

Diocesan Synod Report | 25th June 2025

By Revd Chris Bessant

The Dean of Guildford and the Chair of the House of Clergy made a welcome to the Synod members. Those gathered appreciated the opportunity before the meeting for conversation and generous refreshments. The Dean led a short time of worship, during which a passage from Luke 12 was shared and a reminder of Jesus's teachings about the all too familiar temporal worries we share, yet in the light of Christ's reassurance that we strive for a Kingdom which shall not fail. Those gathered were led in prayer with the important themes of conflict, protection of the vulnerable, our call to mission, and for the good proceedings of the Diocesan Synod that evening.

Bishop Andrew spoke of his duties in the House of Lords, where he had led the prayers that day. Further reflections were upon the myriad challenges that Church of England faces within itself, and those which we share with nation as a whole. Being only a few days short of the services of ordination due that weekend, and being ourselves gathered in the Cathedral, Bishop Andrew reflected upon the vows and commitments that ordination brings. The oversights which the bishop shares with all those he ordains, as a 'treasure entrusted to you' were a reminder of the weight we carry together. Rhetorically, Bishop had considered the question which had recently been put to him of 'what do you think of the Church of England?' That brought feelings of how the beauty of the church might be seen and known by its quietly lived local reality – often unseen in the darkest places – therefore easily missed against the national picture. Hope is to be found in such local places, seen not least with some of the effects of a Quiet Revival. In his familiar call, the bishop emphasised once again the importance of 'us-and-us', rather than the all too easy tendency to towards 'othering'.

Revd Daniel Natnael, incumbent of the new parish of Deepcut, had been invited to share the Good News story of the establishment and growth of the 'newest parish in the Church of England.' Reviewing recent years, Synod was told a story of deep-listening and determination, despite the challenges (much of which was during Covid times). Those gathered in the cathedral were reminded of how the often very challenging nature of change and renewal can be proving time that leaves behind an unexpected strength and blessing. This resonated with how Daniel told the picture of God's growth and structure in The Vine and the Branches, which has reflected the strength and blessing as it has turned out to be in Deepcut.

The meeting progressed with the acceptance of the minutes from the previous Diocesan Synod meeting in March. Time was then taken to review the three questions as received and answered in the days prior to the meeting. These concerned 1) the dissemination of safeguarding alerts; 2) the issue of biodiversity in the context of environmental concerns, and the response of the diocese; 3) concerns in Christian distinctiveness of collective worship materials available from the diocese. The first and the third received follow up questions was taken in turn, with responses made from the appropriate members of the Church House team.

The synod meeting then 'switched hats' into the Annual General Meeting of the Guildford Diocesan Board of Clergy, conducted by the Chair of the DBF. An outline was made of the main factors from the central church financial work on the Triennium Funding plan. This was explained at a high-level, with the addition of a helpful video provided by Church House, Westminster. A series of outlines was given about the recovery of the Parish Share, and the challenges faced by the financial review of the diocese. This changing pattern of national stipend levels was explained, and how it effects the Guildford Diocese (which itself sets the highest level for clergy). The Synod passed a motion to continue with the budget for the next year.

There followed questions about the understanding of average parish share increases, stipends and technical points related to the practice of the Vacancy is See committee (in the light of difficulties experienced in other dioceses recently). The agenda concluded there after.

The Diocesan Synod meeting concluded in peace with a sung Compline.