



**DIOCESE OF BRISTOL**

TRANSFORMING CHURCH. TOGETHER.

## **Bristol Diocesan Synod Minutes**

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**Date:** 21 March 2026

**Time:** 9.15 to 13:05

**Venue:** St Paul's Church, Malmesbury Road, Chippenham

The agenda and papers for this meeting can be found on the Diocese of Bristol website at <https://www.bristol.anglican.org/diocesansynod/>

<b>1.</b>	<b>Worship and Commissioning of Revd Ruth Harding as Adviser for Self-Supporting Ordained Ministers (SSOM)</b>
<p>Julia Childerhouse (JC) (House of Laity; Chippenham) led worship which was followed by the Commissioning of The Revd Ruth Harding (RH) as Adviser for Self-Supporting Ordained Ministers (SSOM) by The Rt Revd Neil Warwick (+NW), Acting Bishop of Bristol.</p> <p>RH spoke briefly about the work of SSOMs.</p> <p>It was reported that there are currently 59 SSOMs serving within the Diocese. These include individuals serving in a range of capacities, with some working part-time and others full-time; some hold responsibility for churches, officiate at weddings and baptisms, and chair Parochial Church Council (PCC) meetings. SSOM ministry was described as vocational in nature, with ministers offering their service without remuneration.</p> <p>Examples were shared to illustrate the breadth and richness of SSOM ministry across the Diocese. These included SSOMs serving as an Army Chaplain, a Police Superintendent, and others working in schools and nursing, bringing their pastoral skills into both their professional and parish contexts. A particular example was given of an SSOM who works as a District Nurse, highlighting how their priestly and nursing roles often converge through compassion, presence, and care.</p> <p>It was noted that SSOMs bring a distinctive and valuable contribution to parish ministry and local communities, enabling the Church to share the love of Jesus in diverse contexts. It was acknowledged as a privilege to be involved in supporting this ministry.</p>	



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All present then stood for prayer led by +NW, which was followed by warm and sustained applause.

### **2. Welcome and Apologies**

The Revd Trudie Wigley (TW), Chair of the House of Clergy, opened the meeting of Diocesan Synod.

TW reported that apologies had been received and confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

#### Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received as follows:

- House of Bishops: 0
- House of Clergy: 13
- House of Laity: 13

TW welcomed Joe Flatman (JF), a new member of the Diocesan Support Staff, who has taken up the role of Director of Property & Estates, succeeding Lindsey McCullam.

TW reminded members that it was assumed all papers had been read in advance of the meeting.

TW then outlined the structure for the morning, explaining that Synod would engage in a variety of ways. These would include table-based discussions, contributions from the floor, formal presentations, informal reflections, and an education-based activity, providing a range of opportunities for participation and interaction.

The meeting would be divided into three sections

- Focus on Transforming Church. Together
- Department updates on carbon net zero (CNZ), Financial Strategy – 10-year plan and education
- Routine business of reports and governance.

### **3. Minutes** **Minutes of 15 November 2025**

TW explained there was an amendment to the minutes as detailed below, with no additional amendments or comments the minutes were received.



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Existing minute	Changed minute	Requested by
<p><b>Item 7 – Expenditure first bullet point states:</b> Repairs to Pattern Church will be delayed (Pattern Church is owned by the Diocese so repairs come from Diocesan Funds)</p>	<p><b>Will be amended to:</b> Repairs to Pattern Church will be delayed. Although the building is owned by the Diocese, all maintenance and upgrades undertaken to date have been funded either by Pattern Church or through external grants. These forthcoming repairs, however, will need to be funded by Diocesan resources because they are required before the BDBF can seek to rent out the top floor.</p>	<p>The Revd Joel Sales (House of Clergy; Swindon)</p>

**Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising from the 15 November 2025 meeting.

There was one outstanding matter from the 20 September Living in Love and Faith (LLF) Diocesan Synod meeting, which was to answer a supplementary question raised at the meeting.

*The answer has been provided in the Formal Written Questions but was taken at this point of the meeting.*

<b>Diocesan Synod member:</b>	Matt Southcombe (House of Clergy; City (at the time of asking question))
<p><b>Question:</b> Can you confirm how many parishes in this Diocese have so far formally adopted the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF), and what percentage of the total parishes this represents? In addition, will the senior staff commit to putting in place a process to monitor both the impact of PLF adoption on those parishes and a comparison to those that haven't adopted PLF and to report the findings back to a future Diocesan Synod so that Synod members can evaluate its effect?</p>	
<b>Person(s) who answered question:</b>	Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary), Christopher Bryan (Archdeacon of Malmsbury) and Lucy Cleland (Chaplain to the Acting Bishop of Bristol)



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**Answer:** Parishes are requested to inform the Bishop when they have adopted Prayers of Love and Faith and are willing to offer them in regular scheduled services. So far, 2 parishes have done so.

In addition, TW confirmed that yes, senior staff are committed to putting in place a monitoring process.

A comment was made by Diocesan Synod Member: **David Jones (DJ), (House of Clergy; Kingswood & South Gloucestershire)**

Concern was expressed that the reported figure of two was unexpectedly low. DJ stated that he had responsibility for five parishes, four of which have accepted the PLF, suggesting that the figures may therefore be inaccurate. The speaker explained that, while Bishop Viv had encouraged discussion of PLF, they had not been advised that the Bishop should be informed once PLF had been adopted. As a result, it was suggested that the actual number may be higher than reported.

TW thanked DJ for this correction.

**Action:** TW confirmed that the Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance (BDBF) will need to return to parishes to obtain more accurate data. TW urged any parishes currently using PLF to inform the Bishop’s Office, in order to assist with improving the accuracy of the information held.

<b>4.</b>	<b>The appointment of members of Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd</b>
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There were no new members of the BDBF to be appointed.

<b>5.</b>	<b>Bishop’s Address</b>
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+NW addressed the Diocesan Synod. A full copy of the address can be found in Appendix A.

<b>6.</b>	<b>Transforming Church. Together (TC.T)</b> <b>6.1 Culture and Origins of TC.T</b> <b>6.2 TC.T Progress Report</b> <b>6.3 TCT in practise – What it has changed and meant to us</b> <b>6.4 Briefing on next Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) bid.</b>
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### 6.5 Table Discussion and feedback to Synod

#### 6.1 Culture and Origins of TC.T

TW invited The Ven Becky Waring (BW), Archdeacon of Bristol, to provide a reminder of the origins of Transforming Church, Together (TC.T).

BW spoke about the culture change that lies at the heart of the diocesan strategy. In doing so, she reflected on where this work began, the Diocese's shared vision for culture, and the agreed strategic outcomes. She emphasised that transformation flows from who we choose to be and posed a series of reflective questions for those in leadership roles. BW concluded with a call to continue the journey of cultural and missional transformation.

The full text of BW's contribution is included at Appendix B.

#### 6.2 TC.T Progress Report

Rob Mountain (RM), Director of Transformation, gave an overview of the TC.T work streams, highlighting the organisational work that goes behind supporting Parishes, a mood map was shown of current workstreams and how they are progressing . Mission progress chart is included in Appendix C.

It was noted that, across all streams, teams are working closely with parishes to support them in understanding what is possible and how agreed outcomes can be achieved.

The majority of the streams were reported to be progressing well. Using a traffic light system, most have moved from amber to green and are broadly where they are expected to be at this stage.

The Supporting Volunteers stream remains at amber, indicating that further work is required. The Human Resources Information System (HRIS) is now in place and ready to support parishes, including in relation to administrative centres and lay ministry.

The Inclusion stream was reported as amber/red and identified as an area requiring further focused work.

Termly reviews are undertaken, with all project leads reporting to the Programme Board. These reviews consider progress to date, key issues and risks, and emerging opportunities.



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Difficulties in encouraging and understanding parish engagement had highlighted the need to make access to resources and support clearer and more straightforward than is currently the case.

RM highlighted two areas currently assessed as amber, indicating that they are not on track.

