



Minutes of the Diocesan Synod

Held at Unipart House, Cowley

11 March 2023

Welcome and Opening Worship

The Rt. Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, welcomed Synod members and visitors to the meeting. The meeting began with opening worship and hymns lead by the Revd Canon Dr Geoff Bayliss, and the passage John 1:1-18 was read by Miss Prudence Dailey.

1. Notices

The Chair of the House of Laity, Mr John Sykes, addressed the Synod and reminded members of procedural matters. Members were reminded that there had been a change in the agenda order and that the General Synod Report would now be taken after the Presidential Address, due to the number of questions received.

Members heard that the diocese had recently run an election to fill a casual vacancy on Bishop's Council for a lay member from Buckinghamshire and there had been no nominations. There was also a vacancy for a Dorchester clergy place. Lay members of Buckingham Archdeaconry and clergy members of Dorchester Archdeaconry were encouraged to identify who amongst them could fill the respective vacancies.

The Synod granted permission for the following staff members to speak during the meeting; Mrs Hannah Mann (Environmental Action Programme Manager), Canon Andrew Anderson-Gear (Director of Mission and Ministry), Revd Sarah Flashman (New Congregations Enabler) and Mrs Emma Firth (New Congregations Project Manager).

Mr Sykes welcomed to the meeting Mrs Abigail Lloyd, who became chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) on 1 January 2023 and invited her to introduce herself. Mrs Lloyd addressed the Synod and explained that she had a background in law, as a barrister in London, and more recently was involved in the review of secular planning cases, looking at listed building consent applications and planning permission in conservation areas. Mrs Lloyd greatly valued working in both the secular and ecclesiastical worlds and seeing the similarities and differences between them, as well as understanding the law which applied to them both.

Members heard that the Diocese of Oxford contained more listed buildings than any other diocese and more listed buildings than other dioceses had churches, whether listed or not. Mrs Lloyd spoke of the historical importance of church buildings, which were some of the oldest and most enduring sites in any area.

Mrs Lloyd explained that the DAC was a unique committee, in that its membership came from a wide range of backgrounds including from the church as well as members skilled in historic-building care, and many who spanned both. Oxford DAC was also fortunate to have good relationships with other key stakeholders, including local planning authorities, Historic

England and the National Amenity Societies. Mrs Lloyd stressed the importance of the good working relationships with the stakeholders and that the DAC was trusted to act in accordance with the law. She explained that at the heart of both ecclesiastical and secular planning law, was a valuable and careful balancing act, whereby if loss was envisaged, one had to look carefully at whether there were any possibilities to achieve the same benefit, but with less loss. The balancing act was sometimes portrayed in a binary fashion, with heritage and conservation on the one hand and mission and the parish on the other. However, this could be a beneficial and helpful process which served to clarify precisely what was needed and why, as well as saving time and money on proposals which may not work. The church benefited enormously from the expertise of many specialists, members and advisors, who offered their time extensively and free of charge by serving on the DAC, which was not something that the secular system had access to.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Synod on 12 November 2022 were approved.

3. Presidential Address

Bishop Steven addressed the Synod and spoke of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelation and the threat of the climate crisis. The four riders represented conquest, war, famine and death. Members heard that in the 21st Century, there were now two new riders, and they represented the threats of greenhouse gasses and the systematic destruction of nature.

Greenhouses gasses trapped the sun's energy inside the atmosphere and raised global temperatures to critical levels, causing fires, floods and storms and raising the sea level. Bishop Steven expressed that this rider could be stopped but only if every nation, institution, faith and every family acted together to reach net zero and did so without delay. The systematic destruction of nature put the Earth's eco system -on which human life depended- at risk. Wildlife populations had declined by an average of 69% between 1970 and 2018, and Latin America and the Caribbean had experienced a 94% drop in the wildlife population. 60% of the UK's flying insects, which were vital for pollination and the food chain, had vanished in the last 20 years. Britain was currently one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, with over one million species currently threatened with extinction. Members heard that this was a critical time, and in December the world had agreed a new set of global targets for restoring nature at the COP 15 conference in Montreal. The principal goal was to protect 30% of the Earth's land, oceans, coastal areas and inland waters by 2030. During the previous week, the UN High Seas Treaty had agreed to set 30% of the world's oceans into protected areas.

Bishop Steven spoke of the importance of Christian action to prevent climate change and work towards carbon net zero. The most immediate reason was for the future of life on Earth, for ourselves and for those who would come after us. The Bible taught from Genesis to Revelation that humanity was part of God's creation, with a particular relationship with the natural world. Members were encouraged to explore Psalm 104, the final chapters of Job, Proverbs 8 or the Sermon on the Mount, and to read the texts through the lens of the two new riders. Bishop Steven read verses from the Book of Genesis, including the following two verses:

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

“..the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken”

Members heard that the word ‘till’ in Hebrew was ‘ebed’, the root meaning of which was ‘to serve’, and it could also mean to worship and to work. It was the word used of the service of God and of the servant of the Lord in other Old Testament texts and was a key word for Jesus’s understanding of his ministry and our understanding of who Jesus was. Hebrew scholars noted that ‘ebed’ could also be translated as *observe*, *preserve* and *conserve*, all variations of the verb to serve. Therefore, humanity had been given a responsibility to serve and steward and watch over the earth and all that lived on it.

Members heard of the ways in which the diocese could repair and restore creation, particularly in influencing the ecology of the Thames Valley in the coming years. The diocese was able to support the pathway to net zero through the actions taken in schools, churches and vicarages across the three counties. Examples of actions that were already being taken included:

- **Rewilding** - Churches across the diocese were rewilding their churchyards to encourage biodiversity and provide a rich habitat for flora and fauna to flourish. St Mary’s Church in Wargrave introduced a ‘Let it Grow’ zone in their churchyard by halting regular mowing and strimming of the grass. This promoted wildflower growth and provided habitats for animal and invertebrate species, helping to increase the biodiversity of the churchyard. The church had also installed bat boxes and bird boxes and created a large compost area that provided shelter for hedgehogs.
- **Partnership with Wildlife Trust** -The diocese had an active partnership with the Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. The trust would be running two training courses in diocesan churchyards during April and May; one about managing green spaces and the other on doing a basic site survey (species identification, vegetation types etc). The Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust were developing a web page called ‘Wilder Churches’, which would feature examples of churches in Oxford Diocese taking action.
- **Tree Planting**- Engaging with gardening and green issues and biodiversity was becoming a normal part of church life across the diocese. Churches in Hungerford had planted 6440 trees to date, and churches in Greenham were also planting trees, though not at such scale.

In conclusion, Bishop Steven reiterated the importance of humankind to till and keep the Earth, which was essential for survival, and to respond to the challenges of the two new Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The Church of England was not able to do this single-handedly but must offer leadership on the matter whenever it could.

