

Bruton & Cary Deanery



Minutes of the Meeting of Bruton and Cary Deanery Synod held via Zoom on Thursday 4th November 2021 at 7.30 pm

Present:

Revd Kevin Rogers	Area Dean
Revd Tristram Rae Smith	Assistant Area Dean
Dr Rob Sage	Lay Dean
Mr Jeremy Pratt	Secretary
Other Members of House of Clergy	2
Other Members of House of Laity	25

Jill Perrett	Deanery Accompanier
Wendy Hester	Schools Chaplain
Other PTO Clergy	1
Other Readers	2
Other Guests	3

Apologies for absence were received from: Peter Leavold, Revd Katharine Hawksley, Revd Anna Creedon, Rosemary Rymer (Deanery Treasurer), Revd Roger Burt, Susan Hartnell-Beavis, Linda Mumford, Russell Hamblin-Boone, Joanna Durham-Matthews, Deirdre Loftus, Harold Clarke, Revd Diane Barrett, Canon Brian McConnell, Revd Candice Marcus, Revd Frank Wright and Roger Cowley.

- 1. Introductions.** Some of the members who were new to Deanery Synod introduced themselves:
Alice Cleaveland was Deanery Synod Representative for Alford.
Charles Oulton was Deanery Synod Representative for North Cadbury.
- 2. Opening Worship** included a reading from Matthew 28:1-10,16-20 and the hymn 'We have a gospel to proclaim'.
- 3. Commissioning of Pioneers Julie Ebsworth and Christy Casley.**
Julie and Christy were commissioned using the following liturgy:

Area Lay Dean: My brothers and sisters, God has gathered us into the fellowship of the universal church. As members together of his body, Christ calls us to minister in his name and, according to our gifts, to be instruments of his love in the world. Within this ministry that is shared by all, Local Lay Pioneers are called to recognise where God is at work outside of our churches and in our community, and to reach those who are disconnected from traditional forms of church. As recognised lay ministers they are called to be part of teams that will lead new, potential, and emerging Christian communities or enterprises under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are called to have the courage to try new things, to take risks and to learn and to grow in the name of Christ, with the support of, and accountability to, their local church and the diocesan family.

People of God:

do you welcome Julie Ebsworth and Christy Casley to this ministry?

All: We do.

and do you promise, by loving and prayerful support to uphold them in their work and witness?

All: We do.

Area Dean: Almighty God, we praise you for Julie and Christy whom you have called to this ministry. Give them wisdom to discern where you are at work; help them to sensitively join in with your mission in the world; help them to see clearly what you are calling them to do; give them the courage to follow your leading, however bonkers it may seem, that they may partner with you and others in creating new ways of living and worshipping for those beyond the current reach of the church; and keep them ever faithful in your service through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

4. Talking Jesus in the rural context

Andy Gray introduced himself as an ordained pioneer minister in the Church of England. He is a full time children's book illustrator, and part-time works for the diocese as faith sharing enabler. So he helps people tell their stories – whether it be in the written word, or tell their stories of faith.

He lives in a large cottage in Aller, near Langport, which is like home from home for him as he grew up in the countryside of Lancashire.

5 years ago the Bishops did something called community conversations, and asked what people needed. One of the answers gave rise to his role: how can we share our faith.

He started about 3 years ago, but instead of making an assumption, he decided to do his own research with people. Was it that people didn't know what to say, or something else?

After about 9 months of many conversations and thinking, he identified what he needed to write to help people. But just before he did, through a strange set of coincidences he chanced across the course he has used ever since. It was the course he was going to write, so he didn't waste time writing it. He took it, and through a lot of use and seeing what worked and what didn't, adapted it.

We are unique, each one of us. It's the strength of being Christian. We all see Jesus in different ways because how we see Jesus and understand our faith is based on our experience. Then we use what we know (our bible knowledge, our traditions – that is our conversations with other Christians and so on) to help us think through those experiences. That makes sharing faith in our rural context very much shaped on our lives lived with Jesus, in this place.

In fact, we are the best people to tell others who are in the same context, because we naturally know how they think. Those who live in towns often have a different way of experiencing faith than those who live in the rhythms of a country life. But whether town or country, we are still called to share our faith in appropriate ways when it's the right moment. And that means actually saying something.

