

Deanery Synod - Annual Report 2020

Deanery Synod meetings having been held by Zoom this year, there has been a lack of the informal, personal contact and exchange of news for which Synod has usually been valuable. It has been striking that each meeting has been overshadowed by the difficulties being experienced through the pandemic, the efforts people have made to maintain contact, develop on-line services etc., and the alarming financial situation in which many churches find themselves.

'Evesham Deanery' no longer exists, as such. With the aim of efficiency and simplification, the number of deaneries in the Diocese has been reduced from 13 to 7; so in February 2021, Evesham was merged into the new Pershore and Evesham Deanery, under the Area Dean, Revd. Sarah Dangerfield, Priest-in-Charge of the Five Alive Parish (Crothorne, Fladbury etc.).

John Preston, the Diocesan Secretary, was the speaker at the May 2020 meeting and acknowledged the difficulties many parishes were facing, as usual income streams (loose collection, envelopes, social gatherings which accounted on average for 40%) had stopped. He stressed that it wasn't the PCC Treasurers' responsibility alone to manage things: the Diocese would help and parishioners had to do their share, such as by joining the Parish Giving Scheme.



The Rev'd Sally Welch, Area Dean from Charlbury church in Oxfordshire, addressed the October meeting. Her impression, on arriving in her post, was of isolation (of families and individuals), poverty (west Oxfordshire being among the poorest in the nation), very expensive housing, poor transport and unsupported communities. Sunday morning was for sport – not coming to church!

What was good and positive? Faith that God was working his purpose out. There are lovely rural churches, owned by the whole community - places to pray in, to reflect and offer hospitality – unbeatable countryside and wonderful Christians with a story to tell.

Starting with a couple of people who liked walking, from each church in her Deanery, she started the Pilgrimage Path Project. They began with footpaths between churches, using existing signed footpaths, and have now added their own Pilgrim Path signs along the way. People can become involved in many different ways. All sorts of different conversations arise and pastoral and administrative matters discussed in a relaxed way. It's discipleship in a new, rural way.

The March 2021 meeting of the new Pershore and Evesham Synod consisted largely of the commissioning of the Area Dean and blessing of the new Lay Chair (Robin Lunn, a General Synod member from Inkberrow) by Bishop Martin. The Deanery Purposes were outlined:

Mutually Supportive Relationships among churches – including different worship styles, different denominations, different expertise;

Effective Mission Planning – encouraging local initiatives, new worship communities and partnerships;

Serving and Transforming Communities – addressing social issues eg. through foodbanks, debt services and dementia support; offering training and enabling partnerships with local councils and other agencies.

Jo Williamson