

**DIOCESAN SYNOD**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY 08 MARCH 2025**  
**AT ST MARY'S CHURCH, ELY**

The meeting opened with Worship led by members from Yaxley Deanery followed by commissioning by the Bishop of Huntingdon and Acting Bishop of Ely of Niki Whitby, Assistant Diocesan Director of Lay Ministry.

*The first part of the meeting was chaired by The Revd Canon Sarah Gower, Chair of the House of Clergy.*

**1.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Received: House of Clergy 20, House of Laity 13

Not present: House of Clergy 12, House of Laity 11

**1.2 MINUTES OF DIOCESAN SYNOD 19 OCTOBER 2024**

Minute 1, penultimate paragraph

Felicity Cooke, Granta Deanery raised a query regarding *Controls remain robust including property, HR and finance*. It was **AGREED** to remove *HR* from this sentence.

The minutes were approved with this amendment and signed by the Chair.

**PROPOSED:** Canon Lizzie Taylor, Granta

**SECONDED:** Revd Canon Wendy Thomson, March

**APPROVED:** With one against

**ABSTENTIONS:** None

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:**

Minutes 4 and 10:

Mr Christopher Townsend, Cambridge North and *Ex Officio* General Synod representative raised a query on progress of the SMIBB bid on children, youth and family ministry and on Deanery Synod Standing Orders. It was advised that there is a separate report on this.

Minute 11:

Mr Paul Hutchinson, St Neots asked if an abridged version of the Changing Market Towns report from John Truscott can be put on the diocesan website. This will be published there soon.

**ACTION: INTERIM DIOCESAN SECRETARY**

**1.3 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 86**

Questions and answers were submitted in advance in a document that was circulated to members. Supplementary questions answers and discussions were given at the meeting.

**1. Mr Jon Smith, Granta**

i) *What are the six or so objectives the Diocese plans to deliver in the calendar year 2025?*

Additional feedback:

The six diocesan objectives were given in the document. No further questions were raised.

Revd Linda Davies, North Stowe asked why safeguarding doesn't appear on the list of the objectives as this is an issue in the church?

Bishop Dagmar responded and thanked Revd Davies for bringing this to the attention of members and confirmed that safeguarding is an on-going priority.

ii) *Are the churches paying their parish share via the Ephesian fund also paying for their share of the Diocese HQ support costs?*

Additional feedback:

No further questions were raised.

**2. Revd Canon Simon Talbott, General Synod representative**

*How many churches in the diocese are placing limitations on how their parish share contributions can be used, by withholding parish share, donating through the Ephesian Fund or similar third party, or through a special arrangement with the diocese, such that their contributions cannot be used to support all churches and clergy in the diocese? How much money is affected by these arrangements?*

In addition, Canon Talbot asked if there were budgetary figures available over the next three to four years and how the accumulation of that loss will affect the budget plans and future ministry.

Additional feedback:

There are limitations for Parish Share contributions and an accumulation of loss that needs to be accepted. Further information on budgetary figures will be provided at a later date.

Mr Christopher Townsend, Cambridge North and General Synod representative noted that £21,000 is not available for EDBF from the Fund. Has the Ephesian Fund been asked if this money is available for parishes to access on application. In addition, what is the purpose of this Fund and is there a way for it to reach parishes who need additional funding?

Mr Jon Green advised that the Diocese is in direct contact with the Ephesian Fund and options are being considered.

**ACTION: INTERIM DIOCESAN SECRETARY**

### **3. Mr David Brock, Granta**

Question

What has happened to the revision of the deanery standing orders since the last diocesan synod meeting. The minutes of that meeting record the following:

*Mr David Brock, Granta, asked whether a small consultative group could be set up with whom Andrew (Gore) could work through questions. Canon Atling confirmed that such a group will be convened and extended immense thanks to Mr Gore for this significant piece of work.*

What steps have been taken to establish that group? Has it met? Who are its members? When will the next revision of the orders be brought to this synod for approval?

Additional feedback:

Mr Brock advised that in March 2024 he asked about Deanery Synod standing orders. Why can the diocesan staff not find this information, and are resources and staff not adequately supported to carry out duties to respond to Diocesan Synod questions during Vacancy in See and staff illness. What has happened to this request, and are procedures in place to consider Diocesan Synod matters and what tasks have been set?