For example Andy was getting his hair cut and his hairdresser asked him directly how he got into this church thing? He asked her if it was how he became a Christian she wanted to know, or how he came to be a minister. She said how did he become a Christian. She wasn't a Christian, but she really wanted to know. He could have just brushed it off with a laugh, but he was ready with a reason for the hope that he had. He had thought it through. He wasn't looking to persuade her to be a Christian, he was just telling her his story.

And that's what all this is about. Andy wasn't there to train people to be evangelists – not everyone is an evangelist, it's a specific calling. But everyone is called to have an answer ready for the reason for the hope they have in Jesus. That's in 1 Peter 3:15.

The great thing is, it can be as natural as breathing. We just need to make sure that we are ready for it when we need to do it.

So for some, that will mean being partners in school. For others, it will be being part of the local community. We need to make connections with our local community so that people can respond positively to our acts of loving kindness and ask why.

Whatever the shape of things, it starts with a willingness to say something about our faith. If we don't say something, how will they know. The reason for that is simple. The world out there isn't a barren spiritual landscape that we need to be careful of, but people are asking questions about spirituality. Andy had had a conversation with someone the day before and had had one that day. People are genuinely interested. In fact the one the day before resulted in someone saying, after he offered to answer any questions that had always bothered them 'Why hasn't anyone else ever offered that?'

All we have to do is be listening for those questions. Sometimes that means saying to people, if you ever have a question about spirituality, feel free to ask! As soon as we do, we might be surprised by the response.

So there are then 3 things which are important to having courage to say something. All things that are covered in the course Andy runs.

1. Know some facts! People like us, and 1 in 5 actually want to know more, and are even open to a spiritual experience. This is from proper verified research by the Church of England. It's not true what

the media says (that no one is interested). And sometimes what we tell ourselves because we are worried what people will say.

2. All we need to know (like the man born blind – “All I know is...”) - because faith-sharing should be as natural as telling people what we did on holiday. We don't need a theology degree.

3. A sense of belonging to God and to one another. This is a surprising thing that Andy has found: the bigger the sense of belonging, the more courage people seem to have!

The 'Talking Jesus' course helps to explore these ideas and more through a sense of fun, laughter, conversation, and a few videos. It's free, and Andy comes, sometimes with a partner in crime, and presents it for us – 90 minute sessions, over 6 weeks. All we need to do is put on the coffee.

A Promo Flyer (which includes Andy's contact details and a link to the Intro Video) is circulated with these minutes.

Synod split into Breakout Rooms to consider three questions:

Question 1: How might doing a course in faith sharing benefit your benefice or church?

Answers included:

Need to feel comfortable with corporate worship, would feel uncomfortable Evangelising. But would find it would be of enormous benefit, in faith sharing.

Felt that they wouldn't be doing for her church or Benefice, but for individuals she met as a Pioneer. That they would have a relationship with Jesus, without necessarily coming to church.

Would feel more confident about sharing my faith after attending such a course. Could share with youth groups, encouraging some to come to a church service.

For some sharing their faith was quite a natural thing.

The more you talk about your faith, the more your faith is built up.

The importance of getting out into the community and village.

People may need help in picking up the hints so as to respond to the opportunities.

Easier to talk about spirituality than Jesus.

Great if we could get people to come along.

Would encourage people.

Would like to think it would be a positive experience.

Might not land well with our congregations – it looked as if it was aimed at the younger generation.

Would it? For a small village. People know who the churchgoers are. Don't think anyone who wants to know would ask me directly. Have some respect for me. But difficult to get it to stick, outside the congregation. Except maybe children.

If we as church goers do the course, then our friends are of a similar age – that is the generation that we already have in church.

Post Covid a lot of people are ready to talk. If we do it in a casual way, we might be more ready to do it and them to listen.

I cannot see many people from the relevant generations we saw on the video who are in church.

Won't want to join our congregations until there is a critical mass of their own kind and age.

But then some of us feel that the point is not necessarily to get them into church – if we think that maybe we are missing the point. More about drawing them into a conversation. Not necessarily even to mention Jesus.

Faith exploration courses have made some people uncomfortable.

Sometimes the conversations begin out of doing what we do, rather than on a course. Someone might see something we do and ask a question about why we do it and that begins the conversation.

Courses need to be adapted to suit the particular group who will be following it – the 'off the peg' course is rarely exactly right for everyone.

A fresh approach might help to shake things up and be helpful in overcoming our reserve.

It was difficult to reach people, who were not already part of our churches. How do we move outside of our church circles?

A six-week course of 90 minutes a week was thought to be a big commitment and it was felt that a one-off event might be more effective and worth doing.

