

Report on the Diocesan Synod held via Zoom on 19th June 2021

Nearly 100 members of the Diocesan Synod met online for the last meeting in the current triennium. 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.

A summary of the meeting is also available on the diocesan website: <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/diocesan-synod-summary-june-2021/>

The full recording of synod is available to view online from the same website page.

Presidential Address: River Of Life

Bishop Steven's address focussed on the links between climate change and biodiversity and the links with our own mission as a diocese. 2021 is a key year globally for the climate and for biodiversity, with two international conferences: COP 15 on biodiversity to be held in China from 11-15 October and COP 26 on climate change to be held in Glasgow from 1-12 November. He said that the entire future of life on the earth may be determined by what is agreed or not agreed in these four weeks in the autumn. If the nations of the earth are unable to find the collective will to arrest global warming and combat biodiversity loss then the consequences for the entire earth and for future generations will be beyond severe. He then reminded us of the fifth mark of mission and the Anglican Communion's calling to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth, asking us to note that the fifth mark is not concerned only with preventing harm but with renewal and repair: to leave the earth in a better place than we received it.

The threat posed by climate change is one with which we are all familiar, and as a response we have, as a diocese, declared a climate emergency and committed to reducing our carbon emissions to net zero by 2035. We might be less familiar with the second environmental crisis to be addressed by COP 15: the loss of biodiversity across the earth, with extinction rates of species between 100 and 1,000 higher than the baseline rate in the previous millennia.

According to the [Dasgupta Review](#) on the economics of biodiversity, which was published in February, there is a straight line from the loss of biodiversity to the global pandemic. In his preface to the review, Sir David Attenborough says, "96% of mammals on earth are now human beings together with their livestock: only 4% is everything else....And 70% of birds alive at the moment are poultry – mostly chickens for us to eat". If we continue on this path, Sir David says, "there is a real risk that the whole ecosystem will collapse".

He then turned to Ezekiel's vision of the river of life, noting that Ezekiel is commissioned to be a watchman over Israel and warn of the coming disaster, but that he is also called to find sources of hope and renewal in God for creation and for God's people. He called us as a Church to share this prophetic call and balance realism with hope: to be sentinels, to warn of what is coming, be in the vanguard of change and point the world to the source of hope and abundant life in Jesus Christ.

You can read Bishop Steven's address in full here: <https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/river-of-life-cop15-and-cop26/>

Approval of the Annual Review

The [Annual Review](#) communicates what has been happening in our diocese. It has been re-designed and now appears in a colourful, engaging format. A number of case studies in the report show how the central services of the diocese were able to support parishes, churches and their communities in their local context and also demonstrate the agility, resilience, and innovation of communities across the diocese. Church at Home was also noted for its extraordinary reach and as a silver lining of lockdown, with more people committing to their faith and God.

Finance

There was a financial update and the draft budget for 2022 was presented. The Chair was very grateful to all parishes and deaneries who continued to contribute to Parish Share despite such a

challenging year: 94.4% has been received. It was confirmed that Parish Share would not increase in 2022. Whilst the 2022 budget had been difficult to compile, Bishop's Council had approved what they felt was reasonable and fair and it was overwhelmingly supported.

Diocesan Ambassador for the Children's Society

Canon Terrie Robinson was commissioned in this role. She gave an update on the work of [The Children's Society](#), and how their new ten-year strategy would help focus the organisation to do everything in its power to overturn the long term decline in the wellbeing of children in the UK, brought into sharper focus due in part to the pandemic. Ways that churches and communities can support the charity are through fundraising, prayer and campaigning. Terrie and her colleagues are available to visit parishes to help support their mission.

Witney Deanery Motion on Holy Communion

The question of how to manage holy communion in light of Covid has revealed a diversity of theological understanding and much unease and uncertainty in the churches in Witney Deanery. Feeling that this was a time to refresh understanding of the rules around holy communion, and that clergy and laity were looking for catechesis on the matter, they asked the bishops for guidance which was duly given and gratefully received. The particular challenges are online communion, remote consecration of communion and the use of individual communion cups. It was felt that this issue will not disappear once restrictions are lifted because, with a heightened awareness of hygiene, people will not easily return to the common cup. There followed an interesting and robust debate about the issues. The motion to raise the concerns of parishes around communion to the House of Bishops was overwhelmingly passed.

Committee Governance Review

Developments in charity governance have progressed significantly in recent years and so a review was necessary and arguably long overdue. The review has consisted of taking a good look at how our committee structures at diocesan level work, addressing the confusing nature of the structure of some committees and the variable terms of office and membership routes of some committees. The importance of improving diversity in the church were also being addressed.

Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE)

Bishop Alan paid tribute to the teachers, staff and students across the diocese who have been unrelenting in their agility, professionalism and support in the face of such adversity. There are 50,000 children in 283 church schools in our diocese, 93% of which are now Ofsted good or outstanding. This year a large proportion (26) of headteachers are moving on.

General Synod

Dr Andrew Bell gave a brief update of both the February and April meetings, which had focused, amongst other things, on the Church's response to COVID, its vision and strategy, safeguarding and the Church's response to racism.

Stephanie Summerell
22nd July 2021

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)
Member Elect: Peter Flory (Chesham Bois)
Vacancy

Representing the House of Clergy:
Revd Peggy Ludlow (Chenies Benefice and also Co Area Dean)
Revd John Goodman (Chalfont St Peter)
Member Elect: Revd Canon Edward Bowes-Smith (Great Chesham)
Vacancy