sunderland (Bishop's Council Member) summarised the Bishop's Council report. Mr Sunderland highlighted two sections of the report.

**Governance Refresh**

Due to a number of factors, there was recognition that a governance refresh was required. This was not a complete governance restructure/review, but a review to ensure that existing documentation and processes were clear and efficient.

**All Saints, Corn Street**

All Saints (Corn Street) would soon undergo a roof replacement, and sensitive discussions were being held about the future of the building.

As this was the final Bishop's Council report of the triennium, Mr Sunderland thanked past Bishop Council members for their commitment, time and expertise. He also highlighted that over three years Bishop's Council members had attended twenty meetings, reviewed seventy-four spreadsheets, six hundred slides, and read reports that exceed War & Peace by sixty thousand words.

**Question:**

**Ms Auriol Britton (Deanery of Bristol South)** – was delighted to hear that there was a Racial Justice Officer starting in January. Ms Britton thought that the church continued to appear to be segregated as many churches had a predominately white congregation or a predominately black congregation. Auriol suggested a scheme to try to integrate church congregations.

**Mr Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)** – agreed and suggested that Ms Britton contact Jillian Downing ([Jillian.Downing@bristoldiocese.org](mailto:Jillian.Downing@bristoldiocese.org)) who was the Racial Justice Officer. The person who is joining the team in January will be the Racial Justice Lead. The Racial Justice Lead will attend Bishop's Staff Meetings and Bishop's Council, and will brief Diocesan Synod at least once per year.

**Mr Roy Hussey (Deanery of City)** – requested that Diocesan Synod not forget the descendants of slaves. He highlighted that many think of slavery in the past but forget that the profits from the Transatlantic Slave Trade were invested and are still around.

**Mr Bruce Finnamore (Chair of the House of Laity)** - reassured Mr Hussey that this matter continued to be actively pursued.

**Mr John Sunderland (Bishop's Council member) moved that the Bishop's Council report was received.**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

## 7. General Synod report

Mr Brendan Biggs summarized his report from General Synod. Mr Biggs highlighted three points from his report.

### **Safeguarding**

General Synod was given an interim Safeguarding report in July 2024, and it had been confirmed that further proposals for change will be submitted to General Synod in February 2025. There would be two essential matters for General Synod to consider in the coming year:

- Deciding how independent oversight of safeguarding would be achieved; and
- How would this oversight be enabled and enacted.

### **Clergy Conduct Measure**

The Clergy Conduct Measure would replace the Clergy Discipline Measure. The New Measure would not include a time limit for which complaints about serious misconduct might be brought.

### **Living in Love and Faith (LLF)**

General Synod had requested the House of Bishops to give guidance on how prayers of LLF might be used in services.

Mr Biggs also explained that it was possible for a Diocesan Synod to submit a motion to be considered by General Synod; however, he encouraged all Diocesan Synod members to talk with their General Synod representatives should they have any questions or wish to a question to be raised at General Synod. The General Synod representatives all stood so they might be recognized and were thanked for their commitment.

### **Queen Victoria Clergy Fund**

As a side matter, Mr Biggs mentioned that he was part of the Queen Victoria Clergy Fund which was a fund for clergy in need. If Synod members knew anyone who wished to apply for the fund, he encouraged them to speak with their Archdeacon.

### **Questions:**

**Dr Claire Jefferis (Deanery of Bristol West)** – Queried whether the Queen Victoria Fund was just for clergy or whether clergy families might benefit as well.

**Mr Biggs** confirmed that it could be used for clergy families.

## **8. Bristol DBF Budget 2025 (motion below)**

The Revd Trudie Wigley in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon (Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance) and Mr Stephen Sheridan (Director of Finance) presented the 2025 Budget.

Mr Bacon explained that Diocesan Synod had a responsibility to consider and if appropriate, approve the Budget (including all the stipends of clergy and salaries of the Diocesan Support Services staff) and at the end of the presentation there would be a motion requesting its approval.

Mr Sheridan presented the 2025 budget to Diocesan Synod and drew particular attention to three key points about the proposed budget.