Canon Tim Walters advised that whilst there are a number of vacancies currently at the Diocese, the budgetary position needs to be considered as a priority at this stage although Diocesan Synod procedures will be considered and further information advised.

**ACTION: INTERIM DIOCESAN SECRETARY**

### **4. Mr Christopher Townsend: Cambridge North and General Synod representative**

Question 1

Please can there be supplied to Diocesan Synod one or more diagrams showing the following statistics for the Diocese of Ely drawn from Statistics for Mission for the ten years 2014-2023: (i) Average Sunday Attendance (Total) (ii) Average Sunday Attendance (Children) (iii) Worshipping Community?

Question 2

Please can there be supplied to Diocesan Synod details of the number of occasional offices (baptisms, marriages, and funerals respectively) undertaken in 2023 in (a) the Diocese as a whole and (b) the Archdeaconries of Cambridge and Huntingdon & Wisbech respectively?

Additional feedback:

Supplementary question from Mr Townsend: Are there any plans to supply on an annual basis statistical information on Mission & Ministry to Diocesan Synod to help gain to better understanding of their work in the diocese?

The Chair advised that arrangements can be made for additional information to be given for members.

**ACTION: INTERIM DIOCESAN SECRETARY**

Mr Paul Hutchison, St Neots Deanery, asked why information on Diocesan Synod is not more widely available to others. Canon Tim Walters advised that there is some historical legacy of not doing this, and information can be shared in the future on the website.

**ACTION: INTERIM DIOCESAN SECRETARY**

## **2. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AND GENERAL SYNOD REPORT FROM THE BISHOP OF HUNTINGDON AND ACTING BISHOP OF ELY**

Bishop Dagmar was encouraged by questions under SO 86 that been put forward by members which facilitated working together on matters, an important aspect that the bishop would like to continue going forward for Diocesan Synod with the aid of presentations to members.

The Bishop updated about the Vacancy in See, advising that the Commission for this are preparing for interviews in November 2025 and working to guidelines given by Mr Stephen Knott and Mr Jonathan Haliwell, the co-ordinators of this process, who visited Etheldreda House recently to discuss matters with a number of people from around the Diocese.

The recruitment of a new Diocesan Secretary and a new Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor is in progress.

The Bishop advised about the good news of growth in churches in the Diocese. The annual Parish Return statistics for 2022-23 show growth up by 2.5%, and total Sunday attendance up by 4.2%. More than half of parishes, 51%, reported growth in Sunday attendance. The national trend showed attendance up by nearly 5% for the third year running, and nearly 6% among young people and children. Having had reduced numbers in the Pandemic, people are returning back to church along with new members creating healthy churches and new pathways to involvement and belonging. Bishop Dagmar thanked everyone for their hard work in making this growth happen.

Bishop Dagmar gave a report from the recent group of sessions at General Synod which took place in London from 10-14 February 2025. Topics included Safeguarding, Racial Justice, issues around the Vacancy-in-See Committee and the Crown Nominations Committee, a Diocesan Finances Review, Working Class Ministry, Sports and Wellbeing Ministry, the Clergy Conduct Measure, Growing Younger and More Diverse, Living in Love and Faith, the National Governance Measure, and Mission and Pastoral Regulations.

Thanks were given to Bishop Dagmar for her address and updates.

## **3. SAFEGUARDING REPORT AND PARISH VISITATIONS**

### **3.1 SAFEGUARDING REPORT**

*Mr Jonathan Chapman, Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)*

Mr Chapman led formal thanks to Mrs Rebecca Boswell for her work as the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor where she has been instrumental in raising safeguarding awareness and progressing matters in the Diocese. Mrs Boswell is leaving the Diocese in March.

Mr Chapman advised that part of his role at DSAP is to act as a colleague to the Diocese and to listen to feedback on safeguarding matters from others, and he welcomes feedback from every level to enable considered decisions on priorities. Mr Chapman also thanked Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) and volunteers involved in safeguarding, voluntary roles that are important for the smooth running of the process.

General Synod looked at a safeguarding model of 3.5 which suggests that DSAP has a scrutiny function which may require changes in legislation. These changes are being considered.

Whilst there is some vulnerability whilst a new Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor and Diocesan Secretary are recruited, progress is underway with these posts, the diocesan team are providing excellent safeguarding support, and a temporary part-time safeguarding professional has been recruited to assist to ensure this is maintained. Mr Chapman advised that a strong safeguarding presence in the Diocese and Cathedral are essential and will continue. There will be a national safeguarding audit in February 2026 for the Diocese and Cathedral.

