

Private & Confidential

MINUTES of a meeting of the **ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD** held at Putteridge Bury on **SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER 2025**

The Synod convened at 0930 with the Bishop of Bedford in the Chair.

Present: House of Bishops 2/2; House of Clergy 61/90 and House of Laity 50/80

PRAYERS were led by the Reverend Canon Liz Hughes (Luton Deanery).

1. OPENING ADDRESS

The Bishop of Hertford addressed the Synod, and a copy of her 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 14 June 2024, which had been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Bishop of Bedford.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND BUSINESS ITEMS

The Bishop of Bedford 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 Ms Emma Robarts had been elected to fill a Casual Vacancy for a Lay General Synod member. Members were informed that there was a lay casual vacancy on Bishop's Council, and an election was to be held for membership of the Verulam House Fund Trust. Nominations for both remained open until noon on 17 October.

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

4. FORMULA FOR DEANERY SYNOD ELECTIONS 2026

At the request of the Bishop's Council, the following was moved from the Chair:

"That this Synod agrees to use the formula noted in paper DS/25/07 for the election of lay representatives from parishes to deanery synods for the elections due in 2026."

There were no questions, and the Motion was PUT and CARRIED unanimously.

5. INSPIRATION FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE

Five short films were introduced by the Archdeacon of Hertford. Following the presentations, members engaged in table discussions reflecting on the elements of the films they found inspiring and shared initiatives taking place within their respective parishes.

6. FEES FOR SSM, PtO AND READERS

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, Glyn Barker, the Diocesan Director of Finance introduced this item. Paper DS/25/08 had been circulated. The changes endorsed the role played by those in lay and non-stipendiary clergy roles in supporting parish ministry. The changes impacting on diocesan finances had been agreed by the DBF and Parishes were encouraged to adopt the new fee structure from 01 January 2026.

There was an opportunity for questions. Responses were received from Dr Mark Eaton (Buntingford Deanery) and Becky Mynett (Amphill and Shefford Deanery).

In response to the questions, the Bishop of Hertford, stated that there would be consultation with the Readers' Committee before providing further updates.

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

7. DIOCESAN BUDGET AND STIPEND LEVELS

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, Dr Tim Coulson, the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance and Mr Glyn Barker, the Diocesan Director of Finance introduced the budget, and referred to the film, made available in advance. Paper DS/25/09 had been circulated.

Dr Tim Coulson noted that the Diocesan Registrar had confirmed that the budget presented to Synod for approval was consistent with the Synodical Government Measure 1969 and that it followed the practice adopted in previous years. However, he stated that, in future, the DBF would broaden the scope of information shared with Synod and that the DBF would look to expand the remit of the Common Fund Budget Committee in preparation of budget proposals.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 2**, Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

"Can the pots of money outside of the Common Fund be used to help reduce the parish share?"

In response to the supplementary question, Dr Tim Coulson thanked Emma Robarts and noted that the budget aimed to strike a balance between reducing the parish share, increasing stipends, and allocating more funding towards clergy housing.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 3**, Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

"I feel it would be logical to put the unknown Designated Funds back into the Common Fund to help reduce the Parish Share and help people. Would you agree?"

In response to the supplementary question, Glyn Barker thanked Emma Robarts and explained that the reason Designated Funds had been set up outside the Common Fund was to ensure that resources were available for anticipated needs. He noted that a number of these funds had been inherited, and he had been working to unpick them to ensure that they were being used appropriately – a process which was often time-consuming. Over the past six years, the total held in these funds had been reduced from £3m to £2m. He emphasised

that Designated Funds should exist to support the Common Fund. Assurances were given that there was a strong intention to manage these funds appropriately.

There was an opportunity for questions. Responses were received from the Revd James Sawyer (Buntingford Deanery), Dr Mark Eaton (Buntingford Deanery), Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery), the Revd Canon Dr Tim Bull (St Albans Deanery), the Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery), the Revd Canon Lucy Davis (Bedford Deanery); the Revd Kaushal David (Dunstable Deanery), the Revd Dr Steven Sivyer (Buntingford Deanery), the Archdeacon of Hertford and Becky Mynett (Amphill and Shefford Deanery).

In response, Dr Tim Coulson, noted that the stipend figures recommended to Synod by the DBF had also been unanimously supported by the Bishop's Council.

Dr Tim Coulson, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, moved on behalf of the Board and at the request of the Bishop's Council:

"That this Synod, noting that the Central Stipends Authority have set the National Stipend Benchmark (NSB) to apply from 01 April 2026 and have invited Dioceses to adopt the NSB for Incumbent Status Clergy, resolves that

- (i) the stipends for incumbents and those of incumbent status in this diocese should rise by £2,239 (6.8% of £32,711) to £34,950 from 01 April 2026.*
- (ii) the stipends for the first three years of curacy should rise by £3,240 (10.76% of £30,110) to £33,350 from 01 April 2026"*

It was noted that the Diocesan Registrar, clarified that as all stipendiary clergy were affected by the stipends vote, this did not constitute a situation of individual personal benefit. As such, clergy were not considered to have a conflict of interest.

The Motion was PUT and CARRIED with FIVE against and TEN abstentions.

Dr Tim Coulson, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, then proposed the following amendment to the Budget Motion:

"That the amount of £500k set aside in the Common Fund budget to be transferred to designated funds should be struck out of the budget, and that the consequent £500k surplus should instead be made available to be spent on one or more of:

- (i) increasing parish clergy stipends further in order to maintain the current differential of St Albans stipends above the National Stipend Benchmark; or*
- (ii) increasing the budget for repairs to parsonages under the category 'property and glebe'; or*
- (iii) reducing the parish share request with the decision on the allocation of the £500k surplus between i, ii and iii above to be made by the Diocesan Board of Finance and reported to a subsequent Synod."*

Contributions were received from the Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery), John Davie (Wheathampsted Deanery), the Revd Dr Sarah Forrest (Hertford and Ware Deanery), Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery), the Revd Jess McLaren (Hitchin Deanery), the Revd Dr Bernard Minton (Dunstable Deanery), Colin Bird (Hertford and Ware Deanery) and the Revd Peter Waddell (Watford Deanery).

The Motion was PUT and CARRIED with SEVEN against and TWENTY-TWO abstentions.

Dr Tim Coulson, Chair of the St Albans Diocesan Board of Finance, noting the amendment above, then moved:

"That the estimates of requirements of the Diocesan Common Fund in 2026 in the gross sum of £17,983,017 be approved, and that the Synod authorises the Diocesan Board of Finance to expend in accordance therewith a sum not exceeding £17,983,017 and that the sum of £14,057,000 be requested as parochial contributions in 2026, to be apportioned in accordance with the approved Parish Shares Scheme."

The Motion was PUT and CARRIED with FOUR abstentions.

8. DIOCESAN FINANCES REVIEW

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, Mr David White, the Diocesan Secretary introduced the item. Paper DS/25/10 had been circulated. There were no questions.

9. FUNDING APPLICATION TO THE STRATEGIC MISSION AND MINISTRY INVESTMENT BOARD

On behalf of the Bishop's Council the Bishop of Hertford gave an update, introduced the current proposal and referred to the film, made available in advance. Paper DS/25/11 had been circulated. The Revd David Kesterton, Area Dean of Luton, the Revd Peter Waddell, Area Dean of Watford and the Revd Darren Collins, Area Dean of Welwyn and Hatfield spoke of their experiences. It was noted that the Diocesan Board of Finance, Bishop's Council, the Board of Mission and Ministry, the Diocesan Board of Education and the Growing Younger and More Diverse Programme Board had all given unanimous support for this bid.

There was an opportunity for questions. Responses were received from Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery), the Revd Canon Dr Tim Bull (St Albans Deanery) and the Revd Canon Sam Cappleman (Bedford Deanery).

In response, Mr David White, Diocesan Secretary, clarified the diocesan financial contribution figures that had been considered and unanimously approved by the DBF and the Bishop's Council.

Contributions were made from the Revd Kaushal David (Dunstable Deanery), Pauline Kendal (Bedford Deanery), the Revd Lynn Sandle (Biggleswade Deanery), and the Archdeacon of Bedford.

The Revd Will Gibbs moved *"That this Synod supports the SMMIB funding bid as set out in Paper DS/25/11."*

The Motion was PUT and CARRIED with ONE abstention.

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

10. LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH – AN UPDATE

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Bishop of Bedford provided an update. It was noted that discussions had taken place in the House of Bishops, but that a final decision would not be made until the December meeting of the House. Following that, a Bishops' statement would be issued outlining the process for taking forward bespoke services, as well as the Church's position on the licencing of clergy in same-sex marriages. This work was being informed by the Faith and Order Commission and legal advice. It was noted that, should the draft Bishops' Statement require consideration by this Synod prior to the meeting of General Synod in February, arrangements would be made to facilitate this.

There was an opportunity for questions. A response was received from the Revd Canon Lucy Davis (Bedford Deanery).

In response, the Bishop of Bedford noted that Synod members could contact their General Synod Representatives with comments ahead of General Synod in February 2026.

11. QUESTIONS

Seven questions had been received as set out in paper (DSQ/25/03), together with their responses. Two questions had been taken under item 7.

In response to the remaining questions, six supplementary questions were asked, and replies made, as set out below:

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 1**, the Revd Edward Keene (Stevenage Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

"Has consideration been given to reallocating the resources we do have from online training sessions to more of these personalised tailored audits to problems we have?"

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked the Revd Edward Keene for the question and stated that diocesan staff would consider what such audit programmes might entail, and what resource reallocation might be required to implement them. It was acknowledged that not all parishes may welcome the concept of an audit across all areas.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 4**, the Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

"Can you confirm that these Liveability Standards will come to Synod for final approval?"

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked the Revd Chris Kilgour for his question and noted that formal advice would need to be sought from the Diocesan Registrar. It was thought likely that the responsibility rested with the Property Committee, and that the final Standards would be brought to Synod for information.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 5**, the Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

"Could you confirm that the proposed standards would not see a reduction in the living or working standards for clergy as they are?"

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked the Revd Chris Kilgour for his question and highlighted increased expenditure on clergy housing in the 2026 Budget.

He explained that the intention was to ensure ongoing improvement in the standards of clergy housing which would be reflected in the measures of suitability, liveability, and maintainability.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 5**, John Davie (Wheathampsted Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

“Is there a reasonably accurate record of the condition of all the parsonages?”

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked John Davie for his question and explained that, due to historic underfunding of this area from the Diocese, the necessary records were not in place. However, he noted that the Property Team were taking corrective action by using the findings of the condition survey to identify and prioritise areas most in need of attention.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 5**, the Revd Ysmena Pentelow (Hertford and Ware Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

“How have clergy living in those properties been involved in the production of the new Suitability Standards?”

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked the Revd Ysmena Pentelow for her question and noted that clergy were elected to the Property Committee by Synod. He added that the Property Team was clergy-facing in its role and therefore regularly received input from clergy about what the housing standards should be.

With reference to the First Notice Paper (DSQ/25/03) **Question 5**, Dr Hannah Kinsey (Hertford and Ware Deanery) went on to ask the following supplementary question:

“Are there plans to increase the £250 given per clergy property to spend on improvements to their property?”

In response to the supplementary question, David White thanked Dr Hannah Kinsey for her question and clarified that the £250 allowance was intended to support elements of redecoration and had been taken up by a small number of clergy. He noted that the idea of providing increased funds to support clergy with DIY work would be raised with the Property Committee, and it was considered reasonable for the Committee to explore this further.

Chair: Mr Peter Adams, Chair of the House of Laity, assumed the Chair.

12. PRESENTATION FROM THE DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

On behalf of the Bishop’s Council the Bishop of Bedford introduced this item and, with the Chair’s permission under Standing Order No.4, Mr Duncan Gauld, the Diocesan Director of Education gave a presentation.

Contributions were received from the Revd Dr Steven Sivyier (Buntingford Deanery), Edmund Booth (Berkhamsted Deanery), the Archdeacon of Bedford, Lynda Logan (Luton Deanery), Janet Bird (Hertford and Ware Deanery) and the Revd Kirsty Wainwright (Buntingford Deanery).

13. DIOCESAN LINK WITH LINKOPING

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, the Revd Simon Cutmore, gave a presentation.

A contribution was received from the Very Revd Jo Kelly Moore (St Albans Deanery).

14. MINISTRY STRATEGY – LISTENING TOGETHER: SHAPING MINISTRY IN OUR DIOCESE

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, the Revd Mark Rodel, Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry, facilitated a condensed version of the listening processes being rolled out in deaneries. Paper DS/25/12 was enclosed.

The Bishop of Bedford thanked everybody for their contributions and dismissed the Synod with prayers at 1551.