

# EXETER DIOCESAN SYNOD

A meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Synod  
was held at Westpoint, Exeter on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 10.00

## Minutes

Introductory worship

The Bishop of Exeter in the chair

### I. Apologies & Notices

Apologies were received from 14 members of the House of Laity and 9 members of the House of Clergy.

- The following new members were welcomed to the Synod: the Revd. Claire Curtis (Tiverton and Cullompton deanery), the Revd. Mark Ruoff (Shirwell deanery), the Revd. Janet May (Cadbury deanery) and Mrs Sheila Roles (Shirwell deanery).
- Farewell tributes were paid to the Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth, the Revd. Preb. Philip Sourbut, the Diocesan Director of Mission and Ministry and the Revd. Geoffrey Fenton (Newton Abbot deanery).
- Information and resources relating to the coronation of King Charles III on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were made available, including prayer booklets for distribution in deaneries.

### 2. To approve the minutes of meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022 **Paper S/01/23**

The minutes of the meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022 were approved without amendment.

### 3. Presidential Address

The text of the Bishop of Exeter's address is available at: [17-Exeter-Presidential-Address-March-2023.docx \(live.com\)](#)

The Chair of the House of Laity in the chair

### 4. To approve the Diocesan Racial Justice Charter and Strategy and a consequential scheme to amend Standing Orders **Paper S/02/23**

The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, Diocesan UKME Adviser, and the Revd. Preb. Philip Sourbut, the Diocesan Director of Mission and Ministry, reflected on the former's experiences of

racism growing up in Plymouth and in training for ordained ministry. The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still then set out the background to the Diocesan Racial Justice Charter and Strategy, particularly in respect of the national report 'From Lament to Action' and the adoption of its recommendations by the General Synod. The emphasis, after similar many reports over the decades, was to catalyse the implementation of actions to address racism in specific local contexts. The approval of the Diocesan Charter and Strategy would be a first step but it was essential to develop a sense of momentum and a sustained programme for change that would be regularly reported on to the Synod to ensure accountability.

In discussion, it was suggested that some of the language used around the concept of intersectionality could usefully be simplified. It was noted that there were clear local examples of UKME leadership in secular organisations (for example, Exeter City Council) from which it might be possible to learn lessons. It was confirmed that 2021 census data, as it was being released over time, was being used in analysis to improve understanding of different geographical areas. This was thought to be particularly important when it came, in due course, to being able to apply for national funds to promote work on racial justice (the details for which were yet to be made available). Encouragement was offered to engage with the visa sponsorship system (particularly for internships), schools and PCCs. The latter would need guidance on issues to do with history and memory (including memorials) and also communications support to present information appropriately and deal well with any media interest. It was also suggested that there was a need to seek out diverse voices from within UKME communities.

The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, the Diocesan UKME Adviser, then moved the following motion:

'This Synod approves the Diocesan Racial Justice Charter and Strategy as set out in Paper S/02/23'

In the absence of debate, the motion was put to a vote and passed unanimously.

The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still then moved the following motion:

'This Synod amends the relevant part of Standing Order 72 so that it reads as follows:  
"Not less than three and not more than eight persons nominated by the President provided that:

- (i) One nomination shall be made after agreement with the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance; and
- (ii) One nomination shall be the Chair of the Church Buildings Strategy Committee if he or she is not otherwise a member of the Bishop's Council; and
- (iii) One nomination shall be the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education Committee if he or she is not otherwise a member of the Bishop's Council; and

- (iv) Up to three nominations can be made to ensure adequate and appropriate UK Minority Ethnic representation on the Bishop's Council

In making the nominations the President shall bear in mind the need to secure that the number of members who are of the clergy and the number of members who are of the laity are as nearly as possible the same.”

In the absence of debate, the motion was put to the vote and passed by a large majority.

5. To receive the annual report of the 'Growing the Rural Church' project **Paper S/03/23**

The Ven. Andrew Beane, Archdeacon of Exeter, reminded members that the mission statement for the 'Growing the Rural Church' project was to “resource rural Mission Communities to creatively use their talents and buildings, and to connect with their unique communities and landscapes to develop sustainable futures.” As the project approached the end of its 7-year funding period, it was important to assess the effectiveness of its delivery and its associated impact. The annual report enumerated the ways in which the project had fulfilled its mission, developed a widely respected brand and helped the Diocese to be recognised as a leading voice in the practice of rural ministry. The conclusion of the project would not curtail its influence; rather it would continue to impact practice within the Diocese and beyond, shaping a new diocesan rural strategy, supporting innovation (from the development of pilgrimage routes to rural church planting) and providing resources that would remain available to mission communities into the future.

