

DIGEST

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Oxford Diocesan Synod

A summary of the meeting held on Saturday 5th September 2020 via Zoom.

1. Welcome and Opening Worship

The Rt. Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, welcomed Synod members and visitors to the meeting. He noted two new members elected to Oxford Deanery Clergy. The meeting began with opening worship using Dwelling in the Word, and the passage Philippians 1.27-2.13 was read first by Mrs Sue Scane and then by the Ven Jonathan Chaffey. The Synod then broke into groups of three to reflect and discuss what God was prompting them.

2. Notices

A number of notices were given. The House of Clergy had met prior to the Synod main meeting to elect a new Chair of the House of Clergy and Vice-President of the Synod, following the resignation of the Revd Canon Sue Booy. The Revd Canon Dr Geoff Bayliss was formally elected to the role.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday 14th March 2020 were approved and signed by Bishop Steven.

4. Questions: TWO questions had been received under Standing Order 70 from Mr Philip Read, Newbury Deanery. One concerning finance and parish share rebates and the other a safeguarding question.

Question ONE: asked "The criteria for the first 1% of the Share rebate for 2020 appear to have been met by every Deanery, thanks to the change in methodology this year. However, it is clear that, despite valiant efforts by the Diocesan Finance team, and the majority of Parishes in the Diocese, a shortfall in Parish Share receipts, probably of around 5% of the budget, will occur, in 2020 and possibly also in 2021.

He asked, "To mitigate this risk, please can there be a further amendment to the rebate provisions such that the 2% rebate for meeting 100% of the 2020 Share is assessed by Parish, and not by the Deanery as a whole? These rebates should continue to be payable to the Deanery, and not to each individual Parish".

In response the Chair of the Board of Finance, The Revd John Tattersall noted his huge thanks for the valiant efforts of so many parishes across the Diocese to pay their parish share in full in a time when parish income may have been reduced and raising funds had been very challenging. It had been humbling to hear of the commitment of parishes to strongly support ministry in the very diverse contexts within the Diocese.

He noted the Diocese recognises that a number of deaneries will not manage to pay their share in full at the end of 2020 and so will not achieve the full rebate. For this reason the diocese was pleased to be able to flex the process to some extent which gave most deaneries the opportunity to, at least, achieve a 1% rebate for paying 50% by the end of July (rather than June, as usually), but it was not possible to go beyond this.

Question TWO: noted that the General Synod in July 2020 was informed that there were currently 27 active National Safeguarding Team Core Groups. It was asked how many of those applied to clergy and retired clergy in the Oxford Diocese? Of those clergy, how many had been suspended or had their Permission to Officiate revoked on the basis of allegations made, but not investigated or proven, and before the findings of the relevant Core Group have been published? Was it Christ-like for the Church of England and the Oxford Diocese to endorse such action by presuming guilt until proved innocent, in contravention of the principles of human rights of being presumed innocent until proved guilty?"

A reply from the Diocesan Secretary, Canon Mark Humphriss, noted that whilst we have a role in them when they affect this diocese, National Safeguarding Team Core Groups are handled by the National Safeguarding Team. Whether national or diocesan, it would be inappropriate to comment further than the detail already provided regarding active safeguarding matters. Bishop Steven is under a legal obligation by virtue of the Safeguarding Measure 2016 to have due regard to recommendations Core Groups make to him, which he has been careful to observe.

He added that both the House of Bishops' Policy and the Code of Practice on these matters were clear that the withdrawal of permission to officiate or suspension of any priest or deacon pending an investigation is a neutral act. These were matters of risk assessment and/or proper procedure, rather than findings of fact.

5. **Presidential Address:** Bishop Steven gave an address entitled 'Humility and Gentleness'.

In his address Bishop Steven focussed on the work of rebuilding in a season when we are still learning to live with Covid-19. He noted that the coming months would be difficult dealing with the aftermath of the first wave: bereavement and ongoing sickness for some; emotional and mental illness for others; the economic effects of lockdown; difficulties in families; the effects on the education and wellbeing of children and young people; the disproportionate effects on some communities. But as we begin to regather, knowing that the storm is not yet over.

Examining how we should minister and serve our communities and God's world in this next season, in a world in continuing crisis, he asked, "How can we play our part as disciples and as citizens and play that part together as part of the Church of Jesus Christ?" He noted how we all have wisdom to bring to this process and we will need insight from each other. Responding to the question requires us to draw inspiration and our pattern from the humility and gentleness of Christ. These are the qualities we will need as disciples and as the Church in this season.

He noted two biblical passages that when examined would pave the way to recovery: The first was the tender description of the servant of God in Isaiah 42. The servant is called to minister to God's people in a time of great crisis yet also great hope for the future. Isaiah 42 describes the kind of leadership which is needed in such a time of jeopardy and danger. The second passage was the one he hoped many would read together as we dwell in the word in this coming year from Philippians 1 and 2. Paul describes the heart of the way in which Almighty God ministers in coming to a world in chaos and crisis and hurt.

The group broke into chat rooms to reflect on the passage. There was an opportunity for members to reflect on their discussions.

Bishop Steven's full address can be found at [LINK](#)

6. **AGM of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance (ODBF)**

Mr John Sykes adjourned the meeting so the Annual General Meeting of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance could take place. The Synod received and approved the Minutes of the previous meeting held on Saturday 15th June 2019, as well as receiving and adopting the Directors' Report and Financial Statements 2019. Members then approved the re-appointment of Critchleys Accountants LLP as auditors for the coming year. Following a break, the meeting then reconvened.

7. **Financial Update and Draft 2021 Budget and Share Allocation**

The Revd John Tattersall addressed the Synod presenting the draft budget for 2021 for approval in outline. It would be debated more fully in November. He noted three key factors:

1. The financial outturn for the current year – he thanked all parishes and deaneries, particular in getting so much parish share in by the end of July, recognising the significant level of hard work, with the strong support of deanery treasurers.
2. He gave thanks to Alison Jestico and the Diocesan Secretary for the level of savings achieved in the central costs, all made without compromising mission.
3. A decision had been made not to over-react too quickly when lockdown struck by not cutting clergy numbers or clergy stipends, which had still felt the right decision, particular as emphasised in Bishop Steven's presidential address.

He reflected on the Total Return approach noting that the Bishop's Council had considered carefully how much the diocese could afford to release by managing its investments on a Total Return basis. He noted that despite the initial setbacks to the markets in February/March the portfolio had recovered well – a fall of only 2.1% to date for which he paid tribute to our investment managers and the confidence of the investment sub-committee for the diocese. A decision to continue a withdrawal rate of 7% per annum over the next triennium would allow availability of funds for the Common Vision programme and the Development Fund of around £2.5m per year.

A summary of budget drivers: No increase in parish share in coming year other than the 5 deaneries who were under a special agreement that is being phased out over a five-year period. Savings across the diocese without compromising mission. Not seeking to impose cuts in clergy numbers, except where individual deanery synods agree (now a devolved process linked to parish share management). This remains a local decision-making process but will be kept under review. There would be no increase in clergy stipends in 2021 in line with national church trends, just as there had been no cost of living increase in DBF salaries.

After a period of discussion and concerns the Synod took note of paper [ODS 20.07](#)

8. Annual Report and Accounts of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE)

The Vice-Chair of the Board of Education, Mrs Maureen Lomas, who introduced the item, noted how 2020 had already given rise to some big challenges and much planning in different ways to usual. Following the lockdown our attention should return to being compassionate and courageous as schools begin to open. She thanked all governors in schools, noting there was a desperate need for foundation governors at this time.

The Director of Education, Mr Tony Wilson, formally presented the Annual Report and Accounts for 2019 of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education 2019. It was noted that education is going through a challenging time with ever increasing demands on the education team and he gave recognition to the excellent service they provide. In his presentation, Mr Wilson noted they operated on three strands: Leadership and engagement; Development and Support, and Quality and Delivery. Some of the highlights include 28 headteachers being trained as part of the first Church of England Professional Qualification for Headship (CEPQH) Oxford cohort under a pilot scheme. Growing Faith has been a part of the Common Vision Programme bringing together two strands of common vision: one serving our schools and the other focussed on children and young people, *Disciples Together* which was launched at the last meeting. Other highlights were: 8 new school chaplaincies, the pilot of The Contemplative Toolkit to 30+ primary schools, 11 ODBE schools being linked with a partner school in India working on becoming carbon neutral, linked with USPG and a new ODBE brand established and applied.

Mr Wilson expressed thanks for the work in the current Coronavirus Crisis and the ongoing issues and challenges being faced. A key document 'Finding your Way' had been published around returning to education and a resource for headteachers was well received. Schools are now using online platforms to deliver routine events, including assemblies and end of term services, some led by Bishop Steven, and this pattern may continue for some time.

After a period of discussion and questions, Canon Geoff Bayliss thanked Tony and all his colleagues for the tremendous work the Education team were engaging with. Members were then asked to 'take note' of the reports. The reports, together with the [PowerPoint Presentation](#) are available on the website at [LINK](#)

9. Report on the Cowley Working Group

The Revd Canon Verena Breed, Chair of the Cowley Working Group, gave a short presentation on behalf of the Bishop's Council outlining the recommendations of the working group. The Cowley Deanery Synod Motion was first introduced by Jayne Ozanne, together with Revd Canon Dr Geoff Bayliss, and supported by this Diocesan Synod in November 2019. The working group formed following Synod's approval of the Motion, and the final report was presented to the Bishop's Council in July 2020 and unanimously supported. The recommendations in the report reflect the aim of the working group to look at how to best provide urgent practical support and funding to be able to provide basic facilities where needed in churches enabling them to fulfil their mission. In order to gauge the level of inequality that exists between the churches across the diocese, the group, working together with the DAC team, developed a questionnaire which was sent out to all parishes and the recommendations have addressed the main issues in the report. Canon Breed noted that if we were to be more Contemplative, Compassionate and Courageous in a more 'Christ-like Church' we needed to be open to the reality of the poverty and inequality that exists between different churches and being able to translate that in local contexts.

Following a period of debate and response, the Synod voted on the report and this was carried with some abstentions. The full report and recommendations can be downloaded from [LINK](#)

10. Annual Reports of the Diocesan Boards, Councils and Committees 2019

The 2019 Diocesan Synod Reports were presented on behalf of Bishop's Council by Mr John Sykes. He noted this was a personal reflection giving a flavour of the work being undertaken across the diocese by all the Boards and Committees.

He noted this was a personal view of some of the highlights and that for many of us it had been a significant year. Firstly, Rosemary Pearce retired after 21 years as Diocesan Secretary. He paid tribute to her contribution as being knowledgeable, competent and enthusiastic. He noted her successor Mark Humphriss had already proved himself a safe pair of hands, but equally, that even he didn't anticipate such an eventful and challenging first 12 months of office! The appointment of Bishop Olivia to succeed Bishop Andrew as Bishop of Reading was a momentous occasion her being our first female bishop in the Diocese. 2019 was a big year for Common Vision and when most aspirations were starting to come to fruition in some way. He noted that being able to have a Development Fund available was a privilege that many dioceses could not afford, even before Covid. In summary he noted there were so many significant works going on in the diocese, often unseen, through its many Boards and Committees which were a cause for celebration of achievement.

Members were encouraged to share the report with their parishes to give the work the high profile it deserves. Synod 'took note' of the reports. They are also available on the website at [LINK](#)

11. FAREWELL TO BISHOP COLIN AND FINAL REFLECTION:

Bishop Steven led tributes to The Bishop of Dorchester, The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher marking his forthcoming retirement following 20 years in the role. He called on the Venerable Judy French, Archdeacon of Dorchester and Mr Simon Richards to each give an account of their time and personal reflections over the years spent in close ministry with Bishop Colin in the Dorchester team. In response to tributes paid to him, Bishop Colin felt humbled, particularly reflecting on the current climate in Covid-19 and being unable to celebrate with many in a way he would have liked to but that would not diminish the great feelings of gratitude he had and how he had so many memories to cherish in years to come. He then led the closing prayers reflecting on his final meeting and departure.

Future Diocesan Synod meetings:

Dates of further Diocesan Synod meetings (All Saturdays) from 0915 – 1315 (or as advised):

14 th November 2020	This meeting will be via zoom (link will be sent out with notification to members only)
20 th March 2021	This meeting will also be virtual
19 th June 2021	Hopefully this will be a physical meeting (venue tbc)
13 th November 2021	Venue tbc