4. Report from General Synod

Mr Sykes invited The Revd Canon Toby Wright and the Revd Joy Mawdesley to address the Synod regarding the General Synod which took place in February 2023.

Members heard the following highlights from Revd Canon Toby Wright:

- Standing Orders made in November 2020 under section 1 of the **General Synod (Remote Meetings) (Temporary Standing Orders) Measure 2020** had been revived and put into operation until 5th February 2026. This meant that those who could not attend in person could join remotely.
- **The Diocesan Stipends (Fund Amendment) Measure** had been revised, which would allow for more sharing of resources across dioceses. Oxford Diocese was particularly commended by various speakers for its financial support to other dioceses.
- **The Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021** had been updated to reflect language used regarding the administration of Holy Communion in Church Schools.
- **The Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure** had provided 'tidying up' of 21 legal amendments.
- **Cost of Living** – A motion had been passed which called on the government to take more action, as well as reaffirming the work that the Church of England was doing to help those in need. 1 in 6 households in the UK were experiencing financial difficulties with consequences for their health, and the work of the church was very important.
- The **Governance Review**, seeking to be simpler and with greater cohesion, had been welcomed.
- **Safeguarding**- The Synod had been addressed by Mr Alexander Kubeyinje, National Director of Safeguarding. It was clear that safeguarding was a concern for many and there was dissatisfaction that there was so much more to do.
- **Insurance Premium Tax** – A motion had been passed calling on the government to exempt charities, including churches, from liability for Insurance Premium Tax.
- **Living in Love and Faith**- This had been the main focus of the General Synod. 18,000 people had watched the debates online. 28 amendments to the motions had been tabled and members had spent five hours considering 19 of them. The final motion was passed with 57% voting in favour of the bishops' motion which repented of 'the failure of the Church to welcome LGBTQI+ people and the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church'. Group discussions had been positive and mostly well-tempered. Some in the Church felt that the motion went too far, and others felt that it was not enough. Many had found it to be a healing and welcoming moment within the Church, although Canon Wright was aware of the pain felt on both sides of the debate. It was not considered to be an issue of culture against the Bible, and scriptural fidelity was claimed by both sides of the debate.

Members then heard from Revd Joy Mawdesley who talked about her experience of the Living in Love and Faith debates at the General Synod. Members heard that the discussions were respectful and conducted in a helpful way. The *Prayers of Love and Faith* were resources

which could be used for prayer for those in many relationships and not just same-sex couples. Revd Mawdesley expressed confusion that two biblical teachings appeared to have been undermined; that marriage was between a man and a woman, and that sex was for marriage. She considered that the *Prayers of Love and Faith* were for individuals and did not mention sexual matters, and was concerned about mixed messages being received.

Members heard that the July meeting of the General Synod would include pastoral guidance on the matter. The direction of travel on the matter had been set and Bishops had received the message that some were unhappy with this. There had been an overall call of unity from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Revd Mawdesley also highlighted the General Synod's amendment to Canon 42, changing the title of the diocesan role of 'Safeguarding Advisor' to 'Safeguarding Officer' and an amended order to reduce the increase in fees for weddings and funerals.

Comments

The Chair thanked the speakers for their contributions and invited comments.

A member stated that during the debate regarding wedding and funeral fees, some General Synod members considered that weddings should be free and burial fees should be £1000. He suggested that it may be helpful for the diocese to provide guidance to General Synod regarding the matter.

One member gave feedback on watching the General Synod online that she was saddened that the world was seeing that members were not respectful to each other during the Living in Love and Faith debates. Another member questioned why the Synod members giving feedback were both from the House of Clergy. In response, Bishop Steven explained that a member of the House of Laity had been approached but had been unable to accept.

5. Questions

Eleven questions had been received in advance, under Standing Order 70.

Q1 *Reverend Jonny Dade asked:*

"This is a question related to the motion passed by the Church of England's General Synod which was to '**look forward to**' the House of Bishops **commending** and **issuing** the Prayers of Love and Faith. The commendation of these prayers will inevitably lead to conflict in parish settings where there is strong disagreement between incumbents and PCCs or indeed within PCCs or congregations. Will our Bishops commit to publicly defending clergy whose conscience leads them to make a decision that incurs significant opposition from within their parishes? Can clergy depend upon the support of our Bishops even where there is a strong difference of opinion?"

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

“Broadly yes. In my letter to the Diocese of Oxford after the General Synod I underlined what I had already said in my speech to the Synod:

My vision for the Diocese of Oxford is that we will be a diocese where all are affirmed and cherished, where same sex relationships can be celebrated and those who hold the traditional view are honoured and respected.

As Bishops we will make this clear in all our communications and correspondence. We will also aim to support clergy in the challenging task of reflection and conversation within PCC’s and between PCC’s and incumbents. Our general advice is to take time over these conversations and decisions.”

Supplementary Question

Revd Jonny Dade commented that those clergy holding to apostolic teachings wanted leadership and oversight, and asked what measures would the diocese commit to making in terms of pastoral provision for them. In response, Bishop Steven stated that the any local provision made would depend on what was to be agreed nationally. There were local conversations taking place and meetings with the Oxford Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship to discuss the matters.

Q2 Reverend Canon Edward Bowes-Smith asked:

“What was the blueprint for the new Diocesan Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy? How does this policy apply to clergy who on conscience grounds withhold leadership positions in their parish to those in active sexual relationships outside of marriage between a man and a woman and where a complaint is made under the EDI policy?”

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

“Our diocesan EDI policy aims to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, appreciating the diverse needs and valuing our differences, so that each and every one can belong and flourish in this diocese. It is also grounded in the principles of respect for individual rights and dignity. within the theological imperative, do justice, walk humbly, have mercy, so that we provide opportunities for all our people to flourish and live life to the full.

It is rooted in law, be this the Human Rights Act 1998 or the Equality Act 2010. It also sits alongside the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy that outlines appropriate behaviour and expectations for clergy and our diocesan Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work.

When doing so, it acknowledges the wide variety of theologies and understandings that exist amongst us. Furthermore and importantly, it articulates a commitment to work within what is currently permitted by the Church of England. So, we await with interest the forthcoming Pastoral Guidance. Any potential complaint raised under the diocesan EDI policy will be considered with this guidance in mind.”

Supplementary Questions

Mrs Julie Dziegiel asked what the legal situation would be if those in certain roles within parishes would be asked to sign a statement of faith, and how that might affect paid staff.

Ms Jayne Ozanne stated that she had tabled an amendment at General Synod in July 2019 that was supported by the Conservative Evangelicals which would agree that the laity should be given access to leadership irrespective of their sexuality, gender or race. Ms Ozanne considered that the answer was contrary to this amendment.

In response to the two questions, Bishop Steven undertook to prepare responses following the meeting.

