

Notes of the Deanery Synod – 2 July 2020

7.30pm by Zoom

Attended by 10 clergy and 16 laity

1. Welcome

A series of videos played while people joined the Zoom meeting:

- Poplar video
- Christ Church Music
- Young Man?
- [Tower Hamlets Together](#)

Andy led evening prayer. Elizabeth Philippa and Angela did the readings of the day.

2. How Has COVID-19 Changed Our Churches?

Andy spoke about the experiences of Tower Hamlets' churches during lockdown and invited us to think about what has been learnt and whether any new ways of working can be taken forward.

Alan Green

Alan talked us through some slides giving an overview of the impacts of COVID-19 in the borough.

Up until the previous week there had been 646 deaths, all having tested positive either in hospital or laboratory. When adjusted for age, this represents the fourth highest death rate in London and reflects levels of deprivation. Queen Mary University has been working with local GPs and found that around 2,000 cases have been diagnosed, many of whom have been managing symptoms at home.

Public Health England have been carrying out analysis according to age, sex, geography, ethnicity and occupation, together with co-morbidities such as diabetes. All disparities are prevalent in Tower Hamlets. We are a vulnerable population.

The local authority response has been impressive. They have moved staff to a communications centre and a food distribution centre has been set up at the PDC. This has led to a £32 million hole in the budget, which the government has promised to fill but with nothing received to date. There is now an active Test and Trace programme running out of the Bromley-by-Bow Centre and there is a local outbreak plan. Churches can play an important role in explaining these services to vulnerable people, particularly those with no internet.

Finally, Alan advised that a Daily Express article stating that Tower Hamlets would be locking down locally is false. The R Number remains under 1. A rise in reported case is likely due to the instigation of tracking and tracing in the borough.

Jane Hodges

Jane is the co-ordinator for funerals in the Deanery, together with Brian Ralph. There was a fear initially that we would be overwhelmed by funerals, but the death rate has been less than the worst fears. We were able to respond to all CofE funerals and all have been carried out by our vicars. Funeral Directors have responded well and, following the initial stress of following new guidelines, are now pretty much back to normal. The funerals themselves have been painful, even more so with social distancing. Mourners have been unable to hug or even sit with loved ones from other households. East London limited attendees to ten. City of London and Manor Park set the limit at 20. With many parts of the country restricted to no attendees, we have been able to have mourners present. The news that the Diocese had waived fees was also welcomed.

Moving forward, Jane would like to work more to revitalise our funeral ministry.

Foodbanks and Finances

At Andy's invitation, Elizabeth Marshall told us about how Bow Foodbank had managed through lockdown. The foodbank operated out of Bow Church on Monday mornings. Around 120 people each week came and were able to choose their own food. After lockdown, numbers went up. The neighbouring Roman Catholic church, always a staunch supporter, hosted it for us. Eventually, as numbers climbed further, we took up the offer of the Bromley-by-Bow Centre to host. Now some 350 people use the foodbank each week and 70 deliveries are made. Elizabeth praised all those that came forward to help.

Andy advised that the Diocese has incurred a loss of some £10 million due to the pandemic. Common Fund contributions have reduced by 19% in Tower Hamlets, compared to 12% in Islington and 9% in Hackney. The total pledge of Tower Hamlets this year was £863,190, which equates to half of the actual cost of our Deanery. The reductions in Common Fund contributions mean the Diocese may have to borrow to cover the shortfall.

Andy urged any churches facing financial hardships to contact Martin Hornbuckle. Two churches have already agreed a 50% reduction in Common Fund, one a 62% reduction and a two a suspension of contributions.

Finally, Andy advised that the clergy have been working well together despite lockdown. Three Chapter meetings have taken place by Zoom and weekly coffee mornings by Zoom have been keeping everyone up to date.

Bernadette Hegarty

Bernadette told us that they had begun using Zoom just before lockdown. The PCC practised initially using Zoom on their phones and then created a wider Whatsapp group to circulate instructions on how to use the platform. It took a few weeks, but now worship is continuing as usual and everyone likes the format. Zoom break-out rooms operate almost like small groups talking amongst themselves as would happen in church. There were some technical problems with the church wi-fi but this was solved by a long ethernet cable run from the vicarage.

It has also proven a valuable platform for those with physical or mental issues that cannot get in to church, for those isolating elsewhere in the country and, indeed, for newcomers. It allows people to see and hear each other but Bernadette felt the whole worship experience cannot be complete without movement and smell. Having said that, the congregation are keen to continue to Zoom Sunday Service when things are back to normal.

Phil Williams

Phil has been using the live.church platform, whereby pre-recorded services can be streamed live. It has been quite a lot of work to get up and running, but is now proving a real gathering and rallying point. The normal pattern of morning and evening services are going ahead. On-line pastors engage and chat, prayers can be requested and prayer ministry is taking the form of a Zoom room after the service. Other break out rooms can also take place. It has been a good experience as it feels as though the church is still together in a large sense. Investment in discipleship, family and other small groups can still take place via Facebook and Instagram.

Break-out and Close

Andy thanked the speakers and divided us into small break-out groups to talk more about what we have learned.

When we came back together, Andy thanked everyone for their contributions and finished with some thoughts from Bishop Sarah. Our actions are based in love and service. We need people to understand more about what we do, that we serve not to convert. Finally, we have a whole 'army of Christians' – the untapped resource of churchgoers.

3. Notices

- a. Andy advised that he will be stepping down as Dean in September and that Jane Hodges will be taking over.
- b. Hayley advised that this is her last Synod meeting.
- c. Andy advised that work continues on Capital Vision 2030, led by Bishop Joanne. Many people got involved in the consultation and the four priorities, looked at at the last Synod meeting in March, are being taken forward:
 - Confident disciples
 - Compassionate communities
 - Creative growth
 - Connected young people

Cultural diversity may also be included as a priority. The draft strategy will be shared in September with a view to going live in November.

- d. Tom Pyke welcomed their new curate, Tracy Browne. She will be licenced on Sunday with the formal ordination on 26th September.
- e. Angela Hancock, a governor of Sir John Cass Redcoat School, advised that there has been a unanimous decision to re-name the school in light of the founder's heavy involvement in the slave trade. The process is underway and being guided by a PR firm. Angela asked for the school to be held in our prayers.
- f. Philip Rice advised that the appeal process has now finally been exhausted regarding the closure of Raine's School. The closure will take place on 31 August.

4. Conclusion

Andy offered up a prayer for all the schools in London, 200 of which are Church of England schools, and for all the teenagers in our borough. Finally, Andy prayed for Sir John Cass Redcoat School and the governors steering the school through difficult times.

Andy played us out with a video of Phil and Charlotte Williams performing 'For Love'.

The meeting closed with a prayer from Tracy Browne.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Next Meeting to be arranged