

**MINUTES OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE EIGHTEENTH DIOCESAN SYNOD,  
HELD AT ST MARY'S CHURCH, HORSHAM AND ON ZOOM ON 5<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2022**

PRESENT:	The Bishop (President)	
(in person or	Suffragan Bishops	2
on Zoom)	Clergy	78
	Laity	62

Miss Gabrielle Higgins (Diocesan Secretary)  
Mr Darren Oliver (Diocesan Registrar)

The meeting began with an act of worship.

**1. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

The Bishop of Chichester gave a Presidential Address.

The Bishop welcomed members to this extraordinary meeting of the Diocesan Synod, and reflected on the origins and purpose of synods in the life of the Church.

The Bishop explained that the word 'synod' is Greek in origin and comes from the idea of being on a road together. The word speaks of Christian identity as the people of God called to journey together, growing into deeper knowledge of God.

The Old Testament is full of stories of synodical life. The story of Noah and his journey in a boat is one of a synodical journey, with the boat representing the Church, going into an unknown future in trust and hope. Similarly, the story of Abraham shows him going into an unknown future and taking his family with him.

The story of Exodus tells of the ultimate synodical journey, with the people of Israel being liberated in the journey they undertake, and being given guidance in the form of a holiness code, which fuses together how they are to worship and how they are to live. At the heart of this is the theme of justice. Without justice, worship becomes a parody of itself and the outcome is that the earth does not give its fruitfulness. These themes echo through the Old Testament and flow into our identity as Christians.

The Bishop explained that Synodical character is not about the rules, amendments, motions and votes. As in the Old Testament, there has to be regulation but that is a means to an end. God has called us together and invited us into a journey of faith that will last throughout our lives and lead us to heaven.

The experience of being a synodical, pilgrim people, is not that we live with everlasting change. The gift God gives us from scripture and teaching and the unfolding of Church, gives us stability and orientation as a synodal people. This is the wisdom, truth and reality that prevents us from being fashion victims, shaped by mood and moment of the day.

It gives us a vision of who and what we are. This is not a vision that fills us with pride and superiority. But it should give us the sense of what it is to be human and created by God, individuals made with purpose, with the image of God upon us. God has given us the intellect and will that enable us to find his purposes of love, leading us from earth to the perfection of heaven.

The Bishop shared the following quotation illustrating how intimate the experience of synodality could be: *“When, in the course of time, we acknowledged our friendship and recognized that our ambition was a life of true wisdom, we became everything to each other: we shared the same lodging, the same table, the same desires, the same goal. Our love for each other grew daily warmer and deeper.”*

The Bishop spoke about the film *Shakespeare in Love*, which ends with words from the opening of *Twelfth Night*, when Viola asks “What country, friends, is this?” The film speaks to us about a phase in the history of our nation, when culture was changing rapidly and the theatre as an art form was taking off. Theatre in England came from the Church, having developed from the mystery plays and then, through the tumult of the Reformation, having grown into something else, a medium that allows us to reflect on life and the things that matter to us most.

Both *Shakespeare in Love* and *Twelfth Night* play with the idea of gender identity, asking questions about whether it is right for women to act on stage, or for men to play female characters, in a context of rapid cultural change.

One small detail in the film is the character of Philip Henslow, who is responsible for putting on the play. Although everything seems to be working against Henslow – there’s no money, the playhouses are shut due to plague, the actor playing the main character turns out to be an actual woman. Despite a chorus of people saying it’s not going to work, Henslow is insistent that it’s going to be alright in the end. How? It’s a mystery, but it will all be alright.

Henslow’s message resonates with the Christian experience of being on a road together walking into an unknown future in which we shall ultimately see God face to face. As a Synod, we want answers about what is going to happen and how it will work but at the heart of Christianity, there is mystery.

