

NORTH COTSWOLD DEANERY SYNOD REPORT FOR 2021

Two of the three Deanery Synods held in 2021 were by Zoom due to ongoing COVID restrictions. The third meeting was at St David's in Moreton-in-Marsh.

Both the February and June meetings were mainly concerned with Deanery Strategic Planning and its proposed timetable. THE DEANERY STRATEGIC PLAN derives from Diocesan Synod's invitation to each deanery to make recommendations as to how it can best serve its community over the next ten years.

In the February meeting, Synod members were involved in two discussions: firstly reflecting on the good and the bad challenges we all faced due to the COVID crisis. The bad things about the year were isolation, uncertainty, anxiety and solitude. On the flip side, community spirit and support and the increased use of technology to keep in touch were positives.

The second discussion involved three forward-looking questions:

1. What area of ministry do you think is most important in your context?
2. What would you love your church community to be doing that it isn't already?
3. How can we flourish together? What might we share in common across Benefices and Deanery?

Discussions concluded that the most important areas of ministry were community, children & youth, supporting neglected groups, enabling lay support and the eco-church.

Church community wish-lists included the embracing of technology, development of youth services, using the buildings resource by increasing community events in churches, the development of confident evangelists and all age/ intergenerational worship.

A flourishing church is not afraid of crossing boundaries: e.g. bringing on-line worship together with the use of church buildings, re-thinking the parish model involving a "less territorial" model of ministry, sharing and learning from the issues that were faced in dealing with COVID.

The main focus of the second meeting in June was also the Deanery Strategic Planning Project, including an update on progress so far. Synod then looked at the Aspirations - 'So what?' & 'What next?'. Responses highlighted a need for change & a positivity. Three main areas were 'who we want to be' (centred by Jesus, inter-generational, diverse in worship, living simply, responding to environmental & social need); 'who we want to serve' (every community, children, young people & families, primary & secondary schools, outward facing with community partners, active in areas of new housing); 'What we want to do' (review church buildings, work flexibly across parish boundaries, consider 'festival' churches, share our faith).

Church buildings were the immediate topic - on the one hand too much time & money is spent on them; but on the other hand, churches are spiritual spaces, social places, iconic - 'most people only know the church in our villages'.

What next? If we agree who we want to serve, how do we make this happen? Main focus on children & youth and access in schools - e.g. Christian Unions and Open The Book.

The October Synod held at Moreton-in-Marsh was the first meeting held "face-to-face" since the COVID pandemic struck. The main focus of the meeting was a reflection on the pandemic. Shared comments came mainly under two headings: community - an outburst of community contact and support; and technology - online services reaching wider congregations and providing new opportunities, online courses etc. Other general comments included mutual encouragement, the importance of family, awareness of nature and of things spiritual. But also concerns about increased mental health issues.

Anxieties on coming out of the pandemic included getting back to where we were, reaching those who have drifted away, economic after-shocks (future of church buildings & lack of visitor donations), environmental issues and church governance.

The Area Dean then gave an update on the Deanery Strategic Life Plan. Gloucester has appointed a team of four facilitators to hasten the process towards a May 2022 presentation to the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Group. The facilitators, who met area deans & lay chairs on October 4th, are seeking 'workable, practical plans for each deanery, to strengthen relationships & trust within deaneries, & develop energy, enthusiasm & direction in deanery activities'.

During all three meetings, good news items and updates from around the parishes included introductions to new clergy, "Comfort & Joy" - an initiative which involved sharing food at festivals, the appointment of Deanery Environment Ambassador, a Senior Youth Connector, a new learning initiative "Living in Love and Faith",