

**AMPTHILL AND SHEFFORD DEANERY SYNOD**

*Making Mission Matter*

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021 At 7.30pm by Zoom**

**1. Opening Prayer**

Caren opened the meeting with prayer at 7.40pm, and welcomed everyone. Caren used the prayer which the Abbey was praying against violence and trauma towards women and girls.

**2. Apologies for absence were received from the following:**

**Clergy:**

Revd Dominic Holroyd-Thomas, *Ampt Hill, Millbrook, Steppingley*  
Revd Andrew Johnson *Barton le Clay, Highm Gobian, Hexton*  
Revd Linda Washington *Harlington, Westoning, Tingrith*  
Revd Shaun Speller *Henlow, Langford*

**Laity:**

Mrs Gillian Kern <i>Diocesan Synod Rep</i>	Mr Tony Howells	<i>Hexton</i>
Mrs Ruth Barton <i>Battlesdon, Potsgrove</i>	Mrs Christine Culliford	<i>Maulden</i>
Mrs Audrey Brand (CW) <i>Campton</i>	Mrs Anne Stiles	<i>Pulloxhill</i>
Mrs Ruth Gray <i>Clifton</i>	Mr Malcolm Curtis	<i>Woburn</i>
Mr David Golding <i>Flitwick</i>	Mrs Linda Cudjoe	<i>Woburn</i>
Mr Nick Crago <i>Harlington</i>	Mrs Ruth Cullinan	<i>Woburn Sands</i>

*(Note from Secretary: several people were having trouble accessing the Zoom meeting, who would otherwise have been present)*

**PRESENT**

Chair:	Revd Canon Lynda Klimas, Rural Dean	<i>Maulden</i>
	Revd Caren Topley, Assistant Rural Dean	<i>Clifton, Southill</i>
Lay Chair:	Mr David Young	<i>Ampt Hill</i>
Treasurer and Diocesan Synod Rep:	Mr Martyn Gates	<i>Silsoe</i>
Secretary:	Revd Anne Barker	

**Clergy:**

Revd Carrie Steer	<i>Clifton, Southill</i>
Revd Lucy Davis	<i>Flitwick</i>
Revd Nigel Washington	<i>Harlington, Westoning, Tingrith</i>
Revd Roni Goodman	<i>Meppershall &amp; Shefford</i>
Revd Diana Young	<i>Woburn Sands</i>
Revd Stephen Nuth	<i>Woburn, Eversholt, Milton Bryan, Battlesden, Potsgrove</i>

**Laity:**

Mr Christopher Hodges	<i>Ampt Hill</i>		
Mrs Elizabeth Overfield	<i>Arlesey</i>	Mr Christopher Valentine	<i>Meppershall</i>
Gill Merrick	<i>Barton le Clay</i>	Mr Kelvin White	<i>Milton Bryan</i>
Alison Millar	<i>Barton le Clay</i>	Mrs Pat Goulding	<i>Shefford</i>
Mrs Sue Silver	<i>Campton</i>	Mrs Liz Allan	<i>Shillington, Gravenhurst</i>
Mr Peter Topley	<i>Clifton</i>	Mr Tim Watson	<i>Shillington, Gravenhurst</i>
Mrs Rosemary Ilett	<i>Clophill</i>	Mr Alan Aldridge	<i>Silsoe</i>
Dr Clare Butler-Ellis	<i>Flitton</i>	Mrs Stella Brooks	<i>Steppingley</i>
Mr Anthony Davis	<i>Flitwick</i>	Mr David Dallman	<i>Westoning</i>
Mrs Carol Watts	<i>Haynes</i>	Mrs Jane Steer	<i>Westoning</i>
Mrs Joanna Daye	<i>Higham Gobian</i>	Mr Bob Ardern	<i>Woburn Sands</i>
Mrs Marjorie Horrell	<i>Maulden</i>	Mrs Wendy Ardern	<i>Woburn Sands</i>

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

These were unanimously approved as correct.

**4. Matters arising** from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the Agenda.

There were no matters arising

**5. Guest Speaker: The Revd Anne Barker “Prison chaplaincy”**

Anne spoke about the threads which have run through the various Chaplain roles she has held throughout her ministry, highlighting the grace of God. The full text is at the end of the minutes.

Revd Caren Topley and Chris Valentine thanked Anne for her presentation.

**6. Treasurer’s report**

Martyn Gates had prepared the draft accounts for 2020, which had been circulated.