### **National Insurance Employer's Contribution increase**

The Government announced in the recent budget they intend to increase Employer's National Insurance, and therefore the 2025 Diocesan Budget document shows a net additional deficit of £175k against the plan approved by Bishop's Council on 15 October 2024. This is caused mainly by the £248k increase in Employer's NI contributions for stipends and Diocesan Support Services Staff for 9 months.

National Church and Bishop's Council were considering remedial options to reduce the deficit and would keep Diocesan Synod informed. This might include submitting a Budget adjustment in June 2025.

### **Increase in Diocesan Support Services (DSS) expenditure**

The increase in DSS expenditure was primarily due to the National Insurance Employer's contribution increase, but also from a small increase in staffing in line with the recommendations in the independent Safeguarding Audit as more safeguarding staff were needed. There was also a need to invest in out-of-date and inefficient IT systems. Finance has updated its systems which had not been updated in many years, and the DSS now has IT support from a local and more cost-effective supplier, (in lieu of the previous inadequate National Church support).

### **Parish Share Requests**

Mr Sheridan apologised for the initial Parish Share requests which had caused confusion and distress in some parishes. In future, the Finance Department would check the requests more diligently before they were sent out. He alluded to a briefing on Parish Share later in this meeting.

Before asking for questions, Mr Sheridan highlighted that some may have noticed that there was a difference between the pay increase for Clergy (3%) and Diocesan Support Services Staff (2.5%). The Diocesan Board of Finance had no control over the increase in stipends as this is set nationally. However, it does over Diocesan Support Services Staff, and it increases salaries in line with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector benchmarks.

### **Questions:**

**Ms Auriol Britton (Deanery of Bristol South)** - queried why £100,000 was spent on vacancy energy costs. Also, she expressed concern that Stipends would increase by 3% but Diocesan Support Services Staff would only receive an increase of 2.5%, Auriol was concerned that she could not vote against financial injustice.

**Mr Stephen Sheridan (Director of Finance)** explained that the £110,000 expenditure was for vacancy works which included repairs, energy costs, tree works, which are all statutory obligations.

**Mr Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)** explained that the Diocesan Board of Finance benchmarks salaries against other third sector salaries, applies a CPI inflation figure to it, and takes into account affordability. In contrast, the DBF generally follows the National benchmark for stipends, hence the small difference this year.

**Mr Philip Barton (Deanery of Kingswood and South Gloucestershire)** – explained that the letter received from Diocese which contained a request for a significant increase in parish share was shocking and weakened the confidence in Hillside House. Mr Barton requested assurance that it would not happen again.

**Mr Stephen Sheridan (Director of Finance)** gave reassurance and requested forgiveness. He promised that he would work to foster a good relationship with Parish treasurers.



**Professor Julian Rivers (Deanery of Bristol West)** – was concerned that the deficit was reducing reserves and highlighted that this arrangement could not continue forever.

**Mr Stephen Sheridan (Director of Finance)** agreed that there could not be an infinite draw down of reserves and explained that there was a 5 - year plan which sought to bring the Diocesan budget back into recurring balance at around 2028/9.

**Ms Kate Davison (Deanery of Kingswood and South Gloucestershire)** – Explained that she was aware of a Treasurer who resigned because Diocesan Comms about Treasurer matters went straight to parishes rather than to the treasurer. Kate asked whether the budget included retired clergy, SSM clergy and LLMs?

**The Revd Charles Sutton (Deanery of Bristol West)** explained that of the total number clergy there are  $\frac{1}{4}$  stipend,  $\frac{1}{4}$  Self Supporting Ministers (SSM) and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Permission to Officiate (PTO).

**Mr Stephen Sheridan (Director of Finance)** explained that SSMs and PTOs were not included in the budget because they are not paid; however, they will be included in the annual report, and he confirmed that a debt of gratitude was owed to them.

**The Revd Joel Sales (Deanery of Swindon)** – thanked Mr Stephen Sheridan for his work. He asked whether the Budget for 2025 resulted in a potential deficit of £4.8 million.

