

Peterborough Diocesan Synod
Summer Session
Bishop Stopford School
08 July 2026 19:00hrs

1. Opening worship

Synod opened with prayers, the Lord's Prayer and a hymn, followed by a blessing. Members were invited to reflect on God's presence, community and mission.

2. Presidential address – children, young people and the emerging diocesan strategy

Bishop Debbie welcomed Synod during Recognise Week and highlighted the Church's celebration of those working with children and young people. She reflected on the importance of children and young people as active members of the Church today, rather than simply its future.

- The emerging diocesan strategy places children and young people at its heart.
- Continued investment is being made in support, training and encouragement for ministry with younger generations.
- The Flourish Programme and partnerships between churches and schools are creating opportunities for new worshipping communities and have received additional national funding.
- Young people continue to demonstrate a strong appetite for faith, purpose, justice and hope when offered opportunities to ask questions and explore spirituality.
- Examples were shared from Bishop's Stortford School, Peterborough Cathedral and Abington Church illustrating engagement with children, young people and families.
- Synod was challenged to consider how every parish creates space for children and young people to belong, believe and become disciples of Jesus.

3. Governance review update

Chris Banks [Diocesan Synod Lay Chair] provided an update on the diocesan governance review and implementation programme.

- Work continues to align the Bishop's Council, Diocesan Board of Finance and Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee into a single governance structure.
- The proposed new body will be known as the Diocesan Council and supported by effective sub-committee structures.
- The aim is to improve decision making through greater clarity about the responsibilities of directors and trustees.
- Training and support will be developed for directors and trustees.

- Recruitment and communication activities regarding the new structures will begin during the coming year.
- Formal implementation will follow the next Diocesan Synod elections and commencement of the next triennium.
- Synod approval of required governance changes is anticipated at the October Synod meeting.

4. Parish Share / Common Fund consultation

4.1 Introduction

Russ Beese [Diocesan Secretary/CEO] introduced proposals arising from an extensive review of parish share arrangements and thanked parishes, clergy, lay leaders and volunteers for their engagement throughout the consultation process.

- The importance of generosity as a diocesan value was emphasised.
- The proposals seek to strengthen ministry and mission across the diocese.
- Parish share receipts have declined from approximately 90% to around 77%, creating a significant reduction in resources available for ministry.
- The aim is not simply budget balancing but supporting clergy, ministry and mission sustainably.

4.2 Proposed model

- Move from a 75% clergy / 25% attendance model to 60% clergy, 20% attendance and 20% income capacity.
- Use a three-year rolling average of Usual Sunday Attendance.
- Introduce adjusted unrestricted income as a factor.
- Deduct eligible building, utility and insurance costs from income calculations.
- Retain separate low-income/deprivation support arrangements through existing funding mechanisms.
- Introduce a transition mechanism limiting increases to 10% and decreases to 5%.
- Rename “Parish Share” as “Common Fund” to reflect a shared diocesan approach.

4.3 Financial explanation

David Mason [CFO] outlined the detailed calculations underpinning the proposed model and presented worked examples illustrating how the revised formula would operate across different benefice structures.

5. Facilitated table discussions

Members participated in facilitated discussions considering:

- confidence and optimism arising from the proposals;
- potential impacts within benefices and parishes;
- barriers to implementation;
- suggested improvements; and
- additional resources required from the Diocese.

6. Questions and discussion

An extensive question-and-answer session followed. Discussion topics included:

- the proportion of benefices currently paying parish share in full;
- confirmation that curates are not included within clergy allocation calculations;
- treatment of benefices whose unrestricted income is lower than the proposed ask, with officers agreeing to review this further;
- inclusion of roof alarm costs within building-related expenditure calculations;
- availability of parish-level data to explain benefice-level assessments;
- the impact on youth and children's ministry staffing and whether staffing costs should also be recognised in calculations;
- parish share expectations during vacancies and the explanation that parish share supports diocesan ministry collectively rather than on a transactional basis;
- the proposed name change from Parish Share to Common Fund;
- challenges facing small rural churches and the need for diocesan support;
- the relationship between generosity, discipleship, mission and sustainable church growth.

7. Children, Youth and Families ministry

Further discussion considered future investment in children's and youth ministry, including:

- development of training pathways for youth and children's workers;
- exploration of longer-term workforce development models; and
- continued diocesan prioritisation of ministry among children, young people and families.

8. General Synod elections update

Russ Beese updated Synod regarding the forthcoming General Synod election process.

- Communications have been issued to deanery secretaries.
- Formal election communications begin in July.
- The diocesan registrar will act as Presiding Officer.
- Further nomination and election information will follow through summer and autumn.

9. Approval of minutes from the Spring Session, DAC constitution.

- The minutes of the March Synod meeting were approved, with no errors or questions raised.
- The DAC constitution was approved. A point was raised regarding use of the term "Chairman"; this was accepted and will be updated to more current gender-neutral wording.

10. Date of Autumn Session

The Autumn Session was confirmed as Saturday 10 October at 10.00 am at Christ the King, Kettering.

11. Key questions raised

- What proportion of benefices currently meet parish share/Common Fund in full?
- Are curates included in clergy allocation calculations?
- How will the model work where unrestricted income is less than the proposed contribution?
- Will roof alarm costs be recognised as allowable expenditure?
- Can benefices access parish-level data behind the calculations?
- Should staffing costs, particularly youth and children's workers, be deducted alongside building costs?
- Why is full parish share requested during a vacancy?
- Is "Common Fund" a better term than "Parish Share"?
- How will the Diocese continue to support smaller rural churches facing declining congregations?
- How will diocesan strategy encourage generosity, discipleship and mission alongside financial sustainability?
- Could diocesan approaches to youth and children's workers become more strategic and diocesan-wide in future?

Appendix 1

Summary of questions and answers

No.	Question / issue raised	Answer given / response	Follow-up required
1	What proportion of parishes or benefices already pay their parish share in full?	The response given was that the figure was believed to be around 60-70%. It was acknowledged that messaging may need to differ for those already paying in full and those for whom the existing target already feels beyond reach.	Confirm the exact figure and consider segmented communications for different parish circumstances.
2	Are curates included in the clergy allocation calculation?	It was confirmed that curates are not included and have not historically been included in the allocation calculation.	Clarify this explicitly in wider communications, as some parishes may assume a curate increases their clergy weighting.
3	How will the model deal with a benefice where unrestricted income is less than the Common Fund ask?	This had not been fully checked at the meeting. Finance colleagues said they did not think it was likely in most cases, particularly at benefice level, but undertook to check.	Run an exception check and report any cases where unrestricted income is lower than the ask.
4	Will roof alarm costs be included alongside utilities and insurance?	Yes. The answer at Synod was that roof alarm costs would be included within the relevant building-related costs.	Include roof alarms in the schedule of allowable deductions and guidance notes.
5	Will benefices be shown how individual parish figures contribute to the overall benefice calculation?	The Common Fund request will be issued at benefice level, but parish-level data used to build the calculation can be provided so benefices can see how the figures have been derived.	Prepare a clear calculation summary for each benefice, including parish-level inputs.
6	Should staffing costs, especially for youth and children's workers, be deducted from income in the same way as building costs?	The response was that the working group had focused on costs all churches need to meet to keep buildings open, such as insurance and utilities. Staffing costs did not come up in the same way but could be considered.	Review whether local ministry staffing costs should be recognised in the model, particularly where they support diocesan priorities for children and young people.
7	Why does a parish continue to pay full parish share/Common Fund during a vacancy?	The answer given was that Common Fund is not transactional. It contributes to clergy and ministry across the whole diocese, including training, support systems, safeguarding, archdeacon/rural dean support, recruitment and vacancy support. If contributions were reduced during vacancies, the cost would need to be borne elsewhere or requests would rise when posts were filled.	Prepare a simple parish-facing explanation of the vacancy principle and the diocesan support provided during vacancy.
8	Why change the name from	The reason given was to provide a reset	Agree key messaging

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	Parish Share to Common Fund?	and communicate the theological and practical idea of a shared diocesan fund, in which all contribute to the ministry and mission of the whole diocese. It was acknowledged that parish share is a positive term for some but not for all.	and test whether the language is clear and persuasive for parishes.
9	How will the diocese support small rural churches with declining congregations?	The response recognised the real challenges faced by small and rural churches, while also emphasising opportunities for mission, prayer, local collaboration and practical diocesan support.	Ensure consultation is matched with targeted support for small rural churches, including visits and practical resources.
10	How will the diocese resource generosity, discipleship and mission rather than only producing a formula?	Bishop Debbie responded that both spiritual and practical support are needed. She referred to prayer, equipping clergy, releasing clergy from some administrative burden, Bubble Church training, clergy wellbeing work, a clergy handbook and better signposting to support.	Draw together a clear support offer showing how diocesan resources connect to the financial model and emerging vision.
11	Could the diocese develop a more strategic approach to employing and training youth and children's workers?	The youth team indicated that the diocese is some way from a diocesan-wide employment model but is creating pathways for home-grown children and youth workers, including sending young adults on free diploma courses.	Continue developing training pathways and explore longer-term workforce planning for children's and youth ministry.
12	What is happening with General Synod election communications?	Deanery secretaries have been contacted and further communication will follow. The registrar will act as Presiding Officer, and deanery secretaries are being asked to confirm clergy and laity for the election process.	Continue scheduled communications with deanery secretaries and eligible electors.
13	Were the March Synod minutes approved?	Yes. No errors or questions were raised and the minutes were approved.	None.
14	Was the DAC constitution approved, and can "Chairman" be updated?	The DAC constitution was approved. A challenge was raised that the document used "Chairman"; this was accepted as a fair challenge and agreed to be updated.	Update the terminology in the DAC constitution to a current gender-neutral term.
15	When and where is the next Synod meeting?	The next Synod meeting was confirmed as Saturday 10 October at 10.00 am, with a changed venue of Christ the King, Kettering.	Ensure diary notices and meeting papers show the correct venue.