

# SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the Synod held on the evening of Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at All Saints, Longhope

## Attending:

Clergy: J Hyde (Area Dean), J Longuet-Higgins (Assistant Area Dean), L Bloom, S Cooke, J Deane, H de Gruyther, M Dunning, R Greenhalgh, J Knight, S Mason, K Mephram, J Monaghan, S Taylor  
Laity: S Padfield (Lay Chair), S Riddick (Secretary), D Wright (Treasurer/Parish Share Officer), L Ashenden, D Connell, M Connell, H Cotton, P Cotton, F Down, N Garbutt, T Greenhalgh, C Hill, N Hogg, C Jones, C Langham, G Limbrick, C May, H Murphy, R Newbery, M Richardson, C Steadman

## Apologies:

Clergy: D Gill, R Spear  
Laity: J Churchill-Wood, J Clutterbuck, V Funnell, E Harbottle, C Hitchins, W Meath-Baker, M McGhee, M Mitchell, Canon R Parker, P Singh, J Smith

After the initial welcomes – including to seven new members – and the noting of apologies received, the Reverend Lara Bloom led our prayers. The minutes of the previous meeting were then approved with two names added to the apologies, and it was noted there were no matters arising not already covered elsewhere.

Through an interview-type process with Sue Padfield, Robert McNeil-Wilson next talked about the **Church of England's General Synod**, at which he is one of our Diocese's lay representatives. He noted that we have eight members at present, being four lay, three clergy plus Bishop Rachel, while the total membership is in excess of 450 – being 52 in the House of Bishops and approximately 200 in each of the House of Clergy and the House of Laity. Our Diocese's representatives try to stay in touch between Synods, but do not pre-agree anything and sometimes have different opinions on matters to be discussed. Robert is passionate about the importance of parishes, and initially stood for Synod on a "Save The Parish" basis. At Synods the Archbishops and their advisers are on a platform at the front and the Bishops tend to sit together. Proceedings are quite formal, but this is probably necessary to keep order. It can be difficult to get to speak, with complaints that "favoured" members are called in preference to others. Robert has a particular interest in financial matters, including on the differing wealth of Dioceses, parish funding, Diocesan Stipend Funds, and whether the Church Commissioners could be more creative with their resources; he is in regular contact with Benjamin Preece Smith (Diocesan Secretary), who is helping the Church as a whole on some of these fronts.

The July Synod was disturbing, with issues over Governance, Safeguarding and alleged mismanagement. A Governance review has been held by Sir David Lidington, and it is hoped improvements will flow from this. Meanwhile the just-concluded November Synod spent the majority of its time on Living in Love and Faith, and this is an area where very different views are held. For the first time on this matter the Bishops did not vote as one, and both the Clergy and the Laity approved the motion to go forward by only the smallest of margins.

Robert concluded by saying he is very happy to take representations from Deanery Synods and others; he welcomes inputs; and he can best be contacted by email via [rmw@unisonprojects.co.uk](mailto:rmw@unisonprojects.co.uk)

The meeting now moved to a presentation by Dan Button on **Gateway Theology School**. Dan noted the School now offers in excess of 30 courses, with new ones being added on a regular basis – including recently on New Testament Greek and Ageing Gracefully. Some courses work well on Zoom, but others are best conducted in person. Costs are normally £10/session, which compares very favourably with other academia. Everyone is welcome to sign up; the courses are designed for “normal” people; and feedback is generally very positive. The website <https://gtstheology.org> has further details, and/or Dan can be contacted via [info@gtstheology.org](mailto:info@gtstheology.org)

The Area Dean then gave an update on the **Deanery Strategic Plan**. As regards young people and their families, she noted the appointment of Kate Smith as Children’s Pastor at St Andrew’s, Churchdown and of John Stilwell at the Primary QuEST Multi-Academy Trust (which works across a number of our Benefices). A session on youth work held at the beginning of October was poorly attended, assumedly due to a lack of capacity in our parishes, and our future plans may need to reflect this. Nathan Youlton, our Sportily worker, is sadly moving on and a process to fill the resulting vacancy is underway. We still plan to create WhatsApp groups to improve Deanery-wide communication, probably beginning with Treasurers and Churchwardens. On collaborative working, the Reverend David Gill is now assuming pastoral oversight for Westbury, Flaxley and Blaisdon on top of his existing responsibilities; while various Benefices have worked together on payroll management and training of lay worship leaders. Finally a Church Buildings Support Officer is being recruited at the Diocese. The shaping of this new role will be important as we continue to develop our proposal to appoint a Deanery Strategic Buildings Officer.

On **Parish Share**, Derek Wright noted that although the initial request sent out from Church House was not unreasonable in total (being little more than we paid in 2019), the allocations between parishes were clearly incorrect, with some being asked for large increases and others being essentially overlooked. He and the Deanery Team have worked through the figures based on prior years, and have come up with a recommendation that Benefices who managed to largely maintain Parish Share payments throughout Covid should be asked for a 4-5% increase, and those who reduced their payments then should now be asked for a 10% increase, to “catch up”. Detailed figures have been sent to all Treasurers and hopefully these can be approved very soon.

As regards **Deanery Funds**, it was noted that we have a small surplus at the moment, and this coupled with reasons of equity mean it would be better if in future each Benefice paid £20 per annum rather than each Parish £10. This was voted on and carried unanimously. We hope to “use up” the existing surplus on training and other initiatives in the near future.

Finally as regards **Diocesan Developments**, Steve Riddick noted that the next Diocesan Synod is taking place on the coming Saturday, so we will have more to report after that. However, the Diocese is holding a Treasurers’ Workshop on the morning of Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December, and the Safeguarding Team is looking for help with a survey; members are encouraged to remind the appropriate people in their Parishes or Benefices.

There was no other business of consequence, and the meeting closed just after 9pm with thanks to Longhope for hosting followed by the Grace. Our next Synod will be on **Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024**, probably at St John’s Churchdown.

*Steve Riddick, 20 November 2023*