

Hertford and Ware Deanery Synod

*Our vision is to see flourishing, Christ-centred communities
inspiring people of all ages and backgrounds
to discover God, grow in their relationship with Him
and respond to His transforming love through serving others.*

Minutes of the meeting held at 7:45pm on Thursday 23rd September 2021
at Holy Trinity, Bengoe

Chair – The Revd Mark Dunstan, Rural Dean

1. The new Rural Dean welcomed Synod members and introduced two new members, Rotimi Ogunlewe and Phyllis Ballam, both representing St Mary's, Ware.
2. **Worship** with hymns was arranged and led by The Revd Ysmena Pentelow, Assistant Rural Dean, based on the church as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) and the centrality of love (1 Corinthians 13).
3. **Present** at Synod:
 - House of Clergy: Mark Dunstan, Ysmena Pentelow, Jo Loveridge, Robert Thompson, Theresa Musiwcho, Sarah Forrest, Angela Lynas.
 - House of Laity: Diana Perkins, Mike Sutcliffe, Tim Alexander, Sara McCrea, Shirley Taylor, Julie Markey, Phyllis Ballam, Rotimi Ogunlewe, Colin Bird, Janet Bird, Sue Rogers, Beresford Thomson.
 - Apologies for absence: Mike West, Robin Bishop, Dorothy Toyn, Helen Harris, David Briggs, Tim Crowther, Lyn Paddon, David Goodman, The Revd Alan Stewart, Jane Francis, Dinah Findlay.
4. **Minutes** of the previous Synod Meeting 12th May 2021 were approved.
5. **Matters arising** from those minutes:
 - The results of the Elections for Diocesan Synod were reported:
 - House of Clergy: Mark Dunstan, Ysmena Pentelow, John Hookway (leaving 2 vacancies)
 - House of Laity: Janet Bird, Diana Perkins, Tim Crowther (leaving 2 vacancies)
 - It was noted that the deadline for financial grants for parishes next year was coming up rapidly. Representatives were requested to contact the Rural Dean urgently if their parish was considering applying for a grant. **Action: All**
 - The Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust Bike and Hike had taken place without a Deanery co-ordinator. Members were invited to consider taking this role on in the future. **Action: All**

6. **Reflection on the Deanery Vision and Mission Action Plan.** The Rural Dean.

The Rural Dean made a presentation in three parts:

i. *Facilitating Mission across 23 Parishes*

This is our job as a Synod. Our Deanery vision (at the top of the agenda) is a broad vision, deliberately identical to the Diocesan vision, but it clearly defines our role – to work to create Flourishing Christ-Centred Communities characterised by Transforming Love. Our parishes are very different, even when united in benefices or teams, but our challenges are similar and manifold: emerging from the Covid pandemic, new housing developments now and in the future (NB this is also a big opportunity), ageing congregations and a lack of volunteers, technological changes, increase of governance responsibility (e.g. Safeguarding, GDPR), climate change, mental health crisis, homelessness, poverty, refugees (including those most recently from Afghanistan), loneliness, caring for church buildings when money is short, fundraising/grant applications, worrying whether our churches are viable, and caring for church schools, their pupils and staff. Working together can help to address these issues more effectively. If two churches are facing the same problem, they would benefit from talking to each other and collaborating.

The Rural Dean's recent experience of meeting church wardens (for the Archdeacon's visitation inspections) had shown there was a wide variety of experience to be shared and a need for it. One example related to the need for good contractors – one church had found someone with a long pole and camera who inspected gutters for £20, meaning wardens did not have to climb ladders. Why were these good news stories not shared more widely? We should not act as if we are all alone. The Bible does not recognise the solitary Christian but believers gathering as a body – the [local] church. Furthermore, we also see on the pages of the New Testament clear evidence of local churches supporting and helping one another, and the apostolic expectation that this be the case. We are not alone. We should share from our strength and humbly ask for help when it is needed.

ii. *Deanery Website and Blog*

This came out of the MAP. The website has information about Deanery life: some areas are open to all, others are members-only which require visitors to log in. All our churches are listed, with links to their websites. There is a calendar listing meetings and events and services, subject to the information being supplied by parishes. There are pages outlining our MAP and our progress in realising our aims. There is scope for further development, e.g. a list of services which are not "standard" services – Messy Church, Dementia services, other Fresh Expressions/Reaching New People initiatives. It can be helpful for people to know that opportunities are available even if their own or most local church does not offer a particular option.

Very few blog posts have been posted while the site was "bedding in". It is now proposed that a pool of volunteers write pieces about something their church has done or is doing, perhaps one blog per month – an inspirational reminder of what God is doing in our Deanery.

iii. *Keeping Matters Live*

This is not about adding new things to our workload; it's about working smarter not harder. We all need to engage with the Deanery to make this happen. There are three practical ways to achieve this:

- a. Representatives have a responsibility to give a report to the PCC and should ensure this is an engaging, detailed report not just a brief remark. In time, we may be able to provide such a report to help.
- b. PCCs need to know about good practice in the area – we should share experience and get our churches to collaborate with others.
- c. It would be greatly valued if PCCs were to give feedback to Synod. The presentations at Synod are meant to assist the parishes – so if they are not helpful, please let us know. Similarly, if a parish undertakes some excellent work following a Synod presentation, hearing about it would be very encouraging for everyone.

We have a shared vision, but our own mission fields and our own unique ways of living out that vision. The Deanery, because it is a collection of parishes, can provide additional insight, encouragement and expertise. We do not meet merely to listen to an interesting speaker and leave it there. Where there are important matters, we want to keep them alive.

7. **Election of Officers:**

- Lay Chair. Diana Perkins has served two terms, but she will continue in post with a new person needed for May 2024.
- Treasurer. Janet Bird has served for several years and is willing to continue. Accepted.
- Secretary. The Revd Doug Loveridge, standing down, was thanked for several years of service. There being no volunteers for this role from Synod, the Rural Dean asked that he should be permitted to recruit someone to do this. Accepted. **Action: MD**
- Assistant Secretary. There is an expectation in the rules that there should be an assistant from the opposite House. To be arranged following recruitment of Secretary. **Action: MD**
- Standing Committee Members (in addition to the above).
 - House of Laity: Lyn Paddon (St Margarets), Mike West (St Mary's Ware), one more vacancy (cannot be co-opted, election necessary).
 - House of Clergy: Ysmena Pentelow, Sarah Forrest (one more vacancy which cannot be co-opted).
- Diocesan Board of Finance. Colin Bird, our current representative is currently Chair of the DBF (and as such now an *ex officio* member of Diocesan Synod). Accepted again as our Deanery representative.

The Rural Dean thanked all the volunteers.

8. **Report from Diocesan Synod.** Diana Perkins.

DP gave a brief report, noting that March 2020 had been the last face to face meeting of Synod, and that the next one would be in October. She reported that "Emerging Hopefully from Lockdown" had been discussed, and "Living in Love and Faith" would be coming for discussion soon.

9. **Parish Share and the Diocesan Board of Finance.** Colin Bird.

CB reported the Parish Share was in a similar position to the previous year, perhaps slightly better (but that is not especially good). Across the Diocese, there could be £1million shortfall, depending on the results from quarter just beginning, with halls reopening, events possible again and people returning to church. The Deanery position was good, though it was anticipated there may be a shortfall of £40,000 at the end of the year (£40,000 is almost “one priest”, and there is nowhere else to find funds). The Diocese had so far weathered the storm, and there was reason to be encouraged. However, it was noted that one of our parishes had paid nothing to date. This cannot continue.

The overall Parish Share will increase by 1.4% next year. However, because membership of many churches is declining, growing churches may see their contribution rise more than 1.4%. There is a 5% cap, but this is not seen as effective. The situation must be sorted. Thankfully St Albans Diocese has been able to draw on reserves, but this cannot continue indefinitely. The question is whether ministry can be held at its current level: difficult decisions have been brought forward by the pandemic.

CB noted that since the decision was taken to set the increase to 1.4% (to incorporate a 1% rise to the clergy stipend), general inflation, energy prices and National Insurance had all increased, so clergy pay would actually decline in real terms – as will the pay of so many other people.

10. Closing Prayer – The Rural Dean.

Representatives, please remember that effective gospel partnership in the Deanery depends on you arranging and delivering a Deanery Report / Update at your Parochial Church Council meetings.

www.hertfordandwaredeanery.org.uk