We do not take life on our own terms but accept the gift of mystery which opens to us God’s love. Every person made in His image, each one of us is a mystery to ourselves and to each other, and we must approach the mystery of personhood with awe and wonder. “We are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been revealed” (1 John 3:2)

The Bishop explained that God has called us together, and that we are travelling through cultural terrain in which new questions are being put to us, including new statements about the mystery of being human. The Bishop expressed his hope that the sacredness of this topic will inform our awareness everything that is said today.

At a recent MDR, a priest had explained that in relation to the topic of gender and sexual identity his greatest difficulty was that there was so much he did not know or understand, and that made it difficult to articulate thoughts. There was consequently a fear of being accused of hate crime because of getting the words wrong.

The Bishop emphasised the need to strive to ensure that this synod would be a safe space for every person here and that there needed to be awareness that whatever we say, we are walking on sacred territory of other people’s lives as well as the sacred territory of own lives and faith.

Returning to the quotation he had quoted earlier, the Bishop said it was from St Gregory Nazianzen, describing a journey of Christian faith with his companion, St Basil. They were teachers of the Christian faith in the fourth century. This quotation was included in the introduction to a Church of England report on homosexuality in the 1980s.

We have actually been walking this journey for a very long time, and this Synod is a step on that journey. This must not be a step that will compel others to leave and so diminish the diversity and quality of our companionship. This step aims to deepen our understanding of the mystery of our

identity and of God's purposes, so that we might continue to witness to Jesus Christ and maintain safe spaces in our sacred places for the people of this age.

## **2. PRESENTATION ON THE PASTORAL PRINCIPLES**

The Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes (The Ven. Martin Lloyd Williams) introduced a video on the Pastoral Principles, which was played for the Synod. The Archdeacon explained that the course could be used widely across the life of the Church and would hopefully continue to be used beyond the Living in Love and Faith discussions, and he encouraged people to engage with it. Members of Synod were invited to spend a few minutes speaking to each other about the principles.

## **3. PRESENTATION ON DATA COLLECTED THROUGH THE ON-LINE SURVEY: THE LLF PAPER**

The Registrar explained the process that would be adopted for the debate and the permission that would be given to the Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes to amend the paper if he thought fit.

The Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes gave a presentation on the data collected through the Living in Love and Faith survey. He thanked everyone for the comments already received and the spirit in which people had responded so far.

The Archdeacon explained the methodology behind the survey and spoke about two recent Ipsos polls. In relation to the numbers generally surveyed for political polls, the sample of Anglicans who had responded to the survey – 1400 or 5% of Anglicans in Sussex – looked to be a reasonable sample. However, it was difficult to estimate the extent to which responders were representative of the Anglican worshipping congregations. It was particularly noticeable that only 34 people under the age of 35 had responded.

It had been somewhat difficult to interpret the answers; cross-referencing various answers was interesting but not straightforward. Although the majority felt that the issues were important, only 34% had engaged with the LLF material.

Since writing the paper and planning this Synod meeting, it had become clear that the diocese was not obliged to vote on feedback to National Church. The National LLF survey would be open until 30<sup>th</sup> April and all were encouraged to engage with the material and fill in the national survey.

This Archdeacon emphasised that this Synod meeting was not a cut-off point for engagement, but was an opportunity to capture and listen to learning that is going on as result of the process. This was about dialogue and listening to one another, and the quality of listening was more important than whether the paper would be accepted by the Synod.

In relation to the ongoing context, the Archdeacon explained that the national Church had set up a next steps group, which was meeting monthly and working with a reference group and all who would be analysing feedback. A report would be published in September and it was anticipated that the report would lead to a General Synod debate next year.

## **4. QUESTIONS UNDER SO69**

There were no Questions under Standing Order 69.

## **5. DEBATE ON THE LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH PAPER**

The Bishop reduced the time limit for speeches to 3 minutes and gave the Archdeacon permission to speak more than once, so that he could respond to points made.

The Bishop opened the discussion to the floor.

