

**First Meeting of the Fifteenth Session
NORWICH DIOCESAN SYNOD
Saturday 23 November 2024 at 09:00-13:15**

Meeting held at Northgate High School, 34 Northgate, Dereham NR19 2EU

Minutes

Attendees:

House of Bishops – 3 representatives
House of Clergy – 43 representatives
House of Laity – 40 representatives

Eucharist and Presidential Address

Bishop Graham gave the Presidential address, which included the commissioning of new Diocesan Synod members.

Apologies:

Apologies were received from 18 members of Diocesan Synod: 8 Clergy, 10 Laity

The Diocesan Secretary announced the members elected and appointed to governance boards and committees for this new triennium.

The President took the chair.

1. Vote for the Chairs for the House of Clergy and the House of Laity

Bishop Graham noted one application for the Chair of the House of Laity was received so it was announced that Kandi Kammoun was elected unopposed.

The Chair stated that two applications for the Chair of the House of Clergy were received so an election would need to take place. The Chair invited Revd Helen Jary to chair the voting. The two candidates gave a one-minute presentation to members of the House of Clergy.

The vote was counted by diocesan officers in the presence of the Diocesan Registrar. Revd Dr Patrick Richmond received the most votes and so was duly elected as Chair of the House of Clergy.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2024

On page 5, 'Chief and Crime Commissioner's Office' to be changed to 'Police and Crime Commissioner's Office'.

A vote to accept the minutes as a true record was unanimous following the amendment and would be signed as a true record at a suitable time.

It was noted that presentations would be circulated with the minutes in future as well as any website links.

3. Any matters arising from the previous meeting

It was confirmed that all actions from the previous meeting had been completed.

There were no other matters arising.

4. Presentation by Gareth Mostyn, Chief Executive, Church Commissioners for England

Gareth Mostyn (GM) was welcomed by the Chair who invited GM to address Synod with a presentation.

GM expressed his gratitude for the welcome and acknowledged recent challenges for abuse victims and survivors. GM went on to say, the Church of England is a complex organization, functioning as a statutory charity governed by diverse laws spanning over 320 years. The Church Commissioners' core purpose, rooted in legislation like the Ecclesiastical Act of 1940, is to support ministry in areas of need and opportunity, reflecting its commitment as part of the family of God.

The Church Commissioners manage a £10 billion permanent endowment fund, releasing funds to support ministry and broader priorities. These include investment in dioceses, net zero carbon goals, racial justice, and safeguarding. Despite challenging economic conditions, the fund has consistently generated strong long-term returns (approximately 9% annually).

The fund is managed with a strong commitment to ethical practices, ensuring the resources are both responsibly earned and something to be proud of. The focus isn't solely on growing the fund but on effectively supporting the Church of England. For the 2023-2025 funding cycle, £400 million will be released annually, a 50% increase compared to six years ago. This increase addresses critical needs and enables greater support. The Church Commissioners determine how to invest and allocate their funds, working closely with the Church of England to set priorities.

A substantial portion of funding is allocated to the Archbishops' Council, distributed through the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). The SMMIB funds both innovative new projects and the revitalisation of existing parishes. There is a particular focus on rural dioceses and areas. Practical tools, like the Church Support Hub, are being developed to assist parishes with administrative tasks. Despite the significant funding, it remains insufficient to meet all needs, so prioritisation is essential. Parishes are encouraged to share their activities to demonstrate the impact of the funding.

GM updated Synod on the Church Commissioners' response to links with African chattel enslavement. In late 2019, a query at a Church Commissioners' Audit and Risk Committee meeting prompted an investigation into historical links to slavery, inspired by similar studies at the Universities of Glasgow and Cambridge. The relevance of exploring 300-year-old issues meant it was initially dismissed. However, research revealed red flags in its history, including significant investments in the South Sea Company, which transported 35,000 Africans to America, with 7,000 dying during transit. Queen Anne's Bounty, part of the Church Commissioners' foundation, also received substantial donations tied to wealth from slavery, with 30% of donors benefiting from the slave trade. At its peak, equivalent investments totalled £440 million in today's value.

