

DIOCESAN SYNOD
MINUTES OF THE MEETING, THURSDAY 18 JUNE 2025
HELD AT ST MARY'S CHURCH, ELY

Members attending: House of Clergy 36, House of Laity 41, non-voting 5. 82 members in total.

The meeting opened with welcome and prayer from the Bishop of Huntingdon and Acting Bishop of Ely followed by commissioning by of Revd Steven Rothwell, Clergy Development Officer.

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

1.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received: House of Clergy 23, House of Laity 21. 43 members in total.

Not present: House of Clergy 17, House of Laity 9. 26 members in total.

1.2 MINUTES OF DIOCESAN SYNOD 08 MARCH 2025

The minutes were **APPROVED** and signed by the Chair.

APPROVED: UNANIMOUS ABSTENTIONS: NONE

1.3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

None.

1.4 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 86

Two questions, from Mr Jon Smith, Granta Deanery and from Mr David Brock, Granta Deanery were submitted in advance as set out in the paper Questions under Standing Order 86 and, together with their responses, was circulated to members. One supplementary question was asked, and a reply made, as set out below.

Mr David Brock, Granta Deanery

To the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance:

Thank you for the replies to my three Order 86 questions. I am pleased to note from the response on the third question taken with other synod papers for tonight that some funds from reserves are proposed to be used for the Missional Priorities of Investing in Growing Younger and Investing in Housing Developments. However, it is apparent from the response to the second question, about the time and method taken to revise deanery standing orders, that the Diocesan Office is simply not up to speed on this issue, which makes me concerned about its resources, support and abilities on other issues. That is the reason I have been asking whether you are satisfied that these are adequate. So, I repeat that question; are you satisfied, and I add, if so on what evidence? I also repeat my question as to why you have taken over what is now over three months to reply to my original emails, replies which have only come in response to my Order 86 questions.

Mr Jon Green, Acting Diocesan Secretary replied:

The Diocesan office is currently operating under unique circumstances, and we can confirm that staff are responsive to the needs and requirements during this time. The office will continue to strengthen later this year with the arrival of a new Diocesan Secretary.

There were no further questions or feedback.

2. BUSINESS OF THE DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE

Canon Tim Walters

2.1 ANNUAL EDBF STATUTORY ACCOUNTS

The accounts have been approved by the Bishop's Council, signed by auditors HaysMac and these will be submitted to the Charity Commission and Companies House. When accepted they will be available to download on the websites of both organisations.

Key points of the Accounts:

- Generally, a clean bill of health for the accounts with only some minor administrative matters needing attention.

- There is good financial resilience which few other dioceses have achieved.
- It was noted that there is £4.8M of free reserves available which is less than the £5.6M that Trustees have recommended as the minimum amount in the Reserves Policy.
- There is a deficit in the budget and strategies should be further considered which, whilst uncomfortable, could reduce the deficit.
- The statement of accounts is complex, particularly due to the property and glebe aspects, which introduces challenges such as determining the fair or market value for property and land on the balance sheet.
- The Unrestricted General Fund is important as this indicates free reserves for financial activities.
- Restricted Reserves include parsonages and money reserved for property.
- The Pensions Scheme showed a surplus. This has been recognised as an asset and ways to offset have been considered.
- The annual report and accounts are treated very much as a statutory report. Trustees might consider creating a narrative to the document to advise stakeholders of what the DBF is seeking to achieve.

Canon Walters concluded that the diocese is in a positive financial position as a going concern and thanked the Financial Controller and the Finance Team for their work.

There were no questions.

2.2 REVIEW OF 2024 ACCOUNTS

These were presented and there were no questions.

2.3 2026-2028 BUDGET

Canon Tim Walters and Mrs Lorraine Orbell, Financial Controller

Draft details were circulated to members before the meeting.

Key points:

- More challenging to reconcile as there is a significant projected deficit in the underlying position.
- Whilst Ely is in a better position compared to other dioceses, there is concern over a projected underlying -£500,000 deficit for 2026, and -£368,000 for the remainder of 2025. A balanced budget is needed going forward.
- The diocese has no control over the reduction of Ministry Share payment rates.
- The diocese has no control over National Insurance rate increases but some control over clergy housing costs and ministry support costs.
- The National Church is in the process of cancelling apportionment and pooling contributions but replacing them with the Ministry Training Fund, and the outcome will be known in summer 2025. Ely is considered a wealthy diocese, due to investments, and will be allocated less funding from the recent £1.6 billion funding announced by the Church Commissioners available to support local churches and clergy.
- The recommended increase in Ministry Share for 2026 is 4%, down from 6%.
- The diocese is considering the removal of the direct debit discount of 2.5% for paying Ministry Share over a two-year period.
- Clergy stipends will increase to 10.7% in 2026, but there is no current proposal to reduce the numbers of stipendiary in Ely diocese.
- Curates will be reduced to 15 in 2026.
- Budget sensitivity aspects were put forward including increasing the Ministry Share, reducing stipends, reducing staff posts, cutting back on non-essential services to parishes. There may be options to reduce Parsonage House costs.
- The £500,000 CMT2 budget could be considered to offset costs and would merit Bishop's Council consideration.
- Ministry and Mission costs could be broken down further.