Q3 Reverend Will Pearson-Gee asked:

“In the event of Prayers of Love and Faith being approved by General Synod and commended by the House of Bishops, what forms of support will be provided by this diocese to:

- Those who use the Prayers but, not appreciating the fact that the House of Bishops commendation has no legal effect, subsequently find themselves facing complaints brought under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963 alleging that their use of the Prayer is not permitted under Canon B5 and constitutes the commission of an offence.
- Those who chose not to use the Prayers and as a consequence find themselves exposed to actions for discrimination under the Equality Act 2010?”

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

“The use of Prayers approved by the House of Bishops would be a defence to any person facing allegations under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure. It is right that all parties are offered independent pastoral support. If a clergyperson faces legal proceedings they are able to apply for ecclesiastical legal Aid if they need professional legal support. Those preparing the Pastoral Guidance are alert to the possible concerns raised in relation to the Equality Act 2010.”

Supplementary Questions

Mr Andrew Bell asked the Bishop of Oxford; “to explain the legal basis for the assertion that "approval" by the House of Bishops circumvents the requirement of Canon B5.3 that prayers "shall be neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from the doctrine of the Church of England?" , and how is your answer consistent with Canon B5.4? "4. If any question is raised concerning the observance of the provisions of this Canon it may be referred to the bishop in order that he may give such pastoral guidance, advice or directions as he may think fit, but such reference shall be without prejudice to the matter in question being made the subject matter of proceedings under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963."

In response Bishop Steven stated that the question referred to a national process, not a diocesan one. The legal advice, which had been received by the College of Bishops and the Bishops on the Liturgical Commission, was based on the text of the *Prayers of Love and Faith* and that commendation under Canon B5 was appropriate. This had now become somewhat contested, however to help understanding, one could look on the Church of England website and see a list of services that had already been commended by the House of Bishops, under Canon B5, which included a wide range

of materials including prayers of dedication for after a civil marriage. The Church's doctrine that marriage is a lifelong union had not changed, and there were commended prayers where that marriage had broken down and a new one was made. This was one of the determinations which made canon B5 appropriate.

Revd Mark Bennet asked whether the diocese would work pastorally so that those who wished to use *Prayers of Love and Faith* could do so without fear of reprisal and vice versa, to which Bishop Steven answered affirmatively.

Q4 Reverend Vaughan Roberts asked:

"Can the Bishop confirm that parish share/common fund payments from parishes are voluntary contributions, and that those parishes who have or might pause payments in the light of the House of Bishops *Prayers of Love and Faith* being commended will not be hindered from seeking a new incumbent following a future vacancy?"

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

"Parish share payments are the means through which parishes fund the costs of clergy (stipend, training, pension and housing). Whilst they are not statutorily imposed by legislation no diocese could function without them. Oxford diocese has a parish share system, reviewed just last year, under which deaneries have substantial involvement in the deployment of clergy as the costs of ministry of those clergy are in practice funded by the parish share contributed by the parishes within that deanery. I would have substantial difficulty - and many questions - of any parish deciding not to pay parish share on grounds of Anglican polity, let alone finance.

Decisions about the appointment of stipendiary clergy are informed by a number of factors, of which a key one will be the willingness and ability of the deanery for the costs of that appointment to be allocated to the parish share met by the deanery. If a parish were to stop payments, then the deanery would have to consider whether other parishes would be willing to pick up those costs if payments by that parish remain paused.

Two PCCs in the diocese have formally advised us that they will in future be making parish share payments through Oxford Good Stewards Trust and it has been clarified that the payment will be the full amounts agreed by the deanery, all of which will be passed by the Trust to the diocese. On that basis, this scenario raises no such issues."

Q5 Dr Andrew Bell asked:

"Has the diocese added to our risk register an assessment of the possible impact of the introduction of *Prayers of Love and Faith*? If not, is an assessment of this risk planned in advance of General Synod in July, when the prayers may be commended? Will the assessment cover potential risks to:

- a. The number of clergy holding licenses
- b. The number of people offering for ordained ministry

- c. Sunday attendance
- d. Electoral roll numbers
- e. Deanery and Parish Mission Action Plans
- f. Parish share contributions?"

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

"The potential loss of parish share caused by a major external event has been part of our formal risk register for several years and is classified as one of the higher risks. Our assessment of the missional, financial and membership risks (and benefits) resulting from the adoption of Prayers in Love and Faith and the release of the pastoral guidance is of course dependent on the final materials released and the reaction to them. Given this, we do not plan to undertake any formal assessment at this time as the basis and value of so doing at this point is not demonstrated. However, in different ways we continue informal assessments of the risks outlined in the question and also what can be done to mitigate those risks."

Q6 Mr Thomas Walton asked:

"Some clergy and PCCs have lost confidence in their bishops, specifically the bishops of this diocese as a result of the publication and endorsement of "Together in Love and Faith", but also in the wider House of Bishops as a result of the "Prayers of Love and Faith" proposed at General Synod. What alternative provision will be made in the short term for those who can no longer in good conscience accept the ministry and licensing of the bishops in our diocese, and what type of long-term "settlement" (as the Archbishop of York mentioned) will you argue for in future discussions?"

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

"The publication of *Together in Love and Faith* generated a significant amount of correspondence, much of it very moving and positive about the content of the booklet and the proposals for moving forward. There have also been a significant number of (mainly courteous) expressions of dissent. The Next Steps group (chaired by the Bishop of London) will bring forward proposals for the revision of Prayers of Love and Faith and the pastoral guidance, which is where questions around any settlement will be agreed. My own position in these conversations will be broadly consistent with the proposals outlined in *Together with Love and Faith*. As Bishops we value our ongoing dialogue with Oxford Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship on these matters."

Supplementary Questions

Mr Thomas Walton asked whether there would be provision for clergy who were about to be ordained but unsure whether they would be able to hold to an apostolic position, and if they were not able to then they may lose their jobs. In response, Bishop Steven stated that he would listen carefully to anyone with these concerns and would hope that such conversations would be helpful. However, ultimately, the Church of England had no

provision to make additional alternative arrangements -alongside those already made- in light of potentially one person's individual views.

Revd Katie Wakeman-Toogood asked hypothetically what would happen if, in one team or benefice, members of the clergy held different opinions and whether there would be provision to acknowledge this situation. Bishop Steven replied that this matter would have to be addressed in any forthcoming pastoral guidance. An amendment had been put forward at General Synod which tested whether members would want the PCCs to approve or not the provision for *Prayers of Love and Faith*. The amendment had been rejected and the decision left to the incumbent of the benefice. Bishop Steven suggested that people anxious about these circumstances should engage in conversations with Bishops and Archdeacons, taking decisions steadily and waiting for pastoral guidance.

Q7 Mr Thomas Walton asked:

"In discussions amongst the House of Bishops about between now and July, will you commit to endorsing the Church of England's doctrine of marriage, and to ensuring that any pastoral guidance produced is logically and theologically consistent with that doctrine?"

