

Wallingford Deanery Synod: Summary 2023

(prepared by Ali Adams, Deanery Synod Secretary)

The Deanery Synod provides PCCs with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church. Meetings are jointly chaired by the Area Dean (Revd Dr Andy Lord) and the Lay Chair (Gordon Gill). The Deanery includes parishes in Didcot, Great Western Park, Harwell, Chilton, Cholsey, Moulsoford, Hagbourne, Blewbury, Upton, the Moretons, the Astons, Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford and Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.

Four Deanery Synod meetings were held in 2023, with three meetings of the Standing Committee. Meetings continued to focus on the Wallingford Deanery Mission Action Plan (MAP) which has four key focus areas:

1. *Development of ministry to children, young people & families*
2. *Developing our outreach to new & settled communities*
3. *Development of appropriate patterns of worship*
4. *Development of the Ministry in the Greater Didcot Garden Town area, both financially & structurally.*

The first Deanery Synod meeting in February focussed on the third area – worship. Representatives from across the Deanery spoke about different forms of worship that incorporate music to inspire potential ideas for other parishes. Information was shared about choirs, organs, orchestras, ‘2nd Sundays’, worship services led by guitar and keyboards, family services, ‘open mike’ sessions, contemporary music, recorded music, intergenerational services, videos, etc. Feedback from subsequent group discussions included recommendations for the use of worship in outdoor situations and care homes, and that bellringing should also be seen as part of worship.

Items of business included thanks to Wendy Muggeridge who was standing down as Deanery Synod Secretary. Ali Adams was elected to take over the role. Jason St John Nicolle was elected to the role of Clergy Rep. The Area Dean asked for a volunteer as Deanery Treasurer. Malcolm Edge and Nigel White had accepted roles as Deanery Environmental Leads.

The second Deanery Synod meeting in June started with the re-election of Gordon Gill as Lay Chair. Revd Rebecca Peters was introduced as new Vicar of Cholsey & Moulsoford, and Revd Jeremy Parsons as the new Vicar of St Matthew’s Harwell & All Saints’ Chilton. Debbie Lord was elected as the PTO Rep to Synod. A report was received from Professor Helen King, the deanery’s linked General Synod Rep.

The meeting was about sharpening our focus towards intentional mission, and led to thoughts about relationships, invitations, small group sessions, going out into the community, baptisms/marriages/funerals drawing people into church, initiatives outside of Sunday morning services, and the need for prayer and theology. It was also noted that we need to rethink our ideas of what church is, given our changing times. Our finances are set up to bring people into existing church, but mission requires us to go out. This particular area of thought will be followed up at the February 2024 Synod.

There was discussion about future financial planning, based on the discussions at Synod the previous April. Votes were held on The Future Financial Plan and the Share Allocation for 2024 and were carried.

The third Synod in July was focussed on the Environment, with Bishop Olivia attending as the lead speaker. It started with a video clip from the April 2023 Climate Action march in London. Bishop Olivia's keynote talk covered pollution and loss of biodiversity, and she showed a scarf knitted for the diocese with different coloured stripes showing temperatures for Reading 1863-2022, reflecting the impact of El Nino and global heating. The Church of England is aiming for net zero across all activities by 2030. Much of the problem is due to our actions, but there is still time for us to help, with the years to 2030 seen as crucial. For individuals, consume in moderation (need rather than want), recycle-reclaim-refill). Be far-sighted and see this as a thing of faith, discipleship, duty...

The focus moved to local examples – Wallingford's Wildlife Discovery Programme, Cholsey's Forest Church, Church Churches Climate Action Group, the Diocese's Ecochurch programme.

Professor Helen King gave an update on her role/time at the latest General Synod.

The fourth Synod was in November. Yvonne Morris, the Discipleship Enabler for the Dorchester and Oxford Archdeaonries, gave a follow-up talk to a previous one on Children, Young People and Families, asking 'where are we now?' post-pandemic. The Church of England intention is to double the number of active young disciples in the church by 2030. The diocese is looking at a transformational increase – from existing small numbers via a series of shifts. How will the national church enable new volunteers? (27,000 needed nationally, with 3000 new staff). We need to explore options locally with churches where there is currently no children's work, through to churches where children's work has continued from pre-Covid.

Yvonne's talk was followed by local examples of working with children and youth, eg. invitations to non-church children to decorate Christmas trees, various different styles of services in schools, the ECHO youth project, prayer spaces in the local library. This was followed by Yvonne reminding everyone that working in 1:1s or 1:2s brings excellent results: we should not be concerned about small numbers.

Revd Mark Bodeker was on sabbatical, and the Area Dean would be taking a sabbatical from April 2024. Revd Hugh Boorman had just retired from his time at the Ladygrove church (which coincided with its 30th anniversary): recruitment is for a House for Duty role. Deanery Synod members were invited to join a group discussing ideas for the Diocese's 'Youth bid' for national funding.

Outside of the meetings, a Deanery Pilgrimage took place in July.