

PETERBOROUGH DIOCESAN SYNOD

The Autumn Session

Held on Saturday 18 October 2025

At The Malcolm Arnold Academy, Northampton

1. OPENING PRAYERS AND PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Opening Prayers were led by Revd Allison Twigg

Presidential Address

Bishop Debbie opened by reflecting on the biblical imagery of wells, drawing from passages in Genesis, Isaiah, Revelation, and John's Gospel; highlighting three central themes: wells as places that can be reopened to revive spiritual heritage, wells as sources of provision and transformation, and wells as sites of profound encounter—most notably, the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Members are encouraged to help the diocese to reconnect with its spiritual roots, trust in God's ongoing provision, and raise expectations for transformative encounters with Christ.

The practical work of the Diocesan Synod, the discussions about finance, governance, and communication are not merely administrative but foundational to the flourishing of ministry. Bishop Debbie went on to draw on the parable of the wise and foolish builders to stress the importance of strong foundations, suggesting that good governance and wise use of resources are essential for building effective ministries and fulfilling the church's mission in Peterborough Diocese.

Finally, the address articulated a vision and strategy for the diocese: to invite all to the well of Christ, to refresh and equip people, to use resources wisely, and to foster a culture of good decision-making and mutual respect. The work of the Synod is described as spiritual and vital, providing the structure that enables ministry to thrive. Members are encouraged to approach their roles prayerfully and with a sense of excitement, recognising that their efforts contribute to the work of God's kingdom.

2. DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE: ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND REPORTS FOR 2024

To receive the Accounts and Annual Report in accordance with Standing Order 110

Paul Buckingham (DBF Chair) led members through a summary of the 2024 report and accounts, offering thanks to Parishes for their response to the Parish Share request in

recognition of the difficult financial times we all face. What we are currently seeing across the diocese [and arguably across the CofE] is a missional crisis expressed in financial terms.

There being no questions, Dr Paul Buckingham moved, on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Finance, That the Synod takes note of the Chairman's Report and the Accounts of the Diocesan Board of Finance for 2024

Noted unanimously, motion carried.

3. UPDATE ON THE GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Chris Banks [CB]

The Governance and Organisation Review (GR) Working Group was established following an external review commissioned by Bishop Debbie, which highlighted that the Diocese lacked joined-up working, intentional decision-making and effective data management, limiting its effectiveness. The Working Group, comprising clergy, laity, external consultants, and diocesan officers, has been meeting regularly since July to address these challenges and drive organisational improvements, with a strong focus on enhancing service to parishes and fostering better partnerships between parishes and the Diocese. It will take sustained effort and time to achieve the desired changes and improve performance, but there is absolute determination to do so.

Key areas of work include governance improvements (such as aligning key governance bodies and reviewing best practices from other dioceses), overseeing the development of a strategic financial plan to address the diocesan deficit, and enhancing HR capacity and processes. The support and assistance received from other dioceses has been very encouraging – these include Southwell, Coventry, Leicester, Sheffield and Bath & Wells. Whilst the National Church has provided funding for both the review and new roles to support organisational changes. Progress includes engaging with other dioceses for insights and organising meetings to improve the management of Parish Share.

Questions:

Damian Pickard Abington

As someone who was interviewed DP wanted to congratulate the working group on its actions so far. What is important now is what comes next in terms of performance and financial management. How does this work translate into a fundamental review of how the diocese is structured as adding more staff is not the answer.

Response: +Debbie agreed in principle, however commented a staffing review would be disruptive now. Instead, we should compare our situation with other dioceses, as this has not been addressed before. Clergy costs are our largest expense but reviewing them negatively isn't helpful. Focusing on clergy deployment and determining the ministry provision needed to deliver our mission is a more informed approach.

Katrina Hutchings Wellingborough: commented that the work of the governance working group was welcomed, and hearing that this is about organisational design to impact on missional growth. Very keen to see this all come together and deliver change.

Mark Lucas Kettering: found the concept of Clergy Deployment worrying and reflected the improvement plan should not be purely a centralised process.

Bishop Debbie in response agreed Clergy Deployment should be worked from the bottom up; we should listen to God, and what our parishes are saying. Understanding what we need, the diversity of our missional offer and where do the resources need to be is fundamental to this work.

Andrew Presland Higham: asked for more information on the appointment of the Bishop's Missioner. Bishop Debbie introduced Becky Dyball and explained the post is designed to give a complete overview of missional activity in the diocese. Where are the success stories. Where might help be needed, what does that help need to look like. Historically we have failed to appropriately link into national church funding, this is key to the new post to enable us to drive new strategies, for example into new communities. What does Flourish look like when the pilot is over.