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

"My approach to questions raised over the coming months which seek my own views will be broadly consistent with the views set out in *Together in Love and Faith*. I am fully in support of logical and theological consistency and rationale."

Supplementary Question

Mr Thomas Walton asked about the inconsistency of the *Prayers of Love and Faith* publication. Bishop Steven state that there was an acknowledgement by Bishops that there was lots of work to do to reach a logical rationale for *Prayers of Love and Faith*, and that encouraging consistency was to be continued.

Q8 Mr Daniel Matovu asked:

"Can the President and Bishops collectively confirm that they will issue a joint statement to everyone in the diocese to the effect that the draft Prayers of Love and Faith are not to be used and cannot legitimately be used at all in any shape or form for same-sex couples until the July meeting of the General Synod (as the Archbishop of York has openly declared) and, at any rate, not before the final version of those Prayers has been fully approved in tandem with the final approved version of the new Pastoral Guidance that is to replace Issues in Human Sexuality?"

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

"I wrote on the day after General Synod to all the clergy and lay ministers in the Diocese reporting the outcome of the debate and including these sentences:

‘The House of Bishops were present in the Synod to listen, especially in the group work. In March we will return to the task of refining and developing the Prayers of Love and Faith and to developing new Pastoral Guidance. At present we expect both texts to be ready in some form by the July meeting of the General Synod. It’s important to stress, for the moment, that nothing has changed in the Church of England’s pastoral practice, although we do now have a clear direction of travel from the Bishops and affirmed by the General Synod.’

There are no plans to issue further statements but all four bishops continue encourage dialogue on these matters in relation to pastoral situations which may emerge.”

Q9 Mr Daniel Matovu asked:

“In the event of Prayers of Love and Faith being approved by General Synod and commended by the House of Bishops, and given that all three houses of General Synod voted to “endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage”, what teaching materials will the Diocesan Board of Education commend to Church of England schools to explain, commend and promote the Church of England’s doctrine of marriage?”

Response from the Bishop of Buckingham:

“All schools including Church of England Schools in the Diocese of Oxford are bound by the DfE’s statutory relationships, sex and health education guidance that came into force in September 2020:

Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

In the run up to this ODBE provided a range of resources for schools to ensure that they were statutorily compliant as well as reflecting their Christian Character. In addition, the Church of England’s Education Office has published a range of free materials that we signpost schools towards:

Relationships, Sex and Health Education | The Church of England

Any school seeking to promote or endorse one form of relationship over others would be in breach of the statutory guidance and therefore acting illegally. This would include the promotion of any form of marriage within any school regardless of its religious character. The outcome of the General Synod in February has no bearing on this legal requirement.”

Q10 Dr Gracy Crane asked:

“What consideration been given to support ordinands and those exploring vocations and who wish to remain faithful to the current teaching of the Church? Some are already considering whether to proceed, following the decision at GS.”

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

“The DDO team are in regular contact with our ordinands at different stages and should be the first point of contact for those in the vocations process and those in formation for ministry who need additional support beyond their training institution. We are aware that a range of candidates may need additional support at this time including those that are LGBTQIA+ and those who hold traditional views on marriage and same sex relationships.

The Prayers of Love and Faith will be commended by the House of Bishops for those clergy who want to and feel able in good conscience to use them. There will be no requirement on any individual to use them.

We do not yet have a draft of the Pastoral Guidance or the ways in which it will be deployed in relation to ordinands during the discernment process. However, because there will be no requirement on any individual to use the prayers, I do not envisage that there will be a conflict of personal conscience on these grounds, nor do I envisage that any candidate’s recommendation for training would be prejudiced on these grounds.”

Q11 *Dr Gracy Crane asked:*

“ The Bishops voted against Andrew Cornes' amendment 68, implying that sexually active relationships outside Holy Matrimony may now be affirmed. Are resources available (until the pastoral guidance is completed) for those of us who need to explain this revised view to youth groups in our churches?”

Response from the Bishop of Oxford:

“Amendment 68 in the General Synod debate on LLF was to add this text to the motion:

Call upon the House of Bishops, when further refining Prayers of Love and Faith, to include instructions making it clear that they should not be used so as to indicate or imply affirmation of sexually active relationships outside Holy Matrimony or to invoke God’s blessing on such relationships.

The Amendment was defeated in all three Houses of the Synod. The voting in the House of Bishops was 3 in favour of the amendment; 28 against with 6 abstentions.

No specific resources have been produced in response to any of the amendments (or indeed the main motion) and there are no plans to do so. The LLF resource library remains available to youth groups, PCC’s and others who want to explore these issues more fully as does my own essay, *Together in Love and Faith*.

Clearly it will be important in working with youth groups and others to explore the range of views taken in response to same sex marriage and same sex relationships across the Church of England. It may be that specific resources for young people will be developed as part of the ongoing LLF process in the coming years.”

Supplementary Questions

Ms Jayne Ozanne asked what messaging we would be giving to the LGBT youth within the diocese, and how they would be made to feel safe and welcome. Bishop Steven explained that there would be opportunity in the future to prepare resources for young people on these matters, and that there was clearly an appetite for them.

Revd Canon Richard Lamey expressed concern that young people may be turning away from church due to the current sexuality debates. Bishop Steven agreed with this concern and noted that many people from outside the church were observing the debates from all sides.

Ms Alex Scott asked about the visibility of the diocesan Living in Love and Faith chaplains, to which Bishop Steven replied that the chaplaincy should be well known and available. He invited anyone with ideas for the chaplaincy to get in touch with them, and the details were available on the diocesan website.

6. Environment

The Bishop of Reading, the Right Reverend Olivia Graham, thanked the Bishop of Oxford for his moving presidential address and introduced the item. Bishop Olivia stated that the diocese was committed to becoming a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world, and these values applied to the natural world and the preservation of the ability to sustain life. The fifth Mark of Mission compelled us to sustain life on earth. A commitment to the natural world was not an add on to Christian discipleship but was integral and part of the identity of disciples of Jesus Christ.

Mrs Hannah Mann, Environment Action Programme Manager addressed the Synod regarding the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan, and members had sight of a report and a presentation.

Members heard that this was a once in a generation opportunity to bring creation back into harmony, to restore some level of justice and to ensure the long-term, resilient and sustainable future of our churches, schools, property and the whole diocese. The Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission were unequivocal in stating the importance of creation care. Christians must reflect on their responsibility to love and care for God's earth.

The diocese had achieved Bronze Eco Diocese status last summer and there were over 170 registered Eco Churches in the Diocese, as well as churches running Repair Cafes, hosting eco-fairs, running community gardens, providing car-sharing schemes, changing their lighting systems, hosting Forest Church services, and partnering with local environmental organisations to engage communities in different issues.