**Mr Stephen Sheridan (Director of Finance)** confirmed that this was correct, prior to the approved use of £2.6 million of reserves and £1.5 million from Transforming Church. Together.

**The Revd Dave Jones (Deanery of Kingswood and South Gloucestershire)** – queried whether the Diocesan Support Services were aware of the concerns in the Parishes about the level of expenditure on DSS staff.

**Mr Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)** explained that in 2022 £200,000 of staff costs were cut from the DSS, so they are now operating at a core minimum. In addition, income from Parsh Share does not cover the cost of clergy, so not a penny of parish share goes towards the cost of the DSS. Numbers of staff are increasing; however, these additional numbers are funded by The National Church. The Diocese of Bristol has committed to maintaining clergy numbers; however, if there was a continued decline in parish share income, tough choices would have to be made. The Diocese of Exeter has already had to begin to close/not replace thirty clergy roles. At the moment, 75% parishes do not cover the cost of their clergy, and this has to change, somehow.

**Mr Richard Bacon (Chair of Diocesan Board of Finance)** moved that this Synod authorizes the Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance to expend in the year 2025 sums totalling £16,626,000 (including project costs) in respect of the items in the budget for that year.

**The motion passed with one against and seven abstentions.**

## 9. Encouraging Giving: Parish Share

Mr Bacon and Mr Sheridan led a session on “Encouraging Giving: Parish Share”.

It was explained that Parish Share was gifted to the Diocesan Board of Finance as a contribution towards the cost of clergy stipends, clergy housing and Diocesan Support Services. Whilst PCC Treasurers had done an incredible job during turbulent times, Parish Share was continuing to decline. As it currently stands, Parish Share was insufficient to fund clergy and Diocesan Support Services costs and consequently they are being financed from reserves.

Bishop Neil encouraged Diocesan Synod members to promote more giving in their churches and asked Diocesan Synod members to consider the following questions: “How can we, as Synod members, help?”

Papers were collected from tables and the ideas will be used by the Archdeacons and others to help improve giving.

Mr Nick Orman committed Parish Share and our 2025 Budget to prayer.

Prior to lunch The Revd Lydia Morey said Grace.

## Lunch

## 10. Priority Communities Update

The Revd Dr Andy Murray explained that he was the Dean of Priority Communities for 70% of his time and the Vicar of Lawrence Weston and Avonmouth for the remaining 30%.

Titles like deprived, low income and poor communities have had negative connotations. Therefore, the term “Priority Communities” was an attempt to remove this negative view and instead demonstrate how the communities were being prioritized.

Part of Transforming Church. Together, there were four distinct areas of investment for Priority Communities:

- **Oversight, networking and training**
- **Licensed Lay ministers (LLM)** – funding for one LLM in each of fourteen priority communities.
- **Operational hubs** - A lot of churches in the priority communities do not have people with the skills and experience to help with governance, safeguarding, compliance and administration. Thus the creation of operational hubs will help to pool resources to assist in these areas and release clergy from these day – to- day responsibilities so that they might focus on mission.
- **Jesus shaped people**

The fourteen priority communities in the top 12.4% Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) included the following:

- St Peter, Penhill
- Parks and Walcot Pinehurst
- St Andrews Hartcliffe and Withywood
- Easton Christian Family Centre
- St Barnabas, Filwood, Knowle West
- St Peter Lawrence Weston
- St Luke's Barton Hill
- St Stephen's, Southmead
- St Agnes in St Paul's
- St Anne's, Eastville
- St Mary's and St James, Lockleaze
- St Mary's, Henbury
- St Mary's, Fishponds
- St Mary's, Shirehampton

As part of the project a data pack had been created for each community which highlighted the needs and opportunities for each area. This data had helped PCCs understand their communities but also challenge assumptions as well.

**Questions:**

No questions were raised.

The Revd Trudie Wigley encouraged The Revd Dr Andy Murray to continue his work and thanked him for passion for Priority Communities.

