

Oxford Diocese Synod

2022

It has been a great privilege to serve the Wycombe Deanery on the Diocesan Synod over the last year. The first time for a while that All Saints has had a representative serving on behalf of the Diocese. It has been a significant year with several important issues discussed and agreed, including:

1. Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

The Living in Love & Faith debate has continued throughout the year. Following Bishop Stephen's public position on the treatment of LGBTQIA+ people, same sex blessings and marriage in church, the Diocesan Synod has been privileged to have several opportunities to hear from him and better understand his position. The debate at General Synod created a position that went too far for some and not far enough for others.

All Saints seek an outcome for LLF which will result in a vision of infinite and inclusive love for all people, including specifically LGBTQIA+ individuals. We are supportive of changes and steps that lead to the blessing and solemnising of same sex marriage, being held legally and properly in the church, officiated by approved and accepting clergy. As an inclusive community, we recognise that this position will be challenging for some members of our congregation, but this should not reduce our determination.

2. Oxford Diocesan Board of Education

The diocese currently advises and assists 284 schools and academies across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, who in turn educate around 60,000 students. The ODBE helps provide and recruit governors, advise on religious education and in some cases runs and operates the school. 96% of Oxford Diocese CofE schools are rated as Outstanding by Ofsted (national figure 87%) and 100% are rated as Good or Excellent by the SIAMS process (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). Two new Free schools have been opened this year and two more are to come.

3. Change in Baptismal Vows

Taking the theme 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1), Bishop Stephen talked about the urgent need for action to tend and steward the earth. Churches and faith communities are a critical part of the solution, being local and global. Alongside the work being done by the Eco Taskforce, Bishop Stephen signalled a change (under Canon law B5) to include a specific reference to the care of creation as part of the Baptism vows. An addition vow will be made as follows:

Q: Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth?

R: With the help of God, I will.

4. Meeting Net Zero targets for Vicarages

Work was undertaken to survey all diocesan vicarages and similar buildings and identify how they can meet the stringent pledges made for net zero by 2030. As a result, it was agreed to use £10m of diocesan funds (non parish share) on a programme of environmental works to help meet this target. This first phase will run to 2028 and take a fabric first approach, using insulation, solar panels and other means to improve the carbon loss within buildings. To complete the works identified (430 properties) is estimated to cost £40m.

5. Changes to Parish Share

A full review of the Parish Share system was carried out, with changes from 1 January 2023, including a new support mechanism for parishes in vacancy, which will see a 10% reduction to the parish share for the period of vacancy. The net result of all the changes is a largely stable position for All Saints.

6. Self-supporting Ministers & Local Licenced Ministers Fees

A proposal was agreed to bring SSM/LLM fees in line with those paid to retired clergy. This means that SSMs and LLMs from 1 January 2023 would be entitled to an equivalent proportion of the fee paid by the recipients as received by retired stipendiary clergy, subject to PCC agreement.