

## Deanery Synod report 2020

The Deanery is the next level of church government above the PCC , and the Synod the assembly that gets to hear reports and vote on things, a bit like a PCC meeting but with more people present and less opportunity to influence matters. Clergy are members of the deanery Synod as is at least one person from each parish, the actual number depending on the size of the electoral roll. One important responsibility of the members of the Deanery Synod is that they form the electorate for General Synod, and that responsibility will arise in the next year.

The Colchester Deanery Synod has, like all other organisations that have to hold meetings, been affected by the lockdown this year. That also means that as our own APCM has been delayed the report on Synod activity covers more than a year.

Each Deanery Synod meeting includes standard meeting activities, minutes, notices, reports of internal matters such as finance and elections of the officers. Much of the time is then taken up with presentations and talks, some of which are more informative and interesting than others. So, for instance, the meeting in Wormingford in June 2019 had a report from the Diocesan Rural Advisor and Agricultural Chaplain and another on youth ministry. The Synod of October last year at St John's church covered a report from CYO schools work in Colchester and a talk by the Diocese's Chief Executive Officer. I didn't know until that point that the Diocese had a CEO as well as bishops and archdeacons, and it left me wondering how much effort is being put into the central administration of the church rather than into parish ministry.

In February this year the Synod met at St Margaret's church and there was actual business to conduct. The first was a presentation by St Stephen's parish on how they had declared a climate emergency in the parish and they wished to encourage all other churches to join with them in conducting environmental audits of their activities and work towards carbon neutrality. This was received enthusiastically by the Synod, though it struck me that there is a real danger in this of confusing activism with the even more pressing need to proclaim our saviour. The other item discussed in February was the ongoing work behind the scenes in grouping the parishes into "Ministry and Mission Units" and reported to us in a document entitled "Deanery Vision and Strategy Plan 2020-2030" Much of this work is to work out how to cope with declining clergy numbers. I took exception to the opening words in the report, which are "Our vision and strategy plan shows how we plan to build up the church..." pointing out that it is God who builds up the church, not us, and we need to fall in line with His vision and not our own. However, the report was overwhelmingly voted into policy, with only the people from St James' church voting against.

Then the virus struck. The June gathering of Synod was online via Zoom. The content was more solemn – the anticipated financial crisis caused by the suspension of worship and consequent drop in income. The most significant of these is that the reduction in clergy numbers planned to happen by 2025 is now planned for 2021. This is likely to involve clergy redundancies and does not rule out closing churches.

The next gathering of Synod would normally take place in October, but has now been deferred to December 1<sup>st</sup>, after the election of the new Synod membership. The venue has not been announced, but I anticipate it will be held online.