



Bristol West Deanery Synod Annual Report 2024

Introduction

Three Deanery Synods took place during 2024.

In 2024 and the key themes were:

- **Serving Others – Focus on Volunteers**
 - **Life Events and Occasional Offices**
 - **Priority Communities – Mission and Discipleship**
-

March Deanery Synod: Serving Others – Focus on Volunteers

Deanery Synod on 12 March 2024 focused upon the issues of 'Volunteers'. The Meeting was held in person at All Saints Clifton.

The Main Theme: Serving Others – Focus on Volunteers

Volunteers are key to our Parishes', communities and mission areas' ability to operate and flourish. Due to societal changes and the 'covid effect' we have seen volunteer numbers reduce significantly. As a Diocese, we are creating a resource framework that will support ministry and parishes/communities to attract diverse and committed volunteers, who in return find their support and service enriching.

In close partnership with the Releasing Ministers to Flourish workstream, **Transforming Church. Together** is doing everything it can to lift burdens from the people who make such good things happen across our Diocese, allowing us to concentrate on bringing God's light to those around us.

Two Questions for Group Reflection:

1. When we talk about volunteers within our worshipping communities what do we mean? (Is volunteering shaped by ideas of 'discipleship', or 'service', or 'calling' – or is it simply *'using unpaid time to benefit others'*?)
2. Do we have different 'types' of volunteer?
 - Worshipping Community members serving the church (PCC to coffee/tea making)
 - Worshipping Community members supporting other charitable organizations
 - Local Community members supporting church activities (church foodbank)

The Uganda Link

Rev Janet Hill and Sarah Thomas updated Synod on the Kitgum Clinic and the Nebbi Girlchild Project.

May Deanery Synod: Life Events

Deanery Synod on 15 May 2024 focused upon 'Life Events and the Occasional Offices. The Meeting was held in person at St Mary's Shirehampton.

The Main Theme: Life Events

A Brief Introduction:

Throughout its history, the Church of England has connected with people as they reach major milestones over the course of their lives and at the end of them. The church offers a variety of services - to mark the birth of a child, to celebrate a marriage, to mark the beginning of a journey of faith, and to commemorate a life that has ended. The Church recognises that all change, even positive events like a birth or marriage, can cause stress as new roles are adjusted to and values, priorities, and belief systems are brought into question. If we take funeral service (in church and at the Crematorium) alone the number in Bristol Diocese has dropped from 2,260 (in 2010) to 1,220 (in 2022). In the same period Marriage and blessings of civil marriage has also halved.

Round Table Discussion:

How do we learn from each other so that we can respond to this decline, connect with people more significantly and develop the missional nature of these events?

1. What items of Good Practice can we share?
2. Given opportunity, what would increase our effectiveness?

Summary:

- A single approach across the Deanery is difficult because of the different parish policies on Baptism and Marriage – Funerals are more straightforward
- Building relationships within community is the responsibility of all members of the worshipping community (not just clergy)
- Building relationships with Schools (Primary and Secondary), Toddler Groups and other centres of community (from pub to Community Associations) is important
- Introducing a pattern of alternative worship helps: Messy Church and multigenerational services, Tea-Time Service, Rise and Shine, etc
- Holding specific groups and events is important: Listening Café, Bereavement Groups, Space for Grief
- Regular invitations and keeping in contact and recognising anniversaries is important
- Form a Parish 'Life Event Team' (not the Vicar, not a rota!)

The Uganda Link

Rev Janet Lee updated Synod on the Lira Palwo clinic (a remote health clinic in Kitgum Diocese which is this year's deanery project), the Archbishop Janani Luwum College and the Nebbi Girlchild Project.

October Deanery Synod: Priority Communities – Mission and Discipleship

Deanery Synod on 8 October 2024 focused upon Priority Communities – Mission and Discipleship. The Meeting was held in person at St Andrew's Avonmouth.

The Main Theme: Priority Communities – Mission and Discipleship

Andy Murray, Dean of Priority Communities, provided an introduction to the work being conducted within the Priority Community Network. Many communities across our Diocese have been subject to decades of underinvestment from national and local government leading to significant

socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation. Across the Bristol and Swindon area approximately 30 of our parishes sit within the top 20% of the national indices of multiple deprivation (IMD). Local churches and clergy in serving in these areas often face a range of particular challenges, not least limited resources. We long to turn the tide and see clergy and churches in these areas flourishing and cultivating sustainable good growth, through intentional investment and support.

Support for clergy, lay leaders and churches who serve in PCs, through:

- Priority Community Network (PCN) gatherings for prayer, planning or social events. This has initially focussed on the gathering clergy from the churches below, and other invited clergy. In time, we anticipate opening the invitation to a wider range of PC churches.
- Tailored lay & ordained ministry development coaching, courses, and programmes.
- The offer for 5 parishes to be part of 'Jesus Shaped People' discipleship programme, which is running parallel to the PC programme (for churches in the top 20% IMD).
- Financial investment for 14 PC contexts, which sit in the top 12.5% IMD.

1. Intentional Mission and Discipleship

- a. Mission is about sharing God's vision of justice and love for all people in the world around us, including our local neighborhood. Discipleship is about recognising and responding to God's presence in every aspect of our lives and, as church members, helping each other to do that. How does this translate into what we do as a Deanery?

Roundtable Discussions:

Following an introduction provided by Revd. Andy Murray, Synod discussed the question of what we actually mean when we talk about Christian Discipleship.

Key points included:

Discipleship:

- Is more than 'volunteering' it is embarking on a journey with God.
- It is the 'working out' of our faith
- The challenge to parishes is to create a culture that enables people to grow in faith – it's about flowering and flourishing
- Some parallel ideas are about 'stepping-out' and 'life of service'

- Is there an important idea about 'belonging' before taking next steps?
- Enable sense of fellowship

Invitation:

- Far better to make personal contact and invite rather than general requests for volunteers
- Also, keep investing in people – enabling offering learning and opportunity, equipping, encouraging, being affirmative, recognize gifts
- How do we recognize those who would like to take next steps?
- Do we have a plan to foster future leaders/
- Make sure it's a safe place to take risks
- Make sure we stick to the Safeguarding policies

Focus:

- The focus of our gifts can be in worship, nurturing, prayer, ministry, pastoral activity and mission – so many ways to live-out being a disciple
- Preaching, teaching, home-groups

Challenge:

- Many parishes are limited in the number of potential 'volunteers'
- Young people and families are often an empty area in churches
- Volunteers for key roles
- Being willing to stop something if it doesn't work
- Being willing to share across boundaries

Elections to Diocesan Synod

Bristol West elected the following numbers to Diocesan Synod:

House of Clergy	Nine members elected (out of nine places)
House of Laity	Ten members elected (out of eleven places)
Ex-Officio	Two members from General Synod – one of each house (not elected)