The expenditure had been £95, and the income £0.

The Deanery has paid off £1000 of the Diocesan loan.

The current balance is £6,265.96.

Martyn asked if these could be approved. All were fully in favour, so the accounts were approved.

**7. Any further reports** from:

- a. Rural Dean/Lay Chairs Conference 9<sup>th</sup> February by zoom

This had been a good meeting. Appreciation was expressed by Bishop Alan for all Treasurers, as this year had been particularly challenging due to the pandemic. There is a shortfall in the Diocese, but under the current circumstances £3m was considered to be quite good.

- b. Deanery Review

The results of the vote have gone to the Diocese, who will come back to Clophill, Maulden, Haynes, Southill, Clifton, Campton, Shefford, Meppershall as these parishes will be impacted in the first instance. This could all be ratified by the end of the summer, which will complete the first phase.

Revd Graham Bradshaw is retiring in May 2021. Eventually there will be discussions about Aspley Guise, Husborne Crawley and Ridgmont about the Deanery Plan.

Each time there’s a vacancy there will be a discussion about the Deanery Plan. At the moment the first phase is going through quickly because Campton, Hayes and Clophill have been in vacancy for about 18months, so there is a need for the matter to be resolved speedily.

Revd Stephen Williams will be retiring imminently, which means there will be the installation of a new Incumbent for Harlington, Westoning, and Tingrith.

Revd Diana Young asked when discussion would go ahead regarding Revd Graham Bradshaw’s parishes, as that will impact her and Woburn Sands. Lynda replied that at the moment Aspley Guise, Husborn Crawley and Ridgmont would be treated as a vacancy.

Stella asked about cover for the vacancy, and Lynda suggested she contact the Church Wardens directly.

**8. Reports from:**

- a. **General Synod**

Nothing to report, other than places on General Synod will be up for election this year

**b. Diocesan Synod**

Lynda reported that they had an interesting meeting last Saturday, which gave importance to Clergy well-being, with the recognition that some laity had also been under pressure. A stimulating talk had been presented by the DAC, and by the Youth Chaplain. Bishop Alan was very positive indeed, and thankful to all for the way churches have been able to 'hold on' throughout this challenging year. He was full of hope.

Revd Lucy Davis has a new role, that of Dean of Women's Ministry. She also mentioned that the youth report had been very salutary about the youth in churches, as the numbers of young people continue to decline, and the need to take this matter seriously - we're failing if we don't involve children.

David Young remarked that we need to spread our net widely to encourage young teenagers. Lynda suggested that maybe we consider doing something in clusters.

**9 Elections to the Diocesan Synod**

There are some vacancies arising. The elections start at the beginning of May. The Deanery Secretary needs to know who the Deanery reps are.

4 Clergy and 5 Laity are required. Let David Young know if you're interested. He emphasised the need to provide email addresses for ease of communication.

**10. News from the parishes Arlesey and Aspley Guise**

Beth Overfield spoke about Arlesey's efforts to fund raise this year, in spite of Covid restrictions. They held an online quiz, an online Christmas Tree festival, and sold calendars to help raise some income. They have held some services, but these haven't been too well attended, as people have been naturally cautious. A couple of children come to church. There will be a quiz this Friday evening. Prior to lockdown there had been a monthly parish lunch.

No-one was present to update on Aspley Guise

**11. Any other business**

For the foreseeable future meetings will be held by Zoom.

Lynda thanked Caren and Anne for their supportive work. She remarked that there will be a lot of change. "Try to be kind to each other. Be gracious and patient with each other. Hopefully things will get easier as the year progresses."

Revd Carrie Steer will be ordained as a priest on June 27<sup>th</sup>.

Lynda has two people being commissioned as Lay Leaders soon. There will be another Lay Leader at Southill.

Kelvin mentioned that the Annual Bike & Hike will take place on Sat. 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021 from 9am-5pm

**12. Date of the next meeting Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July**

**Venue: TBA/Zoom**

**13. Closing prayers**

The meeting ended with the Grace at 8.40pm.

Chaplaincy work has never been my idea. I've never looked for it, but it has found me, in several different contexts. God has clearly and unexpectedly called me to that role, so I want to describe something of my personal journey, at different times and places, with the common threads, in order to demonstrate the amazing work of God as 'Christ makes with his world a touching place.'

**1) A sense of Call**

I was called to Reader Ministry back in 1987 and became licensed in Chelmsford Diocese in 1990.