### **1. Budget**

Concerns have been raised regarding current levels of Parish Share, which require further attention. RM also referred to the preparation of the Stage 3 National Church (NC) submission.

By way of context, RM provided a recap of the National Church funding stages:

- Stage 1 (2022): Enabled the Diocese to explore and assess future possibilities.
- Stage 2 (2023): National Church endorsed the diocesan strategy and released £6.8 million for investment, which is the funding currently being utilised.
- Stage 3: At current spending levels, existing funds are expected to be exhausted by the end of 2026/27. The Diocese is therefore in discussion with the National Church to make the case that further work remains to be done. The National Church is aware of this position, and work is underway collaboratively on a further bid for additional funding.

### **2. Parish Engagement**

Parish engagement was described as an ongoing and demanding challenge. RM noted continuing difficulties in encouraging and understanding parish engagement and highlighted the need to make access to resources and support clearer and more straightforward than is currently the case.

### **6.3 TCT in practise – What it has changed and meant to us**

BW introduced three Diocesan Synod members to share their experiences of Transforming Church, Together (TC.T). This was intended to provide insight into how TC.T is being lived out *on the ground* and the impact it is having within parishes and local contexts.

**Dave Brae (DB) – (House of Clergy; Kingswood & South Gloucestershire) - St Chads, Patchway.**



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DB outlined the significant impact of Transforming Church, Together (TC.T) on St Chad's. It was noted that the TC.T approach was valued for being *parish led rather than top down*, enabling parishes to reflect on their culture and to consider how they might develop and grow. This process was described as central to St Chad's journey.

By way of context, it was reported that the parish had previously faced a number of challenges, including:

- an unhealthy culture
- unlawful governance arrangements
- poor financial controls, including missing records and a lack of checks
- an absence of safeguarding processes
- buildings in a poor state of repair

Rather than focusing on changing the church itself, TC.T enabled the parish to reflect on its culture and discern how it wished to move forward. As a result, St Chad's has been supported to make progress in a number of areas, including:

- Buildings: support from the Diocesan Support Services (DSS) team, with electrical works now being addressed, having not been checked for over ten years
- Discipleship: engagement with the Mission and Ministry team to explore how the parish might grow together
- Leadership structures: development of healthier ways of operating and functioning as a team

It was also reported that, following support from the Education team, the parish has re-established relationships with local schools, having previously been unable to work within them. St Chad's is now working with almost all schools in the area, with relationships having been redefined.

The parish has also been enabled to develop Flourish, which began as a chaplaincy initiative. This includes weekly work with children with special educational needs, providing opportunities for regulation and care. Schools have described this work as offering an additional layer of safeguarding. Worshipping communities have also been established within schools, with approximately 40 people attending each week, and children playing a role in inviting adults into faith.

It was further reported that the Bishop had recently visited St Chad's for a service at which 20 people were baptised and confirmed. By way of indication of growth,



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it was noted that the parish had previously averaged around 30 worshippers and is now anticipating an increase of a further 60 people being added to the electoral roll.

### **Kat Champion-Spall (KC-S), (House of Clergy; City) – Harbourside Churches**

KC-S reported on her experience of working with two churches in central Bristol. She reflected that, as vicars do not have line managers, they often sit at the top of the organisational structure, providing support and enabling others, while having limited access to support for themselves. She noted that it can be difficult to know what support is available and how to access it.

KC-S explained that she had been offered coaching through Transforming Church. Together (T.C.T). Working with a coach on a monthly or six-weekly basis over the course of a year enabled her to focus on areas of personal challenge, to identify obstacles within the mission and ministry of the churches for which she is responsible, and to reflect constructively on her leadership.

She reported that the coaching had been highly beneficial, helping her to understand herself better, to be more compassionate towards herself, to recognise her strengths, and to acknowledge areas where support was needed. It also enabled her to identify where and how to seek that support.

In conclusion, KC-S stated that the coaching had been beneficial both for her personally and for the churches she serves, and that it has enabled her to lead more effectively.

### **Dan Watts (DW), (House of Clergy; Kingswood & South Glos) Christchurch, Downend**

DW reported that he became Vicar of Christ Church, Downend in 2023, motivated by a strong commitment to ministry with young people and families. He noted that this had historically been a strength of the church; however, the impact of COVID-19 and a prolonged vacancy had led to a significant reduction in the number of children attending.

DW explained that the parish serves a community of approximately 30,000 people and includes nine schools (eight primary and one secondary). In seeking to reconnect with the wider community, partnership with local schools and relationship building with headteachers had been identified as a key priority.



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The Growing Faith chaplaincy model was identified as an appropriate means of supporting this work, enabling the appointment of a Schools Chaplain. In June 2024, a Schools Chaplain was appointed. DW noted that time was required to build trust and relationships before schools felt confident to invite the church into their settings.

Over the past 18 months, the Chaplain has established a team of 14 volunteers, through which more than 350 primary age children have attended experience sessions at Christ Church linked to Harvest, Christmas, and Easter. In addition, prayer spaces have been hosted both in schools and within the church. Schools have increasingly invited further involvement, and the local secondary school has approached the parish to explore the establishment of a Christian Union.

DW expressed his thanks, noting that none of this work would have been possible without the grant funding provided through Transforming Church, Together (T.C.T).

BW concluded this item by offering a prayer of thanksgiving.

### **6.4 Briefing on next Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) bid.**

RM gave an update on the latest Stage 3 bid for funding to continue the T.C.T work.

He advised that the funds from Stage 2 (£6.8 million) should run out between 2026 and 2027. There is therefore significant pressure to submit the bid this year. The NC has provided a detailed set of requirements outlining what it expects to see in the submission. The timescale is challenging, with a period of approximately three months available. The final submission is due in early May, with a decision expected from the Investment Board in June.

RM explained that approximately half of all expenditure is allocated to Priority Community Networks (PCN). Both PCN and Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) were identified as critical areas with stable income streams. For the remaining areas of activity, funding is expected to peak in 2026, followed by a reduction thereafter as workstreams begin to conclude in line with the delivery of a sustainable future.

The NC has indicated a potential total funding level of £8.5 million over the next 2 triennia, which is a significant sum and would cover the planned programme of



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activity. However, NC guidance assumes a steady funding profile, whereas the Diocese's workstreams anticipate a peak followed by a gradual decline. Re-profiling will be necessary if we are to avoid a stop-start situation.

It was noted that, if funding is allocated strictly in line with the NC guideline, there would be an anticipated funding gap of approximately £1 million over the next two to three years.

As the bid process progresses, RB asked for Synod's support and prayers that:

1. the funding application is successful and that the NC recognises the need for continuity funding; and
2. the NC agrees to re-phase its funding allocation to reflect the delivery profile of the workstreams.

### 6.5 Table Discussion and feedback to Synod

TW invited members to discuss the following question on their tables.

*How can we enable greater involvement, and better support and encourage the work of parishes, BMO's and chaplaincies in the shared vision of TC.T?*

Notes were taken by facilitators, which can be found in Appendix D. Each table shared a comment back to the Synod:

- **Christopher Bryan (CB) (Archdeacon of Malmesbury)** highlighted the importance of sharing stories at a relational, local level and exploring how people might be invited to share stories within their own contexts and communities.
- **Brendan Biggs (BB) (House of Laity; Ex-officio)** emphasised the importance of clear and consistent communication, particularly the role of clergy in communicating *Transforming Church. Together (TC.T)* to parishes. He raised questions about how TC.T is understood and experienced in parishes that are not part of a PCN, and what TC.T means for them in practice.
- **BW** suggested that Deanery Synod is an ideal forum for this work, as it is a place where people are open to learning more and where cultural change could be positively embraced.
- **Tim Godden (TG) (House of Clergy; Bristol South)** spoke about a general lack of clarity around what TC.T is. Participants identified a tension between the *macro* elements (vision and values) and the *micro* elements (local parish experience), which can feel overwhelming.



