



## Bristol West Deanery Synod Report 2021 – 2022

### Introduction

This has been a second year of continuing disruption and unforeseen changes within our local communities, across society and experienced on a global platform.

As with last year, and before reflecting upon this Deanery, Bristol West, we must mark our awareness of, and our heartfelt prayers for, all who have been impacted upon by the global pandemic. Those who have lost their lives, those who have died alone and those whose livelihoods have been irreparably taken away; those who have been bereaved, especially when unable to be with and alongside loved ones; those who have fallen ill to the virus and the many who suffer from the long-term health impact; those many whose mental health, sense of wellbeing and spiritual strength has been damaged; and our brothers and sisters in other parts of our world who, in their millions, are suffering now – without the benefit of the support we have had. Recognizing that in many parts of the world they are entering the first phase of Covid now and without our levels of support and care.

We are also aware of the work of health and social care professionals; researchers and scientists and teachers; key workers and all who maintain the fabric of society. For them we give thanks and offer our prayers. As we do for those whose responsibility it is to make decisions on behalf of communities, nations and humanity.

We should also remind ourselves that this year has, once again, continued to shine a spotlight upon local and global issues:

- ★ Racism and minority ethnic groupings
- ★ Relationship between wealth and health
- ★ Disjoints between health work and social care
- ★ Pandemics don't recognize national borders
- ★ Human impact on climate change
- ★ Fundamental importance of social interaction in human wellbeing

Each of us could add to this lengthy list. And in our moments of reflection, this does lead us to contemplate our response to Jesus' answer to the question "Which commandment is the most important of all?" (Matthew 22:37-40).

## Key Covid changes during this year:

To remind ourselves of the context:

- 8 March '21                Schools reopen
- 12 April                    Non-Essential Retail reopens
- 29 March                  Outdoor Gatherings allowed
- 17 May                    Outdoor Gatherings up to 30 people
- 19 July                    Most legal limits on social gathering removed (Step 4)
- 8 December              Move to Plan B Measures
- 27 January '22            Plan B Restrictions removed  
                                      "We must learn to live with Covid" Government Statement

Over the course of the year the changes in the restrictions and the advice provided by the Church of England allowed parishes and churches to continue to adapt the way we all 'do church'. This includes the acts of worship and prayer, the way we keep our buildings open and in use and reshaping our place within community and communities.

There was a good deal of learning from the disruptions of the pandemic (see the Synod report 2020 – 2021) which continues to be put into practice. However, there were also a number of negative impacts that we are slowly coming to terms with – these are in addition to the unfortunate health consequences and increased deaths in relation to Covid.

These other impacts include reduced numbers attending church, a continuing sense of anxiety and reluctance to engage, reduced levels of income (both giving and rental/fee), reluctance to volunteer and feelings of impatience and frustration as the duration of impact lengthens.

### **'Stop, Start and Continue'**

However unfortunate, periods of significant disruption enable opportunities for reflection. Many parishes and groups have engaged in exercises to allow them to reflect on priorities and areas for attention and change. Many have used a method of looking to the future and asking questions about what has been and what needs to be – for the church to continue to live the Gospel and be a relevant agent within community.

The method of questioning what we need to 'stop' doing or new things that we need to 'start' doing, or indeed what we need to 'continue' to do (possibly in a different style) has provided a useful tool for many.

## **Deanery Synods in 2021 – 2022:**

### **Inclusion and Representation**

**Deanery Synod on 18 May 2021** focused upon the issues associated with 'Inclusion and Representation'

The Meeting was held by Zoom

#### **The Main Theme:**

The Area Dean introduced the main topic for reflection and consideration during Synod.

This was the exploration of the extent to which we are truly 'inclusive' or are open to others with the expectation that, over time, they increasingly conform to established norms.