Industry Chaplain

At the time I was working in Research and Development at ICI, which itself arose from a Call during a prayer meeting, when I had a picture of two hands holding some kind of circular symbol, with the words, "This is the way, walk in it," *Is 30:21*. I later realised this was the ICI logo. When several rounds of redundancies were being announced it was a tense and stressful time for everyone. One by one, each person was called in to the senior manager's office to be told 'yea' or 'nay', and employees just sought me out to chat about their anxieties and concerns. This evolved into weekly lunch time fellowship meetings, and I seemed to have been identified as their chaplain in an evolutionary way, so I developed a pastoral care ministry in Industry.

Army Chaplain

Following Ordination in 1999 I began as a curate and then Team Vicar in an Urban Priority area. It was while I was in this context that I also received a clear, yet very surprising call to Army Chaplaincy:

I had no previous background, history or connection with the armed forces, but I happened to read "Birdsong" by Sebastian Faulks. I was captivated by the vivid recollections of 1<sup>st</sup> world war drama, and fascinated by the capabilities of the human spirit to survive under extreme duress. I linked that in with my Grandad's harrowing experiences in Ypres when he lost a leg. One particular passage had tremendous impact on me when Padre Horrocks quoted from Ezekiel and said, "I sat where they sat". Here we see the grappling with the perceived presence and absence of God, and the ethics of warfare, with the psychological and physical demands required.

I was compelled to explore further and enter into this wrestling with real and pertinent issues, so I decided to take my explorations to the Imperial War Museum in London, where there happened to be a very moving exhibition of war poets. I absolutely love poetry.

So I'd been well and truly alerted to military concerns when the Garrison Chaplain of 16 AA Bde (Paras) Colchester asked if anyone at the Chapter meeting would be prepared to become an Army Chaplain during the conflict in Iraq – 2003. I shocked myself by putting my hand up. Yes I am!

So I became the Padre for 16CS Med regt. (Paras) and remained an Army Chaplain for 8 years.

Farmer Rep

The leap from Urban Priority area priest and army Padre to Farmer's rep, again caught me by surprise. I was feeling a sense of restlessness and the need to move on, when I stayed with a Baptist friend for a few days. We decided to attend a local C of E church on the Sunday, where there happened to be a baptism. The vicar suddenly announced, "If there's a vicar here looking for a job, please speak to me after the service." I nearly fell off my pew! He was the Rural Dean, and I spoke to him, and I did get a job in the remote, but stunning, Staffordshire Moorlands. Lichfield Diocese then asked me to represent the farming community. I had no experience at all of farming life, but the call was loud and clear.

Not only that, but the MOD asked me to be the chaplain for 22 Signals in Stafford, the majority of whom were the amazing and wonderful Gurkhas.

Prison Chaplaincy

I find myself now in the totally unexpected role as Prison Chaplain at HMP Bedford. God's Call has always taken me by surprise.

I'd been the Vicar of a Benefice of 5 rural parishes in Peterborough Diocese. When I arrived there, the Lord said that I would stay there until certain specific clear signs of growth were evident. In January 2019, things started to come to fruition quite rapidly, sooner than I ever imagined.

All the signs and more occurred by March 2019. As I was younger than retirement age, I was hesitant, but the Lord said I must go back to our house in Flitton so, in obedience, I did.

After about 5 months, the Lord said that when I was going about helping parishes here and there, there would be a 'God-encounter' that would herald something new. Such an unplanned encounter did occur, out of the blue, when the Bishop chatted to me in Woburn Church. He said a vacancy for the Ordained Anglican Prison Chaplain role at HMP Bedford had occurred, and my name came to his mind. I applied and was offered the job.

For me, there's always been a specific call to chaplaincy, and launch into unfamiliar territory.

## 2) Carrying out Chaplaincy

How to be a chaplain will vary according to each person, but for me the theme which emerged centred on Ezekiel's call. *Ez 3:15, "I came to the exiles at Tel-abib who dwelt by the River Kebar. And for seven days I sat where they sat and remained there among them, overwhelmed."* The word implies a fixed and determined silence, of listening sympathetically and absorbing their pain.

When we meet Ezekiel, he's by profession a priest. However, his priesthood had been violently interrupted when he was taken as a captive to Babylon in the first deportation of Jews from Jerusalem in 605 B.C. In Babylon, the Jewish community of exile was preoccupied with two questions: "Has God been unjust to us?" and "What did we do to deserve this?" These questions still arise today.

In exile in Babylon, Ezekiel receives a dramatic call from God. The call "I sat where they sat" has influenced how I should carry out chaplaincy work in a strange and different context, totally out of my comfort zone; listening, absorbing, and familiarising myself with their world, their concerns, and their pain. I think John Bells' hymn echoes that beautifully:

Christ's is the world in which we move;  
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love;  
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,  
and Christ is the one who meets us here.  
*To the lost Christ shows his face,  
to the unloved he gives his embrace,  
to those who cry in pain or disgrace  
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.*

Feel for the people we must avoid -  
strange or bereaved or never employed.  
Feel for the women and feel for the men  
who fear that their living is all in vain.  
*To the lost.....*

Feel for the parents who've lost their child,  
feel for the women whom men have defiled,  
feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,  
and feel for the weary who find no rest.  
*To the lost.....*

Feel for the lives by life confused,  
riddled with doubt, in loving abused;  
feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,  
which longs to be pure but fears to begin.  
*To the lost.....* (Author: John L Bell & Graham Maule Text: © WGRG The Iona Community Tune: Dream Angus)

In industry, my role took me to departments all over the plant, and a walk & talk ministry developed naturally alongside my work as I spoke to the production guys, those in the labs, offices and management.

I didn't have a scrap of military experience, so Army life was completely alien to me, and a very steep learning curve – ranks, culture, protocol, language, abbreviations etc., but I soon discovered that my ignorance of military matters proved to be my way in. I just asked questions, and the men and women were delighted to inform me. I walked and talked, finding the men and women under the bonnet of an ambulance, checking medical equipment, at their desks, in the stores and kitchens, repairing radios and so on.

The Regiment invited me to go on battlefield tours to Arnhem, to go on exercise and eat rations, and use the same stinky portaloos. The guys kept asking me to go up in a Hercules when there was a scheduled Para drop, but I really hate flying, so I procrastinated as long as I could, until I simply had to grit my teeth and do it. The plane flew by swooping and manoeuvring as if avoiding enemy fire and, as there were no seatbelts, I clung on to a pole to stop being sucked out of the plane while the men jumped out one after the other. I felt really nauseous with the movement and I felt their fear. Usually there's 10% injury rate when they drop and lots of being sick in the plane. That day there was absolutely none of these things.

When I was asked by Lichfield Diocese to represent the farming community in the bleak and beautiful Staffordshire moorlands, I hate mud, and I'm terrified to walk across a field of cows. But 'I sat where they sat' - and I got up very early and learned how to milk cows with the farmers using the machines, and by hand. I joined them to pluck geese and turkeys with my wellies on in the freezing snow, in between all the carol services, and I began to have a little inking of their anxieties over TB test results, of the muddy ground affecting the cows' hooves, and of mastitis.

In Prison I walk around the wings, and chat to the Residents. I worked there on Christmas Day, but this year there was full lockdown due to COVID, so I went to every cell in full PPE to speak to all Residents through their observation panels, and to offer prayers and bless them if they wanted. They were amazed that I chose to be with *them* on Christmas Day and make a point of visiting them all. I also find them generally surprised that people should want to work with them in Prison.

### **3) Importance of being Non-Critical.**

As a chaplain I found that I'm not judgemental. This is a massive act of God's grace. When you consider what the men and women have been through in Afghanistan for instance, who am I to criticise them for their attitudes and language? The Chaplain General had been in a dug out with the Paras in Afghanistan, when one of the young men rushed up to him and said, "Padre, I want Holy Communion." "Yes," he replied, "when we get back to camp." "No, now please. I need it now. I've just killed a man and I need Holy Communion." We aren't here to judge, but to offer grace.

One of the concerns I had in prison was that I would label the men in a negative way: that's a murderer, or a rapist, or drug dealer. But what I've found, couldn't be further from the truth. I've actually been a victim of crime myself. I was attacked by someone who was sent to prison for a long time, and my nephew was killed by a drunk driver, who was sentenced to prison; but I've discovered a beautiful act of grace which allows me to see the men as broken individuals. A quote I often give the men is, "Broken things and become blessed things if you let God do the mending," based on *Psalms 147:3*. When you hear the upbringing and background of these men, it would make you weep.

Victims of course need prayer and consideration, but as a victim myself, my desire is that those who commit crimes will be able to turn their lives around, and know their need of God's mercy and grace, and unconditional love. It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict a person of sin, and offer assurance of forgiveness.