DSAP priorities:

- The Makin Review: Most recommendations sit outside of the Diocese as national and international ones; we need to engage and review these particularly around escalations and policies for this.
- National Safeguarding Audit: An audit sub-group are looking at the implementation and compliance of national standards for the Diocese and Cathedral.

- Independent Review on Survivors and Victims: There is an increasing number of referrals going to the team and these needs to be triaged in the first instance to prioritise risk. The Mission and Ministry Team are getting processes in place with parishes to do this.
- DSAP: A review is considering if the organisation is fit for purpose with consultations with safeguarding partners as part of this review.
- Ongoing challenges and changes: DSAP are working on the best way to deal with these.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Ms Sarah Bradley, Ely

There was a motion proposed a few years ago to remove the Archbishop of Canterbury which was not supported and failed at deanery level. What is the role of Diocesan Synod within the safeguarding overview scrutiny.

2. Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, Granta Synod and General Synod member

The number of open cases is high for a smaller team: how many of these are due to concerns raised in the Makin Report and are there more concerns linked to HR issues rather than safeguarding? How does triaging take place, do the PSOs have capacity or is it done by the diocesan team?

Answers: The Bishop's Chaplain and Director of Strategy, Revd Iain Osborne responded to Question 1 and advised this will be part of Agenda point 5. Mr Jonathan Chapman advised on Question 2 that the increase in referrals is not all due to the Makin Report and that the triage process is an organic one between PSOs and the safeguarding team. Open cases are regularly monitored and everyone is responded to, with the Safeguarding team risk focussed to prioritise work.

3. Mr Jon Smith, Granta

The Charity Commission has written to each Bishop asking dioceses as trustees of the Charity Commission if they have everything in place for the assurance of safeguarding requirements. Do we need independent advice to answer this and what is the approach we are taking so that all Trustees have some involvement?

4. Dr Piyush Jani, Cambridge North and General Synod member

When will the new Safeguarding booklet be available which may help with the triaging process?

Answers: Mr Jonathan Chapman noted that more information is required before answering Question 3 and for Question 4 advised that there are guides already available in the Diocese and at the Cathedral, and DSAP will review if this focuses enough on the triaging process.

Bishop Dagmar formally invited Diocesan Synod to give a vote of thanks to Mrs Rebecca Boswell for her work in safeguarding in the Diocese. Mrs Boswell has supported PSOs and the Bishop on matters which have been helpful to everyone. The Bishop thanked the Safeguarding team who have carried on with the work of the department. Thanks were also given to Mr Jonathan Chapman for his work and support.

### 3.2 PARISH VISITATIONS

*The Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech presented this with the Archdeacon of Cambridge*

The Archdeacon Visitations are required by Canon Law and there have been discussions with the Rural Deans on how these should take place. Previously known as Archdeacon's Visitations, these have been renamed Church Visits. Some parishes potentially feel these visits are a waste of time, but they are useful to support clergy, wardens and PCCs to maintain their churches, help PCCs with financial aspects and day-to-day parish operations. There are two ways in which the visits take place. Firstly, a church member walks around the building with the Archdeacon, Rural Dean or Deanery Lay Chair to consider risk assessments and the building and the second aspect is an overview of governance including policies, procedures, safeguarding compliance and other aspects. The churchwardens discuss the Articles of Enquiry and what may be missing from these.

There are nine essential policies that are required by each parish:

- Safeguarding
- Financial Controls
- Conflict of interest
- Volunteering (Safer Recruitment covers much of this)
- Complaints
- GDPR - retention, privacy notice and consent

- Health & Safety
- Equality (Equal Opportunities/Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) incl. accessibility statement
- Employment Policies (grievance, maternity/paternity leave etc.) (if you employ staff)

The benefits of having these visits include keeping people safe and happy, giving information on national grants and schemes, help and support on a wide range of matters, and good practice on policies.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Canon Lizzie Taylor, Granta

Could the archdeacons check during their visits to Resolution parishes, whether the terms of the 2014 Settlement are being observed? These include PCC resolutions to exclude women being reviewed during vacancies, and in between vacancies; the wider church community being consulted before every PCC meeting at which a resolution is considered; cross-referral of women's priestly vocations to clergy in egalitarian churches who will fully support their discernment of vocation.

Answer: The Archdeacons confirmed that are happy to include these elements.

2. Rebecca Cowburn, Bourn

Please could the archdeacons provide advice on local mission, and particularly children's work, as part of their Parish visits.

Answer: The Mission and Ministry Team are able to help on this.

**ACTION: PL**

3. Revd Paul Hutchison, St Neots

What percentage of parishes do the Archdeacons visit, and what percentage do Rural Deans visit?

Answer: Parishes are mostly divided equally between the Archdeacons and Rural Deans.

Thanks were given to both Archdeacons for their work on this which were appreciated by members.

#### **4. BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

*Canon Tim Walters*

Canon Walters gave an overview of the 2026-2029 budget forecast which shows a deficit and advised that the Deanery Liaison Group (DLG) have discussed ways forward whilst maintaining a sustainable church for a balanced budget. Key factors that forecast the budget deficit of c.-£500,000 include the National Insurance employer contributions increase from 5 April 2025, income constraints that will be out of our control, and potential rental changes to housing. Reserves being used to offset the deficit, but many funds are restricted. The Ministry Share collection rate is down -£150,000 in 2024 and difficulties are acknowledged at parish level: we are looking at how these can be remodelled at deanery level and Canon Walters is happy to come and discuss the way forward to deaneries. There are Central Church issues which may affect the budgets from 2026 and these will be tabled at General Synod in July. If approved, new guidelines could put the Diocese in a difficult financial position with a growing deficit.

Sources of income are central grants and support, Ministry Share, and investment income. Whilst there are some areas of flexibility, for a break-even budget changes are required, and it was noted that a substantial increase in Ministry Share is not sustainable for parishes.

Diocesan Synod members were given a set of key points to discuss and consider in groups to prioritise which are at parish level, what areas need to be looked at in greater detail and what future issues might affect things. Information should be emailed after the meeting to the Financial Controller, Mrs Lorraine Orbell: [lorriane.orbell@elydiocese.org](mailto:lorriane.orbell@elydiocese.org).

***The second part of the meeting was chaired by Canon Simon Kershaw, Chair of the House of Laity.***

#### **5. HOW THE DIOCESE RUNS**

*The Revd Iain Osborne*

Revd Osborne introduced this new information section at meetings as short talks about the various committees at the Diocese.

What is Diocesan Synod for? The meetings consider, comment and advise on matters in the Diocese and act as a place of transparency to discuss these whilst helping to be the Body of Christ by listening to each other. Discussions cover a wide range of subjects from secular to non-secular and offer the opportunity for members to ask questions.

Deanery Synods have a role in bridging the gap between Diocesan Synod and parish level. Items can be brought to Deanery Synod, then passed to Diocesan Synod and onto General Synod. Standing Orders 100 and 104 allow proposals to be put forward. They do not approve the budget and arrange feedback to Diocesan Synod for approving the budget.

## **6. ANNUAL REPORT ON RACIAL JUSTICE**

*Revd Sharon Byrne, Bishop's Advisor for Racial Justice*

With reference to Micah 6.8, Revd Byrne advised that we are seeking a common mind and spiritual purpose and in partnership we can challenge racism together. Revd Byrne asked 'Has racism diminished?' and advised that it hadn't according to statistics and by working together with a strategic plan this can be overcome.

The *Lament To Action* programme from 2020 considers some of the actions and aims to gather information, views and experiences by working with schools and parishes, and considers ways to break down barriers. The strategic delivery plan and objectives include:

- Increasing openness by looking at workplace policies and procedures both individually and corporately to make a difference
- Consider influence and support in education
- For training and mentoring to consider working locally for unbiased training, including at PCCs
- To encourage and integrate young people
- For structure and governance to encourage PCCs to consider the positives in community involvement

Revd Byrne is working with the National Church Team on a pilot project for a range of training programmes across three phases aimed at different groups and needs of people. She is happy to discuss and advise on any aspect of racial justice, equality and inclusion. Contact details are: [racialjustice.advisor@elydiocese.org](mailto:racialjustice.advisor@elydiocese.org)

Revd Byrne was thanked for her informative presentation.