The Revd Alison Sowton prayed for the Priority Communities.

**11. Questions**

The following Diocesan Synod member had submitted formal written questions:

**The Revd Will Fairbairn (Deanery of City)**

**Question:** *“As a diocese with a commitment to addressing issues of racial injustice, can I ask whether the Bishop’s Council plans to use its power to co-opt additional members to the newly formed Vacancy in See Committee (VISC), in order to address the underrepresentation of people of colour in this group”.*

**Answer:** *“Bishop’s Council are keen to diversify both themselves, and the VISC, and will use its powers to ensure both bodies have appropriate representation by people of colour”*

**Supplementary question:** The Revd Will Fairbairn confirmed that he did not wish to pose a supplementary question.

**The Revd Rich Cresswell (Deanery of Kingswood South Gloucestershire Deanery)**

**Question:** “The Diocesan Facebook page features a surprising mixture of posts on a range of topics, not all of which have a Christian basis and many of which share views that could be considered controversial within this Diocese and the wider Anglican communion. Is there a written communications strategy for this page and for our other social media output? If so, who is/was responsible for its production and review, who is responsible for ensuring it is followed, and where can the strategy be found?”

**Answer:** “The Diocese’s social media channels do indeed engage with a broad range of topics, reflecting the diversity within our Diocese and the wider Church. This approach aligns with our commitment to be an inclusive and multifaceted Diocese, addressing the needs, experiences, and concerns of all of God’s children. Our communications strategy, including that for our social media, is directly rooted in the Transforming Church. Together (TC.T) strategy, as approved by Synod. TC.T articulates a vision of reaching out to all corners of the Diocese and building connections with those who have felt distant from the Church.

Our Director of External Relations has developed an External Relations strategy to apply the vision, mission, and values laid out in TC.T to our communications, marketing, fundraising and partnerships functions. This document was agreed by the Senior Leadership Team, Bishop’s Staff Meeting, and ultimately, Bishop’s Council – the standing committee of Synod. They also have oversight of the implementation as a matter of routine.

We want to reach beyond the church, and our social media posts aim to do that from a Christian perspective. As with any media, this needs care, and sometimes some people may feel we haven’t got the balance right. The External Relations Director, Harrison Leonard is very happy to discuss the policy which supports day to day decisions, and to hear from members about when our comms are going well, and where we need to take particular care”.

**Question:** “The flourishing and wellbeing of clergy has been deemed of significant importance within TC.T. However, the erosion of the clergy stipend and pension over the last ten years has been a source of notable detriment to clergy wellbeing. The national minimum stipend has decreased by 28% (versus the Retail Price Index) in real terms since 2009. The maximum clergy pension available at retirement after 41.5 years at 68 years old is £13,397 p/a. The Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association say that a single person will need £31,300 a year for a moderate income in retirement (excluding housing). What is this diocese doing to help bring about change with regard to this issue (locally and nationally), and what is being done to support retired clergy in this diocese who are already struggling financially?”

**Answer:** “The flourishing and wellbeing of our clergy is indeed fundamental to the success of TC.T and our ambitions to grow the kingdom, and we recognise the immense stresses on clergy, including financial stress.

Firstly, our Bishop is actively working on the question of a significant stipend increase with colleagues in the House of Bishops, in response to the General Synod motion in February 2024 and Unite questions. Secondly, in addition to always paying the

*recommended increases to stipends, the Diocese has put significant additional resources into clergy housing, and we have begun a clergy coaching (and wellbeing support) programme which has 46 ministers enrolled to date. Finally, the Diocese has committed to sustaining clergy numbers; aiming to avoid burnout through having fewer clergy with the same number of parishes. We take the whole issue very seriously.*

