

**Note of business transacted at a meeting of
the Newcastle Diocesan Synod held on
Saturday 13th July, 2024 at 10:00am
at Newcastle Cathedral, St Nicholas Square, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1PF**

The President was the Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley, Bishop of Newcastle and the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Canon Brian Hurst, The Chair of the House of Laity, Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth and the Registrar, Laura Peace.

The Register, attached, recorded 43 members; 3 visitors; and 7 officers in attendance.

1. Welcome and opening worship

The Bishop of Newcastle welcomed members to the meeting and thanked those members who would not be going forward on to the new sitting of Synod for their service and support. The Bishop gave a special thanks to the following members for their great service to both Synod and the diocese as they too would not be moving on to the new Synod beginning in September; the Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Canon Brian Hurst, the Revd Peter Dobson who would soon be taking up a new post with a diocese in the South of England, the Revd Canon Adrian Hughes who had recently retired from his post as Vicar of St George, Cullercoats, the Bishop's Nomination to Synod, Margy Tasker-Brown and Liz Kerry who was stepping down as a member of Synod and also from her role as DMPC Secretary.

The Bishop led the opening prayer.

The Revd Canon Brian Hurst took the chair

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from 19 members.

3. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

4. Meeting held on 11th May, 2024

4.1. Note of business transacted on 11th May, 2024 (paper DS24 16)

The Synod noted and approved the business transacted.

4.2. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Notices

5.1. Promulgation of Amending Canon No. 42 (paper DS24 18)

The Chair spoke to this item and noted that paperwork relating it had been circulated to all members. As there were no questions or comments the Chair gave the following notice:

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 made miscellaneous amendments to the Canons of the Church of England. It complements the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 2024.

6. Questions

No questions were received.

7. Presidential Address

The Chair invited the Bishop of Newcastle to give their Presidential Address to the Synod.

Bishop Helen-Ann gave a Presidential Address and a copy of the Address is attached to this note.

8. General Synod Report (paper DS24 19)

The Chair invited General Synod members Robin Brims and Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth to give a report from the recent meeting of General Synod held between 5th-9th July.

Robin Brims and **Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth** spoke to the paper.

The Chair invited questions or comments.

Dr John Appleby (Tynemouth) asked if the Church of England would be accepting all safeguarding recommendations put forward by the Wilkinson and Jay Reports and whether the implementation of recommendations was structural or independent. In response, Robin Brims noted that any further information beyond what had been stated in the reports would not be available until February 2025.

The Revd Tim Mayfield (Tynemouth) enquired whether there was a timescale denoting when the diocese may be able to offer same sex blessings in a church. In response, Izzy McDonald-Booth noted that some prayers could currently be used in a service but churches must still wait to be informed as to whether the use of LLF prayers in a stand-alone service may be permitted.

Carol Griffiths (Bamburgh & Glendale) asked if Izzy McDonald-Booth could speak further on a note she had reported, that out of all subjects debated at General Synod, LLF had had the most impact. In response, Izzy noted that the significance of LLF likely stemmed from its impact on people at a personal level. General Synod members had spent seven to eight hours debating the topic over the course of the meeting and it was an issue which was continually raised by the media. Izzy further shared that LLF was also a matter of concern at a local level as parishes regularly made enquires to her on the topic.

The Revd Canon Allan Marks (Newcastle Central) was encouraged to hear that the central church believed that Clergy stipends, pensions and retirement housing needed an uplift and were therefore now under review. In light of this Revd Marks asked if this was a sign of change which pointed to a more generosity from central church going forward. In response, Robin Brims highlighted that the demand heard from diocese regarding this issue required a response from the Church of England, therefore some movement on this issue could be expected. Izzy McDonald-Booth noted that the conversations and presentations heard throughout General Synod pointed towards a shift that would see different thinking with regards to how money was distributed in the future.

The Revd Hannah Cleugh (Tynemouth) noted that 'Questions', as a General Synod standing agenda item, had not been covered in the report and asked what would be helpful to our General Synod representatives in terms of good contribution and scrutiny to improve this question process. In response, Izzy reported that the Business Committee Chair had discussed this issue as the number of questions submitted had continually increased and the current process of hearing questions had become untenable. It was thought the process would change in the future but the importance of having questions heard in order to keep a level of check and balance in place was also emphasised.

The Chair thanked both Robin Brims and Izzy McDonald Booth for their report and responses to Synod.