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- **Ed Shaw (ES) (House of Laity; Ex-officio)** encouraged the sharing of good news stories at a local level and suggested making greater use of the new website to share stories arising from the discussions and from parish life more widely.
- **Adam Beaumont (AB) (Associate Archdeacon)** questioned whether the focus should be reframed, asking how Diocesan Synod itself can engage more effectively and meaningfully.
- **Toby Boutle (TB) (House of Clergy; Swindon)** reflected on whether parishes experience TC.T as a bottom up process or perceive it as top down. He noted the challenge for parishes, BMOs and other contexts in identifying which TC.T streams are most relevant to them. He stressed the importance of clear, down to earth communication and recognised that language suitable for NC contexts often needs adapting for parish settings and for those new to the Christian faith.
- **Chris Bradley (CBra) (House of Laity; Kingswood and South Gloucestershire)** also focused on communication, noting the need for clarity not only from the Diocese to parishes, but also for parishes to articulate what they are doing. He suggested that existing deanery structures could be used more effectively to support this.
- **Simon Pugh-Jones (SP-J) (House of Laity; Ex-officio)** highlighted the importance of handling well the consequences for parishes that apply for support but are unsuccessful, and of closing the perceived gap between diocesan structures and parish experience.

### 7. Question Time

TW advised that Formal Written questions received relevant to an agenda topic will be taken at the appropriate time. There was one question to be raised at this point.

**Diocesan Synod member:** Auriol Britton (AB) (House of Laity; Bristol South)

**Question:** Please could the diocese of Bristol introduce compulsory diversity targets on Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) throughout our area. This could involve 20 % of committee members being from the BAME community, or having a disability or mental health condition, being from a working-class background, or LGBT. I understand that churches which have more diversity are stronger. I believe that this would strengthen decision-making and enable the Church of England in this diocese to resemble a little more closely the multi-cultural community which we are supposed to be here to serve. The Church of



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England is the state church: inclusion of everyone, people from all backgrounds, is not an optional extra, I believe, and diversity doesn't pose any kind of threat to our churches - it merely improves them. Could this target apply from 2030 in towns and cities, and from 2035 in rural areas, to give churches a good amount of time to prepare. What is the general view of this proposal, please, and could it be implemented? Thank you very much.

Members should note that I was instructed by our new vicar, at his first PCC meeting, to "Reform the Church of England"! So here we go.

**Person(s) who answered question:**

Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan secretary) and Emma Bakewell (Head of Governance)

**Answer:** You are absolutely right that having a diverse range of people involved in our governance structures strengthens the Church. When decisions are shaped by those from different backgrounds and with different perspectives, our governance becomes more reflective of the whole Body of Christ. Increased representation also signals clearly that the Church is inclusive and welcoming to all.

However, under the Church Representation Rules (CRR) it is not possible to introduce a mandatory requirement for all PCCs to ensure that a fixed percentage of their members (for example, 20%) are from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds, are neurodiverse, have a disability, identify as LGBTQ+, or come from working class backgrounds.

This is because PCC members must be elected, and the Rules require that the decision about who is elected lies entirely with the members of the parish's electoral roll. We cannot predetermine the characteristics of those who must be elected.

In addition, the pool of eligible lay candidates is often relatively small, depending on the size and composition of the parish electoral roll. The CRR set out the eligibility requirements:

Eligibility to stand for election to the PCC

A person may stand for election only if:

- they are aged 16 or over; and
- they are an actual communicant; and
- their name is on the electoral roll of the parish, unless he or she is aged under 18 at the date of the election, and have been on the roll for at least



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the preceding six months.

(See CRR Part 9, Rule M8(1)(a)–(c))

These statutory criteria necessarily limit who is able to stand, and many who are eligible may choose not to do so for personal or practical reasons.

The BDBF has recently been exploring ways to encourage greater diversity within diocesan governance structures. To do this meaningfully, we first need to understand why certain groups remain under-represented. For example:

- Are individuals standing for election but not being chosen?
- Are there barriers preventing people from standing in the first place?

These are among the questions that Bishop's Council will be considering at its May residential.

In the meantime, PCCs do have the ability to increase representation through co-option, within the limits set by the CRR. PCCs may coopt two or more additional members (the number depending on the size of the electoral roll), which can help broaden the range of voices involved (see CRR Part 9, Rule M15(1)(k) and (10)).

**AB** expressed appreciation for the response given to her question regarding how diversity might be increased. She also shared her disappointment that progress on inclusion within Transforming Church, Together (TC.T) was not as strong as had been hoped. She reflected that, as the Church of England is the established church, there can be a perception that participation is predominantly white and middle-class, which presents challenges for achieving wider inclusion.

**Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)** expressed pride in the huge diversity of the DSS and acknowledged that some of its members (who are not Christian, or of any faith) still have more to learn about how parishes operate.

**Mandy Ford (MF), Dean of Bristol Cathedral** who has oversight of the Inclusion workstream within TC.T, explained that progress has been gradual, in part because of the need to draw on skills and expertise from beyond the Church of England. She reported that a strategy has now been developed, aimed at supporting those who may find engagement with the Church more difficult. Mandy emphasised that inclusion is a shared responsibility and encouraged individuals to be intentional in inviting and encouraging those who may not naturally be included, particularly those who may benefit from additional encouragement or mentoring but who could bring valuable and fresh perspectives.



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### 8. Giving

**Christopher Bryan (CB), Archdeacon of Malmesbury**, spoke on the culture of giving and launched the #MyWeeklyCoffee”Campaign.

A leaflet and postcard were distributed to all members, with additional copies made available. It was noted that the message and associated resources will be shared more widely across the Diocese over the coming weeks.

Members were reminded of the inspiring and encouraging stories that have been shared from across the Diocese, all of which are enabled by giving within local churches. While there is much to be thankful for, it was emphasised that the Diocese also wishes to be honest about the challenges it faces.

Synod was advised that, following the break, there would be a more detailed examination of the Financial Strategy, which aims to stabilise diocesan finances. Members were reminded that they would have read the relevant papers and that the situation presents significant challenges, requiring difficult decisions and substantial change.

It was acknowledged that the scale of the financial deficit can feel overwhelming, with figures that are difficult to comprehend. However, it was suggested that, when viewed collectively and shared across the Diocese, the challenge becomes more manageable. Framed in this way, addressing the deficit was likened to the equivalent of each person contributing the cost of a cup of coffee each week.

It was outlined that, over the coming months, there will be an invitation to individuals to increase their regular giving by the equivalent cost of a cup of coffee each week. It was acknowledged that while some will be able to give more, for others this will be a challenge; the emphasis is on each person contributing what they are able. It was noted that, taken collectively, even modest increases can make a significant difference and would address the current gap in the cost of parish ministry if widely adopted.

Members were encouraged to consider how they might become involved, noting the importance of leadership in modelling and encouraging participation. It was observed that approximately half of those on the Electoral Roll do not currently give regularly. The approach has been shared at offertories across a range of



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churches, where it has been received as achievable, relatable, and straightforward.

The practical application of the initiative was then demonstrated. Members were directed to the postcard on their tables, and a live demonstration was given of making a donation by scanning the QR code and following the steps, which was received with some light-hearted response.

It was confirmed that donations made through this initiative are restricted to the Stipends Fund. Members were also encouraged, if they wished, to adopt and apply the same approach within their local church contexts.

Members were encouraged to make use of the existing giving pathways within their parishes in order to support the sustainability of Parish Share. It was noted that resources will be made available to support churches in communicating this message.

The initiative was described as straightforward and effective, particularly when adopted at scale. Members were encouraged to share the message widely, with the reassurance that, if participation is broad, the current financial deficit can be addressed collectively.

### 9. Carbon Net Zero (CNZ) and Environment

Mr Bruce Finnermore (BF), Chair of the House of Laity, took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

#### **Environmental and Carbon Net Zero Update**

Kit Connell (KC), Environment and Sustainability Manager, presented an update on the Diocese's environmental work and Carbon Net Zero (CNZ) projects.