This discovery revealed the importance of learning from history to avoid repeating such mistakes. In response, the Church Commissioners Board pledged £100 million (1% of its fund) for impact investments over nine years to support affected communities. They also committed to involving representatives closely connected to impacted communities in decision-making.

Overall, the financial landscape remains challenging, with dioceses facing deficits and the Church of England navigating complex financial arrangements, including clergy stipends and pensions. The Church Commissioners are addressing these challenges to create a sustainable platform for ministry. A diocesan finance review and proposals for the next triennium aim to simplify financial systems and enhance support for missional work, aligning with the vision of enabling a thriving Church of Christ.

The chair invited any questions.

A question was raised on the topic of administration, referencing a letter jointly drafted by the chapters of Holt and Repps to the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners. The letter requests support for administrative expenses in rural benefices experiencing financial strain. Given the growing administrative burden on parish clergy, the question posed was: Could the Archbishops' Council consider providing financial support to benefices with limited income streams to alleviate these pressures and enable clergy to focus more on mission within their local contexts?

GM expressed gratitude for clergy who wear multiple hats, serving as worship leaders, administrators, accountants, surveyors, and more. He also extended thanks to lay colleagues and volunteers who provide invaluable, often unpaid, support, highlighting the Church's reliance on their efforts. Typically, funding is directed to dioceses, as managing proposals from all 16,000 churches in the Church of England would be unfeasible. Instead, dioceses are encouraged to submit proposals aimed at enabling mission and fostering local church growth. These proposals can include administrative support as a component, helping release people to focus on their strengths. If there are opportunities for dioceses to pilot and test the benefits of such initiatives, the SMMIB would be open to supporting them as part of a broader strategic approach. However, it was noted that providing administrative funding for every parish is unrealistic due to limited resources. Well-crafted proposals that demonstrate clear missional benefits within a wider strategic framework are more likely to gain support.

A member commented on the focus of new people coming to church and encountering Jesus, emphasising that this is central to the Church's mission. However, noting that the mission of God is far broader, asked whether the theological foundation of this wider mission is understood by the Church Commissioners and effectively filtered through.

GM emphasised the value of simplicity, reminding everyone of the core calling: to love God and love one another. This foundational principle underpins all the Church's activities, worshiping and giving glory to God, as well as demonstrating love through social and community projects and caring for one another.

A member expressed that since 2019, the Church has seen a 20% decline despite funding aimed at growth and asked whether the strategy has not succeeded, or that the funding has not been effectively utilised to achieve growth.

GM responded by pointing out that church attendance has been in decline for over 60 years, averaging a 1.5% annual decrease. This trend accelerated during the pandemic but, in the last two years, has begun to stabilise, returning to levels expected in long-term trends pre-COVID. GM emphasised the desire to see churches full, which is why it's essential to try new approaches. The long-standing decline highlights the need for innovation, adapting to how people live today while building on the Church's strengths. The strategic work focuses on revitalising the parish system, ensuring every community in England thrives, as all are part of a local parish, even if they don't realise it. GM also stressed the importance of accountability, ensuring funding is used effectively for its intended purpose. If a project doesn't succeed or deliver the desired impact, it's crucial to learn from those outcomes, pivot mid-project if necessary, or stop entirely. Equally, successes should be identified and built upon to shape future efforts.

A member referenced the £190 million allocated for net zero initiatives and questioned whether it is justifiable to allocate such a significant amount to climate change efforts, given the Church has experienced a 20% decline and the funds could potentially be directed instead toward evangelism.

GM responded by emphasising that the commitment to net zero aligns with the theology of loving God, loving others, and caring for creation. While the UK may not face immediate threats like some islands already suffering from rising sea levels due to climate change, the issue remains urgent. The allocated funding, though significant, is a small contribution compared to the global need. GM highlighted the clear scientific consensus that the Earth is warming. Caring for God's creation is a missional act that resonates with people and can draw them to the Church. Conversely, neglecting environmental stewardship could alienate individuals and discourage them from engaging with the Church. GM noted the £190 million is over nine years, not annually.