In discussion, support was expressed for the fact that the Diocese had taken the first available opportunity through the Strategic Development Fund to promote a project relating to the life of rural churches. Given the delivery model of the project after its mid-term review it was impossible to state how many parishes and mission communities had engaged with it in some way but a reasonable estimate would be more than 100. The growth that had resulted was difficult to measure and open to different interpretations and definitions. Some churches had grown numerically, some in depth of discipleship and others had seen their culture changed or become more sustainable for the future. External factors had also played a huge part, principally the pandemic, which had challenged the resilience of clergy and lay practitioners alike. It was noted that, notwithstanding its successes and benefits, the project had not been free of organisational difficulties and a final review with our Strategic Development Fund partners would be helpful to capture learning. Tribute was paid to the quality of the resources produced (for example 'Lightening the Load', which was being well-received outside the Diocese) and initiatives implemented, such as Devon Pilgrim. It was suggested that the project may have been a victim of over-promising what could be achieved at the start, especially with a relatively intensive engagement model, but the mid-term re-design had delivered significant benefits and led to greater effectiveness and reach in the later years.

6. To give consideration to the development of a Rural Strategy for ministry and mission and to agree to re-purpose the remaining diocesan funding allocated to the 'Growing the Rural Church' project

**Paper S/04/23**

The Ven. Venera Breed, Archdeacon of Barnstaple, explained her own background in rural parish ministry and her conviction that the Diocese of Exeter should aspire to be a leading diocese in the practice of rural mission and ministry. The development of a Rural Strategy and the allocation of resources to provide enabling capacity would be a significant initiative, within the context of the Next Steps Diocesan Vision, towards sustaining rural mission and ministry into the future. She then proceeded to describe the rural characteristics of the Diocese and noted that rural mission was a specialist form of ministry, requiring specific skills, an understanding of distinctiveness and incarnationality, and knowledge of the complexities and nuances of modern rural communities. She noted that rural ministry was typically characterised by the multiplicity of its points of engagement: parishes, governance bodies, distinct local communities, schools, buildings and congregations and that ordained and lay ministers needed specialist support in order to minister resiliently in their context.

The Strategy would need to sit within the context of 'Next Steps' and relate to other possible specialist strategies, for example in relation to Market and Coastal Towns and Urban ministry. Its development would require careful listening to the rural laity and clergy of the Diocese and also to be realistic and honest about the opportunities and constraints that applied both locally and in a diocesan context. There would be a need to address issues relating to training (on courses and in colleges leading to ordained ministry and then in training curacies and continuing ministerial development, and also in relation to lay leadership and focal ministry), to diocesan support and to local / network peer support.

The Archdeacon then noted that the Synod would be asked to re-purpose the un-used funds designated for the 'Growing the Rural Church' project, to support the on-going implementation of the draft Rural Strategy. The effect would be to transfer it from direct project support to the resourcing of a more holistic approach. The proposal at this stage would be to generate capacity by appointing a Rural Mission Enabler or Enablers for a limited period and embedded in local contexts (eg alongside a part-stipendiary parish post).

In discussion members expressed support for the development of a strategy for Rural Mission and Ministry. Some questions were raised about some of the definitions involved and it was suggested that there was a need for additional analytical work to enable a clearer understanding of particular local contexts (for example in respect of the difference between those moving into rural areas to live and those purchasing second homes). In respect of the proposed Rural Mission Enabler(s) it was noted that they would need to be linked structurally to the Bishop Staff portfolio holder for rural ministry and also to the diocesan Director of Mission and Ministry. It was also suggested that an investment also be made in automated software, so that core administrative tasks could be completed more quickly in multi-parish benefices (especially in the absence of lay officers) and that closer attention be paid to providing solutions-focussed support concerning buildings and the development of rural ecumenical co-operative schemes. It was noted that the Mission

Community Health Check was being rolled out and was proving a useful process for the re-shaping of local ministry and mission in a rural context.

The Ven. Verena Breed, Archdeacon of Barnstaple, then moved the following motion:

‘This Synod agrees to allocate £250,000 from the fund designated by the Diocesan Synod to support the work of the ‘Growing the Rural Church’ project to equip, resource and support Rural Mission and Ministry in Exeter Diocese.’

In the absence of debate, the motion was put to the vote and passed by a large majority.

The Chair of the House of Clergy in the chair

7. To receive a report from General Synod

**Paper S/05/23**

Canon Professor Morwenna Ludlow (General Synod) and Mr. Tim Hamilton (General Synod) presented the report of the meeting of General Synod that took place in February 2023. The range of business undertaken by the Synod was noted and close attention was paid to the discussions and debates arising from the ‘Living in Love and Faith’ process. Both speakers offered their own perspective on where the process had reached. It was noted that although a number of decisions had been taken, there remained much still to do, including another substantial engagement with the issues at the July Group of Sessions.

Members then spent time in facilitated small groups, discussing the issues arising from the report that were of particular significance to them. There was then an opportunity to highlight a limited number of issues in plenary feedback:

- Most groups reported members having a range of views, some expressing approval and contentment, others expressing concern and anxiety.
- There was a general sense of relief that these important issues have been aired and a decision finally made, though this was qualified by an awareness that there is more work to be done in the run-up to the July General Synod, the outcome of which is still uncertain.
- Some sensed a trajectory towards a future change of doctrine that could lead to some form of formal separation. This was painful to contemplate.
- There were feelings of frustration and sadness that the primary mission of church to communicate and reflect God’s love to the world was being undermined by ongoing disagreement.
- There was an urgent need to commit to disagree well and to model that good disagreement to others. Arguments being played out on social media were thought to be particularly destructive. There was a plea for people to discern carefully what sorts of language it was appropriate to use in a public context.
- Concern was expressed how the various aspects of the decisions at General Synod would play out in practice in parishes across the Diocese.
- Hope was expressed for continuing in dialogue and journeying together prayerfully.