KC reminded members of the Fifth Mark of Mission — to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation — noting that this commitment is fundamental to the Church's faith and underpins the Diocese's environmental programme. He acknowledged the wider context of significant global and local challenges, including social inequality, developments in artificial intelligence, and ongoing conflicts, alongside the escalating impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. Key indicators were highlighted, including the fact that the ten hottest years on record have all occurred within the last decade, wildlife populations declined



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by approximately 73% between 1970 and 2020, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, including flooding experienced locally earlier in the year. While acknowledging the considerable progress made to date, KC emphasised that there remains much more to do.

KC reminded Synod that in March 2023, Synod approved the use of reserves to fund environmental and CNZ projects. He then outlined progress achieved through this investment.

### **Carbon Net Zero**

- Decarbonisation plans completed for 190 churches (92%)
- 56 churches supported with energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures
- 80 solar installations completed on clergy housing
- 17 heat pump installations in clergy housing
- 35 fabric upgrades to clergy housing
- Large-scale solar installations completed at two Voluntary Aided (VA) schools

### **Environmental Programme Update**

- Eco Church: 3 Gold awards (Christ Church, Swindon; St Peter, Henleaze; Hazelnut), 28 Silver awards, and 47 Bronze awards, with 52 churches registered overall
- 170 Eco Champions supporting and communicating environmental initiatives locally
- Seven Climate Cafés delivered in partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy, with further events planned
- 97% completion of the National Church Energy Footprint Tool (EFT), enabling effective monitoring of progress

KC also highlighted a number of key partnerships:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA): £100,000 provided for net zero projects in churches across Bristol
- Chippenham Environmental Forum: £3,000 grants available for decarbonisation projects
- Shared Voice Campaign with One City Bristol, following a national emergency briefing in 2025 at which ten experts briefed policymakers on the impacts of environmental and nature crises on wellbeing, the economy, and national security. A 45-minute documentary has been produced, with screenings planned across the Diocese



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KC reassured Synod that, although reserves funding is currently paused, the environmental work is continuing.

### Property and Estates Update

Joe Flatman (JF), Director of Property & Estates, briefly outlined how projects will continue during the pause in reserves funding. He reported that active fundraising efforts are underway and noted the significant progress achieved by the Diocese compared with others that have not been able to commit similar resources.

JF advised that a full update on the Environmental Strategy would be brought to the next meeting of Synod. He outlined six core components of the emerging strategy:

1. **Personal and collective responsibility:** encouraging Synod members and the wider Church to commit to a whole-life journey that reflects the value and glory of creation
2. **Decarbonisation of churches and halls:** supporting local-level action
3. **Decarbonisation of clergy housing:** improving energy efficiency, reducing costs, and ensuring clergy homes are fit for purpose
4. **Decarbonisation of VA schools:** working in partnership to enable long-term, systemic change within communities
5. **Land management and biodiversity:** assessing glebe land opportunities, partnership working, biodiversity net gain, and renewable energy
6. **Partnerships and fundraising:** strengthening collaboration across communities and encouraging fundraising to support the wider environmental journey

Questions were taken.

<b>Diocesan Synod member:</b>	Adrian Howkins (AH) (House of Clergy, City)
<b>Question:</b> The Diocesan Synod of November 2025 adopted a budget for 2026 that paused funding for net zero from our reserves. What are the plans for funding the 2026–29 Environment Programme that will be presented in June? Will any reserves be used for funding this work?	
<b>Person(s) who answered question:</b>	Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)



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**Answer:** The 2026 budget approved in November 2025 paused the use of diocesan reserves for net zero activity because of significant financial pressures at the time. This pause was intended to be temporary while longer term financial planning and prioritisation work took place.

Work has been underway since then to shape the 2027–30 CNZ Programme, including its workstreams and the financial model required to support them. The full programme, along with the proposed funding approach, will be presented to Diocesan Synod in June 2026 for discussion and decision.

At this stage, no final decisions have been made about funding, including whether reserves will be used. A full and detailed proposal will therefore be provided at the June Synod once the Environment Team has completed the programme and its accompanying proposals.

**Supplementary Question:** AH thanked RL for his response to the earlier question and KC and JF for their presentation. Reflecting on his ordination two years ago, AH noted that he had been asked to consider the positive aspects of ministry. He shared an example of taking students to Bristol Cathedral, where they were surprised to learn that the Diocese of Bristol has been at the forefront of environmental activism and action. He expressed concern that reductions in funding could risk losing this leading position, particularly as financial priorities are considered.

AH asked that as Diocesan Synod considers financing and funding these dynamic environment plans whether it can fully take into account the missional aspects of decisions alongside the physical environmental challenges that it is going to address?

**Response:** Joe Flatman (Director of Property & Estates) Responded by emphasising the importance of partnership. He noted that, rather than reducing effort, there is a need to strengthen and deepen partnership working to support this area of work. The possibilities and potential are great and there is excitement about moving forward.

**Canon Simon Pugh-Jones (SP-J) (House of Laity; Ex-officio)** thanked KC and JF for their update and reflected on the Diocese’s commitment to environmental action. He recalled that in 2019 the Diocese declared a climate emergency and made a firm commitment to achieve Carbon Net Zero by 2030, supported by a



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ten-year programme. Noting that the Diocese is now approximately seven years into that programme, he asked for an indication of current progress against the overall timeline.

He acknowledged the challenges associated with carbon reporting and did not seek a precise figure, but asked whether, at roughly 70% of the programme’s duration, the Diocese might also be around 70% of the way towards achieving its carbon reduction target. He suggested that, depending on the position, this could either be a cause for celebration, a prompt for renewed momentum, or a matter of concern if progress were significantly behind target.

**In response:** KC advised that the Diocese’s carbon baseline is taken from 2022, rather than 2019, with the figure being approximately 6,000 tonnes. Data from 2022–2023 indicates that Diocesan carbon emissions had reduced to approximately 5,000 tonnes. Confirmed data for 2024 is not yet available. KC advised that a fuller update on carbon progress will be brought to Synod in June 2026.

It was suggested that future reporting should explicitly assess progress against the agreed timeline, for example by indicating whether progress to date is broadly proportionate to the elapsed period of the programme.

<b>10.</b>	<b>Financial Strategy – 10-year plan</b> <b>10.1 Presentation of Plan</b> <b>10.2 Round Table Discussion</b> <b>10.3 Questions &amp; Answer</b> <b>10.4 Motion to Approve</b>
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BF thanked the members of the Financial Strategy Team for their work in developing the Strategy.

It was noted that the postponed webinar held earlier in the week had been well received (Post-meeting note: 17 members attended live and 22 viewed the recording). Stephen Sheridan (SLS), Finance Director, was thanked for delivering the webinar.

**Richard Bacon (RB), Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF),** introduced the Financial Strategy to Synod and reflected on the context that had led to the current position. The following points were noted:



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- TC.T funding is separate from diocesan finances and is funded by the Central Church; funding is claimed retrospectively once expenditure has occurred.
- Parish Share does not contribute towards safeguarding, training, or *any* central diocesan costs.
- CNZ funding is currently paused.
- Substantial savings will be required across all areas to address the financial challenges.
- There is a need to pivot towards growing diocesan income.

### 10.1 Presentation of the Plan

**Richard Leaman (RL)** then presented the detailed financial plan. He commented that he was approaching the strategy with faith and confidence, and that he believed the plan to be workable.

The presentation highlighted the following:

- We now have £649,000 of new additional annual costs baked-in.
- Parish Share showing zero real-terms growth.
- If nothing is done, Diocesan reserves projected to be exhausted by 2030.

The initial projections examined included:

- Significant savings within Diocesan Support Services (DSS)(staff and operating costs).
- Natural reduction of one stipend per year for the first five years.
- Increased fundraising across the full period.
- A 3% increase in Parish Share over three years.

Despite these measures, this projection still resulted in a £3 million annual deficit and reserves being exhausted before 2035.

