

Stroud Deanery Synod 12th February 2020

Report on Diocesan Synod meetings.

The Diocesan Synod met on 2nd November 2019 and 1st February 2020.

NOVEMBER

Bishop Rachel gave a presidential address. The meeting had started with a Eucharist and she referenced the reading from John 6:16-21, noting the challenge of change during turbulent times and identifying three step changes in mission in the diocese: the introduction of Church Army Centres for Mission in Matson and the Forest of Dean; the development of OneLife and the identification of Holy Trinity Cheltenham as a resource Church in the diocese. The full text of the address is still available on <https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/2019/bishop-rachels-address-to-diocesan-synod/>

The other two main items on the agenda were **OneLife** and **Growing Faith**, both of which are on the Deanery Synod's agenda at this meeting so probably don't require further notes here.

FEBRUARY

1. Church Representation Rules 2020

A question had been asked about how Deanery and Parish officers are to be informed about these revised rules, which cover all aspects of governance in the church. In response the Registrar and Diocesan Secretary said:

- the revised rules are greatly simplified and are easier to use
- there will be an item in the forthcoming Diocesan Bulletin about the revised rules
- the registry helpline is always available if you have any queries via the contact details on the diocesan website under Parish Resources
- some training is being arranged and will be notified as soon as finalised

NB While the new rules allow for APCM's to be completed any time up to the end of May, as the Archdeacons' visitation dates for this year have already been fixed please complete yours by April as usual!

2. House of Bishops Pastoral Letter

Bishop Rachel spoke about this recent letter, her own response to it¹ and the subsequent further statement from the Archbishops, which can be found at the same link. The original national statement caused a lot of comment about its tone and timing and Bishop Rachel explained that this had been considered as an internal document and not for general publication, but some confusion about that had led to it being released. It does not say anything new about the church's position on marriage.

She referred to the context of the extensive work being done in the church at the moment on "Living in Love and Faith", addressing a range of issues about human sexuality and the church, the products of which are due to come to the General Synod in July. This process has been seeking to build trust that the different views held can be well-managed, and has already produced some Pastoral Principles for living well together

¹ <https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/2020/a-message-from-bishop-rachel-to-the-diocese-of-gloucester-regarding-the-release-of-the-house-of-bishops-statement-re-civil-partnerships/>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/Pastoral%20Principle%20Cards%20May%202019.pdf>.

The statement did not meet these standards.

Bishop Robert added his reflections on the process and he and the Dean both thanked Bishop Rachel for her own prompt public statement on the issue.

3. Environmental Policy

There was a presentation² on this by Revd Andrew Braddock and Revd Arthur Champion (who you will remember came to our Deanery Synod recently) updating on the actions taken across the diocese so far, the number of churches registered for the Ecochurch programme and numbers already receiving bronze or silver awards. Revd Dana Delap also spoke about a local development in her parish and how it had drawn other organisations into community projects.

DAC policy guidance is now available and addresses a range of issues including environmental ones.

There are Lent resources available on this theme too, via the Diocesan website.

The following motion was debated and carried overwhelmingly:

“This Synod:

- recognises we are facing a climate and ecological emergency which is a crisis for the whole of God’s creation and;
- calls on all parts of the Diocese of Gloucester to work towards an 80 per cent reduction in emissions of CO2 and other greenhouse gases no later than 2030 based on 2006 data (replacing the current target of an 80% reduction by 2050), and to take other measures in order to be carbon neutral, also by 2030.

4. Safeguarding Annual Report

Judith Knight and the Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel, Simon Atkinson, spoke to a presentation setting out the main themes from the past year. They also referred to a recent comment by the new Director of the church’s National Safeguarding Team, Melissa Caslake in which she acknowledges the extensive progress the church has made in its safeguarding work, and noted the areas that still needed improvement. (*Sorry – I couldn’t write this down quick enough at the meeting!*)

5. Finance update

Julie Ridgeway updated the Synod on the 2019 and 2020 Parish Share and budget positions. She thanked everyone who works hard to bring in the Parish Share and so ensure the Diocesan budget is met. In November the Parish Share committed contributions were expected to show a £220K shortfall against the target set. At the year end so far, there is now an additional shortfall as many parishes have not contributed the amount they originally committed, so the likely deficit is closer to £330K. **Fees** are also not coming in as they should be so please check this in your own parish.

The programme of disposal of unused housing is on track.

Parish Share for 2020 is currently significantly light in the commitments offered and a number of gaps still across deaneries.

Margaret Sheather

² I have asked for this presentation and the safeguarding one to be provided for us to circulate to Deanery Synod members.