

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF DIOCESAN SYNOD

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 JULY 2025

AT BISHOP STOPFORD SCHOOL, KETTERING

INTRODUCTION

The Lay Chair of Diocesan Synod, Chris Banks introduced synod. He was pleased to see so many parish treasurers joining synod members for this meeting. The meeting would trial a new way of working with greater participation and it was hoped that this would be effective and the start of a wider dialogue between the diocese and parishes.

OPENING PRAYER

The Revd Nicki Hobbs (Rural Dean of Higham & Kettering) opened in prayer, remembering Steve Atkins, a former member of Diocesan Synod and involved in many roles in his parish and deanery who had died in June. His funeral would be on 11 July.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Bishop Debbie thanked everyone for being here as part of the shared ongoing journey. She spoke about the joy of the ordinations over the previous weekend when 15 people were ordained deacon or priest. It was somewhat overwhelming for the ordinands understanding the significance of what was happening but feeling the calling. Photos were on social media.

Part of the declarations were “in the strength of the Holy Spirit make Christ known in all those you serve. Live with the power to make a mark.” This is the call for every follower of Jesus. How do we do that in every single parish and how do the Diocesan staff help us.

The National Church’s Vision is the making of missionary disciples, and whilst we were still working on ours, it wouldn’t be far from the national one as we long for people to know Christ in their lives.

We are already talking about who we are. She updated synod on the Governance and Organisation Review and said that is incredibly important for us. She explained that it has said some things which were difficult to hear and provided the tools to help. For example, we needed to be more focused and clearer on how decisions are made and by who. This involves looking at the nuts and bolts of the organisation as we must do governance well. We want to understand our structures and ensure that everything works together effectively. Then we can forget about the structure itself and focus on making Christ known.

She said that we are examining the overall strategy and then we will be able to link our strategy much more closely with decision making. We need to communicate how we are all part of the Peterborough Diocese, whilst recognising that many of you are a long way from Peterborough and may not come to Peterborough.

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A working group had been established to make recommendations arising from the findings of the Governance Report. This could include combining the main trustee committees of Bishop's Council, Diocesan Board of Finance and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee.

We will need some additional resources to make progress with the development of the strategy and the implementation of some of the recommendations. The good news is that we have been awarded additional funding by the National Church to address the shortfall in capacity as we develop our strategy and implement changes. This includes the new post of Bishop's Missioner with interviews taking place next week and she said that she was excited about this.

We will be looking at deanery plans and aim to develop distinct rural and urban strategies. A group was already looking at clergy wellbeing, scoping to establish what is meant by this and then making recommendations on how we can help.

She said that we want to be a Diocese where things are planned and implemented well. It will take time to make the necessary improvements, and we are aiming to do so over a two year period.

BISHOP OF BRIXWORTH

Bishop Debbie then explained that she needed to ask if she could appoint a new Bishop of Brixworth following Bishops John's retirement in September. She would need to go to the Diocesan Commission to justify the appointment. Reasons would include the diocesan geography, the sharing of portfolios, the governance review and the recent safeguarding report. Diocesan Synod members were asked to think widely and creatively and to email with reasons for, and against, this appointment using this address:

diosynod@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

KNOWING CHRIST

She concluded by referencing back to the recent ordinations, where candidates were committed to making Christ known, as we all should. We couldn't do that if we don't know what we are doing to help others to know him better. How can we see Jesus in the eyes of others? Our testimony needs to be "I know the risen Christ in my life and in the life of my community." We have a deep desire to know Christ ourselves and to make him known to others.

DIOCESAN FINANCES

David Mason, Chief Financial Officer, gave a presentation on diocesan finances, setting out the current deficit position, full details of which were included in the papers circulated to all those invited to the meeting.

Time was then spent in small groups, each with a facilitator, reflecting on what David had said and how best to face this challenge together using the following questions:

- (i) What are the key drivers of the deficit, and can any be reversed or mitigated? In other words, what could be done differently to improve the situation?

- (ii) How do we balance our financial responsibilities with our missional calling? In other words, how would you fund the cost of an incumbent?’
- (iii) How can we improve the engagement between the central Diocesan teams and the parishes on the whole issue of parish giving and the funding of mission and ministry? In other words, in what practical ways could we improve communication and mutual understanding of the challenges and the opportunities?

Each group was encouraged to note down key comments and ideas, and these were collected at the close of the meeting. This feedback will be reviewed by the working group and other interested parties as the future financial strategy is being developed.

Synod members and treasurers, especially those who were unable to attend the meeting, are encouraged to provide their comments and ideas via email using the address:

diosynod@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

It was hoped that having this discussion would enable Synod members to be better prepared to consider the 2026 budget at the October Synod.

This period of discussion was followed by a brief question and answer session:

- How long could the diocese continue with the deficit budgets?
 - David Mason explained that with the sale of surplus houses being pursued the diocese could run for up to 10 years potentially with a deficit budget, but clearly something needs to be done before then. Chris Banks added that the governance working group has responsibility to ensure that the Diocese produces a financial strategy. It was later explained that these houses were not parsonages.
- It was suggested that we needed more clergy, not less and with the Church Commissioners (CCs) sitting on large funds more needed to be passed down so that we didn't have to sell houses.
- It was suggested that radical ways of increasing returns on investments needed to be considered, with glebe land only producing a yield of 1.5%/annum
- The funding from the CCs was encouraging but it seemed that to reduce the deficit we needed to reduce activity.
 - Bishop Debbie explained that with the opportunity for triennial funding from the CCs, churches would be asked how they wished the money to be spent. There would be funding to help with strategy once the Diocese was clearer on what it planned to do. At the next General Synod, a motion from Hereford Diocese was asking for the CCs to make available direct funding for parishes without the need for an underlying mission strategy.
- We were asked if the diocese had considered a legacy campaign
 - Chris Banks explained that material was available through the stewardship team.
- It was suggested that the language used when talking about parish share needed to be of equity and talk of winners and losers was unhelpful

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- David Mason explained that that had not been his intention. He was reflecting that whenever the formula for calculating parish share is changed, some parishes will be asked to contribute more and others less.
- Surprise was expressed that not all parishes had signed up to the Parish Giving Scheme and that many had not had a stewardship campaign for ten or more years.
- Chris Banks agreed that the stewardship team worked hard and we needed to consider how to encourage more parishes to join up, but ultimately the decision rests with each PCC

DEANERY SYNOD MOTION

The Diocesan Secretary explained that the Peterborough Deanery Synod had submitted a motion that the parish share formula be reviewed and advised that this would be debated at the October meeting of the Diocesan Synod.

TIME FOR QUESTIONS

Under Standing Order 70, a question from John Harris was raised and it was answered in the meeting. Since Mr Harris was not at the meeting there were no supplementary questions.

PROCLAMATION OF AN ACT OF SYNOD

The Diocesan Secretary proclaimed the amended Vacancy in See Committee's Regulation 2024.

CLOSING

Chris Banks closed the meeting reminding people that the email address for comments and suggestions on both the appointment of a new Bishop of Brixworth and the financial situation would be circulated with the minutes. He thanked everyone for participating so fully during the meeting and for the support of the table facilitators in enabling this.

The 2026 budget would be considered at the October meeting, and the Governance Review would also report back on its progress with reviewing governance structures as well as the two major areas of finance and HR.

The meeting closed with prayers