

## **BISHOP'S COUNCIL REPORT**

Since the last Diocesan Synod the Bishop's Council has met twice, in December and April.

At the December meeting, the Director for Apostolic Life reported on the work of her team, including the proactive wellbeing work which Nicola Canham was adding to the counselling service for clergy and their families, the development of continuing ministerial development under Earl Collins and the continuing rise in ordinand numbers, numbers of young candidates and the ratio of men and women ordinands, matched by a rise in participants on the Living Faith discipleship course and the Authorised Lay Ministry electives.

It was agreed that the Council for Lay Ministry and Discipleship should be united with the Council for Apostolic Life with a focus on strategic, while the warden for lay ministry addressed operational issues with the archdeaconry reader secretaries and relevant others.

April's report came from the Diocesan Director of Education, Trevor Cristin, who updated the Council about the Education Department's Development Plan, the implementation of the Executive Board of the DBE, the challenges posed by small and rural schools, and new initiatives around headteacher welfare, a church and school partnership and governor recruitment amongst other matters. He reported on the rapid progress in school improvement over recent years, with 90% of our schools now good or outstanding in Ofsted terms against a national average of 86%.

A comprehensive review of the risk register by a sub-committee of Council members was presented to the Council in December, and a programme of in depth discussions of the highest risks began with the risk of significant loss of income (due to adverse economic or political environment or fall in Parish Share), or significant increase in expenditure leading to major financial deficits or inconsistent messaging around finance or failure to address structural financial issues. The Diocesan Secretary spoke about the many aspects of good financial stewardship and the importance both of the work around strategic and forward planning in conjunction with the five year forecasts.

The Council also discussed that strategic and forward planning work, looking at financial modelling of different scenarios and various workstreams covering matters such as deployment and how best to sustain worshipping communities, property matters, Church House, training and parish share. Many of these will however now need to be revised, and April saw further discussion of financial risks in light of the impact of Coronavirus.

Work continued on new Training Fund, aiming to get financial support for the increased number of vocations in the diocese, although the planned launch was postponed as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. If anyone wishes to get involved when it is able to restart, for example by donating, encouraging others or hosting events, please contact Sara Stonor.

Further vacancies on boards, councils and committees were discussed in November and further appointments made, including Revd David Hill, Revd Natalie Loveless and Mr Mike King to Parsonages Committees, Mr John Booth as Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee and Mr Bradley Smith to the Audit Committee. An election to fill a casual vacancy on the Council from the lay members of Synod from the Chichester archdeaconry resulted in no

nominations, and anyone would be interested in serving, they should contact the Diocesan Secretary. The Bishop consulted the Council on a proposal to appoint Darren Oliver as Diocesan Registrar, which received full support. The Council did not make arrangements for the General Synod elections, as these are almost certain to be deferred until 2021, and arrangements will be approved by email instead should that become necessary.

In December, there was a review of the November Diocesan Synod and in April it was decided to cancel the May Synod in light of the restrictions arising from the Coronavirus pandemic. A safeguarding update was given to each meeting together with reports of variations to school instruments of government.

The Council also received written reports from the Operating committee at each meeting, and from the Mission and Pastoral Sub-committees, the Parsonage and Houses Committees, the Assets Committee and the Audit Committee in April. Amendments to the clergy family friendly policy and to the Committee Handbook were approved in April, together with terms of reference for a new Communications Steering Group. The audit plan for 2020 was approved in November in advance of hearing from the auditor on his report in April and approving the statutory accounts and Red Book of management accounts.

Thanks were expressed at Catherine Dawkins' last meeting in November for her work as Finance Director and to Philip Bowden at his last meeting in April as Chair of the Finance Committee and the Council wished them both well for the future.

## **GENERAL SYNOD REPORT**

Synod met for the penultimate time over this 5 year term period from 10th -13th February. The Agenda covered Cathedrals, children and the Channel Islands, sexuality, safeguarding and standing orders, environment, end of life and education, supporting the poor and supporting ethnic minorities and supporting the clergy.

### **The Channel Islands' change in oversight from the Diocese of Winchester to the Diocese of Salisbury.**

During the week we took one matter from first consideration to Synod's final approval: a measure requesting The Channel Islands' change in oversight from the Diocese of Winchester to the Diocese of Salisbury. Sadly, there has been a relationship breakdown between Winchester and the Islands, and temporary episcopal oversight has been provided by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Diocese of Salisbury has historically helped the Islands in many ways from as early as C15th and all parties concerned were happy for this changeover to happen. Long term arrangements have been made and everything is in place for the new relationship to begin as soon as possible so the Church's mission within the Islands can flourish under new oversight. Whilst some speeches felt this isn't the right way to do things – when there is dispute, we cannot just run away from it and find help elsewhere – Winchester Diocese and the Archbishop of Canterbury expressed that this is the only way to allow the Channel Islands to move forward and for healing and reconciliation to begin.

### **Synod has now formally adopted the Clergy Care and Wellbeing Covenant by passing an Act of Synod**

The Bishop of Willesden's remarks last Synod asked whether the provisions would make relationships between clergy and parishioners closer or more legalistic and contractual. This has been created by way of a covenant and proclaimed as an 'Act of Synod' as opposed to a legislative change within the Church of England. The legal office has advised that a covenant is not about contractual relationships, but about care, and this does not create legal rights or obligations: "The provisions of the Covenant do not purport to create legally enforceable rights...". Now General Synod has proclaimed this as an Act of Synod, the next stage is for PCCs and Deanery Synods and Diocesan Synods to consider adopting this Covenant and to subsequently allow for conversations to happen.

**Monday closed with questions – 121 of them!** They covered various topics including safeguarding, the Living in Love and Faith ongoing work and issues surrounding marriage, funding for various organisations, updates from various working groups and questions on various statistics.

After revision matters in the morning concerning Cathedrals and Deanery Synod term limits, which will return in July for final approval, Tuesday afternoon gave Synod a chance to see what progress is being made on the Living in Love and Faith work, with an opportunity for questions after. There will not be any changes to the Church's teaching on marriage, but they have created various podcasts, guides and short films and written a book to be used in parishes and deanery synods to help further people's understanding and aid meaningful

conversations around love, sexuality, relationships and prejudices. The pastoral advisory group has created these guides having listened to many different insights, stories and opinions, enabling them to see the bigger picture.

There was a debate on Church's commitment to supporting people within the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community and to stamping out racism and unconscious bias. This came about following the 70th anniversary celebrated recently of the migrants disembarking from the ship "The Windrush" to find new opportunities and help rebuild post-war Britain. The CofE has done extensive work to support BAME individuals including through the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC). 8 reports have been shown to General Synod coming from CMEAC between 1991 and 2015 and multiple other BAME reports and papers have been created alongside.

**Pauper funerals:** local authority funerals conducted for those who cannot afford to give relatives a dignified funeral or where no family can be found. No national set standard exists meaning different authorities will do things differently – some better than others. Some cases have found that the ashes have not been returned to the loved ones, no pastoral care is given to the family at all and priests have not been allowed to hold the service in Church, despite requesting it. The motion noted the substantial rise of pauper funerals, recognised the hurt that has been caused by them and so asked the life events team to urgently assist in the development of this work. The life events team are already doing work to assist those who need financial support and Synod requested that they continue to find ways for the Church and local authorities to work together to find affordable and dignified ways for funerals to be conducted.

**Wednesday saw a Safeguarding update** following the three public hearings that have happened through IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse). Two were on specific case studies (Chichester Diocese and Peter Ball) and the third was an analysis of sample dioceses on what is being done now. Over 4,000 people have come forward to speak about their abuse from the Church. The Archbishops' Council have made five recommendations following the published findings of the May 2019 IICSA report. These relate to introducing safeguarding guidance for religious communities, adding clarity to canon law on safeguarding (the phrase 'due regard' was seen as lacking in clarity especially) and adding sanctions for failing to comply with safeguarding training fully. The Archbishop of Canterbury and others spoke agreeing with the recommendations, apologising for all that has and does happen, acknowledging the courage of those who have shared their stories and expressing deep commitment to creating a safe Church; there is still much to be done.

**The environmental working group** led a debate about what the CofE is doing and what it needs to continue/start doing to reduce its emissions. Good practice examples include moving to solar energy, relying less on cars to get to Church, stopping single use plastics at Church events and holding campaigns/training days on the environment. I also have a copy of a booklet entitled "#LiveLent- care for God's creation", a 40 day booklet for children to use over Lent to take proactive action to appreciate and help the planet and grow in faith at the same time. Feel free to ask me for a look at it. We were informed that there are 35 diocesan environmental officers. Three are full time paid, and the rest are either part time with another paid role or working on a voluntary basis. The motion originally called for the Church to be net zero by 2045, but an ambitious amendment was narrowly passed (by 16

votes) to bring the date forward to 2030. Many spoke saying it is vital to get things moving fast, and many dioceses are aiming to reach net zero by 2030 already.

**Youth and Children in Church.** We received a startling report concerning the decline in recent years in the number of children attending mass. In 2018, national Sunday attendance of 0-16s dropped for the first time ever to under 100,000. 38% of Churches have no one of this age group and 69% have 5 or less. The motion asked that Synod recognises its commitment to growing this age group, encourages diocese to urgently act and encourages sharing of good practice models and resources as well as the exploration of new ideas. It was suggested that funding be targeted to areas with the most young people, but the chamber was strongly divided as to whether the funding should focus on large only or not. Two amendments were carried by a small majority which adjusted the motion to include funding to be also available for Churches with smaller numbers but who aspire to grow the numbers, and to encourage diocese to support Churches with smaller numbers of young people in them. Feel free to ask me for the full report to see the statistics concerning the decline in the number of under 16s we have, and to see which areas are struggling most.

Thursday rounded off with two very broad motions:

The first called the Archbishops' Council to commission a study that explores the reasons why the CofE is not as effective as we would like at attracting people from disadvantaged communities, and how we can address/reverse this. The steepest decline of Church members has been in the poorest areas. Although Church Commissioners have been focussing funding in these areas (such as £24.6 million awarded to the Lowest Income Communities Fund and £36.3 million of the Strategic Development Fund being for deprived areas), the estates evangelism work is making commitments to resourcing and supporting these areas at present, and many areas are working very hard to address this issue, decline is still happening as no 'one answer' had been found to resolve this. One amendment acknowledged the work of the GRACE project and asked for the study to consider this project whilst conducting their study. This is a project run by the Church Urban Fund who are to release their report this year after three years of work. They have been looking at what the Church is doing for those with social and economic difficulty, focussing on social action, discipleship and Church growth.

And the final thing for your attention; amongst legislation, one change happening for the next set of General Synod elections will be that online voting is to be rolled out nationally in place of postal for those who have shared their emails with the diocese. Whilst concerns were raised about the technology working and more errors being likely, many praised the system as a way to hopefully engage more voters. For anyone who is thinking of standing for the 2020 General Synod elections, please feel free to speak to me. Nominations will need to be in between 21 July and 4 September and the elections campaign lasts until voting closes on 9 October if the elections are not delayed because of the current restrictions.

**Canon Mark Gilbert**  
**May 2020**