

PETERBOROUGH DIOCESAN SYNOD

The Spring Session

Held on Saturday 14 March 2026

At Bishop Stopford School, Kettering

1. OPENING WORSHIP

Led by Towcester Deanery.

2. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Bishop Debbie started by welcoming Russ Beese, the new Diocesan Secretary who had started two weeks prior. She then reflected on just over two years of ministry in the Diocese, describing this time as full of joy at seeing God at work. Bishop Debbie spoke of the privilege of sharing life with churches and communities visiting parishes, deaneries, hospitals, prisons, care homes, and civic leaders and seeing God at work in many places.

To explain the structure of the initial thoughts for the Diocesan vision, Bishop Debbie began by explaining what the Church of England Vision is; to be a church for the whole nation which is Jesus centred and shaped by the five marks of mission. A church that is simpler, humbler, bolder. The Church of England Strategy has 3 priorities with 5 bold outcomes.

Looking back to her installation sermon in March 2023, Bishop Debbie introduced the initial thoughts for the Diocesan Vision as: *Raising Disciples, Releasing Leaders, Renewing Communities*. It is helpful to summarise this as *Raise, Release, Renew*.

She also affirmed the Diocesan priorities that had been identified:

- Flourishing Parishes encountering Jesus
- Grow confident disciples of all ages
- Champion children, young people, families and schools
- Resource and release leaders
- Embed a strong culture of safeguarding, wellbeing and trust
- Reimagine our models for sustainable mission and ministry

With 5 possible bold outcomes under the visionary headlines:

Raise

- Double the number of children and young people in our churches
- Double the number of lay and ordained vocations

Release

- Strengthen deaneries to work effectively together

- Create 120 new and sustainable worshipping communities

Renew

- Establish sustainable models for ministry across the Diocese

The next stage will be developing the detailed strategy to deliver these outcomes. This could involve:

- Encouraging and resourcing new forms of worshipping communities
- Developing clear models of ministry fit for the future
- Equipping the whole church through a suite of training and resources
- Releasing clergy capacity and strengthen deaneries
- Actioning the wellbeing programme
- Embedding the governance review and finance strategy

Bishop Debbie has seen that many people already feel resonance with this direction and invited the whole Diocese to contribute prayerfully and honestly as the work continues, reminding us all that the work was collaborative; we need to develop it together and all feel ownership of the final outcome. She encouraged everyone to remember the deep wells of faith and hope that have been laid over the centuries, and to trust that God is already at work.

3. UPDATE ON PARISH SHARE AND GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Isabel Merrifield, former Interim Diocesan Secretary and now Governance Project Manager gave an update on the Parish Share Review. This project is now being led by Russ Beese with David Mason and with a good level of engagement across the Diocese. David has a small working group, but is also consulting with as many parties as possible. There has been some work on communication and Bishop Debbie has recorded a video to be shared at APCMs.

The target is that when DBF Trustees meet on September 9 they will agree the final model and that will be implemented for the 2027 requests. Isabel underlined that either Russ or David would still like to receive any input as the project team want to ensure as many people as possible engage with this process.

Turning to the Governance Review, Isabel shared a diagram showing the target model of where the governance is moving to. She reassured everyone that this is a journey that many other Dioceses have already been on and this is a method that is working well for them.

The synodical structures of the Diocese—General Synod and Diocesan Synod—will remain unchanged, although an updated set of standing orders is being prepared as part of the wider governance review.

The main change will be the creation of a new body, with the working name of the Bishop's Diocesan Council. This single body will take on the roles currently exercised separately by the Bishop's Council, DBF Trustees, The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and The Parsonages Board.

Members of this new Council will effectively wear different “hats” depending on which responsibilities are under discussion at any given moment.

Supporting committees are also being reviewed, with the aim of broadening membership and strengthening the decision-making process.

Because of Church Representation Rules, the new structure cannot formally begin until 1 September 2027, after the next Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council elections. In the meantime, these bodies will meet together in aligned meetings, enabling shared discussion even though they cannot yet legally be an aligned body.

Key documents including terms of reference, the delegated authority schedule, and draft standing orders for Synod are expected to be agreed at the aligned governance meeting on 14 July. From the summer onward, work will begin to implement new committee structures and strengthen governance. Updated Synod standing orders should come to Synod for approval at the October meeting.

The governance working group is continuing to meet to oversee this work which will all be fully debated at the aligned governance meeting.

Members were given 5 minutes to consider any questions from both the governance review report and Bishop Debbie's address and the following questions were asked:

Ian Pullinger (Corby Deanery); commented that there may be a loss of deanery representation in the newly formed governance structure and raised concern about a potential loss of voices from the parishes.

Isabel and Chris Banks (Lay Chair) reassured that despite the reduction in numbers, all those sitting on the newly formed Council may not be members of Synod but would be members of our parish churches.

Dawn Stokes (Daventry Deanery); agreed that the strategy needed to champion younger people, but that we also needed to make sure that we value the older generation who represent many in our church congregations.

Bishop Debbie responded that this was very important and we needed to make sure that we consider how this is reflected in the strategy.

Kevin Fear (Peterborough Deanery); thanked Bishop Debbie with giving the parishes some literacy to use about worshipping congregations. He asked for clarification of what could be shared more widely after the meeting.

Bishop Debbie confirmed that all details, the slides and a video would be available after the meeting which could be shared in the parish so everyone could be involved in developing the strategy and feed in their comments.

Alan Window (Kettering Deanery); reflected that they had already launched bubble church and the number of children in their church had increased hugely, and asked how could they be expected to double that?

Bishop Debbie reassured that the doubling of numbers was to be seen in the context of the whole Diocese and it would not be every parish that would be expected to double their current numbers.

Roger Woods (Greater Northampton Deanery); wanted to make sure that urban, rural and new build communities would be reflected in the strategy.

Nick Alexander (Greater Northampton Deanery); raised the point that the Deanery Synods and PCCs were currently 'floating' on the governance diagram.

Isabel Merrifield responded that this had occurred so as not to imply any direct control from Diocesan Synod over the Deaneries or PCCs, but this could be rectified with a dotted line in the diagram.

Mark Lucas (Kettering Deanery); suggested that traditional church was being missed and that we should make sure we did not give up on something that had been working well for 2000 years.

Bishop Debbie reconfirmed that the strategy needed to reflect all churches and the vision was for all parishes to do that, for some it would be through releasing clergy to focus on mission, looking at enhancing what is already working well.

Chris Banks noted that there was a report that would be circulated after the meeting, and this was cascaded through the deaneries, ideas to increase sharing of information to parishes would be welcomed.

4. UPDATE ON SAFEGUARDING

Victoria Kellett gave an update on the INEQE Safeguarding Audit published in November and its key recommendations.

A key focus was on strengthening governance and oversight. Since the beginning of the year, the DBF trustees now receive the full safeguarding report that goes to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel, covering casework themes, training, compliance and emerging challenges, without any identifying details. This development reflects good practice, observations from the INEQE audit, and Charity Commission concerns, highlighted by recent warnings issued to other dioceses.

The Diocese is looking to appoint a lead trustee for safeguarding; someone with significant professional safeguarding experience, who can act as a strong link between the safeguarding team and the trustees, offering both challenge and support.

Alongside this, the Diocese will establish an operational safeguarding group, bringing together senior staff, parish representatives, children and youth ministry, and others. Its purpose is to ensure safeguarding is understood across the whole Diocese, not isolated within a single team, and that developments are shaped by how they will be experienced locally in parishes.

Although progress has been made, the year has been challenging nationally and locally. Staffing changes have reduced capacity again, slowing the pace of work as casework must be prioritised. Even so, efforts to support parishes continue, including the growth of the Parish Safeguarding Officer network, which has already held several gatherings for mutual learning and encouragement.

Parish Safeguarding Officers were praised as essential partners whose contribution needs to be supported and nurtured.

Questions were asked by:

Jane Jakes (Towcester Deanery); Questioned why parishes were not allowed to use the DBS update service.

Victoria responded that guidance on this had recently changed and it was being reviewed as to whether this could be used in the Diocese. An update would follow in due course.

Debbie Smith Wilds (Wellingborough Deanery); thanked Victoria for attending one of their Deanery Safeguarding Hubs and recommended the networking concept to others.

5. GENERAL SYNOD REPORT

Members were asked if there were any questions raised regarding the report from General Synod which was circulated before the meeting.

No questions were raised.

Beverley Hollins expressed warm thanks to the Diocese's current General Synod representatives, acknowledging the significant commitment involved. She encouraged others to consider standing for the forthcoming General Synod elections.

In response, Andrew spoke about the value of a broad range of people serving on General Synod. He emphasised that members need not be public speakers; thoughtful contributors of all kinds are welcome. He outlined the expected timeline for the upcoming elections, with nominations likely opening in mid-August and voting beginning around 21 September. The number of elected places for the Diocese remains the same: three lay and three clergy, alongside Bishop Debbie and the Dean.

Andrew also described the variety of work General Synod undertakes—from legislation and national church matters to debates on the wider issues of faith in society such as social care and mental health. He highlighted the opportunities for members to bring motions, join committees, and feed local concerns into national discussions. Although the workload requires stamina, he noted that there are real opportunities to shape the life of the Church, and meetings take place in both London and York.

Chris Banks also stressed the importance of Diocesan representation: if people do not stand, the Diocese risks losing its voice in national decision-making. Participation ensures that local churches remain connected to, and heard within, the wider Church of England.

Alison Twigg (Clergy Chair) led a vote of thanks to all those who had represented Peterborough Diocese in the current quinquennium.

6. DEEMED BUSINESS

The reports of the Boards and Committees were received. No questions were raised.

7. TIME FOR QUESTIONS (STANDING ORDER 70)

No questions were raised.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 18 October 2025 were approved, there were no matters arising.

9. OTHER APPROVED BUSINESS

The Diocesan Secretary gave notice that at its February 2026 group of sessions, the General Synod revealed that amending Canon number 44 be made promulgated and executed. Amending Canon number 44 amends Canon C to include provision for the exercise of ministry by Armed Forces Chaplains.

10. DATE OF MEETINGS IN 2026

Wednesday 8 July 6pm at Bishop Stopford School

Saturday 10 October 2026 10am at Malcolm Arnold Academy