

MINUTES of a meeting of the **ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD** held at Putteridge Bury on **SATURDAY 8 MARCH 2025**

The Synod convened at 0930 with the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of St Albans in the Chair.
Present: House of Bishops 3/3; House of Clergy 71/91 and House of Laity 61/81

PRAYERS were led by the Reverend Richard Banham and John Davie (Wheathampstead Deanery).

1. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Bishop of St Albans addressed the Synod, and a copy of his Address is attached to the original Minutes. The Address may be found on the Diocesan website [here](#).

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Synod held on Saturday 12 October 2024, which had been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Bishop of St Albans.

The Minutes were accepted with FOUR abstentions and no votes against.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND BUSINESS ITEMS

The Bishop of St Albans noted those people who had recently joined or left the Diocese, taken up new roles within the Diocese, retired or died. It was noted that Mr Duncan Gauld would start his appointed as the new Diocesan Director of Education on 1 June 2025.

4. APPROVAL OF DEED OF DELEGATION FOR SUFFRAGAN BISHOP

Under section 13 of the Diocese, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, the following was moved from the Chair:

"That this Synod approves the new Deed of Delegation for the Suffragan Bishops, as set out in paper (DS/25/01) enclosed.

The Motion was PUT and CARRIED unanimously.

Chair: the Reverend Will Gibbs, Chair of the House of Clergy, assumed the Chair

5. QUESTIONS

Four questions had been received as set out in paper (DSQ/25/01), together with their responses.

Eleven supplementary questions were asked, and replies made, as set out below:

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 1, Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

'Will the Diocese of St Albans be requesting SMMIB grant money to fund parish ministry, as Carl Hughes has made clear is permissible and as other dioceses have done?'

In response to the supplementary question, the Bishop of Hertford thanked Emma Robarts for the question and reiterated that the diocesan team had worked with both clergy and laity from Luton, Watford and Hatfield in order that the bid would help sustain and enhance parish-based mission in those deaneries. It was essential to the success of the funding bid, that the diocese demonstrated to SMMIB that those posts would be sustainable.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 2, Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

'How many stipendiary clergy posts have been cut or reduced between 2019-2024 and why are you proposing to further reduce the number of stipendiary roles?'

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked Emma Robarts for the question and provided an update on the 5-year recovery plan following the Covid pandemic which had been approved by Synod in March 2022. The actual number of clergy positions lost had turned out to be 7, which was lower than the anticipated 16.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 2, Revd Steven Sivyer (Buntingford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

'Do we know the predicted trajectory of vacancy rates for stipendiary clergy?'

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked Revd Steven Sivyer for the question and noted that this was an area of concern for the Church of England with falling numbers across the country of people receiving a calling for ministerial service. Vacancy rates were 20-30% in many other dioceses.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 2, Richard Simons (Watford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

'Could we have the equivalent figures for the costs of administrative (office) Diocesan staff?'

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked Richard Simons for the question and noted that the 10% reduction in office costs, accepted in 2022 as part of the five-year recovery plan, had been achieved primarily through a reduction in staff pension costs from September 2022.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 3, James Stewart (Sharnbrook Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

'Can you confirm whether the decision to not reduce Parish Share was because of the decision to spend money on Net Zero Carbon?'

In response to the supplementary question, Tim Coulson thanked James Stewart for the question and noted that annual decisions on Parish Share requests, other income and all areas of expenditure were made by Synod on recommendations made by the DBF.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 3, Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

'Why is the diocese not using excess money to pay for stipendiary roles?'

In response to the supplementary question, Tim Coulson thanked Emma Robarts for the question and noted the strong expertise within the various subcommittees to ensure that the diocese maximised the income received. He referred to his previous answer that decisions on expenditure were made each year by Synod.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 3, Revd Peter Ackroyd (Bedford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

‘Would the Chair of DBF give consideration for a debate on finance and declining contributions to be held at Diocesan Synod?’

In response to the supplementary question, Tim Coulson thanked Revd Peter Ackroyd for the question and noted that time could be made on the agenda for future discussion on finance.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 3, Revd Sam Cappleman (Bedford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

‘The total return distribution rate is currently 3.5%, which some would consider relatively modest. Are there plans to review, and potentially increase this rate, which would then contribute additional funds which could then be used to support clergy stipends, the common fund or other projects as directed by the diocese?’

In response to the supplementary question, Tim Coulson thanked Revd Sam Cappleman and confirmed that the total return policy agreed by the DBF in May 2022 included review of the distribution policy every three years.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 3, Revd John Hookway (Hertwood and Ware Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

‘Could the DBF please review the rationale and mechanism for the use of fees for occasional offices being offset against the stipends of incumbents prior to 2013, and the current fees that are due in the stipends fund? Including reviewing the level of fees for retired stipendiary.

In response to the supplementary question, Tim Coulson thanked Revd John Hookway for the question and noted that the DBF would review the points raised.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 3, Revd Josias De Souza (Luton Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

‘Can the Diocese make our lives easier?’

In response to the supplementary question, Tim Coulson thanked Revd Josias De Souza for the question and highlighted the work of the Parish Grants Committee which allocated funding to assist with different aspects of mission work.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/01) Question 4, Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

‘Has clergy wellbeing and morale been factored into these decisions? Could we have a discussion at Diocesan Synod about clergy housing?’

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked Revd Chris Kilgour for the question. He recognised the clear connection between housing and wellbeing and agreed

that time could be made on a future agenda for a discussion on clergy housing. David White reported that the Diocese had a limited budget for housing improvements but that they were development opportunities which could be pursued to provide additional funding for clergy housing.

6. GROWING YOUNGER AND MORE DIVERSE

Paper (DS/25/02) had been circulated.

On behalf of the Bishop's Council the Bishop of Hertford and, with the Chair's permission under Standing Order No.4, the Bishop of Hertford and David White, introduced a presentation. Due to uncertainty around the amount of funding which was going to be available for the Diocesan Investment Programme, the diocese had been advised not to submit an application to the June meeting of the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board. As a result, the Bishop of Hertford, would not bring the motion under her name on the agenda. There was an opportunity for questions. Responses were received from Revd Ysmena Pentelow, Hertford and Ware Deanery and Revd Stefan Chrysostomou, Barnet Deanery.

Chair: Kerry Smith, Vice Chair of the House of Laity, assumed the Chair

7. VACANCY IN SEE PROCESS UPDATE AND QUESTIONS

The Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore, Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee and, with the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, Mr David White - Diocesan Secretary gave an update. Members had been encouraged to view the explanatory video on the diocesan website in advance. There was an opportunity for questions. Responses were received from Revd Jonny Lloyd, St Albans Deanery; Mark Dunstan, Hertford and Ware Deanery; John Davie, Wheathampstead Deanery and Sarah Forrest, Hertford and Ware Deanery.

8. DISCERNMENT FOR A NEW BISHOP OF ST ALBANS

Working in groups, Synod members were asked to consider the following questions:

- What fills you with joy and hope about the ministry and mission of the Church in the Diocese of St Albans?
- What are the challenges and frustrations, and what would you like to change?
- What gifts, qualities and experience do you think are needed in an incoming Bishop?

Each group was asked to complete a form summarising the views expressed.

Chair: The Reverend Kate Pearson, Vice Chair of the House of Clergy, assumed the Chair

9. UPDATES ON GENERAL SYNOD SESSIONS 10-14 FEBRUARY 2025

Living in Love and Faith/Prayers of Love and Faith

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Reverend Tim Bull gave a presentation. No questions were asked.

Safeguarding Arrangements in the Church of England

On behalf of the Bishop's Council and with the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, the David White gave a presentation. There was the opportunity for questions. Responses were received from Revd Tom Lilley, Cheshunt Deanery; Revd Alec Corio, Barnet Deanery; John Davie, Wheathampstead Deanery and Revd Steven Sivyler, Buntingford Deanery.

Revd Kate Pearson called on Revd Will Gibbs and Peter Adams to address Synod and give thanks to Bishop of St Albans for his service to the diocese.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans thanked everybody for their contributions and dismissed the Synod with prayers at 12.30.