9. Deanery Planning

The Chair invited the Archdeacon of Northumberland, the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne and the Director of Mission and Ministry, the Revd Canon Dr Ric Whaite, supported by representatives from Deanery Development Groups, to provide a review of the Deanery Development work completed in this triennium.

The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne gave an overview of the Deanery Planning Process since its launch in 2022. Initial plans had been submitted in June 2023 followed by check-in days held in Morpeth as well as Deanery Development Group (DDG) meetings attended by both Archdeacons and other guests. The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne explained that the overarching aim of the Deanery Planning Process was to generate a culture throughout the diocese that engendered the idea that 'We are the body of Christ, We are the diocese', in order to ensure that every voice mattered and every voice was heard. In doing so the process had tried to stimulate big conversations so that all could have a voice with regard to how Mission and Ministry was organised. The Archdeacon noted that deaneries had done an exceptional job in dealing with a myriad of changing contextual influences from the cost of living crisis and climate emergency to the welcomed arrival of the new Dean of Newcastle Cathedral as well as the new Director of Mission & Ministry and Director of Ordinands & Vocations.

As DDG representative's **the Revd Canon Alison Hardy (Alnwick)** and **Janice Robinson (Morpeth)** could not attend Synod to speak to this item due to ill health, the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne shared a note prepared by both with members.

The Revd Canon Alison Harding's note celebrated all the hard work carried out by Alnwick's Deanery Development Group, as well as their commitment to sharing and conversation which had enabled the creation of a sound and comprehensive plan. Alison acknowledged the difficulties involved as the development of the plan moved from DDGs to PCCs which meant that progress had been slow. However, now the challenge would be to keep momentum going and to try to get parishes more involved in the implementation of the deanery development plan. Alison hoped the coming Season of Seeking would help the deanery development process in trying to better discern how the deanery may move forward and progress their plan.

Janice Robinson's note highlighted the diversity of parishes within Morpeth Deanery and noted that although the launch of the deanery development process was initially met with some scepticism, the deanery had prayed together to formulate a plan. The process had seen a real willingness to engage amongst readers and lay ministry throughout the deanery and had also helped to break down some of the boundaries between parishes to create a more cohesive and sharing deanery. However, there was still some challenges ahead to ensure that all parishes engaged with the process equally. Next steps would see Janice and the Area Dean visit with PCCs throughout the deanery.

The Archdeacon of Northumberland spoke on behalf of DDG representative **the Revd James McGowan (Newcastle West)** who was also unable to attend Synod due to ill health. The Archdeacon of Northumberland explained that Newcastle West had been faced with a serious challenge as the deanery was a densely populated and deprived area with the majority of its constituents being from ethnic minorities and having many different faiths. Historically the deanery had not had a culture of sharing. However, thanks to James, who had been scrupulous in ensuring that collaboration and conversations between parishes took place, things had changed for the better and the deanery was now extremely positive and forwarding facing with regards to the deanery planning process. The Archdeacon of Northumberland gave a public thank you to James and all the Area Deans for their hard work throughout the process to date.

Jacqueline Atkinson (Newcastle West) shared news of The Pantry, a successful foodbank initiative she helped to establish and run within the parish of Denton, Holy Spirit, as an example of how the parish were endeavouring to meet people where they were to share God's love to all. The Pantry started during covid to support the community through a time of extreme hardship and food poverty. As demand increased the parish had relied on donations from the wider deanery and outside organisations and eventually partnered with the West End Foodbank. As well as still supplying food to those in need, The Pantry had now evolved into a safe place for families with various officers on hand to offer support and guidance in relation to welfare, health and benefits advice. The parish also ran a Sunday Jam (Jesus and Me) session for children and parents to attend which had seen considerable engagement by the wider community. Jaqueline hoped these initiatives would continue to grow into a beautiful tapestry of faith where seeking, sharing and sending could be observed at work in a flourishing community.

The Director of Mission and Ministry gave feedback on the reflective exercises he had led with Deanery Development Groups at the Deanery Development celebration held at Newcastle Cathedral in June. This reflective work invited DDGs to look to develop how we engaged in the Mission of 'Seeking, Sharing and Sending'. The exercises then asked DDGs to say where they noticed God, after which they were invited to pray and reflect on what troubled them in this context and then what they were hoping for in order to illustrate how the Season of Seeking could be integrated into Deanery Development Plans. The objective was not to do more but to join together and notice what God was doing. Engagement with the Season of Seeking was to focus us as a diocese rather than a transition from one set of Missional principles to another.

The Archdeacon of Northumberland thanked the Deanery Development Representatives for their hard work and commitment to the process and hoped this would inspire us to recognise the good that can be achieved when we work together.

The Director noted that in terms of the ongoing Deanery Development Process, check-ins would continue and another celebration event had been scheduled for spring 2025. Some guests had been invited to take part in the check-ins set to take place in October to help us reflect on generational worship and work with families and review costing plans. Work was still ongoing to create materials to enable people to engage conscious prayer. A resource which would encourage CELEBRATION rather than comparison.

The Chair invited questions or comments.

Carol Griffiths (Bamburgh and Glendale) commented that the Deanery Planning Process had been a very enriching experience and had deepened relationships within DDGs and parishes but noted that there was also a financial element to the planning process which had not been mentioned during this item. With regards to this Carol asked, if it became necessary to reduce the number of stipendiary clergy posts from the agreed 80FTE, what would be the criteria with which these cuts might be implemented.

In response, the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne noted that there was no simple objective formula that could be used should cuts become necessary due to the diverse contexts of each deanery and the parishes within. However, what Deaneries have asked for in their plans may help to inform any deliberation on cuts should this situation come about. The matter would be raised and discussed at Bishop's Council and final decision would be collectively decided by Synod.

The Chair thanked the Archdeacons and Deanery Development Representatives for their commitment to the process and their contributions to this item.

10. Governance

The Chair reported that as the Diocesan Secretary was absent, a presentation on this item had been included in the supporting slides booklet. If members wished to raise any questions about the emerging structure they were asked to contact the Secretary via Administration Officer, Candis Carr, whose email address was noted at the end of this item within the booklet.

The Chair noted that the new Diocesan Synod would be invited to consider the changes to governance at the early part of the new triennium with a substantive item scheduled for the November Synod.

11. Standing Agenda Items

11.1. Racial Justice

As apologies had been received from the Bishop of Berwick the Chair spoke to this item and reported that there had only been slight progress since the update given at the last meeting of Synod. There were however ongoing conversations taking place with interested parties. A note from the Secretary reported that the Board of Finance was seeking to identify some resource allocation to support Racial Justice work and this may include a reordering of some current work.

11.2. Environment

The Chair invited Bishop's Advisor for the Environment, the Revd Tim Mayfield to speak to this item.

The Bishop's Advisor for the Environment gave an update on progress with the Net Zero Plan on behalf of the Diocesan Secretary and noted that since the plan had been approved at the last meeting of Synod, Net Zero Consultant, Tristan Oliver had been working to complete a funding application in order that implementation of the plan could begin. The application had been successfully submitted to the National Team and further information regarding this was awaited. It was hoped that money received through this process would help fund the appointment of a Carbon Net Zero Officer and Fundraiser to support the diocese in progressing the Net Zero Plan.

With regards to Net Zero quick wins, the Bishop's Advisor commended the Area Dean of Hexham, Revd Martin Naylor who had helped to implement the following Net Zero Quick Wins in the Benefice of Allendale with Whitfield and Ninebanks:

- Allendale Rectory had had a Heat Source Air Pump installed, connected to a 22 solar panel array which runs on 100% electricity.
- St Cuthbert's Church Hall was now heated by a Biomass Boiler.

The Bishop's Advisor also reported that Northumberland Community Energy Limited had secured funding through the North East & Yorkshire Net Zero Hub to carry out feasibility studies on 33 community buildings, including Allendale (St Cuthbert's Church and Allendale Village Hall). Therefore, Allendale hoped this would lead in the future to battery storage being used to provide some resilience in case of disconnection from the electrical grid, for example, during storms.

11.3. Safeguarding

In the Secretary's absence the Chair spoke to this item and reported that the Independent Safeguarding Audit had been completed in May and the final report was scheduled to be published on 29th July.

The Synod paused for a break.

Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth took the chair

12. Financial Items

12.1. Annual Report and Financial Statements (papers DS24 17A and DS24 17B)

The Chair of the Board of Finance, Canon Simon Harper spoke to this item and introduced the following two papers which were to be received by Synod:

- i. *Summary of Financial Statements 2023 (paper DS24 17A)*
- ii. *Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023 (paper DS24 17B)*

The Chair reported that accounts detailed in both papers had been audited by UNW. They were a record of history and therefore not able to be amended. These accounts had been reviewed and approved by Bishop's Council, sitting as the Directors of the Board of Finance and were required to be received by Synod.

The chair reported the following key details from both papers:

- The NDBF's true cash position at year end 2023 was £3.4m
- The true deficit to the organisation was better than expected at £710k

The Chair thanked the Interim Head of Finance, Tom Royle, who was absent from the meeting, for compiling a summary of the accounts which were to be found in the Summary of Financial Statements 2023 paper above and asked members for any points of clarification they may have.

The Revd Tom Birch (Corbridge) sought clarity on the following note, stated on p.46 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023:

'The Resource Church Giving Fund receives donations which are contributions to St Thomas' Newcastle, the Diocesan Resource Church. Funds will be transferred to the legal body for St Thomas' once the legal body is established.'

In response, Resource Church Leader, **The Revd Dr Ben Doolan** (Newcastle Central) explained that the process of organising the governance of St Thomas' had taken a long time and was still not settled. Therefore, until St Thomas' had established a legal body that could receive these funds, the funds themselves were held with the Newcastle Diocesan Board of Finance on behalf of St Thomas'. **The Revd Dr Doolan** further explained that there were three pots of income which sustained the Resource Church and some of this funding came from the National Church. **The Chair of the Board of Finance** noted for members that the Resource Church was not funded through Parish Share.

The Chair of the Board of Finance proposed that the Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2023 be received by Synod.

By a show of hands Synod unanimously agreed to receive the Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2023

12.2. Theological Reflection

The Chair invited the Director of Mission and Ministry to give a theological reflection on giving and finance supported by a reading from Mark Chapter 4.

The Director of Mission and Ministry gave a theological reflection on giving and finance supported by a reading from Mark Chapter 4. A copy of the reflection is attached to this note.

12.3. Looking Ahead to 2025

The Chair invited the Chair of the Board of Finance to give a report on the timetable for the 2025 budget consultation and the emerging financial outlook.

The Chair of the Board of Finance noted that the 2024 Parish Share Offer Consultation with PCC's would begin in the week commencing 9th September and would conclude on 21st October, after which, the 2025 Budget would be proposed and approved at November Synod.

The Chair then shared the following figures to illustrate the current forecast for 2025:

- The current forecast showed a deficit of £1.3m
- This assumed a 2% increase in parish share rising from £3.862m to £3.939m
- Income was expected to drop by £178k
- Expenditure was expected to increase by £207k
- Funds transferred to unrestricted was expected to drop by £63k
- The budget deficit from 2024 would increase by £448k in 2025.

The Chair noted the importance of ensuring that Deanery Development Plans ran in parallel with the budget for 2025 and also hoped that the mindset on giving would change from *how little* we can give, to *how much* we can give.

*There were no questions or comments from **members**.*

13. Any other business

There was no other business

14. Close

The Bishop thanked all in attendance for their support and invited members to move to the Quire for a service of the Eucharist commencing at 12:30pm. The Bishop then led the Synod in prayer and with a blessing drew the meeting to a close.

15. Eucharist

The meeting concluded with a Eucharist.

Presidential Address to Diocesan Synod 13th July 2024

A day or so after the General Election, the England men's football team manager Gareth Southgate wished our new PM well but said he had no tips for how to tackle being in the public eye. "No, I don't have any advice," Southgate said. "I think when you're in a position of responsibility, as I am, you realise that advice comes from every direction... Everybody has a simple solution to complex problems so I'm sure he's going to be inundated". The same could be said for a diocesan bishop!

We meet today in the early days of a changed political landscape. This week I travelled to Westminster to swear my oath of allegiance to the King. The Parliamentary Estate did indeed feel a bit like fresher's week and the reconfigured seating in the House of Lords felt disorientating. Peers who I am used to looking at are now sat around and behind the bishops, and there was a noted sense of change both visually and in how colleagues behaved when they entered the Chamber, finding their seats in new places. There was a lot of positive energy, and I was glad to soak up feelings of genuine hope for the future. I lived up to the North East characteristic of 'shy bairns get nowt' in using the heft of the Bishop of Lincoln nobly assisted by the determination of Baroness Uddin of Bethnal Green (who declared the whole endeavour an act of inter-faith witness) to shoehorn my way into an early part of the queue to take the oath.

As a Lord Spiritual, I don't vote in a General Election. Intentionally not voting made me think about what elections are for and what they point to. A General Election is for the very important task of choosing someone to represent us in the communities where we live. I was struck by headlines like 'make your voice heard' amidst the many competing and eye-catching slogans offered by political parties. I loved seeing the social media photos of dogs at polling stations, even a brave cat, and my personal favourite hashtag 'nunsatpollingstations'. All of life, in other words was bound up in this event. As to what Elections point *to*, well this is where it gets interesting.

Some of the results in the 8 constituencies that are within our diocese were very significant, particularly in the Hexham and North Northumberland constituencies. We now have two MPs who are Government Ministers: Sir Alan Campbell MP for Tynemouth, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury and Chief Whip; and Catherine McKinnell MP for Newcastle North as Minister of State in the Department for Education. Our new PM in his first speech delivered outside No. 10 invited us to join 'this government of service'. I have been struck by this language of service, along with the Government's intentional use of the word 'missions'. I note that the PM's deputy speech writer used to be the ABC's speechwriter. There is an opportunity here for communities of faith to engage with this language in ways that can elevate how *we* proclaim *and share* the Gospel with renewed confidence. Please pray for our elected representatives and I encourage you to reach out and invite them to church and community events.

As well as the changing political landscape, we meet today in the joyful after-glow of our recent ordination services. This afternoon here in the Cathedral we will install a new residentiary Canon. There is so much to give thanks for in this season of renewal as we continue to face into our own reality. There are important issues before us today. As a

reminder of our wider Church life we will hear from our General Synod representatives about some of the issues debated and decided in York. LLF is making slow but determined progress, and safeguarding remains front and centre, and rightly so. Our diocese recently went through our Independent Safeguarding Audit, a process which I cannot commend highly enough for its fairness, robustness, and challenge. The final report will be published later this month.

Looking ahead, as we develop our renewed strategy based on our vision of a diocese that is seeking, sharing, and sending, turning outwards in mission, and becoming younger and more diverse, we will need to pay attention to the alignment of our resources to this vision. This is the purpose of the Governance Review and while I am disappointed that the governance review has not concluded before the end of this triennium. I will be pushing firmly and collegially for this work to be completed and implemented as soon as possible in the new triennium.

I want to turn now and say a bit more about the word 'seeking'; the first word of our Diocesan vision. I was struck by Jessica Martin's reflection during her sermon in York Minster on Sunday morning, at which members of General Synod were present: 'Visions are not something apart, some sort of cosmic consumable light show'. A vision is not the event that is out there, it is right here, around us in this place and in every place.

Seeking is a dynamic that invites both pace and patience. There is a sense of energy. I wonder if that is that because something or someone is lost; or that there is a sense of something missing as in the song "*Big Yellow Taxi*" by Joni Mitchell:

*Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot*

(I'm not brave enough to attempt to sing that!)

Beautiful things can get paved over in the power of big business.

In literature quest is bound up with story: seeking something framed by a narrative (even a homeland, and how redolent that is to today with asylum seekers or Palestinians). In Homer's *Odyssey*, seeking and searching entail discoveries, corrections, changes in plans, growth in understanding. Seeking is always a process rather than a one-off event. When Odysseus got home to Ithaca this was just at the beginning of something, not the end.

The Bible is a library of books for seekers. There is human seeking for other people or lost property, or food or pasture (for livestock) or whatever is treasure. There is the unexpected too. In Eden God seeks Adam and Eve (where are you) in their hiding; Saul seeks his father's donkeys and ends up being king (1 Sam.9-10) or John's disciples seek where Jesus is staying and find the Messiah (John 35-42); or at the Resurrection Jesus' followers seek Jesus' body in a grave and instead find (are met by) a living person. On some occasions too, people do

not find what they are searching for (Joshua 2.22; 2 Sam.17.20; 2 Kings 2.17). Seeking takes on qualities that are moral and spiritual: searching out the commandments (1 Chron.28.8); or searching one's spirit in meditation (Ps.77.6); or searching for wisdom (Prov.2.1-5) or searching the Scriptures (John 5.39). Perhaps Ecclesiastes is the key exemplar in searching for fulfilment in all the wrong places before coming to the end of the matter in concluding that the goal of life is to fear God and keep God's commandments which is the whole duty of humankind (Eccles.12.13). In the New Testament seeking is grounded in God's kingdom (Matt.6.33, 13.45-46). Indeed, to "Seek me and live" (Amos 5.4) is the arguably the Divine invitation of the whole Bible.