- The extent to which specific issues such as racism, ethnic minorities, gender and sexuality, poverty and wealth, and political perspectives have, over the last months, drawn our attention to difference.
- Coronavirus has, for many, significantly increased the sense and reality of isolation. All of us have had some experience of the impact of human separation and many have suffered as a consequence.
- Transforming Church has identified a theme relating to the tension between inclusivity and the socialization of newcomers (making them one of us).
- Within parishes we are inclined to see group categorizations and not take an inclusive perspective:
- We can see differences between those who attend different services (the early morning 8.00am Vs the Parish act of worship for example). These differences also show in multiple benefices where we might attend something at 'our' church but not 'theirs'.
- To what extent do we see the 'users' of our facilities as part of 'us'. Does the understanding of the church community extend across the worshipping communities to recognise other groups (such as those who hire our space and plant).
- How much is the community in which the church building is located seen as part of what we are and actively engaged in our thinking about mission?
- To what extent do we enable our voice to be heard within the community, Deanery, Diocese and more widely?

## **Transforming Church Together**

**Deanery Synod on 20 October 2021** focused upon the issues associated with the values associated with the developing Diocesan Strategy.

The Meeting was held in person at Christ Church Clifton

### **The Main Theme: Introducing the Diocesan Values**

Archdeacon Neil Warwick explained that Transforming Church. Together is the process by which the Diocese has recently developed its vision, including desk research, an online questionnaire, and workshops held on Zoom. There were over 1,200 responses to the questionnaire, and around 2,000 people attended the workshops. Particular effort had been made to listen to those not normally heard, including disabled people, BAME people, LGBTBI+ people and young people. An external consultancy assisted in examining the results of this engagement.

The values which have been identified in this process – together with associated behaviours, experience principles and benefits to our community – are as follows:

- **Openness** – we are loving and open to all, welcoming to everyone, embracing diverse needs, so that we have a long-term relationship with our community, based on acceptance and love for people as God made them.
- **Generosity** – we receive and give sincerely, giving our time and resources to share what we know of Jesus' love, caring for people practically and spiritually, so that members of our community experience God's love and have the opportunity to journey into faith if they so choose.
- **Creativity** – we co-operate with the work of the Spirit, being rooted in faith and responsive to the Spirit, in bold and joyful faith, work and worship, so that we have variety in our projects and worship styles, celebrating tradition and innovation to connect with God.
- **Bravery** – we are courageous with our voices and our actions, acknowledging and learning from our past and actively effecting positive change in the world, so that we are listened to and partnered with, and the collective voices and actions of our community help to bring about transformational change.

## **Net-Zero Carbon Proposal**

**Deanery Synod on 10 March 2022** focused upon shaping a motion to bring to Diocesan Synod to give the previously agreed Climate Emergency recognition a greater sense of urgency.

The Meeting was held in person at St Mary's Almondsbury

### **The Main Theme: Agreement of the Net-Zero Motion to take to Diocesan Synod:**

#### **Rev Dr Andy Murray to move:**

*that this Synod recognises the need to take urgent and immediate action at a parish, diocese and national church level, in order to achieve the Church of England's NetZero Carbon targets by 2030. We affirm the national church and diocesan work currently underway regarding these targets. In addition, we commend the proposals outlined in the 'Bristol West Deanery NetZero Carbon (March 2022)' paper and we therefore call upon the Diocese of Bristol to formally consider the proposals and recommendations contained within the above paper with a view to identifying a programme of support targeted at parish level.*

## **The Uganda Link**

The essential platform for this is '*building relationships of wholeness across culture with Christ at the center*'. In short this is about 'relationship'; between Christians, across cultures, over geography and with, sometimes, differing views of this world. It is about learning from each other and providing mutual support. The Uganda Link is a feature of every Synod and the working life of our parishes in the Deanery.

Two key thoughts at this time:

- ★ The impact of the pandemic has been serious and challenging within the UK; in Uganda and many other parts of the world it is disastrous.
- ★ Additional impacts of the virus have been loss of education opportunity for young women (due to an increase in pregnancies) and an increase in domestic violence.