

## Diocesan Synod Report | 15<sup>th</sup> March 2025

By Howard Mason

The Synod meeting was held at St Nicholas in Addlestone. Worship was led by members of the Youth Catalyst music group.

In his presidential address, +Andrew commemorated the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Council of Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine to address divisions in the church. That gathering of bishops produced an agreed statement of faith in the Nicene Creed, as well as 20 Canons and the process for establishing the date of Easter. Key parallels for today's Church included:

- Christology – the nature of Jesus
- Shared vision – We believe.....
- Synods – literally 'together on the way' involving bishops and clergy and later extended to laity
- Unity of the spirit

+Andrew introduced the Very Revd Bob Cooper as the new Dean of the Cathedral. He observed that the cathedral was for the whole Diocese and expected to invite deaneries to run services. He sought prayers for the finances and growth in numbers for the cathedral, and for resilience in his new role.

### DBE Report

Alex Tear presented the 2024 DBE report, highlighting the impact on the 83 Church schools and 20,880 pupils in the schools. He described the DBE vision for education. and the close linking with the Diocesan Mission. The DBE provided the RE syllabus for the county and nationally recognised supporting material. The DBE was focused on five strategic priorities to develop the Christian character of its schools.

Stakeholder reports from a head teacher, a chair of Governors and an Academy Trust CEO served to emphasise the value of the DBE in developing Christian values and relationships and reaching out into the community.

The meeting formally approved the report and noted the elections to the DBE, due by 24 March, ready for the new DBE to start its term of office on 1 April 2025.

### Net Zero Carbon

+Paul noted that Guildford was leading the country in EcoChurch awards, with three golds and a growing number of Silver awards, including one expected for the Diocese.

Steve Collins was leading on NZC across three dioceses, providing considerable synergy. The focus in Guildford was on the top 20% of churches which resulted in over half the emissions, with

the team seeking to define bespoke action plans to respond to energy audits and to assist in leveraging resources for implementation.

It was emphasised that offsets should only be used after every effort had been made to reduce the basic carbon footprint and to win over hearts and minds to address personal consumption. West End was highlighted as the first church likely to be net zero in the Diocese. The challenge and costs of updating power supplies to accommodate use of heat pumps was noted.

### **Report from General Synod**

Jo Winn-Smith reported on proceedings, with an inevitable emphasis on Safeguarding – a matter which demanded continuing deep prayer alongside refining processes.

The Clergy Conduct Measure replaces the previous Discipline measure, offering three levels of response to safeguarding issues.

The Racial Justice toolkit was recommended.

It is planned to reintroduce a National Youth Council to provide 3-5 representatives to Synod.

### **Safeguarding**

Geraldine Newbold expanded on the safeguarding discussion, noting that it was clearly recognised that the Church of today was different to that of yesterday. Certification by the National Safeguarding Team (NST) under Canon 42 expected by Easter.

From 2024, there was a statutory duty to refer all safeguarding matters to independent bodies, and to implement all decisions from those bodies.

Synod had adopted Option 3 for independent safeguarding as an initial solution, under which the NST would be independent and Diocesan safeguarding teams would remain under local management with independent monitoring. Further work is to be undertaken to explore the legal and operational issues related to a fully independent safeguarding organisation.

The Diocese will be running a series of monthly safeguarding surgeries from April 7.

### **Youth Catalyst Project**

Alistair Etheridge presented a comprehensive review of progress in the Youth Catalyst project which is designed to offer young people pathways into church, working through small groups and worship gatherings to provide missional leads in four schools, support for worship and other resources for parishes.

The impact of the four hubs was reported, with nine churches trained in using the framework, five now offering youth provision and 121 young people engaged in 21 groups. The Youthscape Launchpad project was added in 2024 to help clergy grow their understanding of youth ministry.

The team expanded in September 2024 to include additional resources for worship, social media, newsletter and podcasts. There appears to be a hunger for faith in young people, with evidence

of rejection of the secular views of their parents. Key needs seem to be testimony and practical guidance related to faith, and to be used as part of the community in church.

The national Ministry Experience Scheme provides internship opportunities for 18-30 year olds to explore their vocational calling – applications are now open for 2025.

A series of milestones for the project until September 2026 was presented. Parishes were encouraged to engage with their youth.

### **Revised Memorandum and Articles of Association of the GDBF**

The revised Memorandum and Articles of Association were approved by the Synod as members of the DBF, and then adopted by Synod along with updated Standing Orders.

### **Closing items**

A series of questions had been submitted and answered covering:

- Ordained members of staff at the Diocese – 17 staff, none stipend
- Takeup of PLF by parishes – 11 so far
- Installations of heatpumps in churches – 3 to date, 5 more this year
- Use of electric vehicles by Diocesan staff – 1 diocesan vehicle, 7.3% claims for use of personal vehicles
- Numbers of priests-in-charge - 9
- Demography of clergy – 170, median age 52, 34% over 60
- Likely number of parishes unable to pay share due to NI – none reported
- Options for additional funding for parishes – covered by national funding review due July 2025

The meeting concluded with the Nicene Creed and a blessing from +Andrew.

### **Next meeting**

Wednesday 25 June 2025, 7pm – 9pm