

SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the Synod held on the evening of Tuesday 13th February 2024 at St John the Evangelist, Churchdown

Attending:

Clergy: J Hyde (Area Dean), J Longuet-Higgins (Assistant Area Dean), M Boot, S Cooke, C Dunnett, M Dunning, R Greenhalgh, J Knight, S Mason, J Monaghan, R Spear, S Taylor
Laity: S Padfield (Lay Chair), S Riddick (Secretary), D Wright (Treasurer/Parish Share Officer), R Parker, M Richardson, L Ashenden, R Blandford, D Connell, M Connell, H Cotton, P Cotton, J Deane, F Down, V Funnell, N Garbutt, T Greenhalgh, C Hill, N Hogg, C Jones, J Keene, G Limbrick, H Murphy

Apologies:

Clergy: L Bloom, D Gill, H de Gruyther, K Mephram
Laity: J Churchill-Wood, J Clutterbuck, D Elson, R Ensor, E Harbottle, C Hitchins, C May, M McGhee, R Newbery, J Robertson, P Singh, J Smith, C Steadman

After the initial welcomes – including to two new members, both being curates at Leadon Vale – and the noting of apologies received, the Area Dean led our opening prayers. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved, and it was noted there were no immediate matters arising.

Ian Donald then spoke about “Ageing Gracefully”, including his background as a geriatric consultant at Gloucester Royal Hospital for 30 years; that he’d recently written a book (“With a Light Touch”) on caring for the elderly; and how his lifelong Christian faith affected his thoughts on this topic. He pointed out that by and large we are all living longer (the 80+ age group is the fastest-growing in the country, while the most common age on a death certificate in Gloucestershire is now 86), but sadly many of our later years are in poor health or frailty. This leads to many difficult questions on matters such as giving and receiving care, dependence, dementia, healing and of course death – all of which are impacted by our faith, and which we now touched upon in small break-out groups. Ian is currently running courses (through Gateway Theology School) covering these and related issues, and anyone interested should contact either Dan Button or the ministers in the relevant parts of the Deanery (Joe Knight and John Longuet-Higgins).

Jacqui Hyde next led a brief discussion on Bishop Robert’s recent Rural Ministry Day. Contributions from the floor revealed that this was for the most part a listening exercise, for the Bishop to hear about various issues currently faced in rural communities and thereby to start thinking how Church House might help; but it was also an opportunity for ministers and lay teams to meet others in similar circumstances to their own, and perhaps from there to share ideas and experiences. In due course we should expect some kind of feedback (and hopefully support) from the Diocese.

We then broke into small groups to discuss what kind of topics future Deanery Synods might cover. Ensuing suggestions included Church-School Partnerships; Open The Book; Mission Skills; Mission Response to New Housing; Hospital Chaplaincy; Intercession Support; Fundraising; and improved communications between the Deanery and the Diocese. All these will be fed into our future planning or possibly training opportunities as appropriate; while any further ideas should please be forwarded to the Area Dean or the Secretary.

On Parish Share, Derek Wright noted that our 2023 out-turn was very good, and relayed Church House's thanks for everyone's efforts. For 2024 we have already committed to almost all we have been asked for, and he is hopeful the remaining small gap will be further reduced. Nevertheless, from previous Synods we should be aware that Parish Share does not currently cover the cost of Parish Ministry (in 2023 by in excess of £2million), and a new funding model is being developed for 2025 onwards to help bridge the difference. Although the model is far from complete, it seems likely to be based around the overall cost of mission and ministry associated with a stipendiary post (including a variety of costs in addition to the clergy stipend), with bandings both for Benefices who are deemed presently unable to afford this much and for those who may be able to pay more (i.e. to cover any shortfall). It is of course important that the process is wholly transparent (including the basis for the calculation of the overall cost of mission and ministry) and properly discussed; and to this end we are expecting to hold a meeting (to which all clergy, churchwardens, treasurers and other interested parties will be invited) with relevant people from Church House in April or May.

As regards other Synod business, Derek Wright noted some teething problems with the new Deanery contribution per Benefice of £20, and hopes these will be resolved soon; while the Secretary briefly went through the previously-circulated summary of the recent Diocesan Synod.

Meanwhile under Any Other Business, (i) Jacqui Hyde noted that Lara Bloom is to be formally appointed as an Assistant Area Dean; (ii) Susan Cooke talked about upcoming confirmations – any candidates who cannot be ready for the Diocesan service on Easter Eve should please be referred to her for a possible September date; (iii) responding to a question from Canon Roger Parker, it was noted that a new Sportily appointment has been made, and Jacob Ferguson started work on February 1st; and (iv) the Archbishop of Canterbury is coming to the county on 24th to 26th May, although an exact schedule is yet to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 9pm with thanks to St John's for hosting followed by the Grace. Our next Synod will provisionally be on Thursday 13th June, at a venue yet to be decided (*post-meeting update, now **Wednesday 15th May** at Sandhurst*)

Steve Riddick, 15 February 2024