

Report on the Diocesan Synod meeting held at The Unipart Conference Centre, Cowley on Saturday 11th March 2023

Instead of the usual four hour meeting, March's meeting spanned most of the day to accommodate a shared lunch. This was a welcome change which allowed for more sharing and fellowship than is normally possible. It was particularly appreciated as two of the four meetings held each year now take place over Zoom rather than in-person.

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](#) under 'Diocesan Synod Digest'.

In his [Presidential Address](#), Bishop Steven reiterated the call on us as Christians to respond to the environmental crisis, saying that we have been placed by God to take care of our world and that we should do so out of love for future generations. Some of the statistics he gave were startling:

- Wildlife populations worldwide declined by an average of 69% between 1970 and 2018.
- Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a 94% drop in the wildlife population.
- Wild animals now account for just 4% of mammal biomass globally: humans and our livestock account for the other 96%.
- 60% of the UK's flying insects, vital in the food chain and as pollinators, have vanished in the last 20 years.
- Britain is currently one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.
- Over 1 million species are currently threatened with extinction.

Bishop Steven said that restoration of our relationship with creation was key to our own salvation. He issued a plea that God would give us grace and strength to work together for the renewal of the earth, recognising that this can only be done in partnership with others including government and organisations. For example, the diocese has an active partnership with the Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. The trust will be running two training courses in our churchyards in April and May – one about managing green spaces and the other on doing a basic site survey (species identification, vegetation types etc). There is an [inspiring webpage called Wilder Churches](#), which features examples of churches in the Diocese of Oxford taking action and steps others can take.

Questions tabled prior to the meeting and answered in advance by Bishop Steven were unusually numerous. All of them, perhaps unsurprisingly were related to the motion passed by General Synod to the House of Bishops commending and issuing the Prayers of Love and Faith. Without exception they had been tabled by those holding to a traditional view of doctrine on marriage. The deep division and concern for the future was further highlighted by the lengthy time of discussion and high number of contributors on the day.

Two people reported verbally on the proceedings at **General Synod**, each representing different points of view with regard to LLF, presumably to provide balance. Our very own Jeremy Moody has provided Deanery with a well-balanced report of the same.

In other business we heard about the Oxford Diocese **Net Zero Carbon Action Plan**. This has been formulated in response to one of the milestones identified in the national 'Routemap to Net Zero Carbon' which General Synod endorsed last July (2022) setting out how dioceses across the country achieve net zero carbon. The diocesan Net Zero Action Plans should identify the delivery pathway for net zero, the cost, capacity and resource implications, and the priority actions for the coming years. Because we have been at the forefront of action on climate change in Oxford Diocese, our plan builds on several years-worth of learning and data gathering and so puts us ahead of many other dioceses – particularly in relation to clergy housing, and to a lesser extent, our schools. Progress so far includes:

- declaring a climate emergency in March of 2020,
- committing to a broad range of climate and environment-related measures,
- committing to the goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2035,
- becoming a Bronze Eco Diocese in July 2022,

- completing an energy audit programme for clergy housing and schools; one is underway for churches,
- committing £10m of the estimated total cost of £31 million to deliver actions towards net zero carbon for clergy housing,
- having a baseline for carbon emissions based on 2019 data and against which year on year reductions from 2022 will be measured, and
- supporting churches to engage with Eco Church.

Synod voted to endorse the plan and to call on parishes, and on others associated with the Diocese, to continue their positive work and form their own plans consistent with the Diocesan intention.

Linked to achieving net zero carbon, Reading Deanery proposed to refer to General Synod a motion to influence HM Government to amend planning regulations so that it is easier for churches to install solar panels and other types of renewable energy, which is currently very difficult because of the fact that many are listed buildings. This was passed unanimously.

Wantage Deanery proposed a motion, again with the vote unanimously in favour, which is within our power to enact ourselves: to embrace the principles of the [Sustainable Church Flowers movement](#). This encourages the use of local, seasonal and fully biodegradable/compostable flowers and discourages the use of all floral foam in churches and churchyards.

An uplifting report on the [New Congregations programme](#) was given by the Diocesan team that supports churches looking to nurture new worshipping communities for those who do not currently attend church. The seven Resourcing Hub Churches are established and making good progress with their visions and plans for church growth. The programme has enabled and supported 87 new worshipping communities, and other potential new worshipping communities are emerging from across a mix of differing contexts (including rural) and church traditions. We heard several inspiring stories of how and where this is happening and had the opportunity to share further in small discussion groups. We were reminded that reaching out to those in our communities not currently in our churches requires a cultural shift: growing new congregations will need to become business as usual.

Sir Hector Sants, Chair of the Board of Finance, gave a verbal update on the financial out-turn for the year ended 31st December 2022. In short our Diocesan finances appear to be in good shape and we are on course to break even. This was helped by the fact that in 2022 95.2% of parish share was collected.

Stephanie Summerell
March 2023

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