

HOUSE OF BISHOPS

A meeting of the House of Bishops was held by Zoom on 11
March 2025

MINUTES

THE BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH IN THE CHAIR

1 WELCOME, APOLOGIES, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 1.1 The meeting opened in prayer.
- 1.2 The CHAIR noted that in setting the agenda for this meeting that the Standing Committee had had regard to the feedback that Zoom meetings should be for the important but less contested business with in-person meetings for more complex items needing prayerful discernment. For reasons of availability there would be slight changes to the published agenda.
- 1.3 Apologies had been received from the Bishops of Southwark, Ebbsfleet, Hereford, Islington, Leicester, Beverley, Stepney, Sodor and Man, Derby and from Bishop Anne Hollinghurst.
- 1.4 The minutes of the January meeting HB(25)M1 were approved.

2 STANDING ORDER 14

- 2.1 The CHAIR moved that the House meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14. The House AGREED, with three votes against, to meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14.

3 STOCKTAKE HB(25)09

- 3.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON briefed the House on the work of the Vacancy Advisory and Coordination Group, established to support the Archbishop of York and Dean of the Southern Province on major issues during a time of vacancy. Details of the membership and terms of reference had been shared with all members of the College and following each meeting the substance of the business would be shared with the College and the Archbishops' Council. The group sought assurance that the work on clergy accountability was being progressed. The ARCHBISHOP OF YORK noted that work was also needed to oversee the establishment of future crisis management arrangements.
- 3.2 ALEXANDER KUBEYINJE briefed the House on the latest developments in safeguarding, noting that:
 - 3.2.1 The applications for out-of-time Clergy Discipline Measure processes would be submitted next week;
 - 3.2.2 A safeguarding practice review under the relevant statutory Code of Practice was starting for the David Tudor case;
 - 3.2.3 The Diocese of Sheffield was involved in the criminal trial of Chris Brain in relation to offences in his time leading the Nine O'Clock Service;

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- 3.2.4 That the Synod decision on the Future of Church Safeguarding had understandably created uncertainty and anxiety for the National Safeguarding Team and it was important to ensure they were motivated and kept on board.
- 3.3 In discussion members:
- 3.3.1 Noted that it was important to reflect on the stories they were telling each other in the wake of the vote on independence in safeguarding. There was some sense that the Synod vote was against safeguarding independence whereas it was instead a step to independent scrutiny and national operations;
- 3.3.2 Expressed their support for the work of the National Safeguarding Team;
- 3.3.3 Noted that the regional safeguarding leads were now in place and could help the transition to the new safeguarding models;
- 3.3.4 Asked that for the Safeguarding Practice Review lessons were learned from other reviews;
- 3.3.5 Encouraged a more positive and transparent approach to communications;
- 3.3.6 Sought assurance that, by naming the individuals against which CDMs would be brought, the Church was conforming to legal requirements;
- 3.3.7 Noted that the Synod had voted to "...endorse model 3 as the way forward in the short term and call for further work as to the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model 4". Synod had been given a choice and it had chosen a way forward.
- 3.3.8 Reflected that the voting may have been partisan.
- 3.4 Responding, ALEXANDER KUBEYINJE reminded the House of the importance of making evidence-based decisions on future safeguarding approaches and that much of the change in safeguarding practice in the Church of England had been driven by the National Safeguarding Team. The Tudor Safeguarding Practice Review was being undertaken under the new Code of Practice rather than, as with the Makin review, older guidance. He offered to pick up points of detail on cases with individual members.
- 3.5 ALEXANDER MCGREGOR, as CHIEF LEGAL ADVISOR, noted that the Clergy Discipline Commission had published guidance that said in principle proceedings should be confidential. However the guidance noted that where matters were publicly known it was reasonable for a public statement to be made, so long as it was factual and not seeking to comment on proceedings. The statements by the Church had been consistent with this.
- 3.6 The BISHOP OF LONDON noted that since the vote the Bishop of Stepney had done much work, including with Parliamentarians, the media and with Professor Jay, to explain precisely what Synod had voted for. Continuing SIMON GALLAGHER, senior responsible officer for the Future of Church Safeguarding work, explained that members of the College would receive a briefing on progress later today and reminded the House that the National

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Safeguarding Team had been understandably concerned by both the decision and some of the comments made in debate.

