

TDS23(33) BDC report to Diocesan Synod

This paper, drafted by the Diocesan Secretary is the report of Bishops Diocesan Council (BDC) to Synod, due to the timing of meetings it has not been formally approved by BDC.

Members should feel free to forward this to parish or deanery colleagues.

1. **Fruitfulness and Sustainability - the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal**

BDC monitors progress in implementing deanery plans and the overall diocesan plan for change through the work of the Programme Board for Change and Renewal, this board reports to BDC. Monitoring the implementation of plans is important because it tells us how our churches are doing, it also tells the diocesan trustees how effectively we are spending diocesan resources. The headings in this section are from the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal.

- **Reversing the decline in numbers worshipping in our churches**, requiring significant change to patterns of ministry.

Work continues to produce reliable data on congregation numbers both for this diocese and nationally (please do complete the church Statistics for Mission survey!). Overall it looks like we will be roughly in line with the national picture which tells us that between 2019 and 2023 (over the pandemic) the worshipping community reduced by between 20% and 30%. Provisional data suggests that the “Truro” number to be in the middle of this range; ie as a church we are between 20-25% “smaller” than we were in 2019. This headline number hides a significant variation between churches with some more or less now recovered or growing past their 2019 total, others much more badly hit. Ending this decline in numbers and reversing it is a very significant challenge that will require the re-orientation of our shared resources, hence the proposals coming to you for our use of assets.

Stipendiary clergy roles are vital for fruitful parish ministry and we know that we are currently carrying a large number of clergy vacancies. Our plans describe just over 80 stipendiary posts (headcount, and including curates) however we have a current vacancy rate of 15-20 incumbent status parish clergy which is too high. While recruitment difficulties are common in most dioceses, we are actively working to address this challenge.

- **Reversing the decline in the number of children and young people**
Subject to the approval of the assets proposals by Synod we are developing plans for this very significant area of work. We will work with external consultants as well as actively seeking the views and voices of local leaders and young people themselves.
- **Shifting resources towards communities experiencing deprivation**
Most deaneries are “on-track” with their plans to use Lowest Income Communities Funding and we are beginning to see this shift in resources make a big difference. Huge credit goes to those who in their deanery planning heard Jesus’ call to those in most need in our communities and were willing to heed that call.
- **Buildings, small churches**,
We know that work in these areas is important to parishioners, subject to the approval of the assets proposals by Synod we will consult on how best to make the most difference where it is needed most and report on our plans at a future Synod.
- **Carbon net zero**. A substantive report on this will be made to Synod.

2. Governance - vacancy in see and BDC

Vacancy in See

During the vacancy the Bishop of St Germans will effectively be the acting Bishop of Truro and will chair the Bishops Diocesan Council, all our regular governance and leadership functions are able to continue. Please keep Bishop Hugh in your prayers as he fulfils this role.

Vacancy in See Committee

By the time this Synod meets, the Vacancy in See Committee will have begun its work. The Committee has two roles; one is to compile a “Statement of Needs” which describes the diocese, the second is to elect six members onto the “Crown Nominations Commission” for Truro which will shortlist, interview and recommend our next diocesan bishop. We expect the Chair of the Committee to report to Synod.

Review of Governance

BDC operates a three step cycle of review. The first step was an external review - which was completed in 2020 and implemented over the following year, the second an officer led review - which reported last year on the new arrangements put in place in 2020/2021, the third will be a trustee led review which is beginning now under the leadership of the Revd Jeffrey Terry.

3. Governance - plans for Diocesan Synod in 2024/5

Since 2020 Diocesan Synod has followed a cycle of meetings with key themes taken from the five priorities in The Saints Way. This has meant that some synods have been given over almost entirely to a single area of interest, this has had pros and cons.

BDC - acting as the Standing Committee of Synod - have decided that from 2024 we will shift to a cycle that reflects the themes prioritised by deanery plans and thus the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal (DPC&R). In a typical synod we will include a significant item of work from one of the main themes (there are three as described on p3 of the DPC&R; changing patterns of ministry, children and young people, serving communities experiencing deprivation) and at least one of the subsidiary themes. This means that we are unlikely to devote as much time to single areas of work in an individual synod, but that we should be able to hear about a wider range of work over time. For instance, in May 2024 we are provisionally planning for a significant item on ministry, but to also look at how small churches flourish and are led, as well as the formal Annual Report and Statutory Accounts.

One specific item of business for 2024 agreed by BDC is for Synod to consider proposals and discussions coming from Trigg Minor & Bodmin deanery on the role of churchwardens and how PCCs operate when one or more churchwarden post is left unfilled after the APCM.

Members should note that 2024 will see triennial elections to Diocesan Synod.

4. Church House team

BDC continue to monitor plans for the Church House team to move from our current offices at Threemilestone into the Old Cathedral School in the city centre. This helps us to align diocese and cathedral more visibly, and the smaller offices will save costs.