*That said, it is clear that across the CofE a significant additional stipend and pension increase will cause significant financial challenges to many Dioceses - including Bristol - unless clergy numbers are reduced, parish share income increases, or some significant changes are made to our costs base by the National Church. As with any charity, the Diocese has to balance its books, so we are acutely aware that we are not yet receiving enough in parish share to cover full clergy costs, let alone a significant increase to them. At national church level, General Synod's February 2024 motion directed the Archbishops' Council, the Pensions Board, and the Church Commissioners to work together with dioceses to explore ways in which the level of clergy pensions and stipends might be improved in a sustainable manner. We are grateful to our General Synod representatives for their support in this motion, and for monitoring progress on this on our behalf.*

*With regard to retired clergy, the Diocese of Bristol has a network of retired clergy officers who support local incumbents in their care for retired clergy. All clergy, including retired clergy, can approach the Archdeacons for support, and are also eligible to receive support from the Clergy Society, again, accessed by contacting the Archdeacons. Other national charities also support retired clergy financially. For those retired clergy who are still active, Bristol Diocese expects parishes who invite visiting retired clergy to cover Sunday services to offer a service fee of £62 (in 2024) plus travel expenses. Retired clergy with a licence or Permission to Officiate who are registered with the fees @bristoldiocese.org will receive 80% of the DBF element of the fee for an occasional office, paid by the Diocesan Finance Team”.*

**Supplementary question:** The answer on clergy stipends and pensions was more vague than I would have hoped, and lacks clear positive strategies or timeframe for change. I'm sure that many of my clergy colleagues are wondering how much longer they must continue to rely on grants from charities instead of being given a fair stipend and a fair pension. Our diocesan budgets need to start reflecting the reality of our situation and we must be bolder in making good choices for the future. Here in this room are people who move at levels where meaningful change can come about. I would like to hear from the following and ask each of them “What are you specifically doing in your sphere of influence to ensure adequate clergy remuneration?”

**The Rt Revd Viv Faulk (Bishop of Bristol)** – of behalf of the House of Bishops, she explained that this was actively discussed in General Synod and the House of Bishops. She suggested that The Revd Rich Cresswell speaks with the General Synod Representatives as the increase in stipend is increased by General Synod each year. Also, he may wish to contact The Remuneration and Conditions of Service

Committee (RACSC). In the meantime, the Diocesan Board of Finance would look at how it might better support the clergy.

**The Revd Canon Paul Langham (Deanery of Bristol West and General Synod Representative)** – on behalf of the General Synod reps, he suggested that the General Synod representatives might pose questions at General Synod and to the Pensions Board. Whilst there was currently a private members motion specially about pensions, it might be helpful if the Laity would express concern for the clergy as it might carry more weight at General Synod. Also suggested that the separate meetings of the Houses might wish to discuss this matter further.

**Mr Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)** – highlighted that the Diocesan Board of Finance always followed the recommended stipend levels. Should there be a significant uplift, our budget would *continue* to have to be amended to reflect the reality of our situation. Unless there was a commensurate increase in income, there would inevitably be consequences.

**The Revd Trudie Wigley (Chair of the House of Clergy)** – on behalf of the Chairs of Diocesan Synod, it was explained that Chairs met nationally with senior representatives of national church and this issue had been raised on a number of occasions. She and other House of Clergy Chairs were committed to using their influence to add voice and strength to this issue.

The **Revd Trudie Wigley** queried if there were any questions from the floor.

The **Revd Joel Sales** (Deanery of Swindon): Is everything ok in Hillside House? There have been a number of departures of key staff, and he queried whether these were red flags?

**Mr Richard Leaman** (CEO/Diocesan Secretary) - said he constantly monitored turnover. In a time of transition, and as the BDBF tries to become more rigorous in its approach, together with an increasingly diverse workforce, there will inevitably be departures and arrivals. The turnover for the Diocesan Support Services is 15.2%, which was the third sector average. Richard would like to see this decrease and was taking action to seek to achieve this, for example BDBF had just completed its first ever staff engagement survey, and it always completes exit interviews to understand the reasons for people leaving. At the moment, the BDBF had not identified a common thread, or a particular cause for concern.

The Revd Toby Boutle (Deanery of Swindon) – highlighted that 2025 is the 1700 anniversary of Council of Nicea, was there any plans to mark the anniversary?

