

SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the Synod held on the evening of Thursday 6th March 2025 at Holy Trinity, Badgeworth

Attending:

Clergy: J Hyde (Area Dean), L Bloom (Assistant Area Dean), J Longuet-Higgins (Assistant Area Dean), S Cooke, R Greenhalgh, H de Gruyther, J Knight, D Newman, S Mason

Laity: S Padfield (Lay Chair), S Riddick (Secretary), D Wright (Parish Share Officer/Treasurer), R Parker, L Ashenden, D Connell, M Connell, H Cotton, P Cotton, F Down, N Garbutt, T Greenhalgh, J Hogg, N Hogg, N Johnson, C Jones, C May, R Newbery, S Phelps, K Starr

Apologies:

Clergy: D Gill, J Monaghan, R Spear, S Taylor

Laity: D Elson, C Gardner, C Hill, J Keene, G Limbrick, M Richardson, A Smith

After the initial welcomes and apologies, the Reverend Susan Cooke led opening prayers; following which the minutes of our meeting of 9th October 2024 were approved without amendment. As regards matters arising, the Secretary mentioned that St Andrew's Churchdown has had recent dealings with Lisa-Jayne Gardner (the Diocese's Stewardship and Giving Advisor) and found her very helpful; while Chris May noted that she has signed up for one of Lisa-Jayne's training courses. Everyone is encouraged to use Lisa-Jayne's advice and capabilities where appropriate.

As regards the future model for funding **Parish Share**, Archdeacon Hilary was sadly unable to be with us to give a "first-hand" update. However, following recent discussions plus confirmation from Bishop's Council two days previously, Jacqui Hyde led us through the current situation: (i) reminding everyone that all Benefices and/or parishes have been asked to complete a related questionnaire for the Diocese by 29th March; (ii) noting that Deanery leadership and representatives of all Benefices are then meeting with a team from the Diocese on 8th April to discuss our financial situations based on that data; and (iii) explaining that exact details of how this meeting (and similar ones with other Deaneries) will be organised are still being finalised, but we are expecting further information (including an explanatory leaflet on the new model, a clear calculation of the cost of ministry and mission, and advice on matters such as the stipend fund) imminently. It is anticipated that for practical reasons, Benefices will not meet the Diocese team individually but rather in "similar" groupings. Meanwhile the new model is intended to be collaborative, and after the initial set-up, parish share requests will be reassessed on a rolling three-year cycle.

Derek Wright (Parish Share Officer/Treasurer) then spoke briefly about his experience of the Diocese questionnaires to date; offered to help anyone with queries; and asked that forms be sent to him before the Diocese, so he can check for obvious inconsistencies.

We all then went into "**break-out**" sessions, based on Benefices currently paying similar levels of parish share, to discuss the forthcoming 8th April meeting. Relevant comments from the break-out sessions have been collated, and will be raised in our meetings with the Diocese as appropriate.

Following this, we heard from **Stephen Dean – the CEO of Primary Quest**, a grouping of nine (about to be ten) primary (mainly Church of England) schools in our area, about issues now being faced in the sector. Unsurprisingly most of the concerns relate to funding, and a mismatch between this and the demands being placed on schools. For historic reasons Gloucestershire is one of the most poorly-funded counties in the country as regards education, and this is being resolved only

slowly. Increased energy costs and higher National Insurance contributions will of course only exacerbate the problems being faced. Meanwhile there are increasing numbers of Special Educational Needs children; more new-entry arrivals are not really "school-ready"; parental demands are escalating; children's anxieties and behaviour are worsening; and "disadvantaged" children are falling further behind. As a result, nearly all schools are currently running at a deficit, and teachers' lives are becoming more difficult (hence recruitment and retention issues). Stephen then took numerous questions from the floor, answers to which revealed the value of collaboration across schools, the importance of volunteers, and the ways in which church communities can help.

On **Other Synod Business**, the recent Diocesan Synod was referred to, with everyone encouraged to share details with their congregations as appropriate; and Derek Wright reminded all Benefices to pay their £20 contributions for 2025.

The meeting finished at 9pm with thanks to Holy Trinity for hosting followed by the Grace. The venue for our next Synod will be finalised and communicated in the next few weeks.

Steve Riddick, 9 March 2025