- 3.7 WILLIAM NYE, SECRETARY GENERAL, noted that diocesan bishops and acting diocesan bishops had received a letter from the Charity Commission on safeguarding. He explained the context, and the challenges in that although the Charity Commission regulate charities in the Church of England they do not regulate those parts of the Church which are not charities, noted the advice from the Legal Office to registrars, and reminded the House that safeguarding work was about continuous improvement and the management of risk rather than a task that could be completed. He would put these points in writing for members [ACTION: WILLIAM NYE]. He also reminded members of the importance of submitted a Report of a Serious Incident in appropriate cases.
- 3.8 Sharing their emerging thinking on responses to the Commission, members noted that:
 - 3.8.1 They may wish to highlight the issue of whether bishops could be able to take action to remove a priest from ministry on the basis of a risk assessment – on which the House had commissioned further work, of which the Commission was aware. However this was not straightforward and members would want to consider the case for referring to ideas that had not been worked through;
 - 3.8.2 They may wish to highlight issues around the removal from office of churchwardens;
 - 3.8.3 It should not be presumed that their responses would remain confidential;
 - 3.8.4 That it was important that the Charity Commission understood the Ineqe audits of individual dioceses and annual report;

4 FEEDBACK FROM GENERAL SYNOD

- 4.1 Reflecting on the General Synod members noted that on the whole the Synod had gone well – it had been painful but with some exceptions discussions had been courteous, and the Synod had had honest debates on important issues. Some debates had been longer than necessary because of the need to deal with amendments and that it may be helpful to consider changes to Standing Orders to allow chairs not to select amendments [ACTION: ALEXANDER MCGREGOR to raise with the Standing Orders Committee]. They noted that the CNC debate had been difficult and placed the Bishop of London in a difficult position; nevertheless it had been important to consider the issues and further reflection would be needed.

5 LITURGICAL BUSINESS: EXPANDING THE CALENDAR HB(25)10/11

- 5.1 Introducing the two proposals the BISHOP OF LICHFIELD explained that they both reflected an ecumenical consensus, particularly important in the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, that in both cases the proposals could be uncontroversial, and that they would be good ways of testing the liturgical

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process that had not been used in a decade.

- 5.2 Introducing the proposal for a Festival of God the Creator (HB(25)10) he noted that much of the resource was already available but that it was important to work to a July 2025 General Synod timeline for enable consistency with ecumenical partners and to complete the work this Quinquennium. The decision for the House was to agree to start the work. Continuing, the BISHOP OF NORWICH, explained that there was ecumenical convergence, particularly with the Orthodox churches on the case for such a Festival. Such a liturgy would embody a key theological element and although there was much in the existing liturgy that reflected the role of God the Creator (such as familiar words about “maker of Heaven and Earth”) there was no specific liturgy. This would allow our beliefs to be turned into words, and how the Church lived out its beliefs in practice. At the most recent ecumenical discussions in Assisi the key had been to focus on the act of creation rather than creation itself.
- 5.3 In discussion the following points were made:
 - 5.3.1 It was important for any liturgy to reflect the Church’s trinitarian doctrines and not to create the sense of a God who creates separate from Christ. This may require rubrics that connected the liturgy clearly with Trinity Sunday;
 - 5.3.2 It was important that the language was sufficiently nuanced to allow for the doctrines of redemption and a new creation to be factored in. It was important that it was not simply an affirmation of creation;
 - 5.3.3 There could be impacts on the existing liturgical calendar;
 - 5.3.4 It would be important for there to be a clear theological basis for such a liturgy;
 - 5.3.5 That bringing forward new liturgy under a Canon B 2 process for such a change would raise questions about whether such a liturgical procedure should be used for other liturgical innovation;
- 5.4 Responding, the BISHOP OF LICHFIELD noted the points raised, said that the title of the Festival had not been finalised but could be Christ the Creator, and noted that a Canon B 2 process on an issue of greater consensus might be helpful for the House.
- 5.5 The House AGREED, with 29 votes in favour and no opposition, to instruct the Liturgical Commission to prepare material for First Consideration at the July 2025 Group of Sessions which would introduce into the *Common Worship* calendar a liturgical festival of God the Creator.
- 5.6 Introducing the proposal set out in paper HB(25)11 the BISHOP OF LICHFIELD explained that the Twenty-One Martyrs were regarded as an outstanding example of martyrdom – killed for not renouncing their faith. There was ecumenical support for this. Tradition had been that martyrs were not commemorated until ten years after their martyrdom. 20 martyrs had been Egyptian, one Ghanaian. In a world where religious liberty was under threat

