

Report on the Diocesan Synod meeting held via Zoom on 8th June 2024

This meeting was the last in the current triennium - and, as it happens, my last one. After three terms I have decided not to seek re-election. Amersham Deanery has not had a full quota of either lay or clergy representatives for some time so please do consider standing - even if you miss this meeting's deadline! The Diocesan Synod meets three times a year, usually on a Saturday morning with some meetings being in person and others via Zoom. It might not be the most romantic of roles, but I have found that it does help by contextualising my Deanery and PCC work. Please ask me for more information.

The bishop consults the Diocesan Synod on matters of general importance and concern to the diocese and, in turn, Diocesan Synod provides a connection to Deanery Synods and PCCs. With that in mind I began my first term by instituting the writing of a report such as this to keep you updated and to help you feed back relevant material to your churches and parishes. I hope this will continue but it will now have to fall to someone else.

Elections to General Synod

The Bishop announced that Helen Lamb has been elected as the new lay member in the recent elections to replace Jayne Ozanne who has resigned and that the two clergy members elected were Revd Martin Davy and Revd Ayodeji Ocholi Ibrahim Ada Audu.

Questions

Questions can be submitted prior to meeting and written answers are received with an opportunity to ask supplementary questions when we meet. Revd Jeremy Moodey (General Synod member from our Deanery) had asked two: taking note of the catastrophic fall in the number of candidates seeking ordination and that the Ministry Council had suggested uncertainty created by the LLF process being one possible reason, his first was whether LLF had been a factor in the Diocese in any reduction. Bishop Steven said that as with previous years, it may be that LLF has an influence, however it is not clear how this relates to other significant factors and that data on candidates or ordinands' views on LLF are not tracked.

Jeremy's second question related to the appointment of two new bishops to the Diocese following Bishop Alan's untimely death and Bishop Olivia's retirement and whether it might present an opportunity to permit at least one of the new bishops to be someone with an orthodox view of marriage and sexuality who will not use the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF). Also whether clergy throughout the Diocese would be able to seek pastoral and spiritual oversight from an area bishop who is committed to the Church's historic teaching. Bishop Steven was again rather vague, saying that any appointment will have to balance the various views across the Diocese and that it would be premature to revise the process of appointment that is in place. He said that the names of the two new bishops will be announced around November.

Presidential Address

This centred on how to pray for the General Election. Bishop Steven said as Christians we are called to pray for our nation and leaders at all levels citing 1 Timothy 2:1-2. The Archbishops have called the established church to pray specifically for the General Election. The Church of England has published a resource called 'Pray Your Part' which offers prayer and reflection for 21 days in the run up to the General Election. Each day

explores a different theme, with a short Bible reading, reflection and prayer for a different aspect of our common life. You can sign up for daily e-mails on the Church of England website [here](#)

Development Fund Review

Now in its 5th year the Development Fund was established with the purpose of funding missional projects in the Diocese and has recently been the subject of an external review. This shows the Fund to be of great missional value to the Diocese and a valuable resource for our parishes with grants making significant impacts. It has awarded grants across five broad project types:

- a) Youth and Children's work (42% of awards made)
- b) New Congregations (25% of awards made)
- c) Buildings (22% of awards made)
- d) Environmental or Social Action (9% of awards made)
- e) Streaming and Recording & Other (2% of awards made)

The report also concluded that there is strong internal governance with robust processes in place and that it has been shown to be a catalyst for relationship building. However it recognised that a number of projects have been hampered by recruitment and retention matters. In response it recommends that a training pathway for Children and Youth workers should be developed to help ensure a pipeline of available workers. The lack of Children and Youth workers is incidentally a hot topic nationally. Despite these challenges the report provides a strong basis for the fund to continue in its present form and the motion put by Julie Dziegiel that it should continue until further notice was overwhelmingly carried. Please do consider whether your church or parish might benefit from it.

Finance

Sir Hector Sants, Chair of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance (ODBF) confirmed that Diocesan finances are in good shape and we are currently on track for a modest surplus. This arises primarily from a higher number of vacancies than were budgeted for - and of course a higher number than we would like to have! Parish share contributions are broadly speaking in line with 2023. He explained that a deficit budget of £235K has been set for 2025. This is highly unusual. He reassured synod that it does not arise because of a change of policy and that we are still set to live within our resources. It is because of the surpluses in both 2023 and 2024, which means we have built up larger reserves than we budgeted for. Policy is to have three months of budgeted expenditure in our reserves but as at 31st December 2023 there was the equivalent of 4.3 months of budgeted expenditure in our reserves.

Safeguarding

Synod took note of the annual review of the Safeguarding Panel. It was introduced by Peter Hay, Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel who spoke of the work being done around ex-offenders in church settings. Louise Whitehead, Head of Safeguarding spoke for the lions share of this part of the meeting. She is obviously a passionate advocate of safeguarding in general and particularly seeks to move away from a culture of compliance to one of curiosity, which results in a more robust theology of safeguarding that is shared more generally as we look after the people in our churches.

Initial results of the review show a positive preliminary assessment with the majority of those asked feeling that there is a positive safeguarding culture in their churches. There is however some concern around over burdening Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs), which she recognises is disincentivising. 80 parishes in Oxford Diocese have no PSO.

Link with the Diocese of Jamaica

As part of the national celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of the arrival of HMV Empire Windrush¹, the Archbishop of Canterbury invited the archbishop and bishops of the West Indies to the UK. The Diocese of Oxford hosted Archbishop Howard Gregory of the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands for that week of events. Following the visit, Archbishop Howard contacted Bishop Steven with the proposal of a 'Companion Relationship' between our two dioceses. Following a very engaging and enthusiastic presentation from Revd Polly Falconer, Diocesan Racial Justice Adviser, Synod voted overwhelmingly to support the link.

Annual Review

Revd Canon Janet Binns (Dean to the UK Minority Ethnic Chapter in the Diocese of Oxford) introduced this year's Annual Review which has just been published and can be found [here](#)

Board of Education (ODBE)

Felix Leach, initially Acting Chair following Bishop Alan's untimely death and now Chair of the ODBE presented the Annual Report. He paid homage to Bishop Alan's lengthy and enthusiastic service to the Board as Chair, and said he will be greatly missed. Headline news is as follows:

- Bishop Gavin is joining the board.
- There are 1,000 governors in our schools but there is a 20% vacancy rate.
- Our schools generate £900K of income, which makes them less reliant on grant income.
- The framework within which the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) operates has changed. The previous award of one of four grades has been replaced with a simple judgement as to whether the school is living up to its Anglican/Methodist foundation.
- 95% of ODBE schools are currently categorised as 'outstanding' or 'good' by Ofsted.
- "To Be A Pilgrim" is a new resource that is free for schools enabling Year 6 pupils to experience what it's like to be a pilgrim for a day. They visit the Ashmolean Museum and Christchurch Cathedral to explore the historical and spiritual aspects of pilgrimage.

John Orridge presented the Annual Accounts which Synod duly passed.

Stephanie Summerell
June 2024

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)

Revd Jeremy Moodey (Great Chesham - Ex-Officio as a member of General Synod)

There is one vacancy