A question was asked if GM could clarify why the Church Commissioners, given their improved financial position, have not reclaimed the responsibility for clergy pensions, which was transferred to dioceses and subsequently parishes due to poor investment performance prior to 1997.

GM responded to say the Church Commissioners' current funding focuses on statutory obligations. Beyond these requirements, funding is discretionary and allocated by the Archbishops' Council to support the Church

in exploring new ways of working and responding to local needs. This approach allows greater flexibility in applying Church Commissioners funds intentionally. The Church Commissioners acknowledge the financial challenges dioceses face with current pension and stipend levels and are reviewing ways to improve this. However, there are no plans for the Church Commissioners to take back full responsibility for clergy pensions. Instead, specific opportunities may be created to provide targeted support where it is most needed.

GM was asked about the fund related to chattel enslavement, questioning why it was designated as an endowment rather than being structured for accelerated spending. Additionally, GM was asked about the types of projects envisioned for the fund and whether it might support initiatives addressing issues like human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

GM responded that of the £100 million, two-thirds will be invested as an endowment to ensure long-term impact, while one-third will be allocated for grants to achieve more immediate results. External advisors have provided guidance on areas for investment, focusing on sectors like health, education, and access to finance; key areas they believe the fund should support.

The Chair thanked GM for his presentation and handed the Chair to the Chair of the House of Clergy for the second part of the meeting.

5. Update on progress on Net Zero Carbon Action Plan

Ed Cotterrill (EC), Net Zero Carbon Adviser, was welcomed by the Chair who invited EC to address Synod with a presentation.

EC shared about the Eco Church programme, by A Rocha UK, which supports local churches and dioceses in addressing environmental issues through a comprehensive survey covering worship, teaching, building management, land use, community engagement, and lifestyle. Currently, there are 184 churches registered in the diocese, with 66 Bronze and 28 Silver awards, and we have achieved Eco Diocese Bronze status. The next target is Eco Diocese Silver by 2026, requiring 260 registered churches, with 195 Bronze awarded and 65 reaching Silver.

Churches can participate in activities like eco fairs, wildlife conservation, and creation care services, emphasising mission through environmental outreach. Resources are available via newsletters, social media, and Eco Church websites. A network of Eco Chaplains is being developed, and support is offered through visits and guidance from EC and Barbara Bryant, Diocesan Environmental Officer.

EC spoke to the net zero carbon report shared prior to the meeting, which highlights progress on the Net Zero Carbon programme, emphasising context and practical examples. CO2 emissions data has been gathered, with totals for churches and houses estimated between 5,850 and 8,350 tons. Data integrity varies due to assumptions in calculations. A case study from Congham Church showcases a successful transition from outdated heating to modern infrared systems.

EC reported that collaborative efforts with dioceses in the Eastern Regional cluster are key, supported by a part-time learning coordinator and weekly team meetings to share knowledge, streamline projects, save costs and avoid duplication.

The chair invited any questions.

A member commented that it is challenging to make a large medieval building environmentally friendly due to the high cost of works, and asked what efforts are being made by the Diocese and the wider Church of England to provide meaningful support for these challenges, including those related to power companies support for upgrading power supplies?

In response, it was noted there are several options available through UK Power Networks. As a church, which is considered a community asset, there may be the possibility of upgrading the power supply to better meet

the needs. Regarding heating, modern infrared systems heat the fabric of the building rather than just the air, as older systems do. Creating warm and welcoming churches is essential, not only for achieving carbon neutrality but also for making the space more inviting and comfortable for visitors. These systems can also be integrated with smart controls, such as phone apps, for easier management.

One member commented they had heating issues, which couldn't easily be resolved. However, through working with EC and with guidance from a heating advisor, they installed new infrared heating. It also prompted them to consider their broader plans. A local trust was instrumental in providing funding for quick wins. If anyone is considering updating their heating system, the member encouraged them to reach out to EC as EC is able to support throughout the entire process, making something initially daunting much more manageable.

6. Prophetic Review of the Year

The Chair invited a table discussion about stories from around the deaneries. These included:

- A focus on responding to society's needs in rural communities includes being a voice and support for agricultural areas. Actions taken include hosting an open session with a local MP to discuss the assisted dying bill and organizing a deanery synod that highlighted various local projects, such as warm spaces and food banks.
- In a small rural parish, there is a strong emphasis on addressing injustice, valuing diversity, and caring for the vulnerable. This includes involving the community in church life and finding ways to include individuals with mental health challenges.
- Discussions have explored the pressures of clergy workloads and the increasing demands placed on them.
- In a low-income community, efforts include reviewing the use of churchyards, one example now sees increased footfall due to wildlife such as badgers, foxes, and fifteen bird species. Collaborations with the local council are also underway to connect sports and community projects. Additionally, the issue of a crisis in male role models has been raised.
- Awareness of justice issues is evident in the way buildings are used, such as providing access to toilets and heating, to ensure they are open and available to the public. Efforts have also addressed homelessness and policy engagement. Participating in hustings for general elections has helped raise justice-related issues effectively.
- Explorations into warm spaces, food banks, nature recovery, and practical ways of living faith within communities have shown a strong connection between these efforts and evangelism. These initiatives highlight how prophetic outreach can focus and expand ministry.
- Discussions have included overlapping themes of strategy and pastoral care, with topics such as sustainability, environmental stewardship, and homelessness. Projects like food banks and supporting the vulnerable align with broader themes of diversity, with an ongoing challenge of effectively connecting deaneries to parishes to strengthen these initiatives.
- Efforts have examined how existing church activities, like coffee mornings, men's breakfasts, and women's groups, can be used to deepen prophetic ministry. By inviting representatives from organizations like food banks and homelessness services, congregations gain a deeper understanding of the causes they support, enhancing their engagement and outreach.
- Community interaction initiatives include organising events in local spaces to connect with residents. Examples include interacting with dog walkers in a local field, holding Sunday morning gatherings in village halls and football clubs, and transforming a neglected graveyard into a wildflower meadow, engaging the community in its restoration.
- Local churches are actively engaging in initiatives like Eco Church and addressing the cost-of-living crisis. For instance, one Deanery runs a food distribution project providing £250 worth of food weekly with sensitivity to community needs. Others have become a real Living Wage employer and Norwich Cathedral has been recognised as a Cathedral of Sanctuary.

Archdeacon Keith shared thoughts on the forthcoming Year of Prayer and the resources available, including prayer diaries provided to everyone present. The prayer diaries include information on how to sign up for

either electronic or paper copies. The website was also highlighted, featuring a vision page and a section on available resources.

7. The 2025 Budget for the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance

Tim Sweeting (TS), Diocesan Secretary, Susan Bunting (SEB), Director of Finance, and Mark Jeffries (MJ), Chair of the Norwich Diocese Board of Finance were welcomed by the Chair who invited them to address Synod and share a presentation.

TS shared that the diocesan budget reflects the core purpose of the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), which is to serve the local mission and ministry of churches, chaplaincies, and schools. While statutory and compliance requirements must be fulfilled, the primary focus remains on enabling, encouraging, and empowering local efforts.

TS noted several key financial challenges faced by the DBFs nationally, including a collective estimated deficit of £60 million across dioceses in the coming year, a decrease in regular givers of 30% over the past decade, and decline of 25% in the real value of parish share collected since 2013. Rising costs, such as recent national insurance changes, have further strained diocesan budgets, costing £5-7 million nationally. Additionally, long-term trends, including reductions in clergy numbers, continue to impact financial sustainability.

In response, the DBF has set clear priorities for 2025, including development of a Mission and Ministry Strategy, retaining and filling 160 stipendiary clergy roles for the fourth consecutive year, investing significantly in clergy housing, seeking external funding for grant making to churches, and piloting a project to reduce funeral fee administration for churches, as requested by Dereham in Mitford deanery.

SEB gave a presentation on the 2025 budget highlighting the following key areas for attention in addition to the line-by-line notes accompanying the budget.

The budget shows a deficit of c£356,000, after utilising unapplied total returns to support clergy costs and surplus against book value on property sales to support housing costs. The Archbishops' Council has recommended a 3% increase in clergy stipends of incumbent status and 5% for curates, from 1 April 2025. Changes to clergy employers' national insurance contributions, effective from 6 April 2025, will result in an additional £106,000 cost that has not been included in benefice requests for 2025 sent in September 2024.

SEB explained that 'unapplied total return', is the difference between the value of glebe land and glebe investments, adjusted for inflation from 1995 to the end of 2023, compared to the market value in the 2023 statutory accounts. What was previously classed as capital could be now classified as income, allowing for £1 million to be released each year over the next five years initially, in accordance with the approved Diocesan Financial Strategy. This return is primarily held in glebe land and will be allocated to support the core budget for clergy stipends and other strategic initiatives. Without this robust financial strategy, the underlying operational deficit would stand at approximately £1.8 million.

Regarding Parish Share, every 1% of uncollected Parish Share adds £86,300 to the budgeted deficit. To maintain 160 clergy posts, it is crucial for Parish Share contributions to be received. Looking back to 2019, collections are 7.9% lower, and when factoring in inflation, in real terms this represents a 25% decrease in income. SEB expressed gratitude for all that is done, acknowledging all efforts and contributions while emphasising the importance of continued support. Work to maximise returns on assets and from external funding sources was also explained.

The chair invited any questions.

A member asked whether the DBF could consider funding all safeguarding training and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks to support a safer church environment in light of the risk of parish volunteers not proceeding with DBS checks due to the costs for parishes. TS recognised the expense and responded that the

DBF provides safeguarding training and support, and a partnership approach between the diocese and parishes to funding safeguarding is important.

SEB was asked about unapplied total return and its connection to glebe land, including potential sales, and whether the money generated was being reinvested to support stipendiary clergy and national insurance costs, or being spent. SEB explained the unapplied total return, derived from glebe land and glebe investments, can only be used for the payment of stipends and related stipendiary costs. Its use in this way frees up unrestricted funds that can be allocated to other projects. Currently, the diocese is conducting a strategic review of glebe land, particularly focusing on parcels that generate minimal returns and exploring potential future uses. This review builds on previous glebe developments, and all actions have been verified with auditors. Surpluses from past glebe projects have been allocated to a separate investment fund, which has enabled the initial investment of funds.

A member asked how much the diocese is currently spending on net zero initiatives, and if that spending were reduced or stopped, would the diocese still be facing a deficit? SEB responded that a plan is being developed alongside the budget, with a separate fund allocated specifically for net zero work. Currently, this work is cost-neutral within the budget. Future costs are still being determined, and once finalised, decisions will need to be made regarding funding. At present, this initiative does not impact the deficit.

SEB was asked regarding the 160 stipendiary posts in the budget, how many of these positions are currently vacant, and is there any incentive to maintain those vacancies? SEB responded that there is no incentive to keep vacancies unfilled and the team are working diligently to fill these positions, though the number of retirements continues to impact the overall staffing levels. TS reaffirmed SEB's response. On average, there have been 142 stipendiary clergy in place, and the team are working hard to fill the existing vacancies, with some success. As retirements occur, the focus remains on filling those positions which are crucial for the vibrancy of local mission and ministry, which supports financial health. There is no incentive to leave vacancies unfilled, as doing so benefits no one in the long term.

No further questions.

MJ thanked SEB and her team for their hard work in preparing the budget, which he noted had been scrutinised by the Finance Committee and Bishop's Council of Trustees before being recommended to Synod.

The Chair moved: This Synod agrees the logic behind the assumptions and approves the 2025 Budget.

The result was as follows:

In Favour 82 Against 0 Abstentions 4

The 2025 budget was agreed.

8. Motion from Depwade Deanery

The Chair invited John Hooper, from Depwade Deanery to propose the following motion:

The Depwade Deanery Synod is concerned at the impact on the National church community and the maintenance of Graded 1 & 2 listed buildings under their care, should the Listed Places of Worship grant be removed. We ask that the Diocesan Synod lobbies the General Synod, the Government and the House of Lords, pointing out the impact that a further 20% added to repair bills could have on the preservation of these historic buildings.

