

Private & Confidential

MINUTES of a meeting of the **ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD** held at Putteridge Bury on **SATURDAY 14 MARCH 2026**

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

Present: House of Bishops 2/2; House of Clergy 61/91 and House of Laity 54/79

PRAYERS were led by the Reverend Jane Bannister (Berkhamsted Deanery).

1. OPENING ADDRESS

The Bishop of Bedford 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 11 October 2025, which had been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Bishop of Bedford.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND BUSINESS ITEMS

The Bishop of Bedford noted the exceptional number of questions received in line with Standing Orders, after the agenda was published and proposed that the agenda for the meeting was adjusted to allow a second item for questions as the final item on the agenda.

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.

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, Dr Tim Coulson, the Chair of the DBF, reported that the DBF had committed to present to Synod a budget for 2027 and future years which covered all diocesan funds rather than the previous practice to present a budget limited to the Common Fund. The Terms of Reference and the membership of the Budget Committee had been reviewed, a format for presentation of accounts had been agreed and management accounts were being prepared in that format. In commitment to consulting as fully as possible with Synod members regarding financial matters, consultation webinars would be held prior to future Synods.

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, David White, the Diocesan Secretary, announced that the elections of five clergy and five lay members to General Synod to serve for the quinquennium 2026 to 2031 would be held between 21 September and 13 October 2026.

The Bishop of Bedford outlined items that would be included in the agenda for the next Synod on 13 June.

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

4. INSPIRATION FROM AROUND THE DIOCESE

Three short films were introduced by the Archdeacon of Bedford.

5. VACANCY IN SEE UPDATE

With the Chair's permission under Standing Order No. 4, David White, the Diocesan Secretary, provided an update. The Dean of St Albans, as Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee, led prayers.

6. SESQUICENTENNIAL (150TH) ANNIVERSARY OF THE DIOCESE

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore, Dean of St Albans, introduced the item and provided an overview of the celebrations planned for the year, initiated by the Cathedral. The Bishop of Hertford noted that a planning group, comprising representatives from across the Diocese, would be established to design and coordinate the celebrations throughout the Diocese.

7. LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Bishop of Bedford, gave an update. The LLF programme and all work initiated by the February 2023 LLF motion, would conclude by July 2026. The House of Bishops had established a Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group and a Sexuality and Gender Pastoral Consultative Group.

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

8. QUESTIONS – SESSION ONE

Fourteen questions had been received as set out in paper (DSQ/26/01), together with their responses. Questions 09 – 14 would be taken under item 12.

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

On **Question 03**, the Reverend Edward Keene (Stevenage Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Could the Diocese provide further clarify on the number of clergy posts in the Diocese?" In response, David White confirmed that a full reconciliation, taking into account current vacancies, would be provided.

On **Question 03**, Becky Mynett (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Is it possible to estimate the workload (and potential legal liability), which would fall to parish clergy if the Diocesan staffing levels were to return to 2005 levels, particularly in the areas of safeguarding, finance, buildings, churchyards and mission planning?" In response, David White noted that it was not possible to provide a direct comparison with 2005 staffing levels, as details of the staff composition and work undertaken at that time were unavailable, but that safeguarding had changed significantly

due to transformed expectations over the past 20 years. He explained that a substantial reduction in Diocesan office staffing would reduce support across many areas. Certain responsibilities, particularly safeguarding, could not be delegated, as they remained under diocesan oversight in accordance with the House of Bishops guidance. Responsibility in parishes would not just involve parish clergy, but also churchwardens, treasurers, and parish safeguarding officers. Areas at risk of either being passed to parishes or losing diocesan support, included the management of parish legal and financial matters, church buildings issues, management responsibilities for parsonage houses, and mission planning. Data had been provided to the DBF at its previous meeting regarding the increase in diocesan team staff numbers since September 2021. Over this period, there had been an increase of 0.3FTE funded from the Common Fund. While most new roles were intended to support activities in parishes, they were overwhelmingly funded from external sources.