The current ten-year plan builds on the initial projection (and the assumptions therein) and additionally includes:

- Property sale profits of approximately £0.5 million per annum from 2029 onwards.
- A reduction of two stipends per year in the second five-year period.
- A further 20% reduction in DSS operating costs.



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It was noted that, even with these measures, the plan would still result in an annual operating deficit of approximately £0.9 million, with reserves reducing to around £3 million by 2035.

In addition to TC.T funding, it was reported that further day-today funding ('Transitional Relief') will be sought from the National Church. This will require demonstrating progress with TC.T delivery, significant growth in Parish Share, and a willingness to make difficult savings decisions.

RL concluded by expressing confidence that the Financial Strategy provides a route towards a more balanced budget without unnecessarily undermining mission and ministry, closing DSS, or relying excessively on Parish Share and fundraising.

### 10.2 Round Table Discussions

BF invited members to take part in table discussions, noting that facilitators would record feedback which would be collated and shared with the Financial Strategy Task Group (FSTG) (Post meeting note - at the last meeting in March 2026 the FSTG was dissolved and duties passed back to the Finance Committee – feedback with therefore go back to this committee).

Members were asked to consider:

1. Whether the financial position had been explained clearly.
2. Their overall views on the Strategy.
3. Any questions they wished to raise with the wider Synod.

A point of clarification was raised by **Stephen Grindrod (House of Laity, North Wiltshire)** regarding the Current Ten-Year Plan slide. He queried why the sale of assets, shown as contributing a £9 million improvement, did not appear as income on the projections.

**Response:** RB responded by explaining that asset sales are used to fund activity but do not generate income; income is derived from external funding streams rather than capital disposals.

### 10.3 Questions and Discussion

<b>Diocesan Synod member:</b>	Stephen Grindrod (House of Laity; North Wiltshire)
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**Question:** Financial Strategy: 1) How realistic is the planned Parish Share growth - especially for small (rural) churches with high building costs and small congregations? 2) Is there an implication that as clergy numbers reduce and vicarages are sold off, churches will close? and who will pick up the ongoing costs?

**Person(s) who answered question:**

Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)

**Answer:** These are important questions with which the Financial Strategy Task Group, led by Bishop Neil and Richard Bacon, have been grappling for the last 5 months.

The parish share growth plan is demanding, as are the fundraising targets, and the planned cost reduction activities.

The Archdeacons will be briefing on discipleship and generosity at this Synod, so there will be an opportunity to discuss Parish Share then. Bristol is behind the curve with Parish giving post-Covid - in comparison to almost all other dioceses – so there is clearly work to be done.

In terms of clergy numbers, we will do all we can to sustain them, but the drop in parish share in real terms, and an envisaged national decline in ordinations, are both working against us.

Church closures are a parish decision, but once taken, care and maintenance of the church become a diocesan responsibility until a future use/owner is found.

None of the potential ways forward are attractive; we need to improve our generosity across the Diocese, and we (*all*) need to support parishes more, to give them improved sustainability, and thereby their ability to meet Parish Share.

**Supplementary question** – Our deaneries across the diocese are completely different, has that difference been included in the models we have been presented this morning or is it a generic Diocesan wide one?

**Response by:** Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)



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The work has not been done on a deanery-by-deanery basis. Each line in the budget has been considered by looking at historic data, looking at the micro (parish, staff, and clergy) level

<b>Diocesan Synod member:</b>	Suzanne Grindrod (House of Clergy; North Wiltshire)
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**Question:** What assumptions have been made in calculating the increase in Parish Share and how realistic is it that parishes will meet this request in the current climate?

<b>Person(s) who answered question:</b>	Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)
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**Answer:**

The parish share growth plan is indeed demanding, as are the fundraising targets, and the planned cost reduction activities.

The Archdeacons will be briefing on discipleship and generosity at this Synod, so there will be an opportunity to discuss Parish Share then. Bristol is behind the curve with Parish giving post-Covid - in comparison to almost all other dioceses – so there is clearly work to be done.

And we must be realistic - the drop in parish share (in real terms), and an envisaged national decline in ordinations, are both driving us towards reducing clergy numbers – something nobody wants. We have to do better with our discipleship and generosity, or this will become a reality.

**Supplementary Question:** I thoroughly support encouraging people to give more. Parish share is only part of the problem. Many of our small communities also trying to fundraise for church buildings to keep them in a good condition and not falling down. Is there going to be any support for Parishes struggling to maintain their buildings and do we need a wider discussion on that?

**Response by:** Richard Leaman (CEO/Diocesan Secretary)

We completely get that parishes have so many demands on their finances and parish share is yet another problem. Leanne Hubbard (Director of External Relations) and her team can (and do) help and support parishes to increase their income to help their mission and church buildings. We all want to help Parishes thrive and to be financially viable and to grow.



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The following points were raised by members, to enable grouping all questions were taken first and Richard Leaman (RL), CEO/Diocesan Secretary and others then responded.

*For the ease and clarity of the minutes the questions have been grouped and the answers given under the appropriate questions.*

**1. David Cain (House of Laity; Swindon)** reflected on his experience as an accountant, observing that organisations rarely cut their way out of difficulty and instead often seek to grow their way out of challenge. He suggested that investment in clergy, rather than reductions, could be a more sustainable approach. He asked “if we fold in 2034 as opposed to 2035 and if we put that last years money into investment in clergy not reducing the investment in income generation might we change the whole thing?” *There was a round of applause*

**Response:** RL noted that these were issues the senior team had been grappling with for several months. He stated that the only sustainable long-term approach was growth, as decline would otherwise be inevitable.

He explained that this was why significant time had been invested in working with Rob Mountain and the National Church on *Transforming Church. Together (TC.T)*, which across all the 12 work streams is fundamentally focused on growth. A whole raft of different measures is the only sensible way forward.

He commented that fundraising efforts do not have an immediate turn round, we have to invest in fund raising, invest time and effort into communicating the importance of giving and generosity within the Diocese, this won't come for free and that is factored into the staffing numbers for the DSS (Fundraising and Comms Staff).

**2. Catherine Kosidowski (House of Laity; Swindon)** raised questions regarding Diocesan investments, particularly the underperformance of CCLA (10% from benchmark in the last 2 years). She understood from the webinar discussions that CCLA has been taken over by Jupiter and asked what improvements were anticipated, over what timescale, and whether feedback on this would be provided to Diocesan and Deanery Synods and Parishes?



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**Response:** RL confirmed that Jupiter are not changing the investment policy in terms of places they will or will not invest and that the CCLA had visited and spoken to our Board of Finance. He invited Richard Bacon, Chair of DBF for further comment.

RB observed that it is good practice to review investment management arrangements regularly, this applies to all - Church of England, Dioceses down to PCCs. He noted that some Dioceses have chosen to move away from CCLA, while others have adopted a mixed approach. He emphasised the need for a careful analysis of the available options to determine the most appropriate approach going forward and this will be undertaken during the next year or so.

**3. Llewelyn Lawton (House of Laity; Bristol West)** referred to evidence suggesting that increasing the number of stipendiary clergy can lead to growth in congregation size and levels of giving. He questioned how Parish Share could realistically increase if the Diocese is expected to lose approximately 15 clergy posts over the next ten years.

**Response:** RL advised that clergy numbers had deliberately been sustained over the past five years, but Parish Share income had decreased, so there is no evidence of a causal linkage in Bristol. He stressed that there was no desire to reduce clergy numbers and that every effort needed to be made to sustain and grow ministry across the Diocese. He highlighted the national shortage of ordinands. NC have recently predicted that by 2035 there will be a 1350 reduction in the number of ordinands, he commented that we may well aspire to sustain and hopefully grow clergy numbers but in reality the supply may not be available. Clergy reductions in the first 5 years of the plan will be through natural turn over and drop in numbers, where and how, is episcopal and the Bishop and Archdeacons business.

**4. Will Fairbairn (House of Clergy; City)** asked to what extent demographic factors had been taken into account when calculating the figures and projections presented.