In July 2022, General Synod had endorsed the National Routemap to Net Zero Carbon, inviting all parts of the church to commit to achieving a set of milestones, that would enable them to reach net zero. These milestones were for Dioceses, churches, schools, Cathedrals and the National Church, which had set a net zero target of 2030. Oxford Diocese fully supported that route map and had used it to inform development of the Oxford Diocese Net Zero Carbon Action Plan. Members heard that the Action Plan re-confirmed the target of 2035 adopted by Synod, which was based on good reasoning about the size of our Diocese, the cost of reaching

net zero, and the need to channel vital funds into capital works rather than paying for offsetting from 2030.

The short-term priorities of the Plan were:

- To ensure diocesan buildings use less energy overall by becoming more energy efficient.
- To support diocesan churches and schools move as soon as possible to a credible green energy tariff, and to encourage clergy to do so where they felt able.
- To work with priority schools and churches on decarbonisation plans and explore and identify opportunities for capacity and funding to upscale the work. National data showed that 20% of churches were responsible for 50% of total church emissions, therefore working closely with these high emitters would enable the diocese to have a bigger, quicker impact.

Oxford Diocese was further ahead regarding clergy housing than other dioceses, having completed a survey of nearly all of the clergy houses, and having begun the first full retrofit trial.

Members heard that in the medium and longer-term, the priority would shift to the decarbonisation of heat, and opportunities for onsite generation of energy. This would mean varied solutions according to usage patterns, occupancy, and size, but a large roll-out of heat pumps was anticipated, particularly for schools and clergy houses, and in churches where the technology was viable. The plan was transparent about the expected roadblocks, challenges and the financial implications of delivering net zero. The costs were shared with a degree of confidence as the figures were based on robust audit data.

Regarding immediate roadblocks, the Environment Team was working very closely with the Church Buildings Team to establish bridging solutions for churches where, for example, a boiler broke down in the winter and required immediate action. The national Church had made changes to faculty rules to make the decision to move to net zero easier for churches, and guidance would be published by the diocese to help them navigate the new framework. Mrs Mann told of a good news story from St Anne's Church, where a fundraising drive following a broken boiler enabled a new heat pump and underfloor heating. This had brought vibrancy into the church, increased usage for community activities, and growing numbers in the congregation.

Regarding funding, £190m of national funding had been identified over the next three triennia for delivering net zero. It was believed that as technology was rolled out it would also become cheaper, and there may be opportunities to work with the private sector to lift some of the burden.

Over 60% of the emissions reduction in the Climate Change Committee's net zero scenarios involve some behavioural change, therefore there was a role to play for each and every person, whether through preaching, serving in ministries or taking important actions in our personal lives. Members were urged to consider how they could make a difference, collectively and individually.

In conclusion, members heard that addressing net zero was a challenge, however the plan was laid out and the diocese should have hope. Mrs Mann quoted Romans 15:13 which said; 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him'.

Members were invited to discuss the following in small groups; 'What is your response to the plan?'

Formal Debate

Bishop Olivia moved the motion in her name which endorsed the Action Plan.

Members were generally supportive of the action plan, and comments were made regarding how important it was that the diocese was taking steps to address the global catastrophe of climate change. It was stated that there was an opportunity for the Church to lead by example, and also from the pulpit. Bishop Olivia replied in agreement that the matter was a theological concern and that teaching around the matter could be highlighted in services and sermons. One member commented that the significance of the plan meant that it should be brought back to each meeting of the Synod, and Bishop Olivia agreed with this.

A member was concerned about the financial implications of the action plan on already struggling parishes and considered that the diocese would require a significant amount of funding to carry out the plan. He was also concerned that green retrofits are not always suitable for all buildings. Bishop Olivia agreed that finances would be a huge challenge, and the financial sources had not yet been identified, however, this was not a reason not to implement the plan. Any green retrofitting would be bespoke according to the individual building and its needs. Bishop Olivia expressed disagreement with a member who did not consider climate change to be a negative occurrence. Synod members were encouraged by the Chair to research the science of climate change, and it was heard that the Open University had many free resources on its website to enable this. It was confirmed that the churches in the diocese that were responsible for a high majority of carbon emissions would be informed.

In response to a question regarding green energy tariffs and how they differ from other tariffs, Members heard that the National Church had an approved list of suppliers that the diocese would use. Due to the current energy crisis, it was difficult to change provider at this time, but the diocesan website would be updated to provide clarity on this in due course.

Members voted on the motion, which was passed, with 81 members voting in favour, three voting against and no abstentions.

Resolved

That this Synod;

1. Supports the milestones outlined within the national Routemap to Net Zero Carbon and seeks to meet those as far as possible within the context of the Oxford Diocese;
2. Endorses the proposed Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan as a positive direction of travel and asks Bishop's Council to oversee its implementation (and review as necessary in light of experience) reporting back to Synod regularly.

3. Calls on parishes, and on others associated with the Diocese, to continue their positive work and form their own plans consistent with the Diocesan intention.

7. Reading Deanery Synod Motion

(Note: The Chair of the House of Clergy, Revd Canon Dr Geoff Bayliss, took the position of Chair from this point hereon.)

Revd Bayliss invited Mr Mark Burton to move his motion, made on behalf of Reading Deanery Synod. Mr Burton explained that solar panels on churches would contribute to tackling climate change, as well as demonstrating the Church's commitment to do so with the panels' visibility. The Church was a prophetic voice within the community and solar panels would set a good example to others. There were other benefits such as microgeneration and energy cost savings.

Members heard that with regard to solar panels on churches, there was a strong heritage argument against visible ones, but the current planning policy accepted hidden ones, and it was possible that many churches already had hidden ones installed. Mr Burton stated that a presumption of permission to install solar panels would not be right for all churches, but in adding the presumption into planning regulations, it would make it easier for churches which were appropriate.

The Chair thanked Mr Burton and invited Mrs Abigail Lloyd to move her amendment of the motion. Mrs Lloyd expressed the support of the DAC to address climate change and the diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan, which supported the National Church's Route map to Net Zero Carbon. She was concerned that the original motion called for planning regulations to be changed so that there was a presumption of permission for the installation of solar panels on church roofs. The National Planning Policy Framework was planning guidance, but the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 was statutory law. The key provisions within the Act enshrined the balancing process between harm and benefit. They placed great emphasis on having special regard to preserving listed buildings and preserving and enhancing conservation areas. Environmental benefit was acquiring more weight now than it formerly did and it was not the case that the visibility of solar panels meant that they would not be given permission.

Members heard that the original motion would undermine the balancing process of planning law by replacing it with a presumption of permission, and there was concern that it would be dismissed out of hand by HM Government because of this. There were also factors to consider in some of the ways that solar panel installation could go wrong; in unexpected maintenance problems or being more costly than anticipated. Solar panels might also not be the best thing for the world's environment, in terms of the way that the embodied non-recyclable carbon-cost in their manufacture and installation could outweigh the operational carbon savings, or in terms of the ethical cost of extracting some of the materials.

Mrs Lloyd explained that she had endeavoured to change the original wording of the motion as little as possible, and her amendments sought to retain the heart of the concern of Reading Deanery Synod, whilst working within the essential legal framework. The amended motion

would demonstrate an awareness of current planning law, whilst calling for a fresh look at the weight given to environmental need and public benefit within the statutory process.

In conclusion, members heard that there was a growing debate about the need to stop demolishing buildings and putting up new ones which had small life spans, as this cycle of demolition and new building was costly and unsustainable. In contrast, church buildings were one of the best examples of constant use and reuse, and were the model of sustainability.

Canon Bayliss thanked Mrs Lloyd and invited members to comment on the proposed amendment. Several comments were made in support of both the motion and the amendment, with Bishop Olivia stating that the amendment would strengthen it.

Members voted on amending the motion and this was carried, with 83 members voting in favour, no members voting against and one member abstaining.

Resolved

That the motion be amended as follows:

That this Synod;

- a) propose that all reasonable steps are taken to influence HM Government to ~~amend planning regulations so that there is a presumption of permission~~ review planning regulations, in particular the weight they give to the environmental public benefit, in applications for the installation of solar panels on the roofs of churches, where appropriate, and the installation of heat pumps, and other renewable technologies, ~~even if the churches are listed buildings;~~ including where the churches are listed buildings or in conservation areas and facilitate the installation of renewable technologies in other buildings as part of a programme of measures to increase energy efficiency; and
- b) pass a motion to support this proposal and refer this motion to General Synod.

Debate then resumed on the motion. A member encouraged others to research the Local Electricity Bill which, if passed, would mean that churches with solar panels would be able to sell their energy to the local community. Bishop Steven welcomed the motion and highlighted the importance of the motion being referred to General Synod, where it would be of national interest.

Members then voted on the amended motion, and this was carried unanimously.

Resolved

That this Synod;

- a) propose that all reasonable steps are taken to influence HM Government to review planning regulations, in particular the weight they give to the environmental public benefit, in applications for the installation of solar panels on the roofs of churches, where appropriate, and the installation of heat pumps, and other renewable technologies, including where the churches are listed buildings or in conservation areas; and to facilitate the installation of renewable technologies in other buildings as part of a programme of measures to increase energy efficiency;
- b) pass a motion to support this proposal and refer this motion to General Synod."

8. Wantage Deanery Synod Motion

Revd Benji Tyler was invited to move his motion, submitted on behalf of Wantage Deanery Synod. The motion promoted the use of local, seasonal and biodegradable flowers and foliage and strongly discouraged the use of floral foam. Members heard that the Church of England was uniquely placed to model sustainability such as this and Revd Tyler illustrated this with the passage from Luke 16:10; 'One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much'.

Members heard that one rose stem flown into the UK or grown using fossil fuel created almost 3kg of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of burning 1kg of coal per stem. It was estimated that by swapping imported flowers for Easter floral decorations with local flowers, the diocese could prevent around twenty-four tonnes of carbon dioxide from the collective carbon footprint. Supermarket flowers contained environment altering pesticides and a study had found 107 active substances on such flowers.

Floral foam, commonly known by its brand name Oasis, had been used for weddings and funerals since 1954. It contained microplastic and formaldehyde, which had been found in sea plankton.

Revd Tyler explained that for two years, Wantage Deanery had been eliminating floral foam and using local flowers in its sixteen churches and encouraged the rest of the diocese to follow suit.

The Chair thanked Revd Tyler for his contribution and invited members to comment on the motion. Comments were made in support of the motion and members suggested alternatives such as vase flower arrangements and using chicken wire, which had been used prior to floral foam being available. Some members were concerned that it would be difficult to get the same results without using floral foam and that local flowers do not stay alive as long as imported ones did. It was clarified that the motion was not a mandate but an encouragement.

Revd Tyler thanked members for their comments and support, and acknowledged the concerns expressed. Members heard that church flower arrangers could contact Wantage Deanery for any advice.

Members voted on the motion, which was carried with 83 members voting in favour, one member voting against and no abstentions.

Resolved

That this Synod, embracing the principles of the Sustainable Church Flowers movement, which encourages a living into the Fifth Mark of Mission by promoting the use of local, seasonal and fully biodegradable/compostable flowers and foliage without floral foam,

1. encourages a sustainable approach to church flowers throughout the diocese
- and
2. strongly discourages the use of all floral foam in churches and churchyards across the diocese.

9. New Congregations

The Chair welcomed Canon Andrew Anderson-Gear (Director of Mission and Ministry), Revd Sarah Flashman (New Congregations Enabler) and Mrs Emma Firth (New Congregations Project Manager) and invited them to speak. Canon Anderson-Gear gave apologies from Will Donaldson, Head of New Congregations, who was not able to be at the meeting. Members heard that Revd Donaldson was retiring, and he was thanked for all he had done for the diocese and for his leadership through challenging times.

Canon Anderson-Gear quoted Isaiah 51:2, which encouraged us to 'Enlarge the site of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes'. Members heard that the diocese's vision to make new disciples and grow the church wherever possible should be viewed through this lens and sought to enlarge parish reach and was rooted in local church. This began with a focus on those in the diocese who did not currently attend church each Sunday, as well as those on the fringes of the wider community. The New Congregations programme and the diocesan team was formed to take forward this vision, and to respond to churches who were looking to rebuild congregations post-pandemic and those who needed support with growing congregations.

The team had observed that many leaders and churches embarked on a missional journey when they started to grow organically beyond their church walls. It was not a linear journey, nor was it a one size fits all model. Nurturing a new congregation required listening, engagement, development and learning, and local learning communities 'Greenhouses' fulfilled this need. Members heard of six stories of churches and leaders who were on the own missional journeys:

- After a lack of children returning to church following the pandemic, Churn Benefice started **Outdoor Church** in the rural setting of the Berkshire Downs. Each session had an activity which encouraged everyone close to nature, appreciating the wonder, variety and intricacy of creation, with a short pause for prayer and praise. Feedback so far had been very positive.
- During covid lockdown, a parish in one of the most socially deprived areas of the diocese, St Frideswide's in Milton Keynes, established a weekly membership-based community larder. By September 2020, as restrictions began to lift, they began to offer hot drinks as people queued. With further lifting of restrictions, a small team developed an intentional café offering healthy and nutritious food together with prayer, silence and a 'Sharing Jesus' slot. '**Soup for the Soul**' emerged, embracing forty core members, 90% of whom had no previous church connection.
- **NARNiA** (North Aylesbury Resourcing Network in Aylesbury) was one of two diocesan funded resource hubs set in a varied part of North Aylesbury; some of which contained a deprived area where addiction, severe mental illness arising from trauma, and illiteracy were prominent. It was a contextualised model, where pioneer church leaders had developed relationships as a network, in order to share their expertise in church planting

and new housing mission. Their setting up of a flourishing Greenhouse Learning Community was an encouraging example in an area where their own resources of finance, time and capacity are limited.

