

PETERBOROUGH DIOCESAN SYNOD

The Autumn Session

Held on Saturday 22 March 2025

At Bishop Stopford School, Kettering

1. OPENING WORSHIP

Led by the Peterborough Deanery

Synod remembered Frank Smith and all he had contributed to this Diocese, and prayers were offered for his family as they now arrange his funeral and adjust to his passing.

2. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Bishop Debbie began her address by reflecting on her past year with us, expressing her thanks and gratitude for the sense of belonging and support received from all in the Diocese. Bishop Debbie expressed her particular thanks for the Celtic worship from Peterborough Deanery, as being particularly close to her heart.

There was a recent licencing service held in Peterborough on St Cuthbert's Day, St Cuthbert being a Saint of the early Northumbrian Church in the Celtic Tradition, celebrated for his dedication to prayer (amongst other things). The Bishop introduced the theme for the year, 'Teach us to pray' inspired by Luke Ch 11 which emphasises the importance of prayer and the relationship with God. It begins with Jesus teaching his disciples the Lords Prayer, which serves as a model for how to pray.

The address encouraged everyone to explore different ways of praying and to create a space for prayer in the lives of our communities and congregations. The Central Teams are doing much to help in this theme, providing training and resources. Bishop Debbie asked everyone to reach out and tell us what you are doing, and how we can help. There is much excitement to be had as we embark on this journey together. We hope, by the end of 2025, more people will have taken steps to deepen their prayer life.

Bishop Debbie went on to talk about the critical topic of Safeguarding which requires attention from us all. Recent events such as the Makin report, the David Tudor reporting and the Bishop of Liverpool's resignation highlight the importance of ensuring Safeguarding is fit for purpose, and the challenges we face in addressing it effectively.

Bishop Debbie reflected on her time in ministry and the significant improvements in policies and procedures that have happened in that time, we have dedicated Parish Safeguarding

Officers who need continuous support. Our efforts are focused on fostering a positive culture through training that emphasises risk mitigation and the importance of reporting concerns. We often have an imbalance of power at play which is not conducive to a healthy culture. Open and honest conversations and an appreciation of individual influence are necessary to ensure accountability and transparency is at the heart of a healthy safeguarding culture. We aim to reflect on practices, prioritise kindness and clarity and provide support for those who feel disenfranchised.; effective safeguarding goes beyond policies and procedures it extends to building a supportive culture across all areas of our organisation.

Bishop Debbie updated members on the ongoing Governance Review; the consultants have taken an interview-based approach to gather evidence, and assess our meeting structure. The aim being to provide a structural framework to ensure our ministry efforts in this Diocese thrive. A final report is being written for Bishop Debbie, who will then decide on appropriate dissemination channels. Early indications are the report will contain positive and negative feedback, and we anticipate some challenges. There is evidence of an opaqueness to our current decision making which we will address. Informal conversations are already happening at BLT/BMG to help start to shape our strategy, determining what actions are necessary to foster flourishing churches in this Diocese.

Three particular areas which provide early indications of an emerging strategy are:

The Rural vs Urban Ministry challenges. We will have our first ever Rural Ministry forum in September 2025, with a guest speaker who was the National Lead for Rural Ministry. We will look to explore models of urban ministry and have received national church funding to deliver a specific urban ministry project in Peterborough.

Leadership Development. The medium to long term environment shows us there will be fewer stipendiary clergy with insufficient people coming through training to replace retirements. As a diocese we have chosen not to cut clergy numbers over the last 10 years, but the future does not support this. We need to ensure ministry teams are multi-talented, a mixture of clergy and laity, trained together to work as a coherent team. We must equip clergy to manage this across multi parish teams, leadership is not limited to those with collars.

Children and Youth. Building on the work we are already doing and have done through the Gen2 project. The Flourish Pilot is currently underway, and this looks at creating new worshipping communities in schools. What else should we be doing? Children do not come without parents - how do we engage and build worshipping communities with those parents?

These three areas of work provide the bare bones of what a strategy might look like. We have limited resources in people and finance. Once we have clarity of direction we can access national funding. The national church is very supportive of what we are doing.

Returning to Luke Ch11, specifically 11:9, which states “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you....”

Amen

3. REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Members were given 15 minutes to consider the reports from Boards and Committees and pose any questions, the following members spoke:

Alan Dott (Towcester Deanery); commented on the amount of money and resourcing invested in safeguarding and he sees little mention of Jesus Christ.

Chrys Tremththanmor (Greater Northampton Deanery); expressed thanks to the DBF for the action taken on clergy houses and asked if there would be any work to understand the outcome of the LYCIG investment in the Diocese.

Damian Pickard; (Greater Northampton Deanery); expressed astonishment at the sheer breadth of work undertaken by the diocesan teams and commented that improved communication to parishes and congregations might help understanding.

Ali Williams (Peterborough Deanery); spoke of the broader issue of efficacy in mission and asked how we deal with an apparent disconnect with the centre and embed clarity.

Jennie Smith (Oundle Deanery); commented on the issues around closed churches and asked how we better value our buildings. Also spoke of the mission statistics and how we should ensure they provide a clear picture of attendance.

Flourish Project Report

Provided for members attention.

4. UPDATE ON SAFEGUARDING

An Independent Safeguarding audit is currently in progress for the Diocese and the Cathedral. This has arisen out of recommendation 8 from the ICSSA report published in 2022. The audit is based on the Safeguarding National Standards published in October 2023. This is a 7 year

cycle, driven by the need to have one company (Ineqe) complete all audits for consistency. So far 11 reports have been published and are available publicly, the last one being the report into Lincoln diocese which ran to 80 recommendations; these are significant audits.

This Diocese (and Cathedral) is currently in stage 2 which is the evidence gathering stage, following which the information will be analysed by the Safeguarding lead, and uploaded to the Ineqe 360 reporting tool. There is no extension to the deadline, and it is important we submit as much information as we can in order to give a complete view of safeguarding practices across the Diocese and the Cathedral. This impacts on already stretched resources so thank you for your patience on non-urgent referrals.

Stage three happens between 30 June and 4 July when auditors will be on site, and speaking to people. The objective of the audit is to evaluate the whole Diocese and Cathedral's safeguarding efforts collaboratively. Successes and challenges are needed in our evidence submitted and we want to make sure when our final report is published (expected 3rd quarter 2025) there are no significant omissions. We are asking everyone to contribute to the Ineqe audit, which is confidential, and responses go direct to Ineqe, this is designed to gather insights into how safeguarding delivery and experience feels in this Diocese. We particularly welcome feedback from young people; as there is no personal information involved; participation does not need to be approved by an adult.

5. GENERAL SYNOD REPORT ON THE FEBRUARY 2025 GROUP OF SESSIONS

General Synod began with uncertainty over the Presidential Address, arising from recent Safeguarding failures reported in the media and the impact of those. Synod declared its repentance for failures in Safeguarding and debated the establishment of independent bodies for safeguarding activities and oversight. Time was allocated to Racial Justice, The Crown Nominations Committee standing orders, Living in Love and Faith, Clergy Conduct Measure and the revised Mission and Pastoral Measure. More detail on the discussions can be provided on request.

6. QUESTIONS RAISED UNDER STANDING ORDER 70

Refer to the supplementary agenda for details;

Nick Alexander [Greater Northampton Deanery] thanked Bishop Debbie for all the work being done on LLF in this Diocese and beyond. The language in the word 'delegated' suggests an impermanence in the alternative episcopal arrangements which Nick and other colleagues are concerned about. In response Bishop Debbie reaffirmed the work on this point and others raised currently being done at a national

level. Delegated Episcopal Ministry is complex, and on the ground, thinking is important to this debate, encouraging all present to feed their views to the General Synod representatives to ensure they are heard.

7. APPROVED BUSINESS
None

8. DATE OF MEETINGS IN 2025

9 July 2025 (7pm at Bishop Stopford School)

18 October 2025 (10am at Malcolm Arnold Academy)

Chris Banks drew members attention to the addition of a third meeting of Synod which will be in person on either 9th of July.

Chris drew attention to continuing vacancies on Synod (current members are listed on the Diocesan website) and lay vacancies on Bishops Council. Chris asked for members to think about who might be willing to volunteer. A clergy / laity balance is essential in these key governance forums if they are to work well.

We will be giving thought to how we close the feedback loop following the meetings to ensure the under represented understand the decision making process.