**Response:** Due to the grouping up of answers, this question was not answered at Synod. The answer is that the Archdeacons go through each parish, line by line, to take account of all local factors and to determine an appropriate and achievable parish share request.



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**5. Toby Boutle (House of Clergy; Swindon)** raised concerns about the potential impact of clergy reductions on the poorest communities, asking how any changes could be managed to ensure those communities are not disproportionately affected.

**6. Marc Terry (House of Clergy; Chippenham)** asked whether clear criteria would be developed for decisions relating to “natural wastage”, and whether recruitment would be targeted in particular areas or contexts. He was concerned the term “natural wastage” would make people nervous.

**Responses:** +NW spoke about clergy deployment in areas of poverty, emphasising the importance of ensuring the Church is not present only in areas able to contribute high levels of Parish Share. He spoke how the Priority Community Network (PCN) demonstrates our intent and our action of support to places that are often overlooked.

He highlighted the detailed work undertaken by the Archdeacons, ensuring that decisions are informed by careful consideration of deprivation, as well as urban and rural contexts. He noted that this enables difficult decisions to be made on the basis of robust data.

He advised that he had spoken and written to The Most Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally (++SM) and Church Commissioners advising them of our current financial position, they had responded by emphasising the importance of dioceses being fully aware of the data and financial realities they face, as many dioceses are entering increasingly challenging circumstances.

CB clarified that the term “natural wastage” does not imply that vacancies will automatically remain unfilled. Instead, vacancies will be considered strategically alongside data, to determine where changes may be appropriate. He stressed that this approach must be planned, strategic, and carried out pastorally, while acknowledging that it presents significant challenges.

**7. Toby Boutle (House of Clergy; Swindon)** asked about reductions in Diocesan Secretariat (DSS) costs, noting the number of administrative roles and questioning whether work could be delivered in more modern and efficient ways.



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### **6. Chris Bradley (House of Laity; Kingswood and South Gloucestershire)**

suggested that shared services across dioceses could be explored, drawing on models used in other sectors to improve efficiency through collaboration, shared service arrangements with other Dioceses.

**8. Auriol Britton (House of Laity; Bristol South)** queried whether greater efficiencies could be achieved by merging certain central or head office functions across the Church of England's dioceses.

**Response:** RL provided an update on DSS cost reductions. He advised that at the outset of TCT, £200k of staff costs were removed (6 people). Two staff members had already left, with another departure expected later in the year. He noted that purely administrative roles within the DSS account for approximately 1% of the total costs while most charities run at 12% of the overall budget. The team is operating close to minimum capacity, maintaining compliance (GDPR, Safeguarding, Clergy housing fit for purpose) whilst providing effective parish and school support. He cautioned that further reductions could risk compliance and significantly reduce the level of support available to parishes. Further DSS reductions would be reviewed again in two years when new IT is in place, and we have evaluated the utility of AI.

He reiterated that the vast majority of diocesan expenditure is directed towards mission and ministry, and there is currently a £2.8m gap between the cost of Ministry and the Parish Share income designed to fund it.

Opportunities for shared services have been discussed, noting that South-West Dioceses meet regularly to explore collaboration. A shared IT lead post has recently been advertised, and options for shared safeguarding provision are also being explored. It was noted that while shared services may offer efficiencies, full departmental mergers do not result in any significant cost savings.

The possibility of merging dioceses has previously been considered by the Diocese Commission, who have determined that this is not an approach they wish to pursue.

+NW closed the discussion highlighting that while the 10 year plan could feel like a long road when the world around keeps changing and is unstable, we need realism and hope in this moment, he is confident in DSS staff and in governance bodies such as Diocesan Synod. We must trust in God to navigate these difficult years.



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### 10.4 Motion to Approve

RB proposed the motion: That the Diocesan Synod approves the Financial Strategy – 10-year plan.

The plan was approved with a clear majority; there were 4 against and 9 abstentions.

11.

### Governance Reports

#### 11.1 Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) Annual Report

##### 11.1.1 Presentation of Report

##### 11.1.2 Question & Answers

#### 11.2 Bishop's Council & Board of Directors report (1 December and 5 February 2026)

##### 11.2.1 Questions & Answers

##### 11.2.2 Motion to approve Bishop's Council Reports

#### 11.3 General Synod Report (February 2026)

##### 11.3.1 Questions & Answers

### 11.1 Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) Annual Report

**Adam Beaumont (AB), Associate Archdeacon** and Vice Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) and Project Lead which includes Children, Young People and Families (CYPF), gave apologies for Liz Townend's, Director of Education, absence and explained that if unable to answer any questions they would be taken back and responded to after the meeting.

It was reported that the Annual Report represents a strategic shift away from education being treated as a standalone area, towards a more holistic Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) strategy. This approach incorporates education within a broader framework and places children and young people culturally at the centre of diocesan life and activity. It was noted that this direction is informed by research indicating that this is how the Church is best placed to respond in the current context.

The report was described as a collection of positive developments arising from DSS, TC.T and parish-based work.

Questions and comments were received as follows:



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**Toby Boutle (House of Clergy; Swindon)** observed that the report did not make reference to the Sacraments, particularly baptism and the Eucharist, in relation to church schools and engagement with young people. He suggested that these should be more explicitly referenced in future reports and within the Diocese's vision for work with children and young people, as they are central to the Church's identity and life.

**David Cain (House of Laity; Swindon)** reflected on his experience as a member of the Park Academies Trust, which had recently taken on the Deanery and Kingfisher schools. He noted that the Trust had previously comprised of predominantly non-church schools, and that the Chief Executive had recently commented on the impact of engaging with Christian distinctiveness within the two church schools. As a result, the Chief Executive had asked whether additional trustees with a Christian background and faith commitment might be identified to support this work.

### **11.2 Bishop's Council & Board of Directors report (1 December and 5 February 2026)**

#### **11.2.1 Questions & Answers**

There were no questions raised

#### **11.2.2 Motion to approve Bishop's Council Reports**

CB read the motion: That the Bishop's Council reports for 1 December 2025 and 5 February 2026 be received.

The Reports were received, there were 2 abstentions.

### **11.3 General Synod Report (February 2026)**

Synod was advised that General Synod member, Brendan Biggs (BB) (House of Laity; Ex-officio) had given his inaugural speech at the recent General Synod which from comments received was brilliant and had been very well received.

*There was a brief round of applause.*

In addition to his written report BB wished to highlight:

#### **1. Living in Love and Faith (LLF)**



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BB commented that recent press reporting had not been helpful. He acknowledged that there are deeply held convictions within Synod on all sides of the debate and noted that, for many, the matters under discussion are personal and deeply felt. He also recognised that others are closer to the issues than himself.

It was noted that +NW has been involved in the bishops' deliberations. MF is a member of the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) Programme Board, and ES along with others from the Diocese, has participated in LLF working groups.

It was reported that four actions emerged from the LLF process, of which two have been completed and two have not.

### **Completed actions:**

1. *Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF)* have been commended for use within regular services.
2. The document *Issues in Human Sexuality (1980s)* has been withdrawn from the requirements relating to the Declaration of Assent for ordained ministry.

### **Actions not taken forward:**

3. The bishops have decided not to commend the *PLF* for use in standalone services.
4. The bishops have also decided not to proceed with proposals that would permit clergy to enter into same-sex civil marriages without censure.

BB advised that, while the formal LLF process has now concluded, work on these matters has not come to an end. A new working group, supported by sub-groups, will be established to continue consideration of the issues. BB expressed the view that further work is necessary and confirmed that it will be undertaken. General Synod has been advised that the new group is expected to report back within two years. It was noted that this will be to a newly elected Synod, at which point views and perspectives may differ. It was emphasised that the work continues and that outcomes remain open.

## **2. Safeguarding**

BB then provided an update on safeguarding, noting that it is now a year since the major safeguarding debate. He advised Synod of developments relating to the new complaints procedure, commenting that there is significant work still to be



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done within a limited timeframe, as the Charity Commission expects this to be completed by mid-2027. It was noted that there is currently no draft legislation.

