

## News from the Diocesan Synod

The first meeting of the new triennium 2018-2021 took place in Green Park, Reading on Saturday 17th November 2018.

1. Bishop Steven's Address drew on the work he has been doing on the House of Lords Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence, a yearlong enquiry by a group of thirteen peers to consider "the economic, ethical and social implications of artificial intelligence" (AI). AI is a relatively new field where machines develop some of the qualities of the human mind. Bishop Steven describes AI, along with Climate Change, as the two biggest and serious challenges facing humanity. In the case of AI, the libertarianism of Silicon Valley and massive investment from China (whose view of the individual by the state is very different to ours), present huge challenges. He says Christians must think seriously about the implications of developments in this field. The question is a big one: What does it mean to be human? As a church we have a role to play in this debate - it is our faith that is life-affirming. The House of Lords Select Committee report was to be debated in Parliament on Monday 19th November. (Note: This has now taken place and a link to this can be found at: <https://blogs.oxford.anglican.org/move-fast-and-mend-things/>)

2. In answer to a question from the floor, Bishop Steven informed us that some of our diocesan funds are still invested in fossil fuel industries but that this has been reduced, and that investments in renewables has been increased. The background to this is that, in July General Synod had voted to divest by 2023 from oil and gas companies not on track to meet the Paris Agreement target of limiting global average temperature rise to well below 2°C. Bishop Steven had proposed an amendment to bring this date forward to 2020, arguing that due to the urgency of climate change and the need for global carbon emissions to peak by 2020, divestment should proceed more rapidly. He said that divestment of our funds will continue.

3. The Diocesan Common Vision is emerging. It is intended to be more toolkit than instruction manual, more grassroots than topdown.

Six working groups were set up in September 2017 to focus on six areas in which the diocese wants to listen to what is happening already and explore whether they might help us to become a more Christ-like church. Bishop Steven recognises that some focused thinking needs to be done on the challenges of delivering the vision and strategy that emerge at Area and Deanery level, re-aligning resources to make this new vision possible.

The six areas are as follows:

Focus Area 1 - Making a bigger Difference in the World and Serving the Poor

Focus Area 2 - Sharing our Faith

Focus Area 3 - Planting New Churches and Congregations Wherever we Can

Focus Area 4 - Serving Every School in our Community

Focus Area 5 - Putting the Discipleship of All at the Heart of our Common Life

Focus Area 6 - Celebrating and Blessing Milton Keynes

It has been recognised that a 7th group and work stream is also needed to focus specifically on church based work with children and young people.

At this Synod we heard from Working Group 3. It had been asked to come up with some highly ambitious goals and a plan to deliver them.

The plan is to enable all parishes to develop new congregations and Fresh Expressions of church in their own contexts, whether rural, suburban or urban. The plan will facilitate the development of Resourcing Hubs to support new church partnerships, grafts and plants across the diocese.

With the population of the diocese set to rise dramatically (figures suggest the population increase in the diocese between 2016 and 2040 to be equivalent to the population of Edinburgh moving in) alongside a significant fall in engagement with traditional church in many places, the need is urgent.

The vision is for a mixed ecclesial economy with flourishing traditional parishes alongside new churches and congregations, which will be a variety of types and mostly lay led and relatively small (12-20 in size).

Priority will be given to new housing areas (several Pioneer Ministers are already working in some of these) and key urban areas where church attendance as a proportion of the population is often lowest (30% of the diocese live in the deaneries of Milton Keynes, Slough and Reading, but they account for only 17% of our church goers). It is intended that Resourcing Hubs are set up in these major conurbations. Resourcing Hubs will provide resources to others and receive extra resource such as extra curates, who will go on to plant or revitalise churches in their turn.

Goals are that by 2030:

There will be 750 new congregations or Fresh Expressions. This equates to an average of two per deanery per year, or just over one per parish. There will be 50 new churches or congregations with 100+ adult members. Their size should make them sustainable in the long term.

There will be 6 new Resourcing Hubs with 250+ adult members, each planting at least one new congregation or church beyond themselves every three years.

These goals will be achieved by implementing a five year plan in the first instance that:

Employs a full time Programme Manager

Develops two Resourcing Hubs

Establishes seven new 100+ churches and 50 new Fresh Expressions

Funding will come from the Church Commissioners Strategic Development Fund and the Diocesan 'Total Return' money.

4. The 2019 budget was presented and duly adopted. It is designed to achieve two main purposes: resourcing the regular missional work of parishes and resourcing the developing strategic work, which is seen as vital in the current rapidly changing and challenging environment. A recent change in legislation allows charities to implement Total Return Accounting, which allows them to release unrealised capital gains on investments. This is how it proposes to fund strategic work rather than increasing share by more than the usual. Bishop's Council has approved around £1million for missional work over the next five years to fund projects coming from the six working groups as follows:

- support work in schools,
- appoint a Programme Manager to co-ordinate the new churches and new congregations work,
- fund a pilot scheme of energy audits to improve the environmental efficiency of our church buildings,
- fund a pilot project exploring ways of supporting and deepening lay discipleship and help individuals to explore their vocation in the church and wider community context.

Bishop's Council has also approved the setting up of a 'Growth' fund to which parishes and deaneries will be able to apply to support projects that will help us to be 'a more Christlike Church for the sake of God's world.' About £1 million is expected to go into this fund over each of the next three years. Criteria for its allocation and guidance about the application process are being developed and we will be given more information at the March Synod.

5. Last but by no means least, congratulations to our very own Andrew Bell and Julie Dziegiel who on 26th October were elected to Bishop's Council (the standing committee of Diocesan Synod).

Stephanie Summerell November 2018

Members of the Oxford Diocesan Synod from the Amersham Deanery:

Ex-Officio

Dr Andrew Bell  
Mrs Julie Dziegiel

House of Laity

Mrs Stephanie Summerell  
Mr Nigel Edward-Few  
Mr Edward Weiss  
Mr Michael Hardman  
Mr Lawrence Tebboth

House of Clergy

Revd John Goodman  
Revd Canon Tim Harper  
Rev Cassa Messervy