The Rt Revd Viv Faull (Bishop of Bristol) – Due to the budget there was no longer an Ecumenical Officer; however, the Revd Dr Simon Taylor would report back.

**ACTION: The Revd Dr Simon Taylor to report to The Revd Toby Boutle any plans to mark the anniversary of the Council of Nicea.**

## 12. Individual meetings of the House of Laity and House of Clergy

House of Clergy and the House of Laity then met separately for informal discussion.

<b>13. Blessing and Close</b>
Full Diocesan Synod reconvened. Bishop Viv closed the meeting with prayer.

#### Appendix 1 – The Ret Revd Viv Faull, Bishop of Bristol, address to Diocesan Synod

At the start of September this year, I spent 2 weeks in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, working with the Anglican Safe Church Commission with Anglican church leaders from central Africa and across the world.

A key session focused on the reasons abuse happens, and particularly why it happens in churches. In short, abuse is a possibility in any organisation where there is an imbalance of power. One person has more than another and uses that power to manipulate another. Most people who have power have no desire to harm others and use their power for the good of others.

However there are some who treat others badly – bullying, harassment, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, spiritual abuse. And there *will* be those who desire to abuse children or adults who are vulnerable and target them specifically, building relationships which lead to abuse.

A church is a situation where people who are relatively powerful are brought together with people who have less power. Those in churches who have less power include those who are ordained, lay ministers and lay officers within a hierarchical organisation (literally ruled by priests).

Those in churches who have less power include those whose who are less valued in a hierarchical organisations, those with an identity not seen as theologically normative, for example because of their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality or language, or because of their physical attributes or other social factors including class and wealth, marital status or position.

In Bulawayo we explored at depth how to recognise and resist the workings of abusive and harmful power, how to put measures in place to prevent abuse and harm and acknowledge the power we do hold and use that power for good.

Safe churches are places where all members of the community are deeply committed to protecting and caring for one another, and particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

Central to the introduction to the conference was an address by the Mayor of Bulawayo, David Coltart, who, some years previously, as a leading Zimbabwean QC, inquired into the activities of John Smyth. His determined work broadened the scope of Keith Makin's inquiry and showed how John Smyth was, with the support of friends, enabled to leave the UK and continue an already well-established horrific pattern of physical and emotional and spiritual and psychological and sexual abuse derived from a horribly warped psychosexual identity and an understanding of Christian theology which was a terrible and dangerous distortion of the gospel.

My work with the Safe Church Commission, and on the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Communities has taught me how deep the damage is to those who have been abused, and what it costs for a survivor to disclose. Those who do disclose often find themselves in a worse place than before disclosure. They feel they have lost the only control they had and that is like releasing a volcano, and that they have handed the key to their most private experiences to someone who now has huge power over them (as their abuser had and has).

Most wish they had never disclosed and carry the heavy loads of isolation and shame. And that is because disclosures of abuse are often so badly handled, particularly by organisations, and even more particularly by religious organisations. That is what the victims of Smyth have had to endure and still do endure.

In the last 10 days I have received frequent requests from national media to talk about Makin. I have said I will talk about survivors and the reasons why abuse continues to occur in the church. The media requests were restricted to my views on the Archbishop of Canterbury. The stories of survivors were, once more, being pushed to the margins.

I want the Diocese of Bristol to be a place where safety is possible because each of us understands that we have a responsibility to acknowledge how power operates and how each of us can prevent its abuse, or when it happens, will speak out about our concerns.

I want the Diocese of Bristol to work effectively and determinedly to be a place where those who have endured abuse are not re-abused by the way their disclosure, however faltering, confused or uncertain, is received.



I know from the report on our recent INEQE audit, that we have made progress, particularly in our parishes and particularly thanks to our Parish Safeguarding Officers; the outcome is very positive. But we have so much more to do locally, regionally, and nationally. Please help us, in discussion this morning, for the sake of the wounded Christ, to attend to those vulnerable to wounding, and whose lives are constrained or distorted by the church locally or nationally. I plead with you to make our church safe.