Nick Alexander Greater Northampton; asked that we prioritise biblical language over managerial language, to connect with people so they get behind this work. Recognising growth will be generated by the work of the Spirit.

4. Peterborough Deanery Synod Motion

Revd Keir Dow [KD] introduced this item, highlighting the need to reform the parish share system within the diocese, emphasising that the current approach has become overly transactional and lacks a sense of shared mission and mutual responsibility. This motion before Synod is described as a trust-building initiative rather than a technical fix, aiming to reset the process through open, transparent collaboration and regular consultation with all stakeholders, including deaneries, treasurers, PCCs, and clergy. It does not prescribe an

immediate new model but instead seeks to create space for renewal, with a clear timeline, regular progress updates, and visible senior leadership engagement.

Questions:

Martin Powell Rutland; reflected on the inspirational tone of KD input and asked why the diocese would not want to embrace this. Asking what does good look like? At the very least a published timeline of activities by the March 2026 Synod.

Isabel Merrifield Interim Diocesan Secretary; in response clarified there will be no change to the 2026 Parish Share formula as we do not have time to do the work well, and collaboratively. The work in 2026 will propose the change effective from 2027.

Katrina Hutchings Wellingborough: This is again a positive work stream and goes to the heart of what the shape of the parish share system needs to look like into the future.

George Frost Brackley: asked for more detail on what are the alternative models. KD stressed the desire that we move away from 'models' or adopting something from another diocese. Asking instead that we collaborate across the diocese, taking parishes with us on our journey to a Peterborough Diocese model. A clear timeline for the March 2026 Synod is what is being asked for.

Motion carried; 2 abstentions.

5. Diocesan Budget for 2026

Dr Paul Buckingham and David Mason (DM) (CFO) spoke to the proposed budget for 2026, outlining some key matters for Synod to reflect on; Whilst the budget is still showing a £2m deficit, this has been helped by funding from the National Church towards the increase in clergy stipends as well as extra support for the most deprived parishes. This is tapered and will run out over a 9-year period. Plans are in place to address the budget deficit moving forward and updates will follow at future synods. Great work is being done in the parishes, and we are hopeful for the future.

Questions:

Martin Powell Rutland: requested clarity on how the deficit was being funded, DM advised from reserves.

Oliver Coss Greater Northampton: commented this is welcomed in the context of the governance review work currently being undertaken. Asking for better communication, and involving Deanery Synods in the financial conversations as they are key to getting the messages out and they need to live out effective governance and a healthy financial culture.

Synod were asked to consider the proposed budget for 2026 in accordance with Standing Order 110

Dr Paul Buckingham moved on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Finance

“That this Synod

(a) Approves the proposed budget for 2026

(b) Authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend a sum not exceeding £12,708,883 in 2026.

6. Living in Love and Faith Briefing

Allison Twigg provided an update on the current situation with LLF and gave an overview of key events since 2017: See Appendix 1 for the full briefing

Vicky Brett Peterborough gave a response to the briefing expressing disappointment with the latest update. Speaking as someone who loves this church, served it, prayed for it and believed deeply in its calling to be a home for all. For her community this is not a matter of abstract theology or church process. There is a deep sense of wounding and weariness but they remain hopeful of a church that can speak of radical Christian inclusion.

See Appendix 2 for the full speech.

7. CONSTITUTION OF THE DAC

Postponed as further legal scrutiny is required. This will return in March 2026

8. ELECTIONS TO THE DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

Peter Cantley, Director of Education, gave a brief summary of the forthcoming election process for the Board of Education. This Synod is asked to elect, from nominations across the diocese, 6 members. This will be an electronic process with papers going out next week with a deadline of 14/11/2025.

Motion Carried, 1 abstention.

9. GENERAL SYNOD

See appendix 3 for the full submission

The July 2025 General Synod at York University was marked by a strong focus on legislative responsibilities, with significant moments including addresses from The Most Reverend

Hosam Naoum, who spoke powerfully about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and Brigadier Jaish Maha, who highlighted the importance of military chaplaincy. Notably, a piece of legislation was rapidly passed to ensure military chaplains can remain authorised for ministry when deployed at short notice, reflecting a sense of urgency and responsibility within the Synod.

Financial matters were a major part of the agenda, with debates on the 2026 Archbishop's Council budget and Church Commissioners' funding for 2026–28. Key outcomes included the approval of increased funding for clergy stipends, the passing of a motion to review clergy wellbeing and retirement housing, and the establishment of a £150m Redress scheme for survivors of Church-related abuse. There was also a rare moment of consensus to replace the 1991 "Issues in Human Sexuality" document with interim guidelines for ordination candidates, signalling progress on the Living in Love and Faith process.

Other highlights included discussions on church growth, the introduction of new liturgical commemorations, restructuring of national church institutions into a new trustee-led charity [CofE National Services], and a debate on the Terminally Ill Adults Bill, which reaffirmed Synod's commitment to palliative care over assisted dying. The Synod concluded on a note of conviction and service to society, reflecting the breadth and seriousness of the issues addressed.

10. DEANERY SYNODS 2026 – 2029

CB advised there would be no change to the 2022 to 2025 triennium arrangements. In response to a question on the upper limit of 6 Deanery representatives per parish, it was suggested that Deanery Synod meetings should be open to encourage more participation.

Motion Carried, 3 abstentions.

11. TIME FOR QUESTIONS [STANDING ORDER 70]

None

12. OTHER APPROVED BUSINESS

None

13. DATE OF MEETINGS IN 2026

Saturday 14 March 2026

Living in Love and Faith (LLF) & Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) October Synod Update

As we reflect on *Living in Love and Faith*, we do so knowing that these conversations touch the very heart of who we are as a Church — and that they are not easy. We acknowledge the deep pain experienced by many in our LGBTQ+ communities who have long sought recognition, love, and belonging within the body of Christ. At the same time, we recognise that there are strongly held, yet diverse, theological convictions across our Church, shaped by prayer, scripture, and tradition. I believe our calling in this moment is to walk together with honesty, humility, and grace — seeking to understand one another even when we disagree, and trusting that in our listening and learning, God continues to lead us into truth and love. We also acknowledge that in the room there will be some of you that have followed this process closely and some to whom this may be a starting point for growing understanding.

At a Diocesan Synod level, we recognise that we have not often spoken openly together about these deeply significant matters, and that many may still be unsure how to begin such conversations well. We are therefore keen to explore how we might create space for open, respectful, and prayerful dialogue — where all can be heard and valued. We would welcome your thoughts and suggestions on how this might best be taken forward, so that together we can continue discerning the path of faithfulness and love that God sets before us. Please use the synod email address for this.

Living in Love and Faith (LLF) – Summary

Overview:

- *Living in Love and Faith (LLF)* is a Church of England initiative launched in 2017 to explore issues of sexuality, relationships, and marriage. It followed the introduction of Civil Partnerships in 2004 and the Same Sex Marriage Act of 2013. C of E prevented from solemnising SSM in line with Canons. SSM not permitted for Clergy
- It invited the whole Church to engage in learning, listening, and discernment together.
- The outcomes were published in September 2022 as *Listening with Love and Faith*, alongside a resource called *Friendship and the Body of Christ* to encourage continued reflection on unity amid diversity.
- In December 2023, the House of Bishops commended the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) for use in regular or private worship.
- The prayers can be used during regularly scheduled services (Sundays or weekdays) at the priest's discretion, following discussion with the PCC.

- The bishops also issued pastoral guidance explaining how the prayers should be used.

Earlier this year - LLF Update Spring 2025 leaflet issued – references Delegated Episcopal Ministry whereby parishes that cannot support PLF could receive pastoral/oversight arrangements from another bishop). Diocesan Synods are asked to explore the suggested proposals including delegated episcopal ministry. Faith and Order Commission and Episcopal Reference Group produce papers for General Synod (GS Misc 1406/1407) Peterborough Diocese Scheduled a Meeting to respond to the Spring update.

2025 July General Synod Changes including the removal of the House of Bishops paper 'Issues in Human Sexuality' from the vocations discernment process. Replaced with Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy.

2025 September Peterborough Diocese scheduled a meeting for September 2025 to discuss the proposals of delegated episcopal ministry as asked. In the summer of 2025, it became clear that delegated episcopal ministry as had been laid out in the spring 2025 leaflet was not a viable way forward. Having scheduled an additional synod meeting to discuss an option which was now no longer viable, this meeting was therefore cancelled.

Update on Living in Love and Faith (LLF) – 15th October 2025 (Wednesday)

Context:

The Church of England's House of Bishops met to consider next steps in the *Living in Love and Faith* process, which addresses issues of relationships, sexuality, and marriage. Final decisions are expected in **December 2025**.

Main Outcomes and Decisions (in principle):

1. Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF):

- o The existing PLF—prayers and liturgies for same-sex couples within regular services—remain *commended* under Canon B5.

2. Bespoke (Stand Alone) Services for Same-Sex Couples:

- o Any special or standalone PLF services would require full Synod approval through the **Canon B2** legislative process (two-thirds majority in all Synod houses).

3. Clergy in Same-Sex Marriages:

- o Bishops agreed that clergy entering same-sex civil marriages would require **formal legislation** (a Measure and an amending Canon) before being permitted.
- o Current guidelines therefore remain unchanged for now.

4. **Delegated Episcopal Ministry / Code of Practice:**

- o No new code of practice will be introduced, as bishops felt current pastoral measures suffice.

Pastoral Commitments:

- No one will be required to use the PLF against conscience.
- Updated *Pastoral Guidance* will accompany the commended prayers.
- Allocation of diocesan roles and resources will not depend on LLF views.
- A **Pastoral Consultative Group** will be re-established for support and advice.

Consensus:

- Despite differing theological views, bishops showed **strong unity** on the need for transparency, good process, and pastoral care.
- Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell acknowledged that some will find the outcomes difficult but emphasized prayerful discernment and grace.

Next Steps:

- **December 2025:** Final decisions by the House of Bishops which will then be considered by the next meeting of General Synod in 2026.
- **Potential future legislation:**
 - o *Bespoke services* → Canon B2 (two-thirds majorities all houses of General Synod).
 - o *Clergy same-sex marriage* → Measure + Amending Canon (simple majorities of all houses of General Synod + Parliamentary approval).
- Timelines depend on when any legislation is introduced.

Further Information

<https://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/support-for-parishes/living-in-love-and-faith/>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/search-results?keys=Living+in+Love+and+Faith>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/update-living-love-and-faith-october-2025>

Diocesan LLF Chaplains If you wish to discuss the LLF process or you are finding it is affecting you personally, you are welcome to contact our team of LLF Chaplains, led by the Bishop's Chaplain Steve Benoy, who represent a diverse range of views and experience. Email diosynod@peterborough-diocese.org.uk where you will be put in contact with an appropriate Chaplain.

Appendix 2 Response to LLF by Vicky Brett Peterborough Deanery

Members of Synod, I speak today as someone who has loved this church, who has served it, prayed for it and believe deeply in its calling to be a HOME for ALL Gods people.

Yet after the decision not to proceed with stand-alone same sex blessings, let alone equal marriage, to not proceed with allowing gay clergy to marry, many of us are feeling heartbroken, disappointed and betrayed.

For us, this is not a matter of abstract theology or church process. It is about our lives, our love, our faith. We have sought only to live honestly, love faithfully, to build homes rooted in grace and to serve Christ as we are; and yet.....our own church, our spiritual family , continues to tell us to wait, to carry the pain of delay and exclusion within the very community that baptised and nurtured us.

We are weary, we are wounded. But we are not without hope. Because we still believe in the Church of England we love, the church that dares to speak of Radical Christian Inclusion in the body of Christ. Inclusion that is not conditional, not postponed, but lived and visible among us now. Up to 25% of young people identify as LBGTQ+. They have family and friends, maybe including them fully will help our budget deficit.

So I ask you, stand with us, stand for justice, stand for that radical inclusion we have been promised. When General Synod Elections come up next year, stand for election, stand up for the fullness of God's welcome. Let us be courageous enough to become the Church we pray to be, one body united in Christ, where no one is left outside the blessing of God's love.

Appendix 3 General Synod Update by Revd Canon Steve Benoy

General Synod met at York University from July 11th to 15th, and in character felt somewhat different from others. Of course, summer in York, with everyone onsite on a spacious campus, you see people taking time over meals or breaks to mix with and meet new people, to continue discussions in more open and inquisitive way. It also felt somewhat different because the agenda was tilted more obviously towards the legislative responsibilities for which General Synod exists.

That said, one of the things I have come to appreciate about General Synod is the unexpected 3-minute speech which is so thoughtfully researched, crafted and expressed that you find yourself thinking about it for a long while afterwards.

And alongside those is the space given most days for an invited guest to address the gathering at greater length. I don't think, this summer, anyone can easily forget the address given on the final morning by **The Most Reverend Hosam Naoum**, Primate of the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East. This was at a time when the news was filled with stories of people being shot in Gaza whilst queuing to receive food aid, something he likened to a scene in the Hunger Games. He possessed a humbling dignity, gracious clarity, and spoke with prophetic urgency about the plight of the peoples of the region.

Similarly, bookending the Synod on the first day was an address given by **Brigadier Jaish Maha**, a Christian in the Army who spoke insightfully about the role and value of military chaplaincy, not only as we might experience in some of the settled bases in or near our diocese, but especially in theatres of war.

His address served to set up a piece of legislation which was taken from its first draft reading through to full approval during the course of the five days. Something which might normally take at least a year took a long weekend, and enables military chaplains, if deployed at short notice with those in their care to a new location, to remain authorised for ministry. It was not a complicated piece of legalisation, but it did weave its way through each day and there was in Synod a sense of responsibility, given the times we are living in, to ensure this was done well and with maximum support.

Finances were significant part of business. In preparing the way for a handful of debates on different but inter-related issues, there was a presentation about the 2026 Archbishop's Council budget and the proposals for the triennium funding from the Church Commissioners for 2026-28, which also cast an eye to the years beyond that.

In the debates that followed, regular themes emerged: the benefits and fruit of funding **new initiatives** – what have been known as SDF grants, which now we might hear referred to as

SMMIB funding – the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board; a clear and clearly growing plea for there to be greater **support to dioceses** for funding stipends and parish ministry; **clergy wellbeing** infused the atmosphere of these debates along with the wellbeing of those in, or anticipating, retirement. So:

- A motion from Hereford diocese calling for a fixed proportion of the Church Commissioners assets to be direct towards subsidising stipendiary clergy **failed** to change the plans for 2026-28, but **succeeded** in amended form for this to be a consideration in plans for 2029 onwards
- A private member's motion called for pension provision to be restored to two-thirds of stipend as it was prior to 2011, and for there to be a wide-ranging review of clergy wellbeing and retirement housing provision reporting within a year. This passed without a single vote against
- The 'triennium' spending plans for 2026-28, which included an increase in Church Commissioners' funding from £1.2bn to £1.6bn over the three years, and proposals for a significant uplift in clergy stipends from April 2026 were also passed.

Much of Monday was taken up with giving final approval & establishing in law a £150m **Redress** scheme for victims and survivors of Church-related abuse. Given the stage this was in the process, much of the hard thinking and shaping had been done, but of course, the fine tuning of the texts and the rules for operation required real care. Not always, but usually, debates on matters of safeguarding have been conducted with wisdom and courtesy, and my own impression in July was that speakers were mindful of those both beyond our number, and within our number, for whom this held a significance far more than a piece of legislation.

From some distance out it was clear that next February's Synod is when there would be significant proposals to debate with regard to **Living in Love and Faith**. In July, a private members motion called for a 1991 document called *Issues in Human Sexuality* to be removed from the discernment process for ordination. This affirms a traditional doctrine of marriage and sexual ethics. Many, on different sides of the debate wanted to see it gone – clumsy, inaccurate, wounding to read - though also many wanted new guidance to replace it, consistent with the Church's teaching on marriage. Clearly some work had gone on behind the scenes between leading figures of the different groups invested in this and there was a rare moment of almost unanimous agreement to replace *Issues* with an interim requirement that ordination candidates live consistently within the *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*. It was one of those moments where you felt that this solution had been sitting on the shelf for some considerable time waiting for someone to spot it.

Amongst all this, there were encouraging presentations on **Church Growth & Revitalisation**, the impact of **Thy Kingdom Come**, a debate approving amending the **liturgical calendar** to introduce a new Festival of God the Creator and a new Commemoration of the 21 Martyrs of Libya. Final approval was also given to a Measure which restructures the national church institutions so that most functions are centralised into a new trustee-led charity, **CofE National Services**. There was a discussion about the governance and culture of the House of Bishops, and time given over to revising the **rules for election** this time next year for General Synod , something which proved surprisingly interesting!

Unusually, but rather wonderfully, even after all this business had been transacted, there remained space on the agenda to insert on the final morning a much called-for debate on the **Terminally Ill Adults Bill** which had recently passed through Parliament. Bishop Sarah Mullally led the way, and whilst a range of views were expressed, the appreciation for the Bishops' leadership in the House of Lords was clear as was the support for the motion:

'That this Synod reaffirm that every person is of immeasurable and irreducible value and request His Majesty's Government work to improve funding and access to desperately needed palliative care services instead of enacting a law that puts the most vulnerable at risk.'

In a thorough, varied and demanding few days, it was good to finish on this note of serious conviction and service to our society.

Revd Canon Steve Benoy, Peterborough 193