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there would be a particular resonance to such a festival. The clarity of the martyrdom was striking – ISIS had simply not understood why the Ghanaian martyr had remained with his Egyptian colleagues.

- 5.7 In discussion bishops also noted the case for considering Charlie Andrews, Florence Li Tim Oi and Samuel Ajayi Crowther for inclusion within the calendar.
- 5.8 The House AGREED, with 33 votes in favour and no opposition, to instruct the Liturgical Commission to prepare material for First Consideration at the July 2025 Group of Session which would introduce into the *Common Worship* Calendar a liturgical commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya.

BISHOP OF WINCHESTER IN THE CHAIR

6 Policy implications of the Diocesan Finances Review HB(25)12

- 6.1 Introducing the paper, the BISHOP OF CHESTER welcomed the work undertaken on the Diocesan Finances Review (DFR) and drew the House's attention to the concerns it had expressed in relation to clergy wellbeing and the level of the stipend. Data suggested 20 per cent of clergy were dependent on charitable support of some form. The proposals from the DFR presented a one-off opportunity to catch up and remove the postcode lottery of stipend levels. Within the context of the overall DFR package, with the associated proposed net injection of money into the church economy, these proposals were cost neutral. The BISHOP OF LONDON, as chair of the Triennium Funding Working Group, reminded the House that the proposals needed to be seen within the context of the overall DFR package, but that the TFWG needed a view from the House whether it in principle supported the proposals set out in the paper.
- 6.2 In discussing the proposals members noted that:
 - 6.2.1 There was a case for deferring the decision to May to allow for greater consultation with Diocesan Boards of Finance, to allow for greater work on the financial impacts and to understand the longer-term implications – the tapered support was needed for longer;
 - 6.2.2 That this was a centralisation of policy making away from dioceses, not just on the policy decision for a national stipend but to rely increasingly on Diocesan Investment Programme funding;
 - 6.2.3 There could be consequences for lay salaries from raising clergy stipends;
 - 6.2.4 It was important that proposals were progressive to the poorer parts of the country – and the graph on page 5 showed they were – but there was a risk that they made it harder to recruit priests;
 - 6.2.5 The work to align HR policies was welcome but needed to tackle the more difficult issues such as capability and fitness to work;
 - 6.2.6 Dioceses had received modelling of the cumulative impact for their diocese of the DFR proposals;

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- 6.2.7 The proposals needed to be seen within the current crisis in vocations. No modelling suggested there would be more priests in future; dioceses would in the future be paying for fewer priests;
- 6.2.8 That it was not acceptable that the level of the stipend varied according to the historic wealth of the diocese. This was an issue of equity and justice and a single national stipend would be fairer;
- 6.3 Responding the BISHOP OF CHESTER reminded the House that it was not being asked to make a final decision but to endorse a direction of travel. He reminded the House that a decision to set stipends centrally would be a voluntary decision to cede control and would take much pressure off dioceses. JOANNA WOOLCOCK noted that Diocesan Secretaries had the detailed analysis and that they were considering the whole package from the Diocesan Finances Review, including the abolition of apportionment. NICK MCKEE reminded the House that the Church needed around 400 stipendiary ordinands a year but current ordinations were running at around 240-250 a year. Feedback from those who considered but had not brought themselves forward for ordination had been that the biggest issues were wellbeing and specifically financial wellbeing.
- 6.4 The House considered the proposals set out in paragraph 3 of the paper as a direction of travel and AGREED, with 31 votes in favour and none against, to proceed in this way.

