

Report on the Diocesan Synod meeting held at The Two St James 11th June 2022

This report aims to draw out those points which are most pertinent to feed back to the Deanery Synod who in turn can feed back to their respective PCC's.

Full minutes of the meeting are made available [here](#)

In his [Presidential Address](#), Bishop Steven focussed on the environment and climate emergency. By way of introduction he showed a brief video from United Nations Development Programme [Don't Choose Extinction - UNDP | United Nations | Jack Black | Climate Action - Bing video](#)

He said that over the years humankind has been shaping the earth but doing more harm than good. Climate change is causing an environmental catastrophe and we are not on course: The target of net zero by 2050 is slipping away. National wealth is needed to mitigate these events and there is limited time to take action globally. But humanity can change. We know how to tend and heal the environment and how to work together globally and locally. The crisis demands hopeful positive leadership and a response from everyone at all levels - individuals, government, business, schools, churches...but action is needed now. 60% of actions needed to get to carbon net zero need to be taken by individuals personally. Churches and faith communities have so much to bring to this debate: hope, experience, community work, personal change, repentance, ingenuity... He put out a plea for churches to engage with A Rocha's Eco Church initiative and announced that Oxford Diocese has fulfilled the criteria to become an Eco Diocese.

Bishop Steven has authorised changes to the commission for services of Baptism and Confirmation to include wording on care for the environment and creation. There is a new question as part of this service: "Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth?" Bishop Steven hopes the wording will be adopted nationally.

Proposed Net Zero work to our vicarages

The Diocese has agreed to carbon net zero by 2035. This project is to assist with achieving this target with regard to our buildings. It is the biggest project we have attempted in the Common Vision programme and a major financial commitment for the Diocese. A survey of all vicarages was undertaken in 2021 and a report produced which sets out proposals and funding of the project. This is a complex project as no two vicarages are the same. There are 450 vicarages and the cost will be approximately £30m to get them all to net zero. Synod approved £10m to be spent in the first phase of the project, which takes us to 2028.

Parish Share Review

A consultation has been carried out and a report produced reviewing how Parish share is calculated. 200 responses were received from the consultation. All were very grateful for the survey, some said to change everything, some said to change nothing. Changes have been proposed to try to make the system fairer. In summary it is inevitable some parishes will be better off and some worse off but with any increase capped at 2%. Synod voted for the proposed changes to be made.

AGM of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance (ODBF)

Sir Hector Sants, Chair of the Board of Finance, presented. He said that 2022 is broadly on track to achieve the budgeted deficit of £300 - £400K. He advised there are budgetary challenges and opportunities for 2023. The intention is to break even on operating budget but we may end up with a slight deficit due to vacancy provision change, whilst holding parish share income unchanged. The budgeted stipend increase of 3% is in recognition of cost of living challenges. Savings have been made from clergy pension scheme contributions which will come down in 2023. National Church spending plans offering £1.3 billion of strategic and national investment are welcome but may not impact Oxford Diocese as much as we are one of the more wealthy Dioceses.

Self-Supporting Ministers (SSM) and Licensed Lay Ministers' (LLM) Fees

A motion to pay SSMs and LLMs was put forward. The fact that these are unpaid seems inconsistent when others such as a Children and Youth minister or someone who maintains the church grounds etc are paid. Oxford Diocese is one of the few dioceses in the country that hasn't progressed payment for SSMs and LLMs. The current system was imposed when most SSM/LLM were in paid professions, but many now come from different backgrounds and are not necessarily well paid e.g. those on zero hour contracts. For weddings and funerals, ODBF receive part of the fees, allowing a proportion to go to SSM or LLM would support ministry. Retired clergy can claim at the moment. It would be at the discretion of the local PCC and in communication with their local Archdeacon. This may have an impact on parish share but not significant. Ministers can decide what to do with the fee they receive or are offered. Some may donate back to the local church but others may choose to keep them. We need to strengthen ministry teams and recognise the true place of partners such as SSMs and LLMs within the ministry team.

Julie Dziegiel spoke on behalf of the Finance Committee. The proposal is not without merit but the significant issue is that it will impact total funds required from parish share. There is a need to consider the impact on parishes and deaneries. There are many volunteers within parishes and deaneries already who do not expect payment. How do we differentiate between volunteers? It is hard to determine the potential impact on parish share and the parish share review is already seen as controversial even with a cap of 2%. Could we alternatively provide expenses to these ministers? This would seem to be a proportionate response. There followed much debate, which resulted in the motion being narrowly passed.

Safeguarding update

The Safeguarding and HR team was restructured last year and Louise Whitehead, the new Head of Safeguarding, was welcomed. She set out her vision for safeguarding in the Diocese. She said there will always be some individuals who abuse, but some cultures mean that abuse is more likely to occur. We need to create a healthy culture that will reduce the likelihood of abuse. She said there is lots of good stuff happening, especially at parish level, where there are skilled and committed volunteers. How we respond to survivors of abuse is also key. A working group has been set up with those who have experienced abuse in a church setting to help the church learn from this. She wants her team's work to be based on relationships - with parishes, in Church House, and with survivors and potential perpetrators. The team is always open to feedback and suggestions.

Annual Review of the Diocese of Oxford

The Annual Review of the Diocese of Oxford has been published and is available to read [here](#).

Stephanie Summerell
July 2022

For Information

Members of the Oxford Diocesan Synod from the Amersham Deanery

Representing the House of Laity:

Andrew Bell (Gerrards Cross and Fulmer - Ex-Officio as a member of General Synod)

Julie Dziegiel (Great Chesham - Ex-Officio as a member of General Synod)

Lawrence Tebboth (Gerrards Cross and Fulmer and also Lay Chair of Amersham Deanery)

Edward Weiss (Beaconsfield)

Michael Hardman (Great Chesham)

Stephanie Summerell (Gerrards Cross and Fulmer)

Peter Flory (Chesham Bois)

There is one vacancy

Representing the House of Clergy:

Revd Peggy Ludlow (Chenies Benefice and also Co Area Dean)

Revd Canon Edward Bowes-Smith (Great Chesham)

There is one vacancy