

## Standing Committee Bulletin 16: 24 November 2020

### Via Zoom

**Steve Willson**, as Vice President welcomed everyone to Standing Committee (SC) and invited **Jane James** to give the opening reflection.



#### Coronavirus Pandemic – the challenge of Recovery and Reconstruction

**Bishop Gregory** articulated a vision for 2021 and beyond.

His presentation revisited the Harries Report on the CinW in 2012 and asked the question, do we have the right structures, resources and leadership in place for the church of the twenty-first century?

In St Asaph, work on **structures** is largely complete with the creation of Mission Areas. This has been difficult and challenging at times, with cultural change still to catch up.

**Resources** – finance has been remarkably resilient this year. Much of this could be to do with the MA structure which has enabled improved cooperation. The RB support (£1.1m) has made a lot possible. It's a great achievement to arrive at November's SC with all MAs fully paid up with their MA Share to the end of Q3. In fact, we are predicting a surplus on the diocesan budget of £200K-£300K. This is not because the diocese has made a profit but because there are vacant posts,

and the usual activities and expenses haven't been happening (eg diocesan conference set up).

The DBF has approved a balanced budget for 2021 but we don't know what will happen next year – 2021 is likely to be very challenging indeed. We need to ask the big questions:

- How many church buildings does the Diocese of St Asaph need?
- How many clergy do we need?
- What about lay forms of stipendiary ministry?

We are responding through the MA review process which is looking at vision, evangelism, buildings, finance and the operation of the Shared Ministry Team. From this, a MA Action Plan is created with objectives for the future.

**Leadership** - much work has been done to nurture vocations but are we really learning to work collaboratively? Sometimes, it is too easy to fall back into old patterns.

Going forward, we need to ask of our leadership:

- Are we sharing resources?
- Are we doing intentional mission, eg LyCiG or Hope and a Future?
- How do we ensure we are resilient?
- Are we faithful? Are we leading in God's way or holding onto the things we like?

Five priorities for 2021 and beyond:

- A vision of faith which is energising for the future



- A financial model which is sustainable
- A leadership committed to collaborative ministry
- Leadership which is intentionally missional
- A leadership which says its prayers

**Diane McCarthy** explained how the CinW is helping in this strategic process:

We are very grateful for the generous support from the RB during the pandemic. The RB's only income is from its investments and it must balance spending now with income for future generations. It's working on:

- Clergy remuneration and pension scheme
- The structure across the CinW with six dioceses, looking at duplication and repetition of resources and activity.
- Where is strategy developed and owned?

St Asaph and Bangor are already building on existing cooperative arrangements.



**Bishop Gregory** wrapped up this section saying:

At our March 2021 meeting we will bring some general principles to SC which will guide and inform our thinking.

In our June meeting we will drill down into the detail, to turn our strategic goals into aims and by November we can adopt appropriate plans and budgets.

SC members attended Break out rooms to discuss the presentation. **Among the feedback was:**

This is an exciting opportunity to be courageous. Are we brave enough to do this? An outward focus needs to be our priority – the wording at the moment is too inward looking. Collaborative ministry needs to be for everyone.



The structure of MAs aren't working everywhere and needs to be refined.

We need to ensure people aren't left behind. The church has embraced new technology but not everyone can access it.

Not all MAs have the resources (ie people) to work collaboratively. There can be a tension between local and diocesan – people will work together for a common interest, but you can't force people to be collaborative.

Could there be more training on change management?

Discipleship is key – we want disciples not just church attenders.

There has been a reduction in clergy numbers, but we still have the same number of church buildings. This makes collaborative working very difficult.

Pioneer Ministry can grow a church community.

We need to recognise that the church is a stable presence in uncertain times.

Will there be accountability if leadership is not committed to collaborative ministry with a missional focus?

There's still a tension between MA thinking and parish thinking; a resentment that the



old model of church may not be the future.

This discussion is long overdue. We can't have missional churches with no funding, while wealthy churches stand empty.

This review needs to have teeth. How can MAs make difficult decisions when its members represent their own churches?

If we are going to move to a more mission and outward focus, then we need to have everyone on board and there needs to be more clergy accountability.

Is the structure of each MA correct? Some are very large – is that helpful?

How radical can we be? For many of us, it's a relief that reviews are happening and questions are being asked.

Should Wales have fewer dioceses?

Painful decisions need to be made and we need to be honest about what is holding us back.

We need to regain the enthusiasm we had when MAs were created – have negative people dimmed this enthusiasm?

Can the church fight for better broadband in rural areas?

Great that the MA reviews are happening and good to include SC. The more SC feels engaged, the more will get filtered down to churches

MAs need to be vibrant Christian communities, but are they? Are they just historic communities with an extra level of bureaucracy?

Zoom has broken down some walls and barriers to collaborative working. Young people are less rooted in the structures of the past.

### Report on the Diocesan Conference

**Diane McCarthy:** This year, the conference was online, and the highest number of people ever attended.

There was excellent feedback for both the presidential address and the keynote address from Bishop Ric.

The business of the conference worked well digitally – it was easier to see all the business onscreen, but people did miss personal connections.

*What have we learnt:*

- People appreciated the kindness to the environment.
- People could dip in and out to meet other commitments.
- Majority (85%) welcomed a shorter and more focused event.
- One creative suggestion for future is to separate out the essential business from the inspirational work.
- 2021 needs to build on the spirit of innovation.

### Report from the Grants Committee



**Clive Myers** outlined the work of the grants committee whose membership this year has been refreshed. Gill Stanning, Ian Day and Norman Morris have joined the committee. It looks after six sources of funding:

*Building* – 26 grants awarded so far, usually of about £3,000 but occasionally more.

*Youth projects* – still money left in this pot as many projects are on hold due to lockdown. It's not too late to apply for Christmas initiatives!

*Social engagement* grants. Take up of this fund has been very strong: £6K out of £7K budget taken this year,





*Training bursary* – there has been a decrease in applications this year as many training events have been cancelled.

*MA Admin grants* – 19/20 MAs applied for a grant. This is a 3-year scheme to provide Admin support for MAs.

*Coronavirus Emergency Fund* - £40,000 allocated to support the most vulnerable and those particularly affected by the pandemic...£24,883 is still available. MAs can apply for two grants up to £1,000 each to ensure fairness across the diocese.

**Representation and Inclusivity in the Diocese of St Asaph** (see accompanying paper)

**Sue Huyton** updated SC. The total clergy representation is 57% male, and 43% female. The concerning element behind these figures is a lack of younger women clergy.

**Election of Representatives to the Standing Committee of the Governing Body**

This was voted by house (clergy / lay) and Pam Powell (clergy) and Jennie Willson (lay) were elected.

**Election of Representatives to the Governing Body of the Church in Wales.**

Jane Ayee, Mark Pryce and Paul Whittaker CBE were elected.

**Matters Raised by the Mission Areas**

**Michael Plane, Churches Inspector** responded to the first question from Cedewain MA on Pilgrim Churches:

Due to the ongoing MA reviews and in order to offer a holist approach across the Diocese, new accessions into the pilgrim church scheme are on hold. Existing pilgrim churches will be looked at as part of the MA reviews in terms of how they serve the people of the MA. We need to consider whether new pilgrim churches will be sustainable in the future, in terms of

finance and volunteers – can they offer missional outreach?

**Diane McCarthy** responded to four questions relating to finance from Valle Crucis Mission Area:

Q1: The current MA Share formula has been in use since 2007 and it was always the intention of the DBF to review the share formula in 2020. Due to the pandemic, the plan is now for the review to take place in 2021, making use of the new mapping information showing the demographic information of each MA (<https://churchnearme.co.uk/resource-map/>) and Finance Coordinator information which shows the financial health of each MA.



Q2. When a church closes, its financial affairs are wound up and any assets distributed across the MA (subject to charity law and any benefactor restrictions). It's unusual for a church to close with assets, it's much more common to have debts (either historic or recent). In the event of a church having debts, the DBF is usually approached to write-off a debt. Closure is the only occasion when financial arrears are written off.

The other ongoing liability is the church yard which remains the responsibility of the MA.

Q3: Where money is held in restricted accounts, we are obliged by charity law to respect those restrictions. Information from Finance Coordinator shows that across all MAs 32% of funds held are described as restricted. In Valle Crucis, that proportion is higher.



Across MAs (using 2019 data):

- 52% of MA funds are unrestricted so are accessible for use.
- 32% restricted funds
- 13% of funds are in property – only four MAs have property assets
- 3% is allocated by MAs to endowments.

We have some very wealthy MAs and some have little financial wealth. Some MAs have dug very deep during 2020 to meet their commitments but there are other MAs who have increased their wealth during the pandemic.

At the end of 2019, the DBF had £7.6m in its reserves. Churches and MAs had £20.23m.

The DBF will close with a surplus this year, mainly due to the temporary suspension of clergy recruitment, lay staff being placed on furlough leave and other cost saving measures that have been taken. In September, the DBF asked for creative ideas for how that potential surplus could be used to support mission and ministry. The Bishop's Staff are identifying where we might need to invest, where is there a real need for support and where are there great ideas and energy for growth and mission. It is important that churches and Mission Areas are also proactive in helping themselves e.g. encouraging congregations to take up online giving

Q4. There's a difference between can't pay and won't pay. Financial transparency and consistent financial reporting helps us to understand this. If there are financial difficulties, we hope these can be worked through. The DBF encourage all MAs to keep the dialogue open, to identify any financial problems early and to work together to support people. The DBF and the Diocesan Finance Team are already working in partnership with several MAs.

**Date of the next meeting 30 March 2021  
likely to be via ZOOM**

Bishop Gregory thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting. He paid tribute to Sharn Hughes, church treasurer at Meliden Church and former Mission Area Treasurer in Bryn a Môr MA who sadly died in a road accident near Abergele earlier this week. He also encouraged people to find his Advent Message on the website at

<https://dioceseofstasaph.org.uk/bishopgregory/advent-message/> and closed the meeting with a prayer and blessing.

#### Further information.

All the papers to accompany this meeting can be found at:

<https://dioceseofstasaph.org.uk/standing-committee/>

