

# SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the Synod held on the evening of Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at St Mary the Virgin, Dymock.

## Attending:

Clergy: J Hyde (Area Dean), L Bloom, S Cooke, S Mason, K Mephram, J Monaghan, J Scholes  
Laity: S Padfield (Lay Chair), S Riddick (Secretary), B Voyce (Senior Youth Connector), C Butcher (West Deaneries Youth Connector), R Blandford, F Down, V Funnell, C Hill, N Hogg, A Holland, G Limbrick, C May, J Smith, J Starr, C Steadman, R Williams, N Youlton (*from Sportily*)

## Apologies:

Clergy: J Longuet-Higgins (Assistant Area Dean), D Gill, J Knight, R Spear  
Laity: D Wright (Parish Share Officer and Treasurer), R Parker, M Richardson, L Ashenden, K Carpenter, J Churchill-Wood, R Cottell, H Cotton, P Cotton, G Davies, H Dunsford, D Elson, R Ensor, G Goodman, E Harbottle, A Herbert, C Hitchins, C Langham, H Murphy, P Singh

We started the evening with the sad news that the Reverend Jill Bond had died; we gave thanks for her service and prayed for her family. Opening worship was led by the Reverend Jade Scholes; after which the minutes of the Synod held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 were approved, with no matters arising.

The Reverend Canon Jacqui Hyde then gave a brief update on our **Strategic Planning Process**. The four key areas (building stronger relationships with young people and their families; reaching those who know very little about Christianity or the church; Deanery organisation and communication; and the future of our church buildings) remain unchanged and continue to be developed. Meanwhile an initial meeting has now been held with various people from College Green, to obtain their inputs and ideas; further discussions are progressing as appropriate. From a Synod point of view, we have already focussed on the future of our Buildings, and tonight – under the guidance of Barrie Voyce and Charlotte Butcher – we are to take a more detailed look at work with young people.

The Reverend Kat Mephram next showed a brief video featuring local young people talking about their lives, including topics such as what they consider best about being young, the challenges they face, and the most important things in their lives; after which Jacqui Hyde spoke about the need for us all to better understand the issues facing young people. A questionnaire has been developed in this respect, and she asked everyone to take copies away and try to get as many completed as possible, before returning them to her.

Barrie Voyce then spoke about **Youth Work in the Diocese**. Generally the Church has good contact at both Primary and Junior Schools, but struggles at the Secondary level; the 11-18 age group is therefore the specific focus of the **Youth Connect** programme, which has now been running for two years. Charlotte is a fairly new addition to the team, and covers the West side of our Deanery and the Forest of Dean. He reiterated Jacqui Hyde's comments that we cannot make assumptions about what young people want or need, and instead must listen; then advised that the key age for deciding whether to allow Christ into our lives is apparently 14 – demonstrating the importance of us reaching out to this demographic.

The Synod now moved into break-out groups to debate what we saw as the main challenges facing young people in our areas.

Feedback from groups centred on five areas: the small size of many of our villages (most not having secondary schools, meaning young people have to travel long distances to/from school and may live far away from some of their friends); the lack of places for young people to meet up outside school (fewer youth clubs and similar); social media (albeit handled properly this might be as much a positive as a negative); variable public transport links (especially on Sundays, often meaning high reliance on parents to maintain friendship groups); and the impact of COVID (recognising that for many young people, associated restrictions have taken up a very significant percentage of their lives, and may have led to increased isolation, mental health issues, etc).

Following discussion of these, Barrie spoke of other problems he sees – including petty crime and drugs; family disruption; and sometimes over-protection from risk, which can cause excessive anxiety or simply poor decision-making.

On an overall basis, Barrie believes **young people's key questions** are not dissimilar from those we all faced at that stage of our lives: (i) who am I?; (ii) where do I fit? (e.g what is my peer group/tribe?); and (iii) what am I for/what is my purpose in life? The Church as a whole believes it can contribute in each of these areas, but only if we talk, listen and learn. The Youth Connect team can hopefully help us on this journey, reminding and reassuring young people that we are all children of God; that there is room for us in God's family; and that God has a plan and purpose for each of us.

Charlotte then spoke to us about various initiatives the team has in the near future, to which we are all invited. Details can be found on the Diocese website ([www.gloucester.anglican.org](http://www.gloucester.anglican.org)) or by contacting her via email ([c.butcher@glosdioc.org.uk](mailto:c.butcher@glosdioc.org.uk))

**Other Synod Business** was then dealt with via (i) a brief update on our Parish Share position (being that we paid slightly more than we committed for 2022, and with one exception all parishes have committed to at least a 2% increase for 2023); (ii) an overview of Synod subscriptions to date (numerous 2023 amounts remaining outstanding, plus a reminder that we have changed our bank); and (iii) a quick recap of the Diocesan Synod held on 11th February 2023 (including confirmation that there has been no change to the church's doctrine on marriage). No other business was raised.

Our next Synod will be on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> July; and the meeting closed at just after 9pm with thanks to Dymock for hosting.

*Steve Riddick, 20 March 2023*