## **7. MISSION UPDATE AND DISCUSSION**

*Revd Peter Leach, Director of Mission and Ministry and Revd Iain Osborne*

SMMIB, the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board, through which the Church Commissioners allow dioceses to access funding specifically for mission opportunities. The funding is only available when the application outlines funded work compatible with a diocesan strategy. The Diocesan Strategy is created first and SMIBB are then asked fund the work to enable the Diocese to carry it out. A priorities plan will be adopted in 2025 and a SMIBB bid will be put in place in 2026 when a new diocesan Bishop should be in place.

The focus on priorities for 2025-2027 are considered as:

- Green shoots in parishes
- Sunday attendance
- Innovative mission
- Leading the church into growth
- Finances
- Clergy well-being
- Volunteers
- Clergy recruitment

Ten Areas for priority and missional opportunities in the diocese were outlined, and it was acknowledged that not everything can be done at once. Members discussed these points in smaller groups and arranged them in order of priority.

It was noted that finances should maintain the impact and growth of ministry in the Diocese. Profit and loss need to be balanced, the deficit needs to be improved whilst maintaining a structural

balance although investments have grown. Members discussed in groups how parishes could spend £126 less per year based on a potential increase in the Parish Share.

The results from both discussions will be assimilated for strategy planning and there will be a further briefing to members at the June and October meetings.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Revd Helen Orr, Shingay

There is an area missing on making better use of churches as a community hub and how restoration work will aide this, rather than selling buildings as these are the diocese's biggest asset.

Answer: The Church Buildings Team has grown in the last two years as an investment to look after our church buildings. Whilst this is a priority, the list given for priorities will inevitably not include everything that could be included on this.

Thanks were given to Revd Leech and Revd Osborne.

#### **8. ANNUAL REPORT ON DISABILITY JUSTICE**

*Mrs Sue Nelms, Bishop's Advisor for Disability*

Mrs Nelms advised that there are still many injustices faced in church, an environment that everyone should feel safe in, and not every diocese has a dedicated disability advisor. Challenges include the welcome at services, material used, heating, and involvement in community aspects in churches. Newer buildings are generally better equipped for disability access whilst older buildings aren't, and the DAC are there to help and give advice on changes that can be made for better accessibility. It is also important to promote churches better so that people can find an accessible building and welcoming community. Other aspects to consider include clergy and ministers. 3.4% of clergy having some degree of disability and there are medical and social strands of disability for everyone.

The inaccessibility cycle was considered, and it was noted that during the Pandemic those who were previously excluded from going to church by their disability were able to attend and were welcomed at online services, although after the Pandemic some churches have not maintained online services.

Churches are encouraged to do an accessibility audit and further information on this and other resources are available on the diocesan website: [Disability and Church - Diocese of Ely](#). Mrs Nelms can be contacted for advice and support and is looking to put together a panel for disability projects. Please contact her if you would like to be on this: [disability.advisor@elydiocese.org](mailto:disability.advisor@elydiocese.org)

Mrs Nelms was thanked for her report.

#### **9. LLF TIMELINE - INFORMATION**

*The Bishop of Huntingdon and Acting Bishop of Ely*

A leaflet was circulated before the meeting summarising the project with a timeline for implementation of plans, and Bishop Dagmar advised that timing was not where it was anticipated we should be at this stage. A video was shown, presented by the Bishop of Leicester, the Right Reverend Martyn Snow who is the Lead Bishop for LLF.

Bishop Dagmar acknowledged that this is a process of learning and Diocesan Synods play a part in taking the process forward and that the full day meeting of Diocesan Synod on 11 October 2025 will allow time for more in-depth conversations on this project.

#### **10. CLOSING PRAYER**

Bishop Dagmar led prayers, and the meeting finished at 12:58pm. Thanks were given to The Mother's Union for providing refreshments and the support team at St Mary's Church, Ely.

Dates of next meetings, taking place at St Mary's Church, Ely:

- Wednesday 18 June, evening
- Saturday 11 October, all day

Signed:

Date:

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS		
ITEM	ACTION	BY WHO
1.2	Abridged version of Changing Market Towns report to be on Diocesan website	JG
1.3	Question 2: Ephesian Fund options to be considered	JG
	Question 3: Diocesan Synod procedures for Deanery Synod standing orders to be considered and further information advised	JG
	Question 4i: Diagrams required for members from Statistics for Mission 2014-2023: (i) Average Sunday Attendance (Total) (ii) Average Sunday Attendance (Children) (iii) Worshipping Community?	JG
	Question 4ii: More information on Diocesan Synod on website.	JG
3.2	Question 2: More advice on mission for children	PL