

## Report on Diocesan Synod held on March 16th 2019

**Bishop Steven's address** focused on children and young people. He told us that within our Diocese 15,000 children come every week to our churches, 15,000 carers and children to around 240 toddlers' groups, and that there are 60,000 children educated in our 283 church schools. He pointed out that this represents a tremendous opportunity to work with our youngsters, and one that no other agency across the Thames Valley has. But he spoke of a storm within our young people that he attributed to technology and social media, pointing out that one in four girls aged 14 self harm, and that one in ten children aged 5-16 have a diagnosable mental disorder. The ratio is much higher for those who are LGBTI, in care or in prison.

He spoke of our children's world being marked by turmoil caused by a lack of boundaries - of identity, behaviour, personal space and privacy, asking how youngsters are supposed to be able to grow and change and develop when everything they do is observed and commented on, and when their most personal information is harvested and shared for commercial gain.

In contrast to God creating order out of chaos when He made the world, and creating boundaries, he said that our children's world is one where a lack of boundaries has unleashed chaos.

He said our motivation as church should extend beyond evangelism alone to providing sanctuary for our youngsters where they can find unconditional love, acceptance and a sense of belonging, which we believe can be found in the person of our saviour, Jesus Christ. Essentially it's about being a Christ-like church: "Let the children come to me" (Matt 19:14)

He asked that our PCCs and Deaneries engage actively with Mental Health Awareness Week, which runs from 13th-19th May and whose theme is body image.

**Update on the Common Vision:** The Diocesan Director of Mission, Andrew Anderson-Gear reported on the work his working group has been doing to develop some resources that local churches can use to discern, explore, decide and implement their plan for mission through the lens of our shared call to be a more Christ-like church for the sake of God's world. The goal is to support the local church in their own exploration of the vision. Three guiding principles have emerged:

- that this call to be more Christ-like, to sit at the feet of the Lord, is not the preliminary work we need to do before we find a new strategy. It is the vision and the strategy, or as Bishop Steven put it: "It's not the appetizer before the main meal. It is the whole banquet."
- that the focus of our diocesan strategy should be on the local.
- that the local church is not a problem that needs fixing, i.e. that the tool should enable each church to start from where they are and feel affirmed in being a part of God's plan to bring His kingdom of love and healing of the world.

The Diocesan Secretary, Rosemary Pearce, presented on the Development Fund and its operation. This involves making around £3m of financial support available via grants to parishes, benefices and deaneries to enable them to implement the Common Vision. It is designed to help recipients be creative and to stimulate fresh ideas, to discern what is a God idea as opposed to simply a good idea, and to encourage plans that are sustainable and provide a legacy after the funding ceases. There are two levels of grant funding: Tier 1 for grants up to £2,500 and Tier 2 for grants over £2,500. Match funding would normally be expected at Tier 2. There will be three application cycles per year. Support will be available to make a good quality application and in the planning and discernment activity, out of which grant applications may come. Each project supported by a grant must provide an End of Project Report and will be expected to share their learning in some way.

**Safeguarding:** Diocesan safeguarding is in safe hands: both our safeguarding adviser and the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Panel have many years of relevant experience. The point was made that safeguarding should be proactive, not reactive. There is a new national safeguarding handbook that only came out two weeks ago. It should be arriving in our churches soon. Please check whether it has. There is also a pocket guide that could be given out to anyone working in our churches.