Members are asked to email feedback on suggestions to reduce costs the Financial Controller: lorraine.orbell@elydiocese.org. The 2026 budget will go to Bishop's Council on 17 July and to Diocesan Synod for approval on 10 October.

QUESTIONS:

1. Ms Sarah Bradley, Ely and Ely Villages

Budgets need strategy options. The impact of raising the Ministry Share needs consideration and how parishes can afford this along with clergy support in rural areas, including housing.

Answer: A review of Mission and Ministry priorities will assess activity outcomes. The diocese maintains adequate housing stock.

2. Cdr Ben Peilow, St Ives

We welcome the reduction of the Ministry Share from 6% to 4%, but some parishes can't manage to pay the full amount for this year. Withdrawing the direct debit incentive may mean some payments are made at the end of the year, instead of monthly.

Answer: We are mindful that an increase of 4% Ministry Share is unmanageable for some parishes.

3. Revd Dr John Percival, Cambridge North

Is there justification for 0% inflation on everything?

Answer: Not everything will have 0% inflation, some aspects will have increases.

4. Mrs Rebecca Cowburn, Bourne

Thank you to the Finance Team for their work. Staff costs seem to be high and could some tasks be combined with staff at other dioceses for more efficiency.

Answer: Data is available from the National Church from a review of all 42 dioceses on activity in parishes which could be reviewed for any collaboration projects. If some of EDBF posts are removed, this may have a negative effect on parishes.

2.4 Q1 2025 accounts

Key points:

- Broadly on budget
- Collection rates for Ministry Share are down, but income equates to same period in 2024 with collection rates at 92.8%, similar to 2024
- However, no catch-up in Ministry Share income in December 2024 as in previous years, and collection rate in 2024 was down on 2023
- Investment income down, but that is not uncommon in Q1
- Costs are balanced at this time of the year by reduced clergy housing expenses and a refund of electricity charges from the Barton Road premises in Ely

2.5 Ephesian Fund brief

A paper was circulated before the meeting to members with information on what this is and how it operates.

QUESTION: Mrs Elizabeth Stazicker, Ely

This is a good paper but is there enough discussion at Deanery and Diocesan Synods about the underlying spiritual and practical significance of Ministry Share, so as to evaluate the possible impact of the Fund?

Answer: This is a general observation and not a specific question and doesn't require an answer.

2.6 Glebe Management

The Acting Diocesan Secretary

The current Scheme is governed by a policy made in 1978, there was a revision in 1994 and a paper outlining these changes was circulated before the meeting in Paper K. The Scheme requires amending to reflect the updated legislation and the proposed draft has been approved by the Church Commissioners and by the Diocesan Finance Committee and Bishop's Council.

Question: Revd Canon Nick Moir, Cambridge North

What land is covered generally by glebe management?

Answer: Farmland.

PROPOSAL: To adopt the revised Glebe Management Scheme with updates as outlined in Paper K.

PROPOSED: Canon Tim Walters
APPROVED: IN FAVOUR

SECONDED: Revd Canon Becky Dyball
AGAINST: 2 **ABSTENTIONS:** 15

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

3. BISHOP'S BUSINESS INCLUDING BISHOP'S COUNCIL REPORT

Bishop Dagmar read out a wartime message from the Very Revd Canon Richard Sewell, Dean of Saint George's College Jerusalem and Residentiary Canon of St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem. The bishop advised that a letter of concern from bishops of all denominations, some military personnel and politicians from all parties has been written to the government on the cuts to the UK aid budget and the increase in defence spending, arguing that investment in aid has a long-term positive effect regarding the possibilities of armed conflict and needs to be seen in tandem with defence spending.

A moment of silence and prayer reflected on those who were caught up in global issues and living with uncertainty.

Garden parties are taking place in the Bishop's Garden, and Bishop Dagmar has been enjoying meeting people who are contributing and involved with many areas of diocesan work and mission, and community life, including local businesses and the education sector. Appreciation was expressed to those who helped make these events successful.

Petertide ordinations take place at the end of June with 14 priests and 6 deacons being ordained. Elsewhere in the cathedral, a Youth Pilgrimage takes place in July.

A new Head of Safeguarding starts on 7 July whilst interviews for a new Diocesan Secretary are taking place later that month. The Crown Nominations Committee will be interviewing for a new Bishop of Ely in November, whilst interviews for a new Archbishop of Canterbury are planned for September.

From the Bishop's Council meeting of 17 May 2025, Bishop Dagmar noted the presentation of the 2024 Annual Report and Accounts with Mr Adam Halsey from HaysMac, the diocesan auditors, and discussions on mission priorities, membership of committees, conflicts of interest and glebe policies, and an overall budget for clergy posts and deployment.