The Chair noted that an explanatory note from Nicholas Cannon, Church Care and Development Manager was included in the papers for information.

One member spoke in support of the motion, noting with regret that the VAT scheme is only ever authorised for a limited period, leaving everyone in a recurring position of uncertainty. As suggested in Nick Cannon's

note, contacting MPs is a worthwhile approach. The member reiterated they fully support this motion, given that the UK receive less financial support for our historic church buildings than other countries in Europe.

The President noted the Lords Spiritual has recently been briefed by the Bishop of Bristol, where it was noted that the VAT scheme is undergoing routine renewal, with the current scheme set to expire on March 31, 2025. While the situation is not yet clear, updates are expected once the Treasury finalises the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's allocated budget, which should be confirmed by Christmas. It is crucial to write to local MPs urging a decision in favour of renewing the scheme. Additionally, any churches postponing work due to uncertainty about reclaiming VAT, or being unable to afford planned projects as a result, are encouraged to inform the Bishop of Norwich. A debate on this matter is upcoming in the House of Lords, and sharing local stories can significantly strengthen the case.

The Chair invited John Hooper from Depwade Deanery to respond, who encouraged members to write to their local MP as the volume of letters MPs receive can make a significant impact.

The Chair moved to adopt the Motion from Depwade Deanery.

The result was as follows:

In Favour – 85 Against 0 Abstentions 1

9. Update from General Synod July 2024

The Chair invited questions to be answered by John Brydon, General Synod Representative.

A question was asked regarding Living in Love and Faith (LLF) where concerns were raised about clergy in dioceses where bishops hold opposing views to their own. The question was whether this issue remains under discussion in General Synod, how far it has progressed, and when further guidance might be expected.

John Brydon confirmed that discussions are ongoing and that the matter will return to Synod in February next year for further discussion on the way forward and any forthcoming guidance. The Bishop of Leicester had recently issued an update, with additional information available on the Church of England's website.

10. Question under Standing Order 71

The Chair invited Ivan Kimble from Repps Deanery to ask his question: Each year, for the last three years how many curates have been ordained in the Diocese of Norwich? How many curates are proposed for next year? How may we increase that number? How many are Evangelical?

The Bishop of Thetford answered:

- In 2022, 10 were ordained deacon, 9 of them stipendiary.
- In 2023, 6 were ordained deacon, all of them stipendiary.
- In 2024, 5 were ordained deacon, 4 of them stipendiary.
- In 2025, we anticipate 11 deacon, 8 stipendiary, in line with the budgeted figures
- In 2026, we hope there will be a further 9 deacons, 8 stipendiaries, in line with budgeted figures
- In 2027, currently 14 discernment candidates, 9 are stipendiary but these figures will change, as candidates could make different decisions before that point.

It was noted the selection process for ordination was notably impacted by COVID, leading to potentially lower numbers for 2022/23 than would have been seen under normal circumstances.

Overall, the trend in vocational interest in ordained ministry appears positive within the diocese. The Shared Vocation Space programme has been instrumental in helping candidates discern their calling. Plans are in place to ensure continuity in vocations work following the upcoming retirement of the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, with the process to appoint a successor already underway.

While records of candidates' group affiliations, such as evangelical identification, are not maintained, ongoing discussions aim to encourage both lay and ordained vocations. A new vocational strategy, expected in the coming year, will focus on increasing vocations among younger people, women, those with different abilities, and those from global majority heritage backgrounds. This prayerfully guided initiative calls on everyone to identify and support individuals who may feel called by God to explore their vocation.

The Chair invited the Repps Deanery representative to ask a supplementary question. No supplementary question was asked.

The Chair of the House of Clergy handed the Chair to the President who concluded the business for the first meeting of the fifteenth session of the Norwich Diocesan Synod.

The Bishop of Norwich thanked Susan Bunting for all of her hard work as Director of Finance and wished Susan the best for the future.

Closing Prayer was led by Pam Spychal

The Blessing was given by the President

The meeting closed at 13:06.

Signed:

Date: