

Chairman's Introduction to the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2020 to the June Synod 2021

Good evening everyone and welcome to this part of the meeting which constitutes the AGM and the opportunity for Synod to receive the Directors' and Trustees' Report and Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2020, of which I hope you have all had a copy.

In a few minutes I shall ask Liz Ashmead to present a brief overview of the accounts, we will then hear from Adam Halsey of our auditors Hays Macintyre before opening up to any questions from the floor.

I am grateful to Adam for joining us tonight and for his time, expertise and support throughout the audit process.

The presentations are being kept deliberately short so there is plenty of time for questions - our on-line synods have turned out to be as interactive, if not more so, than our live ones so please take the opportunity to ask questions when the time comes.

But if we don't fill all of the allotted time that's not a problem and we will simply move on to the remainder of the agenda and perhaps conclude a little quicker.

After the Q&A session I shall propose the motion as set out in the agenda and we will use the voting buttons to hopefully in support of that.

I shall then move on to propose the re-appointment of Hays Macintyre as our auditors for a further year.

As in 2020 we will not be asking you to sign off the 2022 budget tonight but will be deferring that until the next Synod scheduled for 15th September.

So, the Report and Accounts tell the story of a year which finished 6 months ago and as we all know was a hugely challenging year across the world.

In the circumstances I think we can be proud of just what was achieved in this Diocese as referenced in the report.

In the circumstances our financial position was not as bad at year end as at one time we thought it might be.

I think it's also fair to say that we are probably in no worse or different a position from most other dioceses, many other not for profit and commercial organisations, or indeed the country itself.

The fact we have not to this point anyway qualified for sustainability funding from Central Church referenced by Bishop Nick indeed indicates that we are not amongst the dioceses perceived to be the most in need.

Nonetheless, the size of our deficit, in a year when we had planned for a reduction, makes for sobering reading and I'm sure Adam will reinforce the urgency with which we need to reduce it in order to remain a going concern for the future.

The Finance Committee and Bishop's Council remain confident we can do this and whilst the purpose of tonight is to sign off on 2020 rather than talk too much about 2021, I would like to give reassurance that many of the building blocks to achieve a sustainable balanced budget for the future are already in place, including:

- the Mission and Pastoral plan
- the recent and ongoing cost reductions within the Church House team
- the proactive management of Glebe, investments and other sources of income
- and of course the generous giving campaign
- all within the bounds of an evolving 5 Year Financial Framework which we first brought to Synod in February of last year.

All this and more is underway, but as we approach the half way point of 2021 I need to be clear that we have a hard road ahead of us and - you know this as well as I in the context of your own parishes - 2021 is going to be every bit as difficult as 2020.

Last year we said to parishes "pay what you can and don't worry too much about what you can't". This year we are asking parishes to make every possible effort to pay share, so that we in turn can continue to fund parish stipendiary clergy and support at broadly similar levels to the recent past.

Otherwise, we are faced with a very different future in terms of clergy deployment – some dioceses are already following that route with substantial reductions. We have been at pains to avoid making radical cuts but what happens now depends so much upon continued parish support.

At this point in the year, giving through Share remains substantially behind where we were this time last year. Part of that is as a result of the discontinuation of the 2% discount for the full payment of share in January.

But this year we need to at least match if not better the Share payment levels of last year and I appeal to you to do everything you can in your parishes and deaneries to facilitate this. It's not a matter of the parishes and the diocese having separate destinies – our fortunes are inextricably linked - as part of One Body and One Church.

By the Grace of God we will overcome the current challenges, looking back in due course perhaps with gratitude that the difficulties of this period have forced us to work together and adapt, in a way that may not have happened otherwise.

So as we draw a line under 2020 I would like to acknowledge the superb support we have had over the last year from our staff team led by David, our volunteers and our clergy, and to pass on our collective thanks.

I would like to say thank you to our parishes for their continuing financial support through such difficult and challenging times.

Finally, and since I've got the conch at this moment and may not get a chance to say it later: I would like to say what a privilege it has been to work with Bishop Nick and to thank him both personally and on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Finance for his selfless devotion to this Diocese over the last 10 years.

For his strong leadership – through good times as well as challenging times, his extraordinary dedication and hard work, his wisdom and guidance, his teaching, his care, example, and discipleship.

He leaves a diocese which is blessed in so many ways – to quote his words “God’s small miracle that is the Diocese of Salisbury”.

May we always be aware of our good fortune, may we give heartfelt thanks to God for it and for Nick’s ministry among us.

And Bishop Nick may I wish you and Helen a long, happy and equally blessed retirement.

Nigel Salisbury