

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

16 JUNE 2018

QUESTIONS – SECOND NOTICE PAPER

- 1) Mr Anthony Archer (General Synod) to ask Canon David Nye, the Chairman of the Diocesan Board of Finance:

“What property development is St Albans Diocesan Property Company Limited currently engaged with and what was disclosed in its profit and loss account for the year ended 31 December 2017?”

Canon David Nye will respond:

As I reported to Synod in June 2014 a wholly owned subsidiary company called St Albans Diocesan Property Company had been set up earlier in the year into which was transferred some glebe land at Houghton Regis. This was done on the basis of professional advice indicating that the land might have development value which could later put at risk the Board’s charitable status if retained within the Board’s accounts.

In late 2017 a collaboration agreement was signed with two major companies who own adjoining land. Planning permission in respect of the combined sites, of which the Property Company holds 14% of the land, has now been obtained for 5,000 new houses together with appropriate infrastructure, shops, leisure, education and community areas. We are told that the total development, is going to take 20 years but over time we expect to see a capital surplus which, ultimately, will benefit the Common Fund.

The loss for the year ended 31 December 2017 was £78,558 (2016 – loss £88,814). The accounts were prepared, with the agreement of the Auditors, on a going concern basis and received a “clean”, unqualified audit report”.

- 2) The Reverend Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Bedford, the Chairman of the Board of Education:

“The latest version of *Valuing All God’s Children – Guidance for Church of England schools on challenging homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying*, goes into much more detail about the effect of the bullying of trans children in schools than the previous version of the guidance. It highlights amongst other things that many schools assume that their school community is entirely cis gendered and do not consider that there may be those within their number who identify as being gender fluid, non-binary or simply as trans. This version of the guidance reveals that almost 10% of trans pupils report receiving death threats whilst at school.

What advice has the Board given to its schools about the provision of gender neutral toilet and changing facilities for the benefit of all of their students, staff and visitors; including those of the Body of Christ who identify as being trans?

The Bishop of Bedford will respond:

The Board of Education takes its response to *Valuing All God's Children – Guidance for Church of England schools on challenging homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying* very seriously. It is currently working with Stonewall to facilitate two training courses entitled "Tackling Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying and Language". These will be delivered shortly to 56 teachers and school leaders from across the diocese and the Board has a waiting list for a repeat of the training in the next academic year. In addition both Deputy Directors have attended a 'train the trainers' course that will enable them to deliver further training to support schools in meeting the needs of LGBTQI pupils. This training will be included within the 2018-19 academic year.

The Board of Education has, since 2013, informally suggested to Voluntary Aided Schools who are applying for Capital Funding works for toilet refurbishment, under the LCVAP programme, that they actively consider closed, single cubicle, gender neutral toilets when replacing existing toilet facilities. This has been in response to general anti bullying guidance. However, even where there is a desire to move to closed, single cubicle, gender neutral toilets the historic nature of Church of England Schools often does not allow for dramatic remodelling of toilet facilities. The Board is currently reviewing its existing briefings to school and would be happy to formalise its guidance in the light of *Valuing All God's Children*".

- 3) The Reverend Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Bishop of St. Albans:

"The continued rate of decline in church attendance and in the numbers of baptisms and confirmations revealed by the published Statistics for Mission over successive years, together with the drop in the collection rate of parish share payments and the apparent failure of a series of mission initiatives (*Decade of Evangelism, Vision for Action, Living God's Love, Thy Kingdom Come*), all serve to highlight the decline of the diocese and must be a cause for concern to the Bishop and his senior staff. The Archbishop of Canterbury has said a number of times recently that being a parish priest was the hardest job he'd done for the Church of England.

Given the disquiet amongst many in the diocese, both amongst the laity and the clergy over the latest mission initiative *Reaching New People in New Ways* and its cost to the Church Commissioners of £1.7m; has the Bishop's Council considered that a significant pause to hastily conceived top down initiatives might be well received by the already hard-pressed parishes and clergy that His Grace has in mind?

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

The RNP project is a response to the substantial amount of missional activity developing in all types of contexts and across all traditions within our diocese, that is reaching new people and has the potential to help them grow in faith and become part of God's Church. The work of the project is not to impose actions onto parishes or chaplaincies but to support them and work alongside them to provide the support they need to develop their fresh expressions of church or new forms of worship to maturity.

Initial Research – the Where are you on your Journey Question

From the 36% of parishes that have responded to our initial research so far, we already see that we have:

- upwards of 220 new forms of church or missional congregations that with support and ongoing accompanying work can develop to grow new disciples of Christ and equip teams of lay leaders.
- very few at the very beginning of their journey (1 - Yet to Start) and only 2 have said that they do not have any engagement in non-traditional forms of worship and have not expressed any thoughts on any potential considerations for future development.
- under 20% are at the early stages of exploring and listening
- over 80% are actively finding ways of loving and serving their communities and beyond to making new disciples.

All of this far exceeds our predictions or previous estimates.

In the first four months since the project went live in mid-January, there has been a very encouraging level of engagement:

Vision Day

Last month approximately 170 people from 77 parishes, chaplaincies and benefices attended the first Vision Day to explore how reaching new people in new ways can take shape for them. One priest from the Anglo Catholic tradition told the Bishop of Hertford that in 20 years of ministry within the diocese this was the best and most inspiring training he had attended.

From feedback we have received, the majority of those who attended would like to benefit from support through all the streams on offer:

- Training
- Coaching
- Consultancy
- Grants
- Meeting with other leaders across an area
- Using our indicator pack to measure participation and growth in faith (the pilot of these packs has been hugely encouraging to those who took part)

The challenge for the project will be responding to the large numbers involved and seeking support.

FX Grants

13 fresh expression set up grants have been approved - ranging from a new form of church for 18-30s in the centre of Luton, to a new all age congregation planted in a new housing area of Biggleswade, to a fresh expression arising out of engagement in the village school in Potton.

Mission Shaped Ministry

38 people from across the diocese have participated in the year long Mission Shaped Ministry Course which is supporting them to grow as leaders and explore the development of fresh expressions or new forms of church in their context.

Learning Communities of Leaders

Leaders from 43 churches from the 3 archdeaconries are meeting regularly as a first wave of involvement within the project. Where appropriate they are also benefiting from consultancy.

Coaching

In April, 24 leaders completed the first Transforming Conversations coaching course and the course for the autumn is almost fully booked.

Deanery Visits

The RNP team have either visited or fixed a date to visit 15 of our 20 deaneries - this is whilst being short of the third FX Officer at present.

As you can see, within our parishes, chaplaincies and communities we see enthusiasm for reaching new people in new ways. However, the project is not only for those already exploring reaching new people in new ways, it is for all parishes and contexts. To ensure that we do this the project team are working hard to start where people are and to journey with them. This requires that the project adopts a new and different way of working. Engagement in the project is context-driven, involves ongoing accompanying work, seeks to equip local leaders and provides a way of inspiring and measuring progress.

But above all the RNP project team are simply working to enable leaders to partner with God's Spirit at work within the communities, towns, villages and estates where they live, work and minister".