Paul says in *Romans 2:23*, "*All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.*" When I've been asked for 'Confession' I use the C of E Service of Reconciliation. The Dismissal is very humbling:

*Priest:* The Lord has put away your sins.  
*Penitent:* Thanks be to God.  
*Priest:* Go in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.

#### 4) Co-workers with Christ

Army chaplaincy is completely ecumenical. I was humbled to be asked by a 'Forward in Faith' priest to lead services for the other chaplains, and I was the only female chaplain at the time.

There felt no distinction between us. I was also very moved to be included in an invitation for their service of blessing of an icon of St Barnabas by the Bishop of Ebbsfleet. I was the only woman priest there, and made very welcome. The male chaplain priests con-celebrated, and gave me communion. Other faiths were gradually being included in army chaplaincy. With the Gurkhas, I felt privileged to be asked to be involved in a Hindu funeral for one of their children.

It's said that there are no atheists on the battlefield and at critical times I felt that to be true. I found they readily asked questions of faith, once they got to know me. The listening and chatting about everyday things paves the way for a spiritual conversation if and when they wanted. When my unit went to Afghanistan I held an Eve of Battle service/drumhead service, and conducted a thanksgiving service for their safe return which they valued.

In prison the Residents are entitled to have access to a leader of their own faith. We're a multifaith chaplaincy, and I've discovered such a wonderful love and care among the chaplains, which I see as the grace of God. We pray for each other and respect each other. I'll give a Qur'an to a Muslim Resident as well as Bibles and Christian literature to Christians of all denominations. I'll give incense sticks to the Buddhists, and make sure Jewish Residents have Kosher meals.

All the Christian literature is kindly donated by the Bible Society, Book Aid, CWR, the Gideons (who are now Good News for Everyone), We have no money at all for resources. They're all donated. UCB sent over Junction 24 packs which include CDs, an activity, Bible notes and booklets. We've been given books to help those with literacy problems too.

Prison Fellowship and Woburn have provided the Residents with radios, reading glasses, art and craft materials, and Christian literature. Prison Fellowship also offer the Sycamore Project which focuses on Victim Awareness, and often leads to a transformation in those who engage fully with the course.

They also manage the Angel Tree project. This involves us asking the Residents if they want to write a label to be attached to a Christmas present for their children. It incurs no cost at all for the Residents, and the feedback from that is thoroughly heart-warming.

I'm overwhelmed by the hunger for Jesus in the prison. The Residents will readily ask for a Bible, and eager to read Christian literature. They're keen to ask for prayer, with an openness I don't always see outside. They ask for Rosary beads and crucifixes, which they love to wear. I always pray they see Jesus within me.

#### 5) Courage

My chaplaincy work has seriously taken me out of my comfort zone, much like Ezekiel, from the familiarity of the Temple into exile in a strange land. The army, farms, prison were all alien worlds to me. Bible verses which have sustained me are Joshua 1:9 "*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go*"; and 2 Tim 4:17 "*However, the Lord stood by me and gave me strength so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles could hear it. I was rescued out of a lion's mouth.*"

It has taken leaps of faith, which I consider to be like risks. I've often reflected on Leo Buscaglia's poem:

**“Risks”**

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool,  
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.  
To reach out to another is to risk involvement,  
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.  
To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss.  
To love is to risk not being loved in return,  
To live is to risk dying,  
To hope is to risk despair,  
To try is to risk failure.  
But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.  
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.  
They may avoid suffering and sorrow,  
But they cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live.  
Chained by their servitude they are a slave who has forfeited all freedom.  
Only a person who risks is free.

All forms of Chaplaincy have impacted me and my image of God. I see our Lord on the battlefield. I’ve seen him in the cowshed, and on the production line and laboratory. I see him behind cell doors, and seen the delight in men who know what it is to be free in Jesus, by risking letting go of all that was, and moving forward with Jesus in their heart.

One prison resident asked if God could open the cell door. I told him that actually happened in the Bible with Paul and Silas, who spent the night singing and praying to God. The jail doors opened and their chains fell off, but they stayed there. The Resident’s eyes were wide open, “They didn’t run?” ‘No, they stayed there, and because they stayed there they were set free.’ “Really! Because they didn’t run they were set free? That’s a good one Miss.”

“Christ makes with his world a touching place.”

*Anne Barker 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021*