8. To make a declaration of climate emergency and agree to sign the Devon Climate Declaration, adopt the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Vision Statement for 2030, adopt a target to achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2030 and agree alignment with the national Routemap to Net Zero Carbon
- Paper S/06/23**

The Ven Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, and Ms. Sophie Philips, the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Officer, introduced the work that had been undertaken since the last Synod to bring forward motions for approval. If approved the motions would set the direction of travel for the rest of the decade in respect of work to reduce diocesan carbon emissions in line with national Church of England policy and would commit the Diocesan Board of Finance to act accordingly. The work had been subject to scrutiny and revision in the intervening period by the Environment Working Group and the Bishop's Diocesan Council, was explicitly underpinned theologically and situated in the context of the Church of England's Five Marks of Mission.

The Archdeacon then summarised the content of the motions and emphasised the limits that applied to them. In particular he highlighted the difference between areas that were within the direct control of the Diocesan Board of Finance (clergy housing, offices and staff travel) and those that were within its influence but not control (parish churches, the Cathedral, church schools and theological education institutions in the Diocese). The motions containing commitments to targets and actions applied only to those issues that were within the DBF's control, and even those would be very difficult to achieve within the time and resources available. If the motions were approved, the next steps would be to continue working to improve data sources, to monitor progress being made and to draft a Diocesan Action Plan, to be brought to the next meeting of the Diocesan Synod.

The Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, then moved the following motion:

'This Synod

- a) adopts the following statement making a declaration of a climate emergency

"As Christians, we believe that God calls us to safeguard the integrity of creation and to renew the life of the Earth and its peoples. The Diocese of Exeter recognises that the global climate emergency is not only a crisis for God's creation but is causing fundamental injustices across the globe.

With the national Church of England, we commit ourselves to work with all available resources towards Net Zero Carbon by 2030. To this end, we will draw up and implement a feasible programme of action with a clear time frame, based on the Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by 2030.

We will review our action plan regularly and report publicly on progress."

- b) agrees to sign the Devon Climate Declaration'

In debate, concern was expressed that the declarations might be seen to be ‘virtue signalling’ and alarmist. In response, it was noted that the declarations could have been made earlier, and some dioceses had done so, but that in this diocese a decision had been taken to undertake substantive planning ahead of the declarations to make sure there was no risk of making an empty gesture. It was also thought important to speak out about climate change from a Christian perspective and to make a public commitment to act in accordance with the fifth Mark of Mission. It was noted that although the potential costs were high, and the reduction of carbon emissions relatively small, it was a moral duty act for the benefit of other people from other parts of the world who were already suffering the detrimental impacts of rising global temperatures. For some, the proposed actions would not go far enough, with there being further ethical imperatives around personal behaviour that should also be pursued (for example in relation to diet and overseas travel). Some concern was also expressed about the incorporation of the possibility of off-setting residual carbon emissions but it was acknowledged that there needed to be some remedial mechanism for those reductions that it would not be possible to achieve by 2030.

The motion was put to the vote and passed by a large majority.

The Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, then moved the following motion:

‘This Synod adopts the following Net Zero Carbon vision statement for 2030:

“By 2030, we will have measured the carbon emissions from our churches, (schools where appropriate), Theological Education Institutions, the Cathedral, clergy housing, diocesan offices and work-related travel, we will have made changes to reduce the energy consumption of our buildings, invested in some of our own renewable energy generation and we will have switched to approved green tariffs.

We will have made substantial progress towards Net Zero Carbon for those activities under our direct control, will have made arrangements to offset the remaining activities that have yet to be directly addressed and will have used our influence to encourage related organisations to act similarly.”

In debate, it was noted that the vision statement ranged beyond areas of control into areas of influence. The statement was therefore not a commitment but an aspiration; there would be no direct consequences if it were not to be realised in full, although the intention was to be completely open about what had and had not been achieved. In terms of data, the Diocesan Action Plan would establish key performance indicators (for example via the parish Energy Footprint Tool and church energy audits) and the quality of the data from around the Diocese would improve over time. It was noted that case law on the installation of solar panels on church rooves was developing and becoming more permissive. Finally, a concern was expressed that where green energy options were not readily available, clergy might be left in unsuitably cold housing in order to reach the target; it was noted that off-setting had been included in order to deal with situations that had no practical solution.

The motion was put to the vote and passed by a large majority.

The Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, then moved the following motion:

‘This Synod adopts the following target for the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance to reach Net Zero Carbon by 2030

“The Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance will seek to achieve a 90% reduction (against a 2010 base) by 2030 in Greenhouse Gas Protocol\* Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions for areas within its direct control, including in relation to clergy housