

SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the Synod held on the evening of Wednesday 15th October 2025 at St Mary and St Bartholomew, Ashleworth

Attending:

Clergy: J Hyde (Area Dean), J Longuet-Higgins (Assistant Area Dean), S Cooke, C Dunnett, H de Gruyther, J Knight, S Mason, J Monaghan

Laity: S Padfield (Lay Chair), S Riddick (Secretary), D Wright (Parish Share Officer/Treasurer), D Bartlett, R Blandford, D Connell, M Connell, L Cooper, C Daniels, V Funnell, T Greenhalgh, D Hopkins, L Hopkins, E James, C Jones, J Keene, G Limbrick, C May, M McGhee, M Mitchell, R Parker, D Power, M Richardson, P Singh, E Stevenson, H Witcomb

Apologies:

Clergy: L Bloom (Assistant Area Dean), M Boot, D Bowers, M Dunning, D Newman, R Spear, S Taylor

Laity: J Churchill-Wood, J Deane, F Down, N Garbutt, C Gardner, C Hill, J Hogg, N Hogg, S Phelps, J Philpott, A Smith

After the initial welcomes and apologies, Reverend John Longuet-Higgins led the opening prayers, during which the Area Dean swore in a number of churchwardens from across the Deanery who had not been able to make this year's Visitation Services.

Following this, Jacqui talked us through the concept of the **Seven Sacred Spaces**, being Cell (also sometimes referred to as Retreat); Chapel (or Encounter); Chapter (or Contribute); Cloister (or Connect); Garden (or Serve); Refectory (or Eat); and Scriptorium (or Explore) – the initial names being based on a "monastic" environment, and the bracketed ones a more modern take. Everything we do (or should do) in our church communities can be covered under one of these headings, which makes the model a very useful one to guide our work.

Commentary on each Space is attached to these minutes as Appendix I.

The Reverend Susan Cooke then spoke about a **Thriving Church Day** held in May which expanded on the Seven Sacred Spaces concept and how it works in practice. It is notable that most churches and Benefices do at least something under each heading, even if only on an informal basis. Some people find it useful to visualise the Seven Spaces in the shape of a wheel or pie, and then assess which of the seven sections/slices are well covered and which perhaps need more attention. This can also be done on a Deanery basis, taking account of our varied gifts and resources.

Will Mansell, the founder of the **Grace Network**, then spoke about the work they do and how it fits into the model. Essentially the Network originated from the Trussell Trust Food Bank, trying to help those in need on a more holistic basis, recognising that poverty and the lack of support structures (family, friends and beyond) were preventing people from moving on. Will became interested in setting up social enterprises as a way of achieving this, at the same time training people in discipleship under the broad heading of "ancient wisdom for modern-day problems". The Network now has more than 150 staff plus projects in numerous places including Stroud and Cirencester; has formal linkages with our Diocese; and has recently started working with the Diocese of Bristol. He finds the Seven Spaces a very useful tool to ensure the Network is covering all bases and makes good decisions. Further information can be found via thegracenetwork.org.uk

Rich Witham and Kelsey Martyn then spoke about the work **Sportily** are doing in our area. Sportily is of course focused on Children, Young People and their families, encouraging them to move more and introducing them to issues of faith. Their work includes things such as After-School Clubs, Breakfast Cafés and support during longer holidays, often with the co-operation of local schools, and covers life skills such as leadership, teamwork and first aid as well as active play. All their activities can be easily assigned to one of the Seven Sacred Spaces, and by doing so they can check their work is properly balanced; sometimes they visualise what they do as a “Big Top” tent with seven different entrances, and people can come through whichever entrance they choose. It was noted that in the key focus areas of large new housing developments (Innsworth, Churchdown, Twigworth etc), we have a transient population at ARRC/NATO (whose English language skills may of course be limited), a sizeable Ukrainian community, and long-standing residents of varied economic circumstances; we are also now running the long-neglected Innsworth Community Centre

We then moved into **Break-Out Groups**, rotating as time allowed across stations for the Seven Sacred Spaces, to reflect further on the concepts and consider how we might use the model in our Benefices going forward.

Finally Sue Padfield directed the meeting to our **standard Synod business**. The minutes of our meeting on 8th July were agreed without amendment, and there were no matters arising. Jacqui Hyde gave a brief update on the (now-renamed) Deanery Strategic Pathway, including that **Deanery Operations Leaders are currently being recruited for three Deaneries** in the Diocese and we hope to be in the next batch. Derek Wright explained that our 2025 Parish Share payments are broadly on track, we are largely settled on our 2026 commitments, but anyone wishing to contribute further without compromising future payments should please speak to him. The **2024 Synod financial statements were approved**, and Derek was authorised to investigate future banking arrangements in the light of proposed charges from our existing providers. A summary of the recent Diocesan Synod will be sent out soon. And no other business was raised other than noting that a **“Children’s Ministry Essentials”** course with Jo Weatherall from the Diocese will be held at 7pm on the 11th November at St Mary’s Newent.

Our **2026 Deanery Synods** are scheduled for the evenings of Thursday 12th March, Tuesday 30th June and Wednesday 14th October, with venues to be confirmed nearer the time.

The meeting finished at 9.10pm with thanks to the West of Severn Benefice for hosting.

Steve Riddick, 19 October 2025