It was also proposed that, following interviews and recommendation by the Appointment Panel, Diocesan Synod should approve authority for the Bishop's Council to appoint the new Diocesan Secretary

PROPOSAL: For Diocesan Synod to delegate authority to Bishop's Council to appoint the new Diocesan Secretary.

PROPOSED: Bishop Dagmar
APPROVED: UNANIMOUSLY

SECONDED: Canon Dr Felicity Cooke
AGAINST: None **ABSTENTIONS:** None

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

4. SAFEGUARDING REPORT

Mr Jon Green, Acting Diocesan Secretary

Referring to the Assistant Safeguarding Officer's report, Mr Green highlighted the increase of case numbers at this time compared to those 2024 and that 91.3% of parishes have signed up the Safeguarding Parish Dashboard, a positive result as the national average is 66.2%. There will be a safeguarding audit in 2026.

There were no questions, and Mr Green thanked the safeguarding team for all their work.

5. HOW DECISIONS GET TAKEN

Revd Iain Osborne, Bishop's Chaplain and Strategy Advisor

Revd Osborne gave an informative presentation on the six key places where decisions are taken in the diocese, other than at Diocesan Synod:

- Breakfast meetings: Informal weekly meetings with a handful of central staff, focused on people and places.
- Bishop's Senior Team: A larger group, monthly meetings and focused on policy but not formally a decision-making meeting.
- The Bishop's Council and EDBF Trustees: Meets six times a year, a key decision-making body. The same people meet sometimes as the Bishop's Council with decision-making powers as Standing Committee of Diocesan Synod, and sometimes as the EDBF Trustees with decision-making powers in relation to this charitable company.
- ADMPCs: Both archdeaconry committees meet three times a year to support pastoral reorganisation, with authority delegated from DMPC (the latter members are also the same people as Bishop's Council). The DMPC/ADMPCs are not sub-committees of anything else, and their powers derive directly from church law.
- Generally, formal decision-making bodies broadly approve proposals laid before them to enable key decisions to relate to what proposals are put forward. There is no single committee that decides this: in practice proposals emerge through an iterative process within the Bishop's Senior Team.

6. MISSION PRIORITIES UPDATE

The Revd Peter Leech, Director of Mission and Ministry

The Ven Richard Harlow, Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech

Mission: Growing Younger

Revd Leech advised that the projects are backed by mitigation funding to 2029 from the National Church, and not from the diocesan budget. Mission priorities are framed and focused around creating more disciples to concentrate resources using experience gained from other projects, e.g. CMT. Other dioceses will be consulted to share information and learning.

Priority is given to help grow worshipping communities by investing in four flourishing parishes to grow by 2028, and eight worshipping communities to flourish by 2031. There will be a phased approach to planning, working with local parishes and communities, to build 12 sustainable parishes.

Key performance indicators include a steering group, resource allocation and governance, in addition to how relationships with stakeholders are important to implement models of growth over three years. Governance will be through ADMPCs.

Strengthening Multi Parish Benefices

The Ven Richard Harlow advised that the diocese has 303 parishes of which 90%, 270, are multi parish benefices (MPBs). There is some level of crisis but also many flourishing churches, although a few difficulties to get people working together in MPBs.

MPBs are growing their worshipping community, with 11 out of 18 benefices flourishing between 2018 and 2023, including through COVID. To encourage future growth, clergy need support with administration, more laity, investing in key leaders, the support of the local community, and financial help to grow parish incomes.

The diocese can help by simplifying governance, increasing income streams, support with fabric requirements, sharing leadership and employ parish administrators and a parish giving officer to strengthen resource requirements

QUESTION:

Christopher Townsend, General Synod

What is the timing on the proposals and what other consultation has been done?

Answer: The Mission Priorities Plan will come to Bishop's Council's 17 July meeting for some decisions, and consultations have taken place at local parish level.

Members were asked to complete an online questionnaire on Mission Priorities.

ACTION: ALL

7. 2024 EDBF ANNUAL REVIEW

Mr Jon Green, Acting Diocesan Secretary

Mr Green highlighted aspects of the review of EDBF activities in the past year. This Review will be circulated to members by the end of June.

Whilst there are some challenges to be met, the Acting Diocesan Secretary thanked and commended the work of the diocesan staff.

8. ACT OF SYNOD PROCLAMATION AND NIGHT PRAYER

Revd Canon Sarah Gower read out the Act of Synod Proclamation and Bishop Dagmar led Night Prayer. Thanks were given to The Mother's Union for providing refreshments and the support team at St Mary's Church, Ely.

The meeting finished at 21:26pm

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

2025

Saturday 11 October, 9am-4pm

2026

Saturday 14 March, 9am-1pm

Thursday 18 June 6.45-9pm

Saturday 10 October 9am-1pm

Signed:

Date: