

Diversity in Participation Group presentation. Synod March 2024 +Sophie

Over the next few minutes, I want to give you an outline update of the work of the Diversity in Participation group over this past year. I shall begin by reading the statement of need, which you can find at the top of the terms of reference for this group previously viewed by Synod.

In view of the prominence of the black lives matter movement, violence against women and girls, the growing challenge of climate emergency and the inequality gap which has widened during the COVID pandemic rather than decreased, we recognise that there is work to be done to address the real and perceived inequity across our church communities and leadership. The establishment of a Diversity in Participation group is our response to seek to address these issues and think together about creative and hopeful actions that can be taken in simple ways to address these challenges and make a felt difference to those most disadvantaged. The Pastoral Principles which Synod will recall we discussed last time 'held together in the love of Christ,' chiefly established as a mechanism for conversations around Living in Love and Faith are a helpful framework for this. I will remind you the pastoral principles identify six pervading evils: prejudice, silence, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy and power, all of which we will recognise within our approach.

In our purpose statement we state: *The DiP group exists to bring together representation from specific groups within the Diocese of Sheffield for regular conversation to assist the Bishop of Sheffield guiding him in increasing opportunities for participation for those groups, removing barriers and growing appreciation for one another within our common life.*

I should also add that there is a well-established but separate group entitled 'Mutual Flourishing' with representation from the spectrum of traditions well represented within our diocesan life. I am of course very happy to answer questions on either, but my purpose today is to talk about DiP, I shall now move on to give you a brief overview from each area.

Disability

Over this past year Rev Christine Herbert has joined the group as successor to the original member who found himself unable to commit the time needed for this work. Though not through personal lived experience but rather extensive professional expertise, Christine has already made a significant contribution. The slide before you is but one of the impressive artworks of a disabled artist Marc Bratcher. He lives in Doncaster, was born, raised and educated in Doncaster before progressing to St. John's college Oxford. He is gaining a national profile as a disabled artist through the medium of the iPad, already offering exhibitions of his work in Peterborough cathedral [click here to read more](#) and other places with a piece generously created to come to Doncaster Minster in due course. Christine and I had the privilege of visiting Marc at home, and it was a very clear reminder to us both, of the significant deficit that currently exists in the life of our church because we do not routinely receive the contributions of disabled adults or children. Christine has already joined the national network co-ordinated by K.T. Tupling (formerly of this diocese), the Oxford diocese' disability lead and has attended a two-day conference in Leicester on our behalf. Surprisingly we learned from this that we are significantly further ahead than many dioceses, even though we feel keenly aware of the lack of progress in this area, here. We are seeing new developments in the life of our diocese especially in the participation of neurodiverse groups of people, and events and services that are lovingly, thoughtfully, crafted with and for them in a way that is leading to greater flourishing and involvement. This can only be a blessing and I want to thank those individuals leading in this way, some of you are in this room.

Women's ministry

I want to give particular thanks for the work of our able and dedicated Dean of Women, Amanda Barraclough. Together with colleagues, Amanda has nurtured a rhythm of engagement, support and communication for ordained women (self-supporting and stipendiary) given hours of her time to 1 to 1 support (and to lay women) and contributed to thoughtful conversations and work streams at a national level, for this, we are grateful, Amanda. Some still ask if this is necessary 30 years on from the ordination of women to the priesthood but having thoroughly explored that question, the answer here is definitely, yes.

This is an appropriate moment to invite you all most warmly to a service of celebration at Sheffield cathedral on Saturday the 8th of June at 4:00 PM when we shall welcome Alison White (former Bishop of Hull) as our preacher, and we shall give thanks for the past, the present and pray together for our shared ministry going forward. I'm delighted to say that we now have a menopause policy as part of our clergy handbook (though its implementation and likely future revisions are yet to be seen), we have young female curates either on, or about to be on, maternity leave and we have begun fruitful listening to the lived experience of mutual flourishing from women's perspective in our diocese, which we intend to do further work on in the coming season.

Poverty

This has probably been the least satisfactory area of our work, although the context of all of our work is affected by this topic as the majority of our communities would be high on the deprivation indices by UK standards. We do know that the Board of Faith and Justice has continued to pay attention to this topic, hence a recent motion to General Synod. We also know that the majority of our church leaders, lay and ordained, congregations, Mothers Union, youth groups schools and others are engaged in initiatives and projects tackling poverty and the growing issues resulting from the cost-of-living crisis, on a daily basis. However, the group has lacked consistent representation in this area; something I plan to address in the coming months.

LGBTQIA+ community

The Diversity in Participation group has had strong representation in this area since its inception. However, given the pressing need of my final topic which I shall come to next, the group made a carefully considered choice to defer our concentration on this matter. Having said that, our work has been intersectional by intent since it began and so I do want to assure those with a particular interest in this aspect of our common life that we have sought to pay attention to the voices within this community and their allies, as we have proceeded. Before Bishop Pete went on sabbatical, one of his last conversations was in relation to this matter. Just to remind Synod we have encouraged all people to join in the Living in Love and Faith process I believe over the last six or more years. We, as your bishops, have played as active a role as we can nationally and sought to be fully responsive to all God's people in the place to which we have been called. During the final phase of the LLF process, prior to its full discussion in the House of bishops, we established a group of four advocates with whom we met regularly, and whom we believe, formed a strong partnership of mutual respect across their vastly different convictions. This was not easy for them, and we are very grateful. In more recent times, we are aware that the levels of distress have, at times, been almost unmanageable for some, which is highly regrettable and burdensome to us and to others. I do think it is appropriate to honour Rev Sue Hammersley, until recently responsible for Saint Mark's Broomhill & St Mary's Walkley, who has been a superb colleague throughout the life of the DiP group. I'm already noticing the gap she leaves and trust that her legacy here, will be better support for those from within this community. That we have established chaplains, well publicised on our website, which I shall mention a bit later this morning is good, but Bishop Pete has also taken the decision that he wishes to appoint a Bishop's Advisor in this area of our common life. This conversation is well underway, and he hopes to make an announcement on this before the summer.

Racial Justice

Finally racial justice, this has been the most significant area of our work as a group, following our decision to focus our attention in order to bring a step change in this regard. You will know that we made an application as part of the triennium funding announced for this area of work (similar to that of the environment group) our bid was successful, and we have been awarded over £286,000 for a project whose working title is 'Turning the Map Diverse'. I'm very open to the fact that this may not be the best title going forward. The project will exist in three phases.

Phase One: Listening and Learning (2024-5)

- (i) Building on the diocesan wide research we have done, establish and facilitate a strong network of voices of all ages and diverse heritage to enable us to identify and address the priority areas over the coming three years.
- (ii) Engage with other dioceses and organisations and National Church to learn about the most impactful way to bring change with regard to addressing anti-racism and tackling racial injustice.
- (iii) Engage with intercultural worshipping communities in our diocese and more widely to identify key principles to pay attention to. We want to understand and appreciate the value of ethnic diversity in relation to church growth.

Phase Two: Training and Enabling (2025-6)

- (i) Develop a suite of training which is accessible and strongly encouraged for all licensed ministers and key lay leaders throughout the diocese.
- (ii) Build on the areas in which there is significant ethnically diverse representation and participation in the life of our diocese and develop a tool to help every mission area understand how best to reflect their community's diverse heritage as well as how to access learning more widely where that is not readily available in their location.

Phase Three: Celebration, Confidence and Cultivation (2026-7)

- (i) Showcase our confidence, commitment, and good practice through an increase in the reach of training and a potential series of large and small events and services, to encourage replication and inter-diocesan learning and engagement.
- (ii) We will share learning with other dioceses in the Church of England and any resources that we have developed and found to be of value in our context.

The timeline we had hoped to achieve is affected by the fact that we were unable to shortlist for the Racial Justice Officer role this week. Disappointing, but we are clear that it is right to go out again and possibly seek the research admin past attached at the same time. We trust that God will provide the right team for this work and this will mean that we can start in summer or thereabouts.

But we do by no means stand still in this area: We are continuing to see the growth of participation among GMH people at all levels of the life of the diocese. We are sending delegates to an intercultural worshipping communities conference in Leicester in March. We have begun an Urdu speaking congregation in Doncaster, and we are hosting a regional hub event which is one of four across the UK in October at the cathedral, as requested by the Racial Justice Unit (more details to follow). I also commend to you a recent podcast by the youth group from St Mary's, Bramall Lane, definitely worth making a cuppa and listening to the wisdom they have to share about, well...pretty much everything! This was also a very strong theme at our recent Breathe Deep youth event, my thanks to Mike North and the team for 'top notch' planning and power sharing as we released the voices of the most diverse range of young people that I believe this diocese may have ever known.

Please pray for the RJ appointments. I am aware of lack of capacity and want to ensure that this work is well supported.

Finally, we will be needing to address the makeup of the DiP group in the light of moves in the diocese and this is something I will attend to following the completion of my duties as Acting Bishop of Sheffield.