While Scripture is full of human seeking for God the heart is in *God's seeking* after people and creation. Consider the Medieval Scottish theologian Duns Scotus that "God would have sent God's Son even if there had not been a fall". After all God clothes Adam and Eve before they leave Eden. The incarnation is the heart of God's seeking (and at-one-ment/atonement – the Word become flesh (John 1.14). Another aspect of God's seeking is God's omniscience – God who searches every mind (1 Chron.28.9; Rev.2.23) and every heart Psalm 139.1ff and 139.23). Thus the destiny of seeking is the "coming to be at home" – and we can be "at home" even in the here and now as well as the "there and then". All of this stands as much under the presence and work of God's Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who inspires, leads, guides, and settles. It is the Spirit we invoke in all our work, alone, together, in parishes, chaplaincies, schools and diverse places of work, rest and play.

Seeking and finding are built into the fabric of human living. In Scripture the rhythm of seeking is part of human life in the world (not just in the church or temple!) and part of the spiritual life in which we all dwell. At a human level there is "a time to seek" (Eccles.36). At a divine level life is lived in a double awareness: that God has come to seek the lost (Luke 19.10), and that the person who seeks will find (Matt.7.7-8). This is the wondrous reality that we are invited to embrace in an intentional season of seeking.

Before I conclude, I would like to pay tribute to those elected members of this Synod who are stepping down with great gratitude for their time on Synod. Please if you are present today would you stand so we can offer our appreciation. From the House of Clergy I would like to particularly mention Canon Adrian Hughes who retired at the end of June. I would also like to pay a personal thanks to the bishop's nominees, particularly Liz Kerry who is also stepping down from chairing the DMPC and who has served this diocese immensely well in this role, and on Bishop's Council and as a member of the CNC.

A final word.

There is a risk that the working out of resourcing can become rooted in the principle of scarcity. I note that the Archbishops' Commissions (on families and households, care, racial justice, housing and community) sought to address policy challenges through the framework of 'reimagining' as the means of charting a new course, drawing on Christian theology, tradition, and values. It's my hope that such a reimagining can lie at the heart of our seeking, sharing and sending. It continues to be a huge joy and privilege to serve as your bishop, and I give thanks for your patience and forbearance as I continue to form myself more fully into

the leader that I believe, and trust God is calling me to be for the sake of God's Kingdom in this diocese.

+Helen-Ann Newcastle
July 2024

**Theological Reflection - Giving and Financial Stewardship
DDMM to Diocesan Synod - 13.07.24, AM**

Mark 4:35-41

A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Suppose for a moment we are engaged in a game of identifying pairs of opposites. One of the insights one gains from such a game is learning that what we might assume are distinct, even oppositional, things are less clearly so for others.

I've wondered in this way about the text from Mark 4 and Jesus' question to those with him aboard the boat. This was the Gospel text a few short weeks ago in the Year B Sunday Lectionary.

When Jesus asks those with him "Have you still no faith?", I wonder what the opposite of faithfulness is that his question is gesturing towards? Is it as simple as faithfulness vs. an absence of faith? What is our commonplace experience of a lack of faith?

- Perhaps it is not knowing enough about faith?
- Or perhaps we face challenges to living as faithfully as we would wish to?
- Perhaps we have witnessed the powerfully destructive ways faith can operate?

The passage leads me to rest on a different kind of opposite to faith. In the circumstances of the story from Mark the emphasis is very firmly on the lack of control that those aboard ship are experiencing. Their response to this lack of control is to exhort Jesus to exercise the kind of control they assume they need in the storm they are experiencing.

The phrase "the stormy present" was made famous during the American Civil War by the then General and, later, President, Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps it seems an apt one to describe some of our life together in the Church of England, as the Diocese of

Newcastle? Our attention seems to be commanded by besetting storm conditions. The kind you have heard me characterise to this Synod when I arrived in March of this year: “we do not have enough” “we are not enough”. The storm we might seek to rouse Jesus to calm is one not of too much wind and waves, but too little. A storm of scarcity with respect to money, skills, people. Too much being required of too few.

Perhaps like those aboard the boat with Jesus we want a greater measure of control, security and agency. We want to see our efforts make a difference. But this is not the measure of our faithfulness. Like those in the boat with the sleeping Messiah, faith can be primarily understood not in terms of what beliefs we hold or how much we do but whether we are enabling one another to seek and trust in God in far from promising circumstances. It is to look for the ways in which faith’s opposite isn’t unbelief but control. Jesus isn’t only asking “do you still have no faith”, Jesus is also asking why do you still put so much into remaining in control?

When it comes to discernment with the stewardship of our human, natural and fiscal resources our responsibility is to give thanks for what God is sharing with us, rather than name it as insufficient.

Faithfulness means beginning not with asking what can afford to do, but where is God inviting us to be and to witness? And when we witness, it will not always be to a God that does things according to our short- or medium-term demands or prayers. Instead it will be faithful people witnessing that there is something more happening than human agency at work, there is an emphasis on God’s agency.

What is the “stormy present” of the Church’s life like? Like the disciples we turn our attention and emotional energy towards how to build a “better” church, and turn away from the uncomfortable reality of the present.

Jesus isn’t the remedy to the storm we might experience, but enabling one another to be articulate and faithful in those circumstances is to encounter Jesus. Every part of our life together - including our sharing responsibility for shared gifts - is part of our testimony to that encounter.

Tributaries:

Julian Agnon (2024), No country for Eight-Spot Butterflies

Ruha Benjamin (2024), Imagination: a manifesto

James Butler (2024), Declining to be church?

Rowan Williams (2000), Resurrection


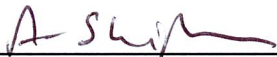


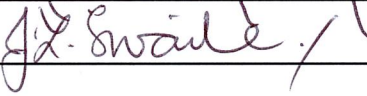



Diocesan Synod 13th July 2024

Surname	First Name	House	Deanery	Attended (Signed)
Abrams	Jane	Laity	Bellingham	Apology
Alexander	Gill	Clergy	Ex-officio	
Allinson	Paul	Clergy	Newcastle West	
Appleby	John	Laity	Tynemouth	✓
Arckless	Robert	Laity	Alnwick	✓
Atkinson	Jacqueline	Laity	Newcastle West	J Atkinson
Ayerst	John	Laity	Norham	
Barclay	Carol	Laity	Newcastle Central	Apology
Batson	Lee	Clergy	Ex-officio	✓
Birch	Tom	Clergy	Corbridge	Tom Birch
Bowsher	Andii	Clergy	Newcastle Central	
Brims	Robin	Laity	Ex-officio	Robin
Brown	Christine	Laity	Bedlington	
Carr	Candis			✓
Caro	Rae	Clergy	Tynemouth	Rae
Christie	Joanne			Apology (non member)
Cleugh	Hannah	Clergy	Tynemouth	Hannah
Collingwood	Nigel			Apology (non member)
Craggs	Lynne	Laity	Bedlington	L Craggs

Surname	First Name	House	Deanery	Attended (Signed)
Denyer	Nicola	Laity	Ex-officio	
Dixon	Steve	Clergy	Tynemouth	<i>Steve Dixon</i>
Dobson	Peter	Clergy	Newcastle Central	<i>Peter Dobson</i>
Doolan	Ben	Clergy	Newcastle Central	<i>Ben Doolan</i>
Doran	Emma	Laity	Tynemouth	<i>Emma Doran</i>
Evans	Aidan	Laity	Newcastle West	<i>Aidan W Evans</i>
Field	Carole	Laity	Bamburgh & Glendale	
Fisher	Meg	Laity	Newcastle West	Apology
Flintoft	Ian	Clergy	Ex-officio	Apology
Fox	Louisa	Laity	Newcastle East	<i>Louisa Fox</i>
Gill	Helen	Clergy	Newcastle East	
Gill	Kyrinn			✓
Glover	David	Clergy	Hexham	<i>David Glover</i>
Griffiths	Carol	Laity	Bamburgh & Glendale	<i>Carol Griffiths</i>
Grocock	Chris	Clergy	Morpeth	<i>Chris Grocock</i>
Hamilton	John	Laity	Bedlington	Apology
Harding	Allison	Clergy	Newcastle West	<i>A. Harding</i>
Hardy	Alison	Clergy	Alnwick	<i>A. Hardy</i>
Harper	Simon	Laity	Ex-officio	<i>Simon Harper</i>

Surname	First Name	House	Deanery	Attended (Signed)
Hartley	Helen-Ann	Bishops	Ex-officio	✓
Hennebry	Ian	Clergy	Bedlington	<i>I. Hennebry</i>
Heslop	Neil	Clergy	Newcastle West	<i>N. Heslop</i>
Hildred	Mandy			<i>M. Hildred</i>
Hills	Mike	Clergy	Newcastle Central	<i>M. J. Hills</i>
Hills	Sarah	Clergy	Norham	<i>A. Hills</i>
Holmes	Gary	Laity	Morpeth	
Hunter	Matthew	Clergy	Newcastle West	<i>M. Hunter</i>
Hunter	Stephanie	Clergy	Bedlington	
Hurst	Brian	Clergy	Bamburgh & Glendale	<i>B. Hurst</i>
Jones	Jennie	Laity	Newcastle West	<i>J. E. Jones</i>
Kennedy	David	Clergy	Corbridge	
Kerry	Liz	Laity	Bishop's Appointment	Apology
King	Matthew	Laity	Newcastle East	
Knox	Hilary	Laity	Morpeth	
<i>Chillingworth</i>	<i>Joanne</i>	<i>Laity</i>	<i>Alnwick</i>	<i>Joanne</i>

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Lawrance	Robert	Clergy	Ex-officio	
Lea	David			David Rhea
Lunn	Sarah	Clergy	Bellingham	Sarah Lunn
Macpherson	Catherine	Clergy	Bedlington	Apology
Marks	Allan	Clergy	Newcastle Central	Apology
Mayfield	Tim			Tim
McDonald-Booth	Izzy	Laity	Ex-officio	←
McGowan	James	Clergy	Newcastle West	
McKenzie	Gwyn	Laity	Corbridge	Apology
Mitchell	John	Laity	Hexham	
Moon	Sarah	Clergy	Bedlington	Sm
Morsman	Andy	Laity	Hexham	Apology
Murray	Alice	Laity	Bellingham	
Naylor	Martin	Clergy	Hexham	Apology
O'Grady	Anthony	Clergy	Morpeth	
O'Hagan	Ruth	Laity	Newcastle Central	✓
O'Sullivan	Helen	Clergy	Alnwick	Apology
Peace	Laura			Peace
Pope	Valerie	Laity	Morpeth	←

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Ramshaw	Susan	Laity	Bedlington	
Robinson	Janice	Laity	Morpeth	
Robson	Claire	Clergy	Ex-officio	Apology
Royle	Tom			
Russell	Tara			Apology (non member)
Shipton	Andrew	Clergy	Newcastle Central	
Sourbut Groves	Catherine	Clergy	Ex-officio	
Stuart	Rod			Apology (non member)
Styring	Roger	Laity	Ex-officio	
Swaile	Jill	Laity	Bellingham	
Tasker-Brown	Margy	Laity	Bishop's Appointment	Apology
Taylor-Kenyon	Louise	Clergy	Bamburgh & Glendale	Apology
Terry	Neal	Clergy	Newcastle East	
Tranter	Stephen			
Waddle	Shane			
Whaite	Ric			
White	Simon	Clergy	Morpeth	
Williams	Hugh	Laity	Alnwick	
Wilson	Carol	Laity	Hexham	Apology

Surname	First Name	House	Deanery	Attended (Signed)
Windass	Roger	Laity	Bishop's Appointment	
Wood	Rachel	Clergy	Ex-officio	Rachel Wood
Wood	Simon	Laity	Ex-officio	
Wright	Steve	Clergy	Hexham	Steve Wright
Wroe	Mark	Bishops	Ex-officio	Apology
Tulip	Joseph	Comms		JR

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Brims	Robin	Laity	Ex-officio	
Brown	Christine	Laity	Bedlington	
Carr	Candis			
Caro	Rae	Clergy	Tynemouth	
Christie	Joanne			Apology (non member)
Cleugh	Hannah	Clergy	Tynemouth	
Collingwood	Nigel			Apology (non member)
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Dobson	Peter	Clergy	Newcastle Central	
Doolan	Ben	Clergy	Newcastle Central	
Doran	Emma	Laity	Tynemouth	
Evans	Aidan	Laity	Newcastle West	
Field	Carole	Laity	Bamburgh & Glendale	
Fisher	Meg	Laity	Newcastle West	Apology
Flintoft	Ian	Clergy	Ex-officio	Apology
Fox	Louisa	Laity	Newcastle East	
Gill	Helen	Clergy	Newcastle East	
Gill	Kyrinn			
Glover	David	Clergy	Hexham	
Griffiths	Carol	Laity	Bamburgh & Glendale	
Grocock	Chris	Clergy	Morpeth	
Hamilton	John	Laity	Bedlington	Apology
Harding	Allison	Clergy	Newcastle West	
Hardy	Alison	Clergy	Alnwick	
Harper	Simon	Laity	Ex-officio	