There was a discussion of what outside groups we might reach out to.

Many people didn't like talking about their faith for fear of an adverse reaction. There was a very British reserve at talking about such a personal thing as your faith.

Question 2: Who do you know already whom you would love to become a Christian?

Answers included:

Has two brothers, one a believer, one who is not. He would really like his other brother to believe, and to talk about Jesus with him, and to listen to what he is saying.

Everyone. Pioneering is chaotic, two steps forward, one step back, you do not see the fruit from what you are doing. No one specific, just everyone who is not a Christian.

My brother. I think it would give him peace in his later years.

People knew of those who they would love to become a Christian and are praying for them.

Some people may already have a faith.

Everybody – why pick?

Eldest grandson.

People drift. God can call them back.

Question 3: If a friend isn't a Christian, how might they come to know Jesus if they aren't told about him?

Answers included:

If someone came to the funeral of a loved one, they might find solace, peace, and warmth from those leading, and facilitating the service, which could encourage them to come the church again.

Another talked about his son-in-law, who is at Theological college, having a tent erected in his neighbour's garden, and inviting a number of friends over for the weekend. On the Sunday he talked about Jesus, in the tent. He said that he would be surprised if some of the people didn't come to church after the experience.

It was commented, that "the church" is not a building, but wherever Christian people meet. It was agreed with, a tent, under a tree...

By example.

Through their actions, e.g. a kind act.

Also realise the importance of being able to share your story.

General comments included:

Necessary to have conversations about our faith and Jesus.

Making use of friendships and relationships, but recognise the need to have the relationship.

People do know we are Christians – a case of asking questions to find the opportunity to tell our story.

How do we recognise opportunities or initiate conversations? Listen and ask questions to identify common ground.

Recognising that spiritual exploration and inquisitiveness has increased post Covid so use this as a conversation starter.

Use our role in church as a conversation starter as people don't know what the role entails and then add why we do it.

It was felt that Andy's style and approach might not go down very well in a traditional rural parish with a predominance of elderly people.

We discussed the need for talk to be accompanied by action. Talk undoubtedly was important and needed to come naturally.

However, the way we live our lives and whether people noticed anything different about us was also crucial both for the integrity of our witness and as a catalyst for people to ask us questions about our faith.

How could we demonstrate that we are distinctive? Perhaps displaying love for our enemies might be an example...

We also commented on how people had noticed the contributions of the churches during lockdown. In one church, for instance, the church porch had become a community hub including the distribution of food.

Questions for Andy included:

Are the materials varied for different age groups?

The course is aimed at a variety of ages and the materials are not just the videos.

5. **Previous Minutes.** The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 2nd June 2021 were approved (proposed by Eric Deyes, seconded by Jane Jeanes).
6. **House of Laity: Deputy Lay Dean Vacancy.**
Jay Greene had resigned as Deputy Lay Dean because she had moved from the Deanery. Jeremy Pratt was elected in her place (proposed by Rob Sage, seconded by Jane Jeanes).
7. **School Chaplaincy Report – Wendy Hester**
Wendy was working in the 3 secondary schools in the Deanery: Sexey's School, Bruton; King Arthur's School, Wincanton and Ansford Academy. She had been in post for 2 years which was mainly during the pandemic. She had seen how God changes the day and does amazing things.

Wendy had been meeting small groups at breaktime or lunchtime. New students come and find her but it has taken 2 years. She had been individually offering pastoral support but is not a counsellor. In Sexey's, which is a church based school, she had run a club during the previous winter for borders which had used material from Youth for Christ.
8. **Area Dean's Notices.**
 - a) Diocesan Synod Report. Diocesan Synod had met the previous Saturday. One third of the members were new. The Five Year Plan had been discussed. This would involve redundancies and a reduction in the number of clergy posts. This hadn't gone down easily with those present and some details were being reconsidered.

Deaneries would have to look at Pastoral Organisation and their Deanery Plan. The Deanery would be asked to do detailed work on this. This was only the beginning of the process.
 - b) Enabling Ministries. Sets of cards with questions were available and a Discussion Starters Pack, details of which are circulated with these minutes.
 - c) Spirituality Post. This couldn't be progressed at the moment because all deployment options were on hold.
 - d) Archdeaconry Inspections. These would be taking place to do an audit on what is happening in parishes and they would also provide a pastoral encounter.
9. **Closing Prayers.** The meeting closed with the grace.

Next Deanery Synod Meeting – Tuesday 29th March 2022 at 7.30 pm