On **Question 04**, James Stewart (Sharnbrook Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Will the DBF commit to doing everything that it can do to keep the cost of parish share per member from going up? In response, Dr Tim Coulson affirmed that the DBF was committed to keeping parish share costs as low as possible. He noted that increases had been limited to small rises, with a decrease in parish share last year and that Synod approved any increase in Stipends. Over the past 20 years, the number of Incumbent clergy had been maintained despite a one-third decline in parishioners. Approximately two-thirds of parishes in the Diocese were meeting their share in full.

On **Question 06**, David Roberts (St Albans Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Why if the call for information and listening exercise is not seeking to make any judgement on particular theological positions or ways of expressing faith and worship? There is a specific reference to the exclusion of evangelical worship and practices, and should not the exclusion potentially apply also to central, liberal or anti Catholic worship and practices elsewhere, or is this part of a special understanding with scenarios?" In response, the Bishop of Hertford noted that it was explicit in this listening exercise, as St Andrews is a church within the evangelical tradition.

On **Question 8**, Dr Hannah Kinsey (Stevenage Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Would the Property Committee consider expanding the remit of the decoration grant to include other aspects of clergy housing?" In response, David White noted that the Property Committee had committed to review the criteria for Decoration Grants at its next meeting.

On **Question 9**, the Reverend Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "I wondered if there was information as to why there have been both few applicants for, and of low take-up of, the Decoration Grants?" In response, David White reported that the reasons for the low number of applications, and for some recipients not drawing down grants that had been awarded, were not currently known.

On **Question 9**, the Reverend Isaac Pain (Bedford Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Would the Property Committee be willing to survey clergy to understand the reasons for the take-up of Decoration Grants?" In response, David White noted that this was a reasonable request, which could help to improve dialogue between the Diocesan Property Team and clergy.

On **Question 9**, the Reverend Dr Sarah Forrest (Hertford and Ware Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Could the Decorations Grant look into covering manpower as well as the product?" In response, David White noted that this could be considered when the Grants were reviewed.

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

9. SINGLE FRIENDLY CHURCH

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Archdeacon of Hertford introduced the item. A set of questions for consideration in parishes prior to a substantive item at the June meeting of Synod was provided in paper DS/26/01.

10. STRATEGIC MISSION AND MINISTRY INVESTMENT BOARD BID UPDATE

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Bishop of Hertford, provided an update (DS/26/02).

11. RELEASING THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD – DISCIPLESHIP AND VOCATIONS

Paper (DS/26/03) had been circulated.

On behalf of the Bishop's Council, the Bishop of Hertford introduced the item.

Contributions were made by Beth Tranter (Hitchin Deanery), the Reverend Canon Richard Banham (Watford Deanery), the Reverend Edward Keene (Stevenage Deanery), Michael Kershaw (Hitchin Deanery), the Reverend Canon Lucy Davis (Bedford Deanery), the Reverend Canon Caren Topley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery), Catherine Harer (Rickmansworth Deanery), the Reverend Rachel Wakefield (Wheathampstead Deanery), the Reverend Canon Mike Jones (Luton Deanery), the Reverend Canon Dr Tim Bull (St Albans Deanery), the Reverend Dr Christie Gilfeather (Welwyn Deanery), Canon Peter Adams (Luton Deanery), the Reverend Dr Min-Min Peaker (Sharnbrook Deanery), Martine Whitaker (Barnet Deanery), the Reverend Jess McLaren (Hitchin Deanery) and the Reverend Josias de Souza (Luton Deanery).

The Bishop of Hertford, moved:

"That this Synod affirms our collective commitment to cultivating a culture of discipleship and vocations among the whole people of God; supports the continued development of diverse and sustainable lay and ordained pathways; and encourages parishes and deaneries to participate actively in this shared endeavour."

The Motion was PUT and CARRIED.

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

12. QUESTIONS – SESSION TWO

Fourteen questions had been received as set out in paper (DSQ/26/01), together with their responses. Questions 1 – 09 were taken under item 08.

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

On **Question 11**, Dr Hannah Kinsey (Stevenage Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Could the Parish Grants Committee consider making it a condition of providing

funding for staffing requirements that individuals employed by the Church have a Christian background?" In response, David White noted that the Committee could review the matter, taking into account employment law.

On **Question 11**, James Stewart (Sharnbrook Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Can you make application form be simplified for parishes that struggle to apply for grants, and could consideration be given to removing the question regarding payment of parish share?" In response, David White noted that, whilst the Diocese understood the parish share position, the question allowed for an explanation as to why a parish might not be paying in full. He recognised that the wording of this may not be clear.

On **Question 11**, the Reverend Dr Sarah Forrest (Hertford and Ware Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "What kind of support can the Diocese offer to smaller benefices and parishes that might find it more difficult to become aware of, and apply for, these grants?" In response, David White noted that, on 02 March, the Bishop's Council, as the Standing Committee of Synod, had allocated money to support Rural Ministry. He added that, in developing the details of a grant scheme for which rural parishes could apply, careful consideration would need to be given to the questions asked, in order to make the process as straightforward as possible.

On **Question 12**, the Reverend James Sawyer (Buntingford Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Could the Diocesan Secretary or the DBF confirm whether, in reallocating total return funding at the last Synod, some flexibility to help reduce costs for clergy, churches and schools had been lost, and whether an additional stipend cost had been added to the Diocese in perpetuity?" In response, David White noted that neither the DBF nor Synod had discretion regarding the use of Total Return on investments held within the Stipends or Glebe Funds, as these funds were required to be applied to stipends and associated parish costs. It was therefore acknowledged that there was an inherent limitation in flexibility.

On **Question 12**, the Reverend James Sawyer (Buntingford Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Was the income from Total Return likely to remain constant year on year, or might it fluctuate in line with market performance?" In response, David White noted that the DBF's Total Return policy, which initially set at 3.5% distribution and was increased to 4% in the previous year, provided a predictable level of income. This income supported Stipend costs and, through the principle of fungibility, could potentially release other funds for alternative purposes. The distribution was calculated based on the average asset value over the preceding five years and did not fluctuate immediately in response to market changes.

On **Question 12**, the Reverend James Sawyer (Buntingford Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Would the DBF allow Synod greater choice in how funds were allocated, or are we to be denied the flexibility to use the benefits of total return where it is most beneficial?" In response, David White confirmed that the sum of £500k, originally designated for investments, had, at the request of Synod, been reallocated towards clergy housing, specifically for energy-related improvements. He explained that decisions on the allocation of funds set aside for parish investment had consistently been made by Bishop's Council, acting on behalf of Synod. As such, questions of prioritisation were considered strategic matters for Bishop's Council, rather than financial decisions for the DBF. In its role as Standing Committee of Synod, Bishop's Council, was able to consider such matters in greater detail than would be possible in a full Synod meeting. Additional consultation in advance of Synod meetings on financial matters had been introduced to provide greater opportunity for input. These had been scheduled to allow discussion prior to the DBF's approval of the proposed budget to be presented to Synod, thereby enabling increased engagement despite the challenges of decision making within a large assembly.

On **Question 13**, the Reverend Cllr Robert Donald (St Albans Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "How could Synod members set this strategic direction more effectively than in the past, and whether this could include Synod developing a high-level strategic plan to guide and inform the annual budget, as well as to articulate the Diocese's vision and priorities?" In response, Dr Tim Coulson noted that the additional meetings prior to Synod would allow for greater engagement into forming the decisions of the DBF. With regards to the DBF coming back to Synod with a more strategic financial review, David White noted the precedent brought to Synod in March 2022 with a five-year financial strategy to recover from the impact of Covid.

On **Question 14**, the Reverend Cllr Robert Donald (St Albans Deanery) asked the following supplementary question: "Could you confirm that information would be provided on capital budgets, and what difference Synod members will see in October this year when reviewing the 2027 budget in terms of income and expenditure of those capital budgets, and how this relates to the Common Fund parish share?" In response, Dr Tim Coulson confirmed that the intention was to present a complete overview of the Diocese's finances. He explained that, in the 2027 budget, all expenditures and income would be included, providing a full picture of how resources contributed to costs.

The Bishop of Bedford thanked everybody for their contributions and dismissed the Synod with prayers at 13:00.