

SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3rd November via Zoom (*thanks to Seven Towers Benefice for hosting*).

Attending:

Clergy: S Mason (Area Dean), J Hyde, L Bloom, S Cooke, P Donald, D Gill, K Mephram, P Phillips, H Sammon, J Scholes, S Skepper, S Taylor, S Witcombe, P Youde

Laity: S Padfield (Chair), R Parker (Parish Share Officer), S Riddick (Secretary), Derek Wright (Treasurer), L Ashenden, R Blandford, K Carpenter, H Cotton, P Cotton, F Down, H Dunsford, R Ensor, B Fellowes, S Fellowes, E Frampton, G Goodman, E Harbottle, C Hill, A Holland, N Hogg, C Jakeman, C Langham, E Magee, C May, C Steadman, C Wilman

Apologies:

Clergy: J Longuet-Higgins, J Perkin

Laity: J Churchill-Wood, R Cottell, M Cowdrey, C Hitchins, E Lovell, H Murphy, M Richardson, L Ward, R Williams

The meeting began at 7pm with initial prayers (led by Sue Padfield) and the usual welcomes (especially to new members and those using Zoom for the first time).

The **Minutes** of the meeting held on 26th August 2020 were approved without amendment. There were no matters arising not already covered under subsequent agenda headings.

The Reverend Simon Witcombe then made a presentation on **Christian Presence and Support at the University of Gloucestershire**. He noted that the institution's roots date back to 1847, when an Evangelical Training College was established with 100 clergy and 100 lay members; through various mergers and consolidations (including with GLOSCAT), it formally became a University in 2001. There are currently three principal sites (at the Park and Francis Close Hall in Cheltenham and at Oxstalls in Gloucester), with in the region of 10,000 students in total (including more than 500 "international").

The University offers chaplaincy services across each of its sites, with support for people of all faiths and none. There are Faith and Social Spaces, plus a chapel at Francis Close Hall; while regular activities include things such as Big Questions Café, International Café, Monday Mindfulness, Soul Space, Dog Walking etc – plus Communion and other services on a regular basis. Various groups have been set up, including recently a Chinese Christian Group and an Africa Group. While special/"one-off" events are also held from time to time. The staff try to be very inclusive in all they do, and to encourage students' spirituality. Covid-19 has of course affected their work, with many things now being done principally online; but they are continuing as best they can.

Partly as a legacy of the institution's history, the chaplains are supported in a variety of ways by a group of volunteer **Foundation Fellows** – including via prayer meetings; assistance at events and services; helping Christian Unions; financial support; training; and generally by listening and providing encouragement. The chaplains would welcome interest from anyone in the Deanery who would consider becoming a Foundation Fellow.

The Reverend Paul Youde is currently a Foundation Fellow, and now spoke of his role. He has always had a passion for education, and very much enjoys being involved. The Fellows are a fairly small group and in his opinion can be quite nimble if problems arise. He has taken a great deal of satisfaction from helping both the chaplains and various students over the years. And he would definitely encourage

others to put themselves forward – particularly if they have any existing links or history with the University, or think they might enjoy working with students.

The secretary of the Fellows Executive Committee is the Reverend Mike Parsons mwsp@btinternet.com and he would love to hear from anyone who might wish to discuss further.

After taking questions, Reverend Simon said he would send the Secretary details of an upcoming Interfaith Event for onward distribution (*post-meeting update: received and circulated to members*).

Moving on to the **Deanery Strategic Planning Process**, Simon Mason noted that due to Covid-19 the timescale has now extended beyond Easter 2021; there have also been efforts made to simplify the approach. Incumbents are currently “mapping” opportunities for ministry and mission in each Benefice, and this will be followed by Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (“SWOT”) analyses – including specific consideration of what has been done “during Covid” which might be kept and built upon. After Christmas, groups across the whole Church family will look to identify commonalities and areas for collaboration. It is still the case that the Diocese wishes to lose two stipendiary positions and gain one non-stipendiary post per Deanery in the next few years; and therefore – depending on the results of the process – the shape of our Benefices may need to change. Further details will follow by the February Synod, at which we may ask Diocesan Support to attend.

Simon also noted that a number of our **ministers are retiring** in the near future – including Steve Taylor, Helen Sammon and Suzanne Skepper. He is already in touch with the Diocese to seek their support.

As regards **LIFE Vision Updates**, it was noted that the “Long Table/Feeding the 5000” project was a great success, and is now moving to a “**Comfort and Joy**” initiative of Christmas meals for those in need. **Greenway Benefice** worked to help feed needy children over half-term, supporting 64 children in areas not previously reached; thanks are also due to Morrisons in this respect. **Rudford Retreats** has extended its online offerings with great success, 90-100 people now being regularly involved. St John’s Churchdown has used its railings for **All Souls remembrance**, and an associated video has been watched online by more than 1000 people. **Gloucestershire Historic Churches Trust** has been helped by a remotely-made CD of choir music. And **St George’s Brockworth** has continued to increase its digital skills and local outreach. Sadly there is no real progress to report with the **Newent Community School Chaplaincy Project**, due to Covid-19; but we remain committed.

On **Parish Share**, Roger Parker noted that because of Covid, many parishes are struggling to meet their 2020 commitments, particularly where they previously depended on village hall hire or similar income streams. **2021 Parish Share is to be the same as 2020**; but he is still awaiting feedback from many churches as to whether this is achievable. Given Parish Share effectively pays our ministers’ stipends, we must all do the best we possibly can. In this respect, the Area Dean noted there may be some limited relief available for 2020 for those parishes who have lost significant hall hire fees, but there are very strict eligibility requirements.

On clergy matters. Helen Sammon noted that the **Covenant on Clergy Care and Well-Being** has progressed a little, with emphasis on the three-way relationship between the clergy, local worshipping communities and the Diocese. A Clergy Day has been held with Bishop Rachel, and a booklet issued for discussion. We will no doubt hear more in the near future.

The **Treasurer** noted that five 2020 subscriptions remain outstanding, but otherwise funds are in good shape.

On **Training**, an Advent Course is being organised for a number of Benefices (to be led by Dan Button), and will be opened up across the Deanery if capacity allows. Meanwhile online courses on “Eco Church: Getting Started” and “Everyday Faith” are available through the Diocese website.

As regards **Any Other Business**, Remembrance Sunday services are affected by the “new lockdown”, but we are expecting Government guidance to allow limited outdoor services; Readers were recently licensed via Zoom; and Bishop Rachel may seek to make worship at Diocesan Synod on 28th November open to everyone – details to follow.

The meeting ended before 9pm with closing prayers and thanks to all attendees.