7 LECTIO DIVINA

- 7.1 The House broke into regional groups for Lectio Divina.

8 ASSESSMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING HB(25)13

- 8.1 The House considered the proposal that the Assessment of Psychological Wellbeing (APW) should become a mandatory part of the Shared Discernment Process.
- 8.2 Introducing the paper, the BISHOP OF CHESTER explained that the proposal had been a recommendation from the Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Abuse. When it had been introduced APW had been about filtering out bad cases but it was now a positive framework for enabling the wellbeing of all. APW supported discernment, but was not discernment. All dioceses were using APW but making it mandatory for all, regardless of whether they were going through the national discernment process, would enable greater consistency.
- 8.3 In considering the proposal, the House
- 8.3.1 Sought reassurance that APW had made a difference by screening out unsuitable candidates;
- 8.3.2 Noted that there was a wide variety in the quality of APW reports and that there was a case for greater quality and consistency;

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- 8.3.3 Sought reassurance that APW reports were properly trauma-informed and were fair to those candidates who were neurodiverse – and that the APW process commanded support from GMH groups and neurodiversity groups;
- 8.3.4 Noted the positive opportunities created by APW for bishops to provide a continuity of care for their clergy, offering a deeper sense of security and safety;
- 8.3.5 Noted the potential cost for dioceses.
- 8.4 Responding, the BISHOP OF CHESTER noted that APW was an independent professional opinion and that the Ministry Development Board was looking for ways in which better and more consistent provision could be provided. The APW was more than a statement of fitness to practice. JOY GILLIVER explained that the Ministry Development team were now requiring APW assessors to attend training to provide greater consistency, that one of the reasons for making APW mandatory was that it would enable poorer quality providers to be removed from the work, and that there was work under way with neurodiverse groups to seek assurance that APW was appropriate.
- 8.5 The House AGREED unanimously that the Assessment for Psychological Wellbeing should become a mandatory part of the Shared Discernment Process from September 2025.

9 **REPORT FROM THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS STANDING COMMITTEE** **HB(25)14**

- 9.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON introduced the paper. She noted the Standing Committee was seeking to become more forward thinking and plan agendas further ahead. She drew the House's attention to the private members' motion on an independent culture and governance review of the House, which the Standing Committee would consider in April, and noted that the work for May on accountability of the clergy would cover the range of issues within the area of clergy terms and conditions, including those raised by the Bishop of Blackburn. Members should share any comments with the Secretariat via simon.gallagher@churchofengland.org.
- 9.2 Commenting on the work programme members:
 - 9.2.1 Noted the importance of progressing the work on ensuring that Acting Bishops could vote in the House and General Synod. The Bishop of Dudley was progressing this with lawyers;
 - 9.2.2 Drew attention to the work on the House's identity and role, and the theological reflections on episcopacy;
 - 9.2.3 Noted that work needed to be done on the connections with the College and with regional groups, and where the ministry of retired bishops could be considered;
- 9.3 Responding, the BISHOP OF LONDON noted that the House did not plan programmes for the College, but that the College was the place where

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conversations on ecclesiology, theology, episcopacy, mission and mutual support could happen in a more in-depth way. The work programme was not just about the content but about the way in which the House worked.

10 CLOSE

- 10.1 The Chair welcomed the Bishops of Taunton and Richborough, together with Bishop Graeme Knowles as acting Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, to the House.
- 10.2 The meeting concluded in prayer.

SECRETARIAT

14 March 2025