

DIOCESAN SYNOD

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2019

(St Olave's School, Orpington)

MINUTES

Bishop James opened the proceedings by welcoming Mr Nigel Pope to his first meeting of the Synod as Chair of the DBF. He went on to thank the Rev Dylan Turner (Cobham Deanery) for his work as a member of Diocesan Synod and of Bishop's Council, noting that it was his last meeting due to his appointment as an Archdeaconry Growth Enabler. Bishop James also mentioned Mrs Abi Hiscock and Mr Graham Wilkinson, who had been appointed as the other two Archdeaconry Growth Enablers.

The Archdeacon of Bromley & Bexley then welcomed members on behalf of the Board of Governors to St Olave's School, saying that, after a year of intense work and various new appointments, the school was in a good position and was a really happy place to be.

The Synod then listened as one of St Olave's students, Matias, played a short piece on the piano, prior to taking part in the short act of worship led by the Rev Jane Winter. The reading was John 15: 5-17.

THE REV CANON ALYSON DAVIE IN THE CHAIR

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS – The Rt Rev James Langstaff

I omitted to say at the beginning that it is of course Matthew's [Girt] first time in the substantive post of Diocesan Secretary, although we have seen him around the place once or twice before. So we welcome you, Matthew, to your substantive role with this Synod as its Secretary among other things.

Most dioceses in the Church of England have a meeting of their synod at around this time of year, and I rather suspect that a number of my episcopal colleagues will take the opportunity in their addresses to say things relevant to where we are in terms of our national life. I have decided not to do that – partly because the situation changes almost daily, if not hourly, and partly because I actually said quite a bit about that at the last meeting of this synod and, if I'm honest, don't have a great deal to add to that. In particular I spoke then about the vital need for us to rediscover that which we hold in common within our society, to attend to the language we use in public discourse and to seek to heal the divisions which have so sadly and deeply come to affect our society. Many of those themes were amplified a few weeks later in the statement issued on behalf of the College of Bishops.

So in relation to all of that, my enjoiner to all of us – myself included – is simply that we continue to pray, that we do all that we can to heal divisions within families (and it does affect families), communities and the wider nation, and that we have an especial care for those who, whatever the outcome and the rights and wrongs of arguments, may find themselves the most adversely affected whether financially or socially. And, depending on how apocalyptic your view as to what might be, the practical outcomes – both short term and long term – communities in Kent, and down into East Kent especially in the Canterbury Diocese, may find themselves affected in very practical ways. And we, as churches, may be on the front line of meeting of some of those needs which arise.

In deciding what to say on occasions such as this, I often try to discern some theme which connects some of the items on which the Synod is to deliberate. Such a theme failed to come to me until I read what I said last time and then found myself thinking about that in one of those 4:00am periods of sleeplessness which most of us probably have from time to time. The theme which I came upon is that of stewardship – stewardship in the broad sense of how we guard, grow, and pass on that which is entrusted to us. This is, of course, a theme with which we are familiar from Scripture. We have the various parables, notably in Matthew and Luke, about those to whom things are entrusted and who must in time give account for their stewardship of that which is entrusted to them. The call is to show oneself faithful in that trust, even if that trust – initially at least – is a relatively small thing. Even the dishonest steward of Luke 16 is commended for his shrewdness; and those in Matthew 25 who prove trustworthy in what is entrusted to them are rewarded with more responsibility. Scripture teaches us also that we are to be the stewards of creation and that's what I was talking about last time; that we have been entrusted with the mysteries that God has revealed to us; and that we should use whatever gifts we have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Last time I did begin to speak of our stewardship of creation, and we had, I thought, a good and worthwhile discussion around that theme. Since then of course the world has discovered the passion and indeed the fury of Greta Thunberg, we have had the burning of the Amazonian forest, which had a great deal of publicity around it, the Global Student Climate Strike and now the Extinction Rebellion protests in London and around the world. And some of us may have been caught up in those, and some of us indeed may have taken part. This is an agenda one cannot avoid, and my hunch is that it will play increasingly strongly and not least in forthcoming elections such as the next presidential elections in the United States of America. Whatever our views on the political manifestations of this concern, the theological imperative to care for (and thus to seek to cure, to heal) the creation is in my view crystal clear. And of course this is not just about respect for the created order in itself, but it is about loving our neighbour, including those in places like Polynesia threatened by rising sea levels and those in parts of Africa, including our companion Dioceses of Mpwapwa and Kondo, where once fertile lands are becoming increasingly desertified and the people starve as a result.

Today in this meeting we will receive a brief update on some of the actions taken since our discussion at the last meeting and a gentle request to Synod to approve the direction of travel and to encourage the formation of a group to take these matters forward, not least in partnership with our neighbours in the Diocese of Canterbury. The paper refers also to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 2020 which is to be published next month. It is entitled 'Yes to Life' and has been written by Dr Ruth Valerio, formerly of the Christian organisation A Rocha and now working internationally with Tearfund.

We will doubtless be promoting that book for reading and for study, whether in Lent or at other times, and I am also delighted to announce today that Dr Ruth Valerio has accepted my invitation to become an Ecumenical Canon of our Cathedral for a three-year period with the designation of 'Canon Theologian'. I am really grateful to Dean Philip, who is away at the moment on study leave, for his discussions with Ruth which have led to this appointment, and we will now be working with her to identify the ways in which she can stimulate our theological thinking and our Christian action over these next three years.

Today we have also before us our Common Fund budget for 2020. I will avoid stealing material from others who will present that budget, but I want to say a few things in the context of that Christian call to exercise stewardship. When we think of money, we often use the idea of stewardship when we think about our own individual response, our own individual giving. More in my mind, however, is that stewardship which we – that is I as Bishop, my Leadership Team, the Bishop's Council, and this Synod – share corporately in relation to our diocesan resources. We, in that sense, are stewards of that which is entrusted to us.

I am not going to rehearse the various discussions and debates which we have had over recent years, but I do want to offer a few observations on where we have travelled and where we are now, not least because I discern that we may be moving into a slightly different place.

1. In relation to stipendiary deployment, we have talked a lot about the need for reductions and we have made them. Indeed (and I am grateful to Richard Williams for researching some of the detail) our notional establishment of non-curacy posts has reduced by over 20 in the last 10 years – that is not inconsiderable, and it has been painful in some places but it has come about. Those reductions have in part been brought about as a result of the 38 or so Pastoral Schemes or Orders which have been put in place during that time, and that is a considerable amount of work by parishes, by archdeacons, and by many others.
2. At the same time, we have seen a considerable diversification of the forms of authorised ministry which we are deploying and of the settings where that ministry is deployed. We now have a number of Bishop's Mission Orders in place which were not there a few years ago, we have enabled self-supporting clergy to move into roles of wider leadership, and we have lay ministers discerning their callings in increasingly imaginative and mission-shaped ways, which are different to where they might have been, say, 10 years ago.
3. Perhaps slightly counter-intuitively, while we have reduced the overall number of stipendiary posts, we have sustained and even grown our vocations to both ordained and lay ministries, and I would want to say grown both in quantity and – given that quite a lot of the products of it are sitting in this room – in quality as well. Those of you ordained in the last few years, those of you licensed to licensed lay ministry, similarly.
4. Over that same 10-year period, despite the very significant need for increased expenditure on such things as safeguarding, which we will also touch on this morning, we have managed to hold our diocesan-level administrative expenditure to only a 6% increase in real terms over those 10 years.

5. We have also, as detailed in a paper circulated to you for information, been incredibly successful in obtaining external funding from charities and from the National Church to create additional resource of different kinds – that’s another kind of stewardship – not least additional posts to support mission and ministry in our parishes and communities, and we referred to one earlier which is the one that Dylan is moving into. In addition to what is itemised in that paper, which is around particular posts, we have also attracted six-figure sums of external charitable funding into our Missional Property Fund and into our Children & Young People’s Fund – and that is already very directly and tangibly benefitting local mission in our communities as we equip ourselves for that work. On top of that, and this is slightly mind-blowing – we have already or we will quite soon draw into the Diocese £85m of government money for the building new Church of England schools, particularly in areas of new housing. It’s not something we reflect on usually but I was struck by that the other day. And that funding comes through one or other of our academy trusts, and is central to establishing Christian presence and mission in those areas of new housing – one of the particular challenges facing this Diocese. In addition to being schools, some of those buildings – perhaps most of them – will have the potential to host new worshipping communities as well. And so it is something we need to be aware of and, indeed, to be thankful for – not least to those who have laboured very hard to obtain that money and I think particularly of the Chief Executives of the Trusts concerned and our own Education Team represented by John Constanti and by Bishop Simon as Chair of the Board.
6. All of this has taken place while we also as a Diocese enable parishes to retain locally a higher proportion of their unrestricted income than most other dioceses in the Church of England. You note that I’m putting that the positive way round quite deliberately. In Rochester, well over 60% on average of that income is retained in parishes for local ministry and mission. In our neighbours in Canterbury and Chichester that figure is 50% or, in fact, significantly less than 50%. That is one reason why we are able to have, for example, many more employed youth, children’s and families’ workers in our communities than is the case in most other dioceses.

I do actually believe that all of that is about good stewardship, exercised by us in this Synod and those who work on our behalf. And that puts us within realistic reach – and others will say more about this later on – of a situation that could be break-even and that, in turn, opens up for us the possibility of a different kind of conversation for the future. That conversation would be less about reducing stipendiary posts overall – we’ve done a lot of that – and more about making sure that the posts that we do have are the right posts in the right places, in the places where they are most needed for the mission of God. That conversation would be increasingly about how we invest in mission across all our communities in the Diocese, rural as well as urban, existing as well as new. That conversation would be about how we can continue to foster vocations not only for our own benefit, but also to give away to the Church across our nation, and that too is beginning to happen.

And yes, there are challenges which may at times work in opposing ways and make things difficult for us. Yes, total clergy numbers nationally will still decline for some years due to retirements and we need to be realistic about that. The economic impact of Brexit may (depending on what it turns out to be) affect levels of giving in our churches, as also other charities and such like are having to face.

IICSA's report on the Church of England will almost certainly affect our public reputation in the land in unhelpful ways and hence have an impact upon our work of evangelism, our credibility in the light of our communities and our society. And, no doubt about, and one might as well name it, our internal disagreements over human identity and sexuality will also have their public effect, and that will, as it were, come out in a more public way next year when documents are published probably in the summer of next year. For these and other reasons, I am certainly not complacent. But I do dare to believe that as a diocesan family, insofar as we are able to shape our own life, we may in some respects at least be on the threshold of a future which has some stability sustainability about it.

Finally I want to turn to what is perhaps the most important dimension of our stewardship – and that is our stewardship of the gospel or, as the first letter of Peter puts it, our stewardship of God's grace in its various forms. This too we are called to guard, to grow and to pass on. One dimension of that will be touched upon this morning because it is encompassed within the 'Life Together' shape of Christian living which we will hear about later on. This is the offer to us as a pattern for Christian living in fellowship with others, offering both accountability and mutual support in discipleship. It embodies much of what is found in the national 'Setting God's People Free' document; it is about 7-day/week discipleship within a framework of mutual commitment to prayer and Christian living. To refer to our gospel reading we heard earlier, it is about how we may be fruitful branches within the vine. And in terms of that potential fruitfulness, actually this could be more important than anything else I have talked about this morning. Indeed without it – without that faithfulness of discipleship and the life of prayer – the other things become mere good activity rather than faithful and fruitful following of Christ. So let us indeed seek to be faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. Thank you.

2. DBF Budget 2020

Mr Nigel Pope introduced himself to members as the new Chair of the DBF, saying this had been his first budget process for the Diocese and adding that some aspects of diocesan finances were complicated. To give some background to his appointment as Chair, he told Synod that he had worshipped in the Diocese for almost 40 years, had served for 13 years as a parish treasurer, six as churchwarden, and been on his PCC for more than 25 years. His first three months as Chair of the DBF had taught him that it was not an "us and them" process, although it could often feel like it in the parishes, but was rather "all of us together" with the same goal – to grow God's kingdom.

The Budget Review Group, Finance Committee and Bishop's Council had all debated the budget before Synod agreed that the Diocese should be aiming for a break-even budget in 2020. This would require an increase in parish offers (including DBF fees) of 7.1% and, whilst it was acknowledged that this would not be easy, it was achievable.

To provide a context to the budget before members, Mr Pope reminded Synod that the Diocese had, in March 2018, agreed a Finance Strategy to break-even in 2020. In order to do that, it had introduced the following measures:-

- Implementation of Called Together
- Launch of Common Fund and Indicative Offers
- Control of Diocesan Support Expenditure over the last 10 years, despite increasing costs of compliance, including safeguarding
- Absorption of other additional costs in recent years with the transfer of costs from National Church, including clergy pension deficit payments (c£7M provision), and the transfer of the cost of curates from parishes (c£1M pa)

The proposed break-even budget for 2020 was based on £9.4M Parish Offers and the recovery of DBF fees. If all parishes met their Indicative Offers, the actual result would be an income of £9.7M. The 2021 forecast assumed full receipt of Indicative Offers, with an increase in offers (including DBF fees) of 7.1% in 2020 and of 3.2% in 2021.

However, Mr Pope noted that there had been no increase in offers over the past few years despite unavoidable increases in diocesan expenditure, and therefore it had seemed right to prepare a fall-back position, which would result in a deficit of £0.8m.

The principal movements required to achieve the break-even budget were:-

	£K
Deficit per 2019 Forecast	(618)
Transfer from Diocesan Pastoral Account (re 2019 Budget)	(500)
Decrease in clergy stipends	105
Increase in Parish Offers	250*
Recovery of DBF fees	387*
Reduction in lay pension costs	166
Increase in capitalisation of parsonage costs	100
Other	<u>28</u>
Deficit per 2020 Budget	(82)

The Rev Richard Williams, Finance Director, said that Rochester needed to challenge itself to come up with the funds. Evidence showed that no particular share system was major factor in the recovery of parish share. Rochester Diocese was ranked at 37th when it came to parish share as a percentage of parish income.

He added that other dioceses had requested much larger increases in giving, which had been met or almost met:-

- Truro had requested a 26% increase in parish share in 2015 which led to a 21.5% in-year step change in parish share collected
- Peterborough yielded an 18.2% increase between 2013 and 2017.
- Norwich introduced a new share system in 2014, which moved to a cost base approach, which resulted in a 15.9% increase over the period.

Mr Williams went on to say that effective deployment and a focus on growth were key, and that the Diocese should not be seeking simply to manage decline. It was not about the system but about coming together and that an increase of 10% over two years was manageable. He added that the Diocese was looking to support stewardship through the appointment of a Generous Giving Officer, and parishes that had undergone a stewardship campaign had seen a noticeable difference in giving.

Members were urged to look at the resources and presentations on the website in relation to the Common Fund, to use them widely in parishes and deaneries, and then to have honest discussions in their parishes as to what their offer would be.

The Rev Trudi Oliver (Gravesend Deanery) had noticed that there was a reduction in laity pensions and wondered why. The Finance Director responded that there had been a review of the closed diocesan staff pension scheme over the last 18 months, which had resulted in a slight reduction both in the terms of that scheme but also a member had retired. There was a small number of members left in that defined benefits scheme and this was obviously reducing. The contribution rate for the defined contributions scheme open to new staff was 5% of income, and that was less onerous in terms of diocesan expenditure. Mrs Oliver replied that she felt a bit uncomfortable seeing the laity pension scheme going down while the clergy one was going up. Mr Williams responded that the deficit for the clergy pension scheme was reducing and there had been a reworking of the undergirding calculation of the deficit going forward, which had led to a reworking of the contributions required for that scheme. He added that the deficit for the laity pension scheme would be completely paid down by the end of 2019.

The Rev Nigel Bourne (Gravesend) stated that he would vote in favour of the budget. However, he felt it would have been significantly better if parishes had been informed of their likely offer levels much earlier to enable Deanery Synods and particularly Area Deans to see if contributions could be met. He said it would be unreasonable for Synod to try and reject the budget, but he had severe reservations about its achievability, so the second motion helped him to support it. Gravesend Deanery had 12 benefices, three of which paid sufficient to cover their ministry costs. The one that currently paid the most had indicated that they would not be able to pay as much in 2020, as had the next highest payer. Gravesend was not a rich deanery and even the richer parts were saying that they had difficulties. The poorer parts, he thought, would find it inevitably impossible to give an average of 7% more.

Mr Williams said that there had been much discussion on the date of publishing the Indicative Offers, and it had been felt better to share the Common Fund literature as a whole to enable parishes to get to grips with it, and then to produce Indicative Offers after Synod. The calculations had been worked on for a long time, and parishes had received the calculation for 2018 and the formula was quite simple, so most PCC Treasurers were pretty well informed already. He apologised if parishes did not understand their likely position but hoped the Indicative Offers would be published in the coming week.

The Rev Canon Mark Barker (General Synod) said that the figures seemed to suggest the base case over five years would leave the Diocese in a better position than the break-even budget.

Mr Williams replied that the base case included assumptions on reductions in clergy numbers, which still had to be achieved. And the ultimate aim was to get to a position where there was no longer a need for reductions to save money.

Mr Laurence Pearce (Sevenoaks Deanery) remarked that the leasehold improvements seemed to him to be an infinitely flexible possibility of numbers, whilst the reduction in lay pension costs seemed to be a one-off saving resulting in a gap in future years.

Mr Nigel Pope clarified that the reduction in lay pension costs was a contribution to the deficit which had previously been payable, and which would not be necessary going forward thereby becoming a yearly saving rather than a one-off.

Mr Gerry O'Brien (Sevenoaks) thanked those involved for all the work in producing the budget and felt that the Diocese had to go for it, saying it was courageous because it sought increases over previous years. He asked that, as the 2021 budget was planned, those working on it should bear in mind that, over the last seven years, numbers on Electoral Rolls had declined by 27%, so there were fewer people contributing towards a bigger budget and there was a need to be realistic in what was requested.

Bishop James said that he had been encouraged that, when the proposal to fund three half-time Growth Enabler posts was taken to the Bishop's Council, the Council had insisted on the need to invest in growth and evangelism and therefore agreed it was necessary for the posts to be full-time roles.

Mr Williams added that, whilst the amount of personal giving had to increase to meet the budget requirements, it should be remembered that the Diocese of Rochester was currently in the bottom quartile of dioceses when it came to giving – Rochester gave at 3.4% of income whilst the average across the country was 3.7%. He also pointed out that the rate of decline had tailed off and the Diocese was working hard to ensure it was headed for growth.

Mr Martin Sewell (General Synod) said that his parish was not prepared to run a deficit in order to meet the suggested parish offer. However, there would be a feeling of guilt that the parish was not meeting the offer, and he wondered how that might be mitigated against.

Mr David Fitzpatrick (Orpington Deanery) pointed out that parishes had to have faith that God would provide, adding that the Electoral Roll was not the only judge of those who were giving in parishes.

Mr Cameron Clark (Cobham Deanery) said that he would wish to amend the second motion to read "notes" rather than "endorses". Whilst he supported the budget, he too had a number of reservations. Community Engagement & Social Action was a rapidly growing cost, and he wondered how its effectiveness was evaluated. He also questioned why there was an increase in staffing within Children & Young People, when the spending had been reduced. On the matter of Safeguarding, Mr Clark asked what would happen if the external funding provision for the Past Cases Review was not forthcoming. Finally, he questioned why a new diocesan website was deemed necessary.

In conclusion, he felt the Diocese was unlikely to achieve a break-even budget in practice and, whilst it was not wrong to have the faith to plan such a budget, it would not have an instant payback. His own parish was hoping to meet its offer in full but could only do so by using £10k from its reserves. Many parishes would not have that option.

The Diocesan Secretary responded to Mr Clark, saying that the Community Engagement & Social Action increase was being sourced from external funds, and there were clear plans for evaluation and reporting. The issue of Children & Young People was multi-faceted, but the staff increase was also sourced from external funds. With regard to safeguarding, this was a point where the DBF would pick up the slack for parishes – it was an unavoidable cost, but the work had to be undertaken to ensure transparency and support for survivors of abuse. Mr Girt emphasised that Electoral Roll figures were not the sole basis for calculating parish offers.

Bishop James added that, on the subject of safeguarding, he was looking to see what funds might be released from his budget towards this expense.

The Archdeacon of Tonbridge, speaking on the need for a new website, said that she had received more and more negative feedback on the current website over the last couple of years, with people complaining that it was not easy to navigate and far from fit for purpose. She was supportive of all that the Communications Team were doing to ensure a better service for parishes was provided going forward. Bishop James added that the provision of a new website was being undertaken in partnership with a number of other dioceses, so design costs, etc, would be shared.

The Chair of the Board of Finance MOVED:

"That the Synod authorises the expenditure of a sum for the Common Fund not exceeding £13.5M".

On being PUT, the motion was CARRIED *nem con*.

Mr Cameron Clark (Cobham Deanery) proposed that the second motion be amended to read "That the Synod *notes* the Bishop's Council's approach to the 2020 Budget with the aim of breaking even in 2020 but with a prudent fall-back plan should parish offers fall short of the required level."

On being PUT, the amendment to the motion FELL.

The Chair of the Board of Finance therefore MOVED:

"That the Synod endorses the Bishop's Council's approach to the 2020 Budget with the aim of breaking even in 2020 but with a prudent fall-back plan should parish offers fall short of the required level."

On being PUT, the motion was CARRIED, with three abstentions.

3. **Safeguarding**

(a) Update

The Archdeacon of Tonbridge informed members that a letter would be going out shortly concerning the Past Cases Review and detailing necessary action by parishes.

Resources to support parishes over the coming months would be available on the diocesan website. A project manager had been appointed to lead the Diocese through the Past Cases Review process, which was proving incredibly helpful. More files had been discovered which needed to be reviewed, and Bishops court staff had been undertaking preparatory work which had proved more extensive than envisaged. A bespoke NSPCC helpline had been set up for those affected by issues raised by the review.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

(b) Policy and Guidance Documents

The Archdeacon of Tonbridge said that parishes had already been notified about the key changes coming up with regard to safeguarding training, and that staff at Bishops court had gone through the guidance on recruitment of PTO clergy with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser to ensure compliance. She urged parishes to get in touch with the Safeguarding Team if they had any questions about training, safer recruitment and the like.

Mr Gordon Hunt (Malling Deanery) felt the document before Synod on training and development was rather unclear. He pointed out that Synod was being asked to adopt the guidance and it seemed there was no choice in that, so there was little point in the adoption process. As he understood it, House of Bishops' guidance, as soon as it was issued, had a certain legal force and church officers were required to give it due regard.

Mrs Conalty replied that Synod was, indeed, obliged to adopt the guidance, and she would certainly recommend that course of action. There was a question around insurance and whether the Diocese would be covered if it did not adopt it. She felt, also, that it gave a strong message that the Synod cared about safeguarding, training and safer recruitment, so it made sense to adopt it.

Mrs Jane Belle (Sevenoaks Deanery) asked whether dioceses were linking over this, particularly with regard to past cases and retired clergy. Mrs Conalty replied that such linking up was happening all the time, eg in the last few days the communications strategy about the Past Cases Review had been shared with the national team, who were then sharing it with other dioceses as a good practice example for them to use. The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser also met regularly with the national team and other lead safeguarding advisers from across the country.

Mr Martin Sewell (General Synod) added that there was also a channel of communication from some of the survivors of abuse that was fed back to the diocesan safeguarding leads as appropriate. He also said that the Archdeacon was a much-trusted figure within that.

The Archdeacon of Tonbridge MOVED that:

“The Synod ADOPTS the following documents, issued by the House of Bishops:-

- [Practice Guidance: Safeguarding Training and Development \(July 2019\)](#)
- [Practice Guidance: Safer Recruitment – Permission to Officiate](#)

On being PUT, the motion was CARRIED, with two abstentions.

MRS SARAH POOLE IN THE CHAIR

4. Deanery Synod Representation

The Diocesan Secretary informed members that the formula before them was unchanged from that agreed after a rigorous Synod debate in 2014, the Bishop’s Council having noted that a number of parishes still found it difficult to fill all their seats.

The Rev Jeremy Blunden then MOVED:-

“That the Synod adopts the formula below, as recommended by the Bishop’s Council, to determine the lay representation on Deanery Synods, as given below:-

No on the Electoral Roll	No of Representatives to Deanery Synod
1-50	1
51-150	2
151-225	3
226-300	4
301 or over	5”

The motion was seconded by Mr Philip French. On being PUT, the motion was CARRIED, with 1 against.

5. Diocesan Policy on the Environment – Care for Creation

Bishop James reminded members that the original motion from Sevenoaks Deanery Synod had talked about the formation of a diocesan policy. However, having considered the issues, it had felt more appropriate to take a different approach at this stage to produce a diocesan workstream that could grow and develop as necessary. Miss Claire Boxall, the Called Together Manager, had been asked take the lead on this.

Miss Boxall drew Synod's attention to the paper circulated prior to the meeting, saying that things were moving quickly as Care for Creation was becoming a widely debated issue in Church life with regards to what action dioceses, churches and individuals should be taking. Indeed, the Archbishop of Canterbury had spoken on the subject of climate change just recently (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgsJE2UnGk4>).

Miss Boxall said that this was not a discussion as to whether climate change should be an issue for Christians but about what action they should take. There was much data and many reports being gathered on the subject, and those seemed gloomy at first sight but there were points of light within them.

She urged members to look at the EcoChurch site (www.ecochurcharocha.org.uk/) and to take the survey there to see how 'green' their parish was. Miss Boxall commented that staff had been thrilled by the number of members who had brought their reusable cups to the meeting – this had resulted in half the usual number of disposable cups being used – so bit by bit Synod was becoming more eco-friendly.

A multi-faceted approach was being taken, in that properties were being reviewed to understand what could be done practically there, and discipleship was also being looked at, as the two went hand in hand. In the new year there would be a number of things in which parishes and individuals could get involved, eg, a new Lent book written by Dr Ruth Valerio would be out in November and would be publicised widely; the Lambeth Conference would have climate change as a major topic of conversation because it was affecting partner dioceses already; and there would be an international policy event in Glasgow and anyone wishing to be involved in that in some way should be in touch with her. Finally, a Working Group was being formed and those who had already expressed an interest had been contacted in the first instance, but anyone else who was interested in being part of that group should also get in touch.

Bishop James then opened the item up for comments.

The Rev Richard Martin (Gravesend Deanery) wished to reiterate that care for creation was not a solely Christian concern, and the Diocese would do well to link with interfaith groups on the matter. He encouraged the Working Group to embrace working with others. By way of a small example, he said that participants in an interfaith walk in Gravesend during Interfaith Week in November and, as part of that, participants would be litter picking as they walked together.

Mr Martin Sewell (Gravesend Deanery) wanted to ensure that the issue was approached in a positive way, because he had recently read on social media that a pupil had committed suicide because he was concerned about climate change. He emphasised that, amongst the narratives, some would be extreme, irresponsible, or political, and it was vital to talk about it positively – the aim was to educate and not to frighten.

Mr Gerry O'Brien (Sevenoaks Deanery) added that, in his opinion, change came about through the ballot box. He thought, therefore, that members should consider getting involved with a political party and urge a greener policy from within.

He urged Synod to take part in the political process, rather than discount it, adding that Jesus instructed his followers to be salt and that salt had to be added to the mix in order to make a difference.

The Rev Roger Bristow (Bromley Deanery) pointed out that there was a clear desire for the DBF, the DBE and the Cathedral to work more closely together and this topic gave the perfect theme for the next Church Schools Festival.

The Rev Canon Mark Barker (General Synod) commented that there were no dates attached to the aims in the paper and that would be helpful. He wondered too whether the appointment of an Environmental Officer would be possible, although he recognised that this might require funding.

Miss Boxall responded that she hoped the following times would be possible: _

Short-term – by Christmas.

Medium-term – within six months

Long-term – thereafter

On the matter of an Environmental Officer, she had asked other dioceses what they had done and discovered there was a majority of voluntary post-holders with very few paid.

Bishop James added that one of the tasks of the working group was to tighten up on timings, etc, and to work out how frequently Diocesan Synod should be updated on the aims. He also recognised that schools could teach the Diocese a lot and it would be good to harness the passion and knowledge there.

Bishop James then MOVED that:

“This Synod approve the approach outlined in the paper and encourage interested individuals to join the Environment Working Group”.

On being PUT, the motion was CARRIED *nem con*.

6. Called Together

The Called Together Manager, Miss Claire Boxall, introduced the item, saying there were a number of things to bring before Synod, and she had asked various speakers assist in this.

Firstly, the Rev Jane Winter spoke about “Life Together”, a new initiative, launched at the Licensed Lay Ministries Conference, which sought to be a diocesan rhythm of life that was a strong but flexible resource for all different worshipping communities.

The aim for the diocesan rhythm of life was to help build confident disciples – a clear desire that emerged from ‘Our Conversation, Our Future’. There was no one definition of ‘disciple’, but being a disciple involved being with Jesus and acting like Jesus – both were necessary.

Growth as disciples came from learning from Jesus and one another, and putting that learning into practice, and being a disciple was a way of life.

Mrs Winter went on to explain that a small planning group had been given the following brief on what a rhythm of life should be:-

1. For the whole Diocese – that meant:
 - all the different groupings within our Diocese – churches, groups in churches, schools, work places, etc
 - all the different people groupings: young, old, parish based, commuters,
 - all the different ministries, that means all of us.

It was to be a community rhythm of life

2. Inclusive of elements of Benedictine spirituality, fostering the relationship with the Cathedral and with St Mary's Abbey, West Malling, both of which were Benedictine foundations.

Life Together had been trialled with different pilot groups and feedback taken into account, and advice had also been sought from the sisters at St Mary's Abbey.

The Benedictine tradition had given three strands – Abiding, Obeying, and Conversion:-

- Abiding – being with Christ; being rooted together in Christ
- Obeying – responding to Christ through listening together
- Conversion – loving like Christ – a different way of life as a result of abiding and obeying.

Each group that took up Life Together would decide how they would do it, just as Benedict expected communities of monks to work out how to live his rule together.

Life Together was a way of being in community, abiding and responding to Jesus together, and therefore was not individualistic but was about being intentional in supporting one another.

Testimonies on the different ways of being part of a Life Together were shared - a group at the Cathedral had set aside a time to meet, whilst members of the Diocesan Youth Council – spread across the Diocese as they were – had set up a WhatsApp group and prayed with and for each other online. Mother Mary David at the Abbey insisted Life Together was about “doing what you can, not what you can't”.

The pilot groups had provided some ideas which would be available on the diocesan website.

Mrs Caroline Clarke, Diocesan Community Engagement & Social Responsibility Advisor, picked up the baton and spoke about various community initiatives that were currently being championed in the Diocese.

She told members of the need to ensure people could recognise the signs that a person had been trafficked into modern slavery and could therefore offer help in escaping the situation. Mrs Clarke also mentioned the help that was available to parishes and people who had contact with rough sleepers – the largest group of people likely to be targeted for trafficking at the moment.

And there was also the White Ribbon campaign, which sought to end male violence against women, and invited men to make a pledge never to commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women.

Mrs Clarke urged Synod to take the literature she had available, and to use the resources available on the diocesan website to inform their parishes.

Bishop Simon then spoke on the work of the new Growth Enablers, and the text is as below:-

The worst kind of defeatism is when we stop doing the right things because we don't see quick results. The second worst kind of defeatism is when we won't try something new because we can't imagine the results. The Holy Spirit is a spring of living water for us. Think about the liquidity of water and its capacity to seep everywhere. There is a fluidity and speed about God's work that means we are always catching up.

Part of the duty of mission is to notice the opportunities, the patterns and trends of local life. To join the dots. Behavioural science and behavioural economics are expanding all the time. How do we identify spiritual behaviours in our communities and respond to them in ways that point to Jesus?

One of the risks of parish ministry – I speak from gold star personal experience - is to re-invent the wheel. To arrive at an idea that has been thought of and implemented already just down the road. Thankfully I think we are moving away from this failing as parishes learn from one another, but there is still some way to go. There is also a strong case for obtaining a more objective view of what is going on in the parish. We like to think we know our parishes well, but it is unlikely we do, given the speed of change and the greater anonymity of neighbourhoods.

Think back to the world in early 2011 when the last census was taken. The banking crash had just happened, austerity lay ahead, social media was in its infancy, politics was stable. It has been a decade of astonishing change that impacts intimately on our neighbourhoods. When we've sat in front of the same CCTV screen for months on end (if you'll take the metaphor), it's easy to miss the movements that matter. A fresh pair of eyes goes a long way.

We have created three growth enabler posts, one for each archdeaconry. Two of them are here today: Abi Hiscocks (who will work in Bromley and Bexley archdeaconry) and Dylan Turner (whose patch will be Rochester archdeaconry). The third, Graham Wilkinson, will work in Tonbridge archdeaconry. Here are three things, among others, they will do:

1. *Come alongside parishes to help them further establish a vision for numerical and spiritual growth, using the excellent toolkit created by our own clergy and lay leaders.*
2. *Work closely with each archdeacon and their steering group to deliver support in a coherent, informed way.*
3. *Share thinking with those who support ministry with children and young people and who deliver community engagement, to ensure we do not miss things or fail to mobilise behind the Spirit's leading.*

Here are three things the growth enablers will not do:

1. *They won't tell people how to do things, like the worst kind of management consultant.*
2. *They won't have pre-programmed answers from a one size fits all checklist created by a diabolical diocesan algorithm. There is a receptiveness and flexibility about this process, so that learning can be shared across the diocese. Each growth enabler will come with an open and enquiring mind, keen not just to advise, but to be advised so that other parishes may benefit.*
3. *They won't audit the church they visit. Let me spend a moment or two on this one. I get twitchiness. The feeling that your inadequacies are only ever inches from being exposed. We are defensive because the Church seems to exist in practice in an edgy twilight world somewhere between grace and law. There's no doubt what we believe. Grace, God's boundless favour, should free us to live boldly and lovingly. Instead, we wait for the next discouragement to come our way for how we think we've failed. And then visit the same criticisms on others because we've been hurt.*

If anyone feels anxious that their ministry is going to be found wanting, I invite them to contact Caroline Butler, my PA, and she will fix up a time when you can come round to my home and listen to me talk about my own weaknesses and mistakes in ministry. Block out a day for it.

We need so much more honesty in our ministry for God. Because it's then we begin to join another set of dots, those that connect our human weakness and God's strength. If I have any prayer for our diocese, it's that this kind of honesty will be liberated.

The growth enablers will come in their own human weakness, to help create a dynamic of encouragement, support and advice in mission.

We are a people of resurrection. And we all have a deep longing for Jesus to be embraced in our lives and in the lives of those around us. To bring healing for people in this most insecure and fractious of times. To help make this a reality, we have to work more closely and smartly together in mission.

Miss Boxall summed up by saying that the work which made up Called Together was vast and very varied, and she urged members to hold it all in prayer.

The Roger Bristow (Bromley) said that his Deanery Synod had recently had a presentation on work with children and young people. He pointed out that, if the churches were serious about recognising children and young people as part of the life of the Church today, then they needed to be serious about how they included them. He felt strongly that one way was to look at how to involve children and young people in ministry – active at the front of the church and engaged fully with all aspects of church life. He wondered whether a course in lay ministry – one that was authorised by the Bishop – could be developed for young people to engender a real sense of trust in them and in their ministry.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

7. General Synod Report

The Rev Canon Mark Barker reminded members that they had received a very thorough written report from Mrs Angela Scott. He wished to draw attention to a few things within in it.

One topic was on knife crime, which had been at the forefront of publicity in Rochester with the Cathedral recently hosting the Knife Angel sculpture. General Synod debated a motion for churches to be encouraged to offer a place of sanctuary to young people as part of efforts to combat knife crime and serious youth violence in their communities.

There had been an overwhelming vote in support of a proposal to improve the approach to the care and wellbeing of clergy.

There were further steps towards bringing the Church of England and the Methodist Church into communion with each other. That had received Synod's backing but not the green light that was perhaps hoped for, and the House of Bishops was asked to report back in the next quinquennium.

Synod received a very powerful presentation on safeguarding led by Bishop Peter Hancock, with input from the independent Chair of the National Safeguarding Panel and from a survivor of abuse. A very penetrating and sometimes uncomfortable question time followed.

Southwark Diocese presented a Diocesan Synod Motion, which sought the welcoming of refugees with professional qualifications and the provision for courses and placements to enable them to practice in the United Kingdom.

Synod was informed that further funding of around £50m would be released over the next five years for Strategic Development Fund bids.

Last on the agenda, but definitely not least, was Mrs Angela Scott – supported by Ms Debbie Thrower – who led the presentation on Anna Chaplaincy as a Rochester Diocesan Synod Motion. The Guardian and the Daily Mail had both run articles on the matter the following day, and there was much support for the motion, commending and calling every diocese in the country to engage in mission and ministry to older folk, especially those living with dementia, and highlighting the work of Anna Chaplaincy and the Gift of years.

Canon Barker concluded by reminding members that General Synod elections would be held in 2020 and that some existing Rochester representatives had indicated their intention to stand down. He therefore urged Synod to pray about that, and to talk to and encourage others to stand.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

8. Time for Questions

(a) Question from Mr Terry Whittaker (Gillingham Deanery)

“It is understood that new Church Representation Rules are being published and that these will allow the use of electronic signatures, eg for people joining the electoral roll or for completing election forms for diocesan committees or synodical posts.

“Can the Synod be assured that, following the introduction of the new CRRs, guidance will be given as quickly as possible on what is acceptable as an electronic signature, and under which circumstances they might be used?”

Response from the Diocesan Secretary

“As soon as the necessary information is available to us from the National Church, we will ensure that parishes are given guidance as to how they might implement the use of electronic signatures.”

Mrs Poole reminded members that the next meeting would be on Saturday 7 March 2020 at St Andrew’s Church, Paddock Wood. The summer meeting, on Tuesday 7 July 2020, would begin with Evensong at the Cathedral and then move to Bishops court.

Bishop James concluded the meeting by saying that, with regard to the General Synod Report, he had to confess to being quite proud of Rochester Diocese and what it had achieved with its motion on dementia at the July Sessions. He had also been very encouraged by the passion and tone of the debates during this Synod meeting.

The Synod closed with prayer at 1:05pm.