**Synod summary – March 2021**

Diocesan Synod met on Thursday 18 March to discuss some weighty and challenging matters, with the evening also being marked by Bishop Guli’s final appearance at a Synod in this diocese.

In recognition of this, Bishop Guli led the Synod in its opening worship, which reflected on the story of Jesus as a 12 year old in the temple from Luke’s gospel and offered time for reflection. Codra Spencer and Steve Bailey joined Bishop Guli in leading this time of worship.

In his Presidential address Bishop Martyn focused on disagreements and how we think differently about them. He reflected on the violence that had marked the early years of the Church of England, but how Anglicanism had then learnt the art of reaching settlement, which he felt was part of Anglicanism’s gift to the Church. In stressing his personal commitment to unity, Bishop Martyn noted that unity comes at a cost: some see unity as suppressing justice, while others see it as suppressing truth. Jesus’s prayer, however, was that his disciples should know the truth and work for justice in the world.

Bishop Martyn went on to reflect that the three main topics on the Synod agenda had been deliberately included together as there was commonality between them. He noted that the ‘Women, the State of Play’ report had shown that there was a lack of awareness of the full implications of the 2014 settlement around women bishops and that he still needed to do work on thinking through the full implications of that settlement. With respect to the Racial Equity Strategy, he felt that some believed that there was no racism in the Church, while some journalists had suggested that the Church was pursuing a ‘woke’ agenda; in fact neither was correct. As regards Living in Love and Faith, Bishop Martyn said that there was disagreement about whether human sexuality was or was not a first order issue. He added that the LLF course came recommended by the Living Well Together Group although two members of the group had not felt able to recommend it on theological grounds.

There were currently three different approaches to these issues: a settlement had been reached on women in the episcopate; there was a zero-tolerance approach to racism; and Living in Love and Faith offered resources for teaching and learning and to inform conversations. Finally Bishop Martyn reflected that conflict would not go away, but that Jesus was calling Christians to love one another.

You can read Bishop Martyn’s full Presidential Address to Synod [here](file:///C:\content\pages\documents\presidential-address-to-synod-18-march-2021.docx).

**Living in Love and Faith**

Alison Booker, Mike Kelly, Andy Brockbank and Penny Pullan presented information about the Living in Love and Faith course as members of the Living Well Together Group. Alison Booker spoke the Pastoral Principles and said that how we have these conversations is very important; she was genuinely moved by the attempt to make quality of listening to another person’s journey part of our discipleship. Mike Kelly reflected on his experience of doing the LLF course as a participant, noting that he liked the blend of stories and experience with Bible study, which allowed both discussion and disagreement. Andy Brockbank spoke about his experience of leading one of the sessions for the LWT group and how the course materials were easy to follow as a leader, but the conversations were not easy ones to have. He said that it was important for people to feel safe in the conversations and that Trevor Thurston-Smith was working to put support in place for those who might feel vulnerable when participating. Penny Pullan highlighted the importance of the LLF book, which went into much greater detail than the course.

Responding to a question from David Monteith which noted the potential cost of engagement with the process, particularly for LGBT+ people, and asked about the process to be followed in the diocese, Bishop Martyn said that there would be a national capturing of learning over the next year, which will include diocesan feedback. This will be co-ordinated by the LWT group and LLF Advocate. Andy Brockbank added, in response to questions posted in the Zoom chat, that it was not known how many churches had run the course to date and that people who were interested in acting as LLF course facilitators should contact him.

**‘Women, the State of Play’ report**

Following a short break, Karen Rooms spoke about the ‘Women, the State of Play’ report which, she said, represented a research snapshot from a pre-Covid world. She invited Synod members to reflect in breakout rooms on two questions relating to different parts of the report

* Research Interviews: What did you notice? What surprised you or has made you think differently?
* Recommendations: Which 3 do you think we should we prioritise this year?

The breakout groups were asked to post feedback in the Synod chat function and this produced a wide range of comments which highlighted the deep pain which can still be felt because of attitudes towards women in ministry; the lack of knowledge and understanding of the evangelical complementarian position; and surprise that the role of women is still felt to be an issue in the church. Synod indicated it would be helpful to have a clearer understanding of the complementarian evangelical position and a clearer understanding of how the Five Guiding Principles can be lived to enable people to flourish. There was also strong support for further conversations in parish/deaneries and for cultural change.

Some members of Synod expressed the view that there had not been enough time for this discussion or on the other major items.

The Synod agreed by an overwhelming majority to take note of the report.

**Racial Equity Strategy**

Presenting the Racial Equity Strategy, Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy shared a story which demonstrated how racism can drive people away from the Church of England to other denominations. He stressed that combatting racism was not about a battle in a culture war but rather involved following a biblical imperative. He noted that the Church of England had shown itself to be very good at voting through reports about racism but there was much less evidence of these having resulted in concrete outcomes.

Responding to questions and comments, Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy noted

* The need for repentance, reparation and reconciliation in order to overcome the Church’s lack of credibility in this area.
* The fact that those who think they live in monocultures (for instance in deeply rural areas) are likely to be much more connected to a plurality of cultures than they think.
* The opportunity for people in the Diocese to take part in Unconscious Bias training, and the fact that the training is not being used as a way to solve biases but as an opportunity for increased awareness and as starting point to engage in conversations without being defensive.

He also responded to a request for an executive summary of the Racial Justice Strategy, saying that this would be produced but encouraging people to engage with the full strategy document as much as possible.

The Synod then unanimously adopted the Racial Equity Strategy.

**Other business**

Bishop Martyn reported to the Synod that he was sad to report Stephen Barney’s retirement as Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance. He was pleased to propose David Palmer to take up this role and the appointment was ratified by the Synod.

Jon Walker then gave an update on the February meeting of General Synod focusing on debates on safeguarding, the response to the pandemic and the vision of a church that is simpler, humbler and bolder.

Bishop Martyn then paid tribute to Bishop Guli and thanked her for her extraordinary grace, care and wisdom. Bishop Guli led the Synod in a closing prayer.