- Sam Muthuveloe, an Associate Priest at the Cross and Stable Church in Downs Barn in northeast Milton Keynes and a local GP, started **Chatterbox** after seeing the mental health challenges of parishioners and his medical patients. Chatterbox took place each Wednesday morning and currently over fifty people gathered at the church to enjoy free hot drinks and cake. Attendees were local people of all ages, of other faiths and none, and they enjoyed the chance to meet new people, share concerns with one another, support the lonely or bereaved and receive a boost for their mental health and wellbeing.
- Bicester had experimented with different expressions of a new community for 20 years. This included two examples of church planting. **Emmanuel Church** began in 2002, planted on the Bure Park housing development with church home groups from St Aldates & St Ebbes in Oxford. From worshipping in the local school, in December 2012 they moved into a new church building and became their own parish.
- The eco-town in North Bicester had seen **Hope Church** planted on the Elmsbrook Estate from a small team from Emmanuel. Focussed on the Fifth Mark of Mission and creation care, they now met weekly for worship in the Eco town's business centre, led by a Pioneer Curate.
- Approx 10 years ago, St Edburg's church received Diocesan new communities funding for a Church Army pioneer minister for the new Kingsmere development. With deep roots in the local church primary school, the voluntary family ministry team were serving families through a weekly **Stay and Play** toddler group and a small but growing monthly **Messy Church**.
- In January this year, St Edburg's launched a new **Intergenerational Morning Service** on the second Sunday of each month. It's primary focus and intention was to reach out to over sixty families who came for baptism every year, along with other families from across the town.

Members heard that many new worshipping congregations built on the work that God was already doing, and although innovative, they were usually built upon existing Parishes. Over the past few months, the New Congregations Team had been seeing and hearing new, positive stories going from churches and new worshipping communities as things picked up post-pandemic.

Synod members were then invited to discuss the following in small groups:

1. Please share a story from your deanery or parish/benefice of either a new congregation or missional activity reaching those not currently in your church
2. If you were wanting to begin a new congregation what would be the primary challenge, you would need to overcome (aside from finance)

Questions

Members were invited to submit questions to the New Congregations Team which were read out and answered by Bishop Steven, Canon Anderson-Gear, Revd Sarah Flashman, Mrs Emma Firth and Revd Canon Toby Wright as follows:

1. **What experience can the committee share on new congregations in multi-faith urban parishes and deaneries?**

‘St Paul's in Slough is our UKME Resourcing Hub and the reason they were granted funding to do that work was in order for them to become a beacon of good practice in terms of growing church within multi faith and multicultural areas. They have a conference coming up in April on intercultural mission more information can be found on the Diocesan website.’

2. **Post COVID there's a real need to support children's education: could an outreach project be helped?**

‘Yes - Generally you can start to build relationships and see how things go from there.’

3. **How do we define New Congregation? Is it linked with worship or is it about drawing people together in community?**

‘There is a clear definition. We have a lot of potential new worshipping communities or new congregations that are moving towards being actual new worshipping communities. There is a point at which an outreach activity intentionally reaches a place of worshipping for maybe half an hour with all the hallmarks of worshipping that you would expect. A little bit like Andrew described with Chatterbox. We know that there are certain characteristics about the hallmarks of worshipping and that we can describe quite easily.’

4. **Does a new congregation count if it takes place at work?**

‘Yes absolutely; if it's meeting all of those characteristics of worship.’

5. **How do we avoid being “church centric”- getting people into buildings - when it comes to sharing the good news?**

‘That’s a key factor in exploring new worshipping communities, as many of them are taking place outside of the church building, or on a day other than Sunday. What is important is being church centric in a different way. You are taking church to the people, you are taking Jesus Christ and the good news to the people, meeting them where they are.’

6. **You say new congregations are contextualised; how can a church discern what is needed?**

'There are two books which the Diocese recommends. The first is *21st Century Christian* (Michael Moynagh & Michael Adam Beck, A Fresh Expressions Book, 2020), and the second is a *Godsend: A Handbook for New Christian Communities*, (Michael Moynagh, 2nd Edition, Fresh Expressions 2023). I tend to use something called needs based evangelism, which comes from a Methodist writer in America who said, look at the needs within your community and if you base your groups around that then people will turn up. I would start by asking, 'What are the needs within your community?' and address those needs to engage with people. The work we do in in the Greenhouses is very much based on being context based and responding to people's needs.'

7. Do we have a table of case studies with key points which are not verbose?

'Yes, and work to add this to our website is in development; we are continually updating our records because we recognise that this is one of the areas that will help to increase feedback so that we can share the good news stories.'

8. Is our aim to build the church or the Kingdom of God - would ecumenical partnerships be more effective reaching some new groups?

'We are working on a project, and Bishop Gavin has commissioned a Baptist, who is our lead pioneer minister on an area of new housing, and we are in touch with 75 families who were not previously in touch with any church and working ecumenically has been absolutely superb. So the diocese is really committed to that and I would thoroughly recommend that we don't just do it in our silos.'

There is also an ecumenical youth work project in Didcot: [Ecumenical youth work - Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](https://www.anglican.org.uk/what-we-do/youth-work/ecumenical-youth-work)

9. Why would a new congregation grow when an existing congregation in the area is in decline?

'Often with a new congregation you are engaging with a completely different community which is not related to the existing congregation. It can be enormously fruitful to do that. Think of the nets being let down on the other side of the boat.'

10. Is there any correlation of churchmanship in successful development of new congregations?

'No, the research is that churches of all traditions are able to engage with it; the key pieces of research are from anecdotal evidence published some years ago: it is the practices of the church rather than the tradition within Anglicanism that makes a difference.'

11. How many BMO's have been introduced in our diocese within the last 3 years?

'We think it's three and we hope for more in the future.'

12. Often our narrative in this area prioritises our success and implicitly raises the stakes - how do we ensure that trying - even if we seem to fail - is a live part of our culture?

‘That’s really important because actually, we will only learn as we experiment and things don’t work everywhere. So one of our tests collaboratively, as we go forward, is to ensure we are talking about the stories and things that don’t work as well as the things that do, to encourage each other and to create a learning culture.’

13. Do you intend that new congregations will always remain separate from the parish church, even as they mature overtime?

‘The imagery of expanding your tent, is not about being in the parish church or out of the parish church, it includes all church within the parish including new and different expressions of church. Many of us will have multiple congregations even within our own churches at different times and those people may or may not meet each other. We need to think about it as an extension of meeting church where people are, so they are all part of that one church within the parish even if they are being served in different parts of it.’