### **3. Clergy Conduct Measure (CCM)**

BB reported that the CCM, which had been expected to be completed, has returned from Parliament. Parliament requested a change to the provision that clergy conduct hearings, which are normally held in private, should instead be held in public. This amendment has now been approved, and the Measure is expected to proceed.

BB further advised that Parliament has taken a similar position in relation to the Church Governance Measure, which has also been returned for reconsideration. It was noted that this Measure may not return to Synod for up to two years, as agreement has not yet been reached between Church and Parliament on the required changes.

It was reported that Parliament has indicated that it wishes the Church to prioritise Safeguarding ahead of Governance reform. BB observed that this intervention is unusual and noted that it is of interest in the context of the relationship between Church and State.

### **Other Matters**

Finally, BB highlighted that recent changes to the rules allowing PCCs to make certain decisions by email, as detailed in his report, have been approved by Parliament and are now in force.

### **General Synod Proclamation**

BF read the following proclamation from General Synod to Synod:

“I give notice that, at its February 2026 group of sessions, the General Synod resolved that Amending Canon No. 44 be made, promulgated and executed. Amending Canon No. 44 amends Canon C 8 to include provision for the exercise of ministry by Armed Forces chaplains.”

### **11.3.1 Questions & Answers**

There were no questions raised.

BF thanked St Paul’s Church team for hosting the Synod meeting, highlighted some Diocesan notices and concluded the discussions.



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<b>12.</b>	<b>Blessing and Close</b>
	+NW closed the meeting with prayer.

### Appendix A

Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2026

## Bishop Neil - Address to Diocesan Synod

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Thanks

Sisters and brothers in Christ, thank you for being here today. Synod gatherings remind us that the church is about people—faithful, prayerful, and committed people.

Thank you for the many ways you serve Christ and your communities through our diocese, seen and experienced as a church rooted in every local community and by a skilled team in Hillside House.

In recent months and years, I have seen three things again and again across our parishes: lives changed by making Jesus known, extraordinary social action, and remarkable financial giving. These are signs of a living Church.

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### First, lives changed by **making Jesus known**

Everywhere I go on a Sunday and in the week, people tell me about young people walking into church and wanting to know about Jesus and have a life of faith.

I also do regular confirmations...people from 8-to-eighty standing up and saying 'I believe'...tens and tens and tens of people. I say to them, 'God has called you by name and made you His own.'

What a moment...repeated again and again.

The sense, experience and testimonies of God at work - one 16-year-old stood up and said, ‘...life, school, my family are all better since I became a Christian.’

This evangelism and transformation in lives is our core calling...everything we do starts here.

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Second, thank you for your **social action**.

Across our parishes people are responding to the needs around them with compassion and courage...

...41,000 people reached in 2025 by 1,600 volunteers (disciples) giving 122,000 hours of support.

Building community, reducing isolation, supporting families, feeding people... collaboration with other organisations for good.

Rural, urban, town, village, estate, school...amazing.

In Swindon a couple of weeks ago we gathered church leaders and community leaders to see the social action impact and hear from two vicars.

Two stories impacted me in particular - a vicar looking outside his window on a Swindon estate - saw a load of young people hiding in his garden. He went out to find out what was going on. ‘Sshhh,’ the teenagers said, ‘get down’. He thought the worst - in recent history groups of teenagers, some with knives, had run across the estate looking for a fight. ‘What’s going on?’ the vicar asked again. ‘We’re playing hide-and-seek.’

What a transformation...the church, Shine Pinehurst, and the vicar Simon Halls, had invested in a pizza oven on wheels with teenage chefs trained to make give away pizzas to young people across the estate. Embedded ministry on the estate over many years, with other organisations, had changed the climate, children could play out again. The church was part of the change. Much need is still present, and yet this is a transformative moment. Thanks be to God.

Secondly, social action, carried out visibly as a church community, has become central to the mission in Swindon New Town. Welcome spaces offer free warm drinks, snacks and games, and a free shop, run with SBC’s Live Well team, provides warm clothing for anyone in need, especially those in the asylum system or newly arrived as refugees. A youth group, toddler group and a series of summer clubs have also been established, each shaped by local need.

Opening churches in these ways has helped form and strengthen communities, breaking down barriers and making God’s love more visible. Many have begun a journey of faith

through these projects, later seeking baptism, confirmation and participation in the Eucharist.

Similar work across our Diocese happens quietly. It rarely makes headlines. But it matters enormously. Through these acts of care, the Church is present where Jesus calls us to be—alongside those who need hope, dignity, and practical help.

In our communities where loneliness can be widespread and community fragile, across our Diocese, and in our churches, you continue to make people feel known and valued. Your work in sustaining that life of community is deeply important.

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Third, thank you for your **financial giving**.

These are challenging financial times. Costs rise—for households, for parishes, and for our diocese. At the same time, our financial giving in Parish Share, has remained level since Covid.

I want to acknowledge that it hasn't been easy for any of us.

Financial giving is a central expression of Christian faith - something for which I am deeply grateful.

Honesty requires us to acknowledge that we are facing real financial pressures as a Diocese. Rising costs - some beyond our control, changing patterns of giving, and the realities of maintaining buildings and ministry mean the gap between our giving and the cost of ministry (vicars, housing, training) has moved apart. Our giving hasn't covered the cost of ministry for some years.

We have remained faithful and maintained the level of clergy in our local communities and churches. God is with us and churches grow when they have good lay and ordained leadership.

This moment is not primarily about budgets and spreadsheets. It is about our shared commitment to a Church being present in the name of Jesus.

I am encouraged because I believe the foundations are already strong. The three things I mentioned—making Jesus known, social action, and your generosity are the signs of a Church that is alive.

Our task now is to build on those strengths.

When I was a parish priest for 10 years, paying parish share was sometimes a struggle, the parish had relied on other parishes to financially support it in the past - a net receiver not giver. The PCC remembered that and was determined to pay Share.

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Nehemiah

One year, I reminded the congregation of story of Nehemiah rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. It seemed overwhelming. The wall was broken down, people were

discouraged.

The remarkable thing in that story is how the rebuilding happened.

It was not accomplished by a few heroic individuals doing everything themselves. Instead, the people worked side by side. People repaired the sections of wall nearest their homes. Craftsmen, merchants, priests, and ordinary labourers all took part. Each brought what they could—their skills, their time, their effort.

No single person rebuilt the wall. Together, they did it. The wall was restored and the life of the city renewed.

Be encouraged as we start from a much more encouraging foundation and like the people in Nehemiah’s day, we are not called to solve everything alone.

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We can do this!

Some contribute through their time and service. Some through pastoral care and prayer. Some through leadership and vision. Some through financial giving. All of these matter. All of them are part of the work of building the life and mission of the Church.

Everyone brings what they can.

So, as we face the financial realities before us, my hope is that we approach them in that same spirit—with confidence in God and each other through shared commitment.

We also need to work wisely on our costs and contingencies, which the team has been doing for several months.

I believe the financial resources to close the gap are out there. I personally commit to increase my financial giving to the diocese.

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## Conclusion

I heard the story of John recently. In a hospice and near death and sitting in the garden, he had a profound experience of a ball of light coming towards him and God saying, ‘do not be afraid.’ John asked to see the local vicar, Gaby Doherty, who sought to understand what God was doing in that moment. John was baptised and took communion - for the first time ever. Family and friends said John was transformed for the better. He died knowing Jesus and the peace that alone can give. I share that story for myself...

...I’m called to be a shepherd who seeks the lost...that vicar shares the cure of souls, and it reminded me, and I hope you, that we face life with confidence and faith.

Let our new bishop find us working and praying and giving for the transformation of lives and communities in the name of Jesus.



Let us continue the work you are already doing so faithfully - making Jesus known, serving our communities, nurturing relationships, and giving generously to God's mission.

Thank you for all that you do. Thank you for your faithfulness. And thank you for being part of this shared work of the Gospel.

