

Diocesan Synod Report | 24th November 2023

A Diocesan Synod in Two Halves

Walking in from a very cold frost 2 degrees Centigrade outside into a warm and newly re-ordered St Mary's Church, Guildford to be welcomed with hot coffee and a pastry set off the morning well for us.

This Synod we covered topics ranging from our Nigerian Link, Living in Love and Faith (LLF), Net Zero Carbon (NZC) our DBF budget 2024, Synodical Governance and the numbers being elected from each Deanery – Clergy and Lay, the Promulgation of Canon No 42 for Safeguarding Adviser, Members Survey results, Written Q&As and finished with the Diocesan Youth Leaders on 'What makes churches young'.

So, what really happened?

Bishop Andrew after welcoming Bishop Paul to his first Diocesan Synod since his elevation which was good news! - then asked us to pray for peace. He was excited to report on the continued restoration of the historic Link between Nigeria and Guildford Diocese, first established 60 years ago. Relations had greatly improved and Bishop Andrew had recently addressed the Divine Commonwealth Conference having been formally invited by Archbishop Henry Ndukuba. The Archdiocese has 20m members in 70 Dioceses and they have much in common with Guildford as concerns their Faith, Language, Technology (Zoom/Teams) and Time zone {almost!}. We are the only Diocese in the Church of England linked with Nigeria. A fact welcomed by Archbishop Justin.

Regarding LLF, Bishop Andrew urged us all to hold together whilst accepting that there was a lack of clarity on the way ahead. He asked Synod to send in their thoughts and views. Comments included the impact of such teaching on Church Schools, financial support for clergy facing legal proceedings, the role of Parliament, underlining the freedom of religious belief and can the doctrine of marriage be changed. So much unresolved and uncertain.

Net Zero Carbon (NZC) was presented by Steve Collins and Bishop Paul leading from the front declaring that the Environment was a gospel imperative beginning with Genesis and the Creation and how theologically it must be treasured. Everyone needed to play their part with our schools having the largest carbon footprint. There should be a NZC question in everything we do with one member stating that we should always hold all our meetings online. The issue for me was how to maintain the level of engagement?

After coffee and another pastry, we moved on to the 2024 DBF Budget and how it works with inflation, post pandemic and wage settlements. Inflation was described by the Finance Director as 'sticky'. The national recommendation for the stipend increase had been set at +5%. The Average Parish Share across our diocese is approximately £90k with combined Ministry and housing costs for a parish with one, housed stipendiary incumbent is currently at around £63k. Diocesan Synod agreed an overall increase of 3.75% for parish share 2024.

The Parish Needs Process continues, and a Church Commissioners grant coming in to assist Youth Ministry called 'Growing Younger' involving Schools and Youth Leaders.

With the elections for the next trimester of Diocesan Synod in 2024, our synod will stay roughly the same in its breakdown between Clergy (64) and Lay (67) per house. But concern was expressed at the largest Age Group numbers of members who were 60+. Where were the young? I thought that I was young once at 19 and already serving on both Dorking Deanery and Guildford Diocesan Synods.

In Q&As, a plea was made for more Church School Governors and Trustees/ Members of Academies.

Then it was a privilege to hear from our very confident Diocesan Youth Leaders who wanted representation and their voices heard via Social Media (Tik-Tok) and in our Churches as they 'reach out in outreach'. We failed them miserably by not bringing many recyclable cups for refreshments in our meeting. But they certainly made their point and voices heard.

And at this Guildford Diocesan Synod - all our votes were unanimous.

As we ended with mince pies, may I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and Blessed New Year.



Canon Peter BRUINVELS CC

Elected Member – General Synod