

St Albans Diocesan Synod – Saturday 12th March, 2022
Background Paper for Item 7 – Racial Justice Action Group

The Diocese of St Albans is committed to becoming a family of churches, schools and chaplaincies within which all can flourish. Within this we are committed to advancing the participation of those from ethnic minorities; to making sure that their voice is fully heard; to becoming a Diocese that fully reflects the diversity of its population; and to ensuring that clergy and laity of any background can minister anywhere in the Diocese without unlawful discrimination or hinderance.

We acknowledge that we have not done as much as we might, and at times we have got it very wrong. We also recognise that, on occasions, we have made steps forward and desire to build on these.

By our life together, teaching, actions and the way we communicate, we commit to challenge all prejudice and discrimination. We seek to model in the world that fullness of humanity, without which Christ is diminished. (Diocesan Ethnic Minorities Charter)

Diocesan Synod at its meeting on Saturday 19th March, 2019 received a presentation on 'Celebrating and Including BAME people in the Diocese' from the Revd Grace Sentamu Baverstock. Warmly received, this focused on the work of the then CMEAC (Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns). It reported back on a survey of ethnic diversity in our parishes and in particular the under-representation of BAME¹ people both in congregations and more especially in leadership. Grace was forceful in her challenges.

There was also reference to the growing roll-out of Unconscious Bias Training, the Vocations' team target of 2-3 BAME people to Baps by 2020, and events that brought together BAME people and others to explore diversity in our churches. Discussion at Synod focused on what more was needed.

Subsequently a number of key events emphasised the urgency of the agenda. On 25th May 2020 George Floyd was murdered by Police Officer Derek Chauvin during an arrest in Minneapolis. Among other responses were a series of world-wide Black Lives Matter protests. There was the Windrush scandal and on 19th April 2021 the BBC screened the Panorama programme: *Is the Church Racist?* On 21st April 2021 the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce published its report 'From Lament to Action' and the work is continued by the Archbishops' Commission on Racial Justice chaired by Lord Boateng who addressed General Synod this February.

Lessons Learned Review

Prior to this the Diocese failed in relation to the possible appointment of a Curate to a Title Post. This racist incident led to a series of actions including the adoption by Bishop's Council of 'An Ethnic Minorities Charter for the Diocese', the appointment of a Bishop's Adviser for Ethnic Minority Concerns (Revd Jairo Nyaongo), the renewal of what is now the Racial Justice Action Group (chaired by Revd Jo Burke), and the development of the Action Plan that is before Synod today.

Bishop's Council also commissioned a 'Lessons Learnt Review' in relation to the possible curacy appointment which was carried out by Dawn Lewinson. This review contains 30 Actions and 46 Recommendations covering the broadest range of Diocesan activity. The Review was considered and received by Bishop's Council on 13th July, 2021 and remitted to RJAG for action. The Review is available at: <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/lessons-learnt-review-may-2021/>

¹ This was the term used then. Subsequently the use of terms is changing. UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) and GMH (Global Majority Heritage) are being used.

Much of the report unsurprisingly focuses on the discernment and initial training processes for clergy, as well as appointments in parishes. However, it also covers staff recruitment, communication, policy and culture in the diocese.

There is direct reference to supporting the DMEAC (now the Racial Justice Action Group) and to the development of an action plan, both of which have been addressed.

Some of the recommendations refer directly to IME and are being taken up nationally as part of the outcomes of the 'From Lament to Action' report.

Within those areas that are under the control of the diocese, a large part of the review focuses on training. This ranges from the further rollout of Unconscious Bias Training for all those involved in recruiting and appointing clergy and staff (including parish representatives), to training for senior staff and key strategic decision makers to include intersectionality, cultural competency and racial justice.

Other key areas of focus are communications and policy. There are specific actions regarding the diocese publishing statements regarding key issues related to race equality – including the Black Lives Matter movement and reactions to media stories which highlight injustice and inequality. In terms of policy, the diocese is expected to ensure that there are policies and procedures which fully set out the diocesan position on race equality and which emphasise that the diocese will not tolerate behaviours which could be seen to be racist or discriminatory. All policies, procedures and training across the diocese should be reviewed and monitored on a regular basis.

Finally, much of the report seeks to address the culture within the diocese, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that every aspect of our work has embedded within it an awareness of, and sensitivity to, potential cultural/ethnic bias and unfairness.

Not all of the specific recommendations and actions in the report have measurable outcomes, and some are not within the remit of the diocese to effect (such as those relating to TELs and initial training).

The RJAG action plan does cover a large part of the report, going into more specific and measurable actions in most cases. RJAG are working to highlight where there are potential gaps and review how these might be covered.

Diocesan Synod Motion

The motion before Synod seeks to build on this work and challenge to date, as we work together to fulfil that vision outlined at the start of this paper. At the heart of it is the Action Plan that has been considered by Bishop's Council who emphasised the need for Diocesan action to be complemented with grassroots initiative. The Action Plan is, of course, not the whole story but will focus our efforts and, when achieved, move the Diocese forward considerably.

There is then a particular focus in the motion on appointments where racial bias is only one part of a wider need to ensure equity and justice. It is recognised that unconscious bias is only one aspect of the agenda, and it is good that 'Active Bystander' training is also offered within our Diocese. In passing this part of the motion, it will prioritise finding the best training and also make just, equitable, and safe appointments the responsibility of us all.

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)*

Revd Jo Burke	Chair, RJAG
Revd Jairo Nyaongo	Bishop's Adviser for Ethnic Minority Concerns
Rt Revd Richard Atkinson	Bishop of Bedford