Amen

## **Appendix B – Text by Becky Waring, Archdeacon of Bristol**

### **Culture Change at the Heart of Our Diocesan Strategy**

As we gather three years into our diocesan strategy, I want to begin with a simple reminder: *the heart of any strategy is not a document. It's a way of being.*

Yes – we will continue to talk about plans, finances, structures and priorities, and we'll do that today. But strategy only matters if it shapes the kind of community we are becoming together.

### **Where This Began**

Many of you will remember the early conversation: a wide consultation asking what kind of church we long to see and to be. Those conversations grew into focus groups, and then into project streams – each exploring how we could grow into that vision more fully.

Along the way, each project stream produced culture change statement. They lived on the website for some time... though I'll admit, I hadn't seen them all myself! So, they've been gathered up and distilled into one simple paragraph.



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### **Our Shared Vision of Culture**

Here is the culture we seek to embody:

**A Diocese where all can belong, flourish and share God's love – marked by joyful discipleship, empowered enabled leaders, thriving young people, committed volunteers, and inclusive, sustainable communities shaped by hope, justice and partnership.**

*Childres, young people and families are at the heart of this flourishing, shaping a church that is both rooted and renewed.*

I hope this is a vision of a culture to which all of us can say, "Amen."

Because our reaction to this vision – how we choose to inhabit it – is the real work of culture change.

### **Our strategic outcomes**

This culture underpins the strategic outcomes we agreed together:

- A form of church in every community, where all can participate, thrive, and belong.
- People who worship God in every aspect of their lives, and throughout their lives.
- A Diocese recognised as a powerful force for Gospel change.
- A Diocese that is environmentally and financially sustainable.

These are ambitious outcomes – but they are more than targets. They are an invitation. And that means every one of us has a part to play.

Not perfectly.

Not all at once.

But faithfully.

We are trying to transform church together – we belong to and with each other, not for ourselves but for the growing of the kingdom across our beautiful Diocese.

### **Questions for Us as Leaders**

So, as we consider where we are three years in, and as we take **seriously** our role as representatives here at Synod, I want to offer a few questions to hold before God:

- What are we modelling – and what are we encouraging in others?
- Are we supporting one another when the work is hard?
- Are we open to change – even when it stretches or unsettles us?
- Are we prepared to be curious, creative, collaborative

Because the culture we create now will shape everything as we follow Jesus, serve others and transform our communities.

A Call to Continue the Journey

So, let's keep choosing to be a people who are open, generous, brave and creative – and rooted in hope. Let's keep encouraging one another

And let's trust that even small, faithful steps will bear fruit in God's time.

**Thank you for all you do, your encouragement, your perseverance, and your commitment to be a Diocese that reflects God's love in its culture as well as its actions.**

**Appendix C – Missional Progress**

**Missional Progress**



## **Appendix D – Table Discussion Notes**

How can Synod best support the work of the parishes in order to achieve our shared mission?

- Some parishes have been less engaged in TC.T – e.g. Those that are not PCNs and already have thriving children’s work. Could we engage more with people outside the church asking what they would like from the church? Could the centre encourage that?
- Some parishes have lost children and families to nearby BMOs – how do we present TC.T as relevant to those parishes?
- Could we do more in sharing stories of growth (not just PCNs and young people)?
- Could we do more to assist to communicate TC.T more to parishes? It takes time for new ideas to trickle down to the pews e.g. Providing clergy with brief notes for PowerPoints or newssheets
- Better address the VE impacts where parishes apply for support but don’t get it.
- TC.T is perceived by some as one option for support ‘optional’ not intrinsic
- Better sharing awareness of TC.T (to front lines in parishes)
- Does everyone who needs to, know what TCT is? NO
- Be more focused on narrow objectives, keep it simple!
- Better share good news stories from TC.T, especially of (and to) young people

- Better equip TCT decision makers in the realities of individual parish challenges and issues. Add 'relevance' in parish perception.
- Better explain how the millions invested equate to transformation
- Close the gap between 'Diocese' and 'Parish'
- Rethink the language that we use. 'Strategy' – theories
- Do parishes see this as a push up process? Is it really?
- News stories are here; how do we share them?
- How to select from the great number of streams – e.g. Working on a deanery Priority Network? Which streams are still current – what can really still be achieved.
- Packaged for the national church. How then repackaged for local churches – radically different.
- Holding pattern – nasty for new Diocesan bishop
- Some parishes feel alienated and far from the diocese, others feel close.
- What do we do about those relationships? Suspicion leads to disengagement.
- Adjust TC.T to reflect the quiet revival. Young adults in strategy. Is TC.T flexible enough to support this?
- Pray
- Sharing more stories like the ones we heard
- Glos initiative Deanery Operations Leader
- How could comms work better through synodical system to get to parishes
- How does Synod know what is going on in my Parish – so how can Synod help
- How can we help Parishes to prepare funding bids, eg. Community funding especially in poorer parishes who do not have the expertise.

- Maybe the Deaneries could be more enabled to do the Parish-level research as to who needs it most. More use of Deaneries and Deanery Plans.
- Clarifying with the Parishes what does Parish Engagement look like@ As them – personal visiting
- Overcome historic prejudice of Parishes toward the Diocese. Parishes need to overcome the #them and us# Needs personal visit by Deanery or Diocese personnel.
- We need more of the good success stories to be communicated – as what could be available in the next round of funding.
- Bristol Diocese has a reputation of being re-active (top down), BD needs to be more pro-active.
- How gather and share stories more, recognising churches can be inward looking. Hard to get people to read.
- How can we break scepticism.
- How trust the process of support ie. Tony Bush “we need permission to fail!”
- Best use of Deanery Synod ie. Roy & Lee ‘Mission in a Brave New World’ people want to know more.
- Not another layer of church – keep business short
- Share good news and practice
- New mission and ministry initiatives
- Embracing change of culture comes as people together – this could be the work of Deanery Synod
- Rather than what were doing – what are our values
- Spread the benefits and reach of mentoring formally and informally, at Diocesan and Deanery level.
- Share stories from Diocesan Synod at Deanery Synods and elsewhere.
- Work out how to engage those who feel left out/left behind



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- because of Clergy Vacancy

- because of Clergy disengagement

- More good news stories on the new website and elsewhere encouraging parishes to send them in.
- Locally enculturate the vision – needs to be more than reports
- Is the ‘We are the Diocese’ messaging all being given at a lower level
- Shared stories locally through people visiting – build relationship – strengthen the Deanery
- Like hooks in the Velcro – if Synod is hooks and parishes are the fluffy bits, what are the hooks
- Recognising that engaging with volunteers takes time and they need lead in to engage.
- Don’t do this from centre – the congregations don’t understand it, why should they engage – get out there and explain it
- In a previous diocese, the team went out to venues to engage with people (1600) who had never engaged with diocese. Leaflets are not enough.
- What is missing? Our parish has already engaged and considered in PCC. What more can we do/be involved in.
- Congregations don’t understand impact of 10 year strategy.
- Parishes are focussed locally – the diocese is seen as ‘other’.
- Parishes have their own priorities and won’t engage in everything, eg. Coaching for clergy, there is no need to be involved.
- Part of TC.T is raising money. If people understand TC.T, people can start praying for it and caring about it. People can decide they have something to offer. People need to understand what a diocese is.
- Remember TC.T started as ground up, as a vision, so how is the Diocese central team able to support parishes to develop their vision.

- What are we talking about when we say TC.T vision and values are important and good, but the attempt was ‘all inclusive’, which is good but downside is you lose sense of focus. Then down to the detail.
- TC.T has become arguably reduced to a list of possible funding options – what do we mean by engagement in the big vision or the funding? or both. Perhaps one way to engage on a macro level and one on a micro.
- TC.T is too big and can be confusing. Simplification would be good! Parishes think it is overwhelming.
- Everything we do in our parish should be with congregation and maybe outside of it not just PCC
- You keep having to communicate that TC.T is funded by National Church and is NOT the parish having their money/vicars being taken away and replaced with managers.