The Revd Andrew Woodward (Brighton) explained that, as the Diocesan Liaison Officer for the LGBTI+ communities, he had been disturbed to read a recent article in the Church Times, which reported that a high proportion of LGBTI+ Christians do not feel safe to be themselves in their own churches. These are Christians who are brave enough to come to church. As we continue in what may be perceived to be our own deliberations, as the established Church, we have a responsibility to all people, and risk losing a whole generation of LGBTI+ people, who do not feel able to come to church and to God. Will this synod commit to offering a better welcome to LGBTI+ people in our parishes and deaneries?

Miss Alison Marchant (Battle and Bexhill) said she had been struck by summary point B, and that nobody wants to see the church fracture. A high view of scripture places a high view on unity. There had already been a lot of pressure put on unity. In ECUSA, many clergy had been forced from their churches and many of their congregations had gone with them. Those forced to leave had flourished, with many joining ACNA, while many ECUSA churches had been left empty. Similar things had happened with other denominations within the UK. A number of Church of England clergy were already leaving over this issue, and more may follow, and some potential ordinands would also be lost to other denominations. The majority of Anglicans are in the global south and maintain traditional teaching. They can face persecution because of association with Western attitudes. If we are truly concerned about LLF and maintaining the unity of the Church, can we be assured that there will be serious consideration of the impact on those Christians who do not live in the west?

The Revd Martin Lane (Hastings) explained that, before ordination, he had worked as a chartered accountant and had enjoyed it! As an accountant, he realised that, when translating numbers into words, it is very easy to misrepresent them. This is why auditors like to see the written report as well as just the accounts. Point F was ambiguous and lacked clarity. The report does not say which of two views stated holds the majority or how the 3% difference had been calculated. He would prefer to see a clearer statement that says 'x prefer to maintain' vs 'x prefer to change'. Point G was not a question that was asked in the survey, and we do not have the data to tell us how others feel on this matter. What is a significant number of people? In relation to Point H, how could a handful of comments offer a balanced view? He would prefer to see both of these points omitted entirely.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Brighton) thanked the Archdeacon for his thoughtful presentation and sympathised with task of analysing the statistics. In relation to the demographics, he pointed that 80% of the respondents were over 55. It would be useful if this process could also look at what people outside church are thinking and doing. We are the Body of Christ and at the end of every service, we go out into the world and work to His praise and glory. How can we do that without understanding the outside world? We are people in a time and place, people of the Book. If we go back to the Acts of Apostles, there was controversy over circumcision and over the welcoming of Gentiles. When Peter goes to the Gentiles, he is confronted by other Christians about it not being what God has said should happen. We need to go to places where people are; it's not where you are that matters, it's where they are.

Ms Gill Bradnam (Hurst) explained that she had initially felt disappointment in the low number of respondents, which is statistically unimportant and cannot be assumed to represent the views of our Diocese. However, church surveys generally have a low response rate and, in that context, the response level could be seen as good level of response. Other dioceses were likely to present findings based on similar response levels and this may be more helpful than she originally anticipated. However, with such a low level of response, how can the Church of England take decisions, without knowing if they accurately represent general opinion or not? She was reassured by what the Bishop said about this being a

journey and that views may change over time. How can the Church of England go about increasing the numbers participating in surveys in future?

The Revd Canon Andrew Cornes (Eastbourne) felt that the paper's last point needs expansion and felt that three things should be included. Firstly, that progress has been made in this area, secondly, that there is a long way to go, and thirdly, that painful issues have arisen. Churches in this Diocese had made progress in welcoming people and it had become easier for LGBTI+ Christians to be welcomed and listened to. However, it was sadly still true that there was a lack of understanding and sensitivity. Attitudes in Britain had changed with enormous speed. In most churches, there are those who hold traditional views but do not feel able to voice this. He suggested that 'Point J' should be amended to reflect this.

The Revd Canon Mark Standen (Bognor and Bognor) thanked the Archdeacon for his work on this. We need to be very aware of the voice of LGBTI+ communities. However, he wished to echo what Mrs Alison Marchant had said and feared that people would have to resign their orders if teaching on this issue was to change.