14. What is the difference / connection between BMOs and new congregation / church plants?

‘A church plant is a specific way of growing a new congregation where a group of people from a church go and plant a church somewhere else, with relevant permissions and a Bishop’s Mission Order (BMO) is often created when that church is planted, and they need some form of structural authority that is recognised within the parish in which they are operating.’

15. Given the intention to revive ‘old’ congregations via environmental initiatives - bringing communities into our churches - what is the right priority to give to ‘new congregations’?

‘The call before us all is to ask who is not here and how do we reach them? They are not mutually exclusive because what we know is that many people are passionate about the environment and there are lots of opportunities for us to engage with people who are not in our churches, through environmental initiatives, so it is not an either / or. There may be a capacity issue as well, if you are passionate, engaged and growing things through the environmental initiatives, and you say that you cannot engage in developing new congregations, then of course, that is your discernment and you have to work with the capacity that you have.’

16. Serving the community is a valid and important mission imperative, but how do we know we are growing new congregations, rather than stopping simply at answering a social need?

‘A new worshipping community and a new congregation is intentional. We set out with that intention of developing worship. Other missional / outreach activities are valid in and of themselves because they’re loving and they’re building relationship, but if you are going to develop that into a worshipping community that is absolutely intentional.’

17. Can you share an example from a rural village community?

‘Yes - Emma shared that lovely example of Churn Benefice. I would also add to that, Toddlers in the Woods which is in Jordans Village in Seer Green near Beaconsfield.’

18. Before we are looking for a new congregation should we care for and look after our current group?

‘Yes and No. I have had experience of absolute flops when it comes to trying to grow new communities which have made no difference, and others where it has worked. When I started in Witney, we tried planting on the West side of Witney: it was a disaster and I thought afterwards that it was probably because we didn't have any power at the centre to get to the extremities. If you're waiting for your church to be absolutely perfect, you're missing a trick because it will regenerate what you are doing at the centre by working there. You absolutely need some energy, but you really need to have the courage and conviction to make sure you go forward and just give it a go.’

19. My experience has led me to conclude that the role and gift of the evangelist is massively undervalued / under-appreciated in church planting, how can we encourage this vocation?

‘We hugely under-appreciate the gift of evangelism in the church; we need to lift it up much more and we are beginning our complete re-formation of our process of formation for discipleship and lay ministries in the Autumn. We will have more details in a few weeks’ time about that. The opening module every year of our ‘open access’ year for those preparing for lay ministries will be mission and evangelism including the formation of new congregations. So, I'd really encourage you to think and pray about who from your deanery and benefice can be encouraged to come to learn about evangelism and be formed in different forms of ministry at the beginning of September.’

All the questions and answers raised at the Synod can be viewed on the New Congregations Website.

10. Financial Year End Outturn

The Chair of the Board of Finance, Sir Hector Sants, addressed the Synod regarding the 2022 financial year outturn. Members heard that the yearend results showed that the diocese would break even on the core budget. This was good news considering there had been a budgeted deficit of £561k, and that £330k had been spent from the maintenance fund. The designated fund had been carried forward and the remaining £220k would be carried forward against known and agreed projects.

The positive outcome against the budget of £500k reflected two main factors. Firstly, the property rental market continued to be positive and secondly there had been a benefit from the reduced contribution rates of the clergy pension scheme. Sir Hector expressed gratitude for the parish share contributions and explained that 95.2% of the ask had been contributed.

For the current year, there was a budgeted deficit of £165k for the core budget. This was based on an expected 96% recovery rate of parish share. The budget included a 4% increase in stipends and salaries but no increase in overall parish share contribution ask. Sir Hector

acknowledged that some members may have concerns as to whether the forecast budget would be achievable however he was optimistic based on the year so far.

Members heard that the budget for 2024 was a work in progress at this stage and would depend on variables such as inflation forecast and stipend and salary levels, any increase to which would result in a rise in parish share contribution. Sir Hector reassured members that the executive team would be looking at mitigating cost savings.

The Finance Committee continued to explore total return and the outcome of this could be shared at the next meeting of the Synod. The diocese was considering a model of a five-year rolling income and would take into account a considered view of investment volatility.

Canon Bayliss thanked Sir Hector for his update and informed members that if they had any further questions, they could direct them to the Director of Finance, Mr John Orridge, following the meeting.

11. Final Reflection and Closing Blessing

The Revd Deiniol Kearley-Heywood reflected upon the meeting of the Synod. Members heard that Diocesan Synod was a place where theology and practice met, and it was hoped that this had been experienced today. The meeting had started with a reading from John's Gospel, and Christian hope had been expressed through a reading of Romans 15. Members had heard the words of Isaiah 51:2 and the message that we should enlarge our tents. The Bishop of Oxford had expressed that there were two new riders of the apocalypse and had taught the interesting etymology of the word 'till'.

Revd Canon Toby Wright and Revd Joy Mawdesley had shared their perspectives of the meeting of February's General Synod, and the Synod had heard the diocese's response to the climate crisis, as well as the opportunities and challenges presented by this. The Reading Deanery motion had highlighted the importance of solar panels, while Mrs Lloyd strengthened the motion with her amendment. The Wantage motion regarding the use of sustainable flowers and the disuse of floral foam had been positive. The Synod had reflected that good practice drove good theology.

The meeting ended with a closing Blessing by Bishop Steven at 15.20.

Attendance

The Synod was attended by four Bishops and a further 80 members from the House of Laity and House of Clergy.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from the following members:

<u>House of Clergy</u>	<u>House of Laity</u>
Revd Alicia Baker	Mrs Ann Beaton
Fr Desmond Banister	Dr Andrew Bell
Revd Gill Barrow-Jones	Mr Sid Gale
Revd Mark Bodeker	Mr Richard Hyslop
Revd Canon Edward Bowes-Smith	Prof. Helen King
Revd Anthony Buckley	Mr Mark Knight
Revd Chris Ferris	Mr David Knights
Revd Diana Glover	Dr Felix Leach
Revd Dr Zachary Guiliano	Mr Gavin Merrylees
Revd Keith Johnson	Mr Rick Mutwarasibo
Revd Canon Dr William Lamb	Mr Gavin Oldham
Revd David Meakin	Mr David Phillipson
Revd Talisker MacLeod	Mrs Abigail Price
Revd Gareth Miller	Mr Philip Read
Revd Ian Miller	Lt Col Lyndon Robinson
Revd Jeremy Moodey	Mr Lawrence Tebboth
Revd Phil Parker	Mr Jim Tucker
Revd Will Pearson-Gee	His Hon Christopher Tryer
Revd Canon Val Plumb	Mr Stephen Walker
Revd Mike Smith	Mrs Alison Wood
Revd Jason St John Nicolle	
Revd Ainsley Swift	
Revd David Williams	