He had recently spoken to three people; an incumbent, who was very anxious about the future, a curate who had said he would be praying for the Synod today and was feeling worried about the future, and another priest who expressed fear that the Church of England's stance on marriage would change and that there would be pressure or coercion to go along with it.

The Revd Jonathan Frais (Battle and Bexhill) supported the view that Paragraph G should be omitted and felt that Paragraph H was also inappropriate, as neither of these things had been asked in the survey. Earlier in his career, he had served as the Anglican chaplain in Kiev for ten years and was still in touch with many people, who were concerned by the suggestion teaching might change. What is our understanding of something given from outside ourselves? Marriage saves love from taking shapes of our own devising, and drives us back to scripture, so that we can reflect on marriage. Genesis 1 and 2 are crucial to our understanding of marriage and are later quoted by both Jesus and Paul, but this has been omitted from the LLF material. The omission of Genesis 1 and 2 leaves us wrong-footed and omits what God has given us right at the beginning.

The Revd Dr Andy Angel (Hurst) explained that the Pastoral Principles had appeared suddenly in the middle of difficult conversations with people of very different positions, including things people have been through, with no warning they were coming. People suddenly found themselves shocked because they were being told they were ignorant, fearful, hypocritical and abusing their power. He urged people to try to avoid doing that with their congregations and wondered if there was a way to express this less negatively; rather than asking people to acknowledge their prejudice, could we encourage them to nurture openness, turn addressing ignorance into create learning communities where people are willing to have their learning challenged, and instead of casting out fear, encourage people to create safe spaces?

The Revd Patrick Pearson-Miles (Storrington) spoke about the experience of two family members. A young man who realised early on that he was same-sex attracted, came to faith and realised that he faced the dilemma of ignoring Christian teaching or denying his own desires. He chose celibacy but the personal cost was huge. Another family member lived in a same-sex relationship and then became a Christian. He was faced with a similar dilemma and chose to leave the same-sex relationship and follow Jesus. He met a woman, got married and had four children, but has had to guard against any same-sex attraction. God's ways are different to ours; as followers of Jesus, we have a better story to tell. That is why we are different and set apart from the world. If we change teaching on marriage, what

would we say to these people who gave up everything to follow Jesus? God loves us but he wants to be like Jesus and take up the cross.

The Revd Martin King (Horsham) thanked the Archdeacon for his work on this. He was concerned about the summary of comments. Paragraph G contained a sweeping statement and it would be difficult to endorse the paper because this undermines the integrity of the survey. People were not asked questions about blessings and same-sex marriage. If such views were put in additional comments, could they be quantified in some way?

The Revd Natalie Loveless (Arundel and Bognor) felt that it was important to capture and listen to emerging learning. She felt that people of all positions were not engaging and learning in the way we have been encouraged to. This topic would be better addressed through open groups and discussion rather than through surveys. There was no one 'biblical position' as there are lots of different positions based on what it says in the Bible and there is not one that is the definitive one. There are better ways to do this. It might be helpful to collect qualitative data rather than quantitative data and attempting to summarise it. She would like to not send this paper and to think about better ways of going about this process.

The Revd Danny Pegg (Eastbourne) explained that he was coming to this issue following spiritual reflection and theological thinking, and he believed that others were coming to the table with the same. LGBTI+ people were being driven to suicide, being driven out of churches, and driven from their faith. Individual commitments to celibacy should not be conflated with rules for all. As the national Church does not require a paper, and hearing the concerns expressed, he suggested that this should be seen as a step on the journey and that the Synod should not send the paper, but should continue conversations.

The Revd Jim Horton (Brighton) explained that, next week, he would celebrate 28 years in partnership with his male partner. He had been selected and trained in the Church of England but the Church would not marry them. He could see nothing in their partnership that was not compatible with Christian teaching. As a Chaplain for the Sea Cadets, he worked with many teenagers who knew nothing about the Church, who did not understand why the Church of England discriminates against LGBTI+ people and refuses to marry gay couples. This is not just an issue for us within the Church; we have to realise that we are ministering to those who are outside the small bubbles that attend church on Sunday.

The Diocesan Secretary read out comments which had been submitted from those attending on Zoom:

The Revd Matthew Foy (Hastings) supported the deletion of paragraph G of the paper, on the basis that he did not believe the survey supported the claim that a significant number of respondents would support the blessing in church of civil partnerships as the survey did not ask a question on this subject. He noted that it was unclear what a 'significant number' meant, and expressed a concern that the arrangement proposed would seriously undermine the unity of the church and cause the fracture feared by paragraph B. He was aware of both clergy and ordinands who would feel they would need to leave the church if a decision were taken to go down this route.

Dr Simon Eyre (Eastbourne) also noted that there was no question regarding the blessing of civil partnerships or same sex marriage and felt it would be best if point G were removed to avoid the possibility of giving a misleading impression that this statement was based on answers to a specific survey question. In addition, he felt that while point J rightly highlighted the problems that LGBTIQ+ Christians experience in line with pastoral principle 1 regarding prejudice, this needed to be balanced by the increasing fear that many who wish

to maintain the traditional teaching of the church feel when they speak about what they believe. He suggested alternative wording for point J.

The Revd Tom Holbird (Brighton) noted the relatively high proportion of people who indicated a desire for further dialogue (26%), only 2% below those who prefer a revision, and that 57% indicated a preference for affirming the church's position and engaging in further dialogue. Given the context of the pandemic which had made full engagement in LLF more challenging, and given the 'conspiracy of silence' which has led to the need for the LLF process, he sensed that we are still early in the process of deeply listening to one another. He was in favour of further dialogue, of ever deeper listening, especially to the experiences of same-sex attracted people, of better theological dialogue and of being even bolder in what this 'further dialogue' looks like across the household of faith.

There was a short break, while the Archdeacon and colleagues considered the comments made during the debate.

Having considered the comments made during the debate, the Archdeacon proposed four amendments to the Living in Love and Faith paper, as following:

- Change to paragraph f, to read: 'That in this diocese a small majority of 38 responders would prefer to affirm the Church's historic position on identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, namely 429 responders, compared to 391 who would prefer to see that position revised.'
- Remove original paragraph g
- Remove original paragraph h
- Change to paragraph i: add, 'It also needs to be recognised, in line with Pastoral Principle 1, that many of those who wish to adhere to the church's traditional teaching increasingly feel intimidated and fearful to speak out.'

The Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes moved:

*"That the motion standing in my name be amended to read "That this Synod adopt the LLF paper as amended in the form displayed on screen to be submitted to the national Church""*

The motion was carried on a show of hands, with 94% of those voting on Zoom in favour.

## **6. RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE LLF PAPER AND SUBMIT TO THE NATIONAL CHURCH**

The Revd Martin King withdrew the following amendment:

*"That the motion standing in the name of the Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes be amended to read "That this Synod adopt the LLF paper as amended by deleting item (g) of the summary points on page 26 to be submitted to the national Church""*

The Archdeacon of Brighton and Lewes moved:

*"That this Synod adopt the LLF paper, as amended in the form displayed on screen, to be submitted to the national Church"*

The motion was carried, with 51 in the room and 49 on Zoom in favour, 17 in the room and 11 on Zoom against, and 6 in the room and 6 on Zoom abstaining.

The Archdeacon thanked the Synod, emphasising that this would be an ongoing conversation, and that listening to each other was key, as we consider what sort of Church we want to become. He encouraged parishes to organise a Pastoral Principles or Living in Love and Faith

course, if they had not already, and explained that there was still time to organise the training of facilitators and to submit feedback to the National Church.

The Bishop thanked the Archdeacon for his work on this process and thanked the Synod for their input to the discussions.

It was announced that the next meeting of the Diocesan Synod would take place on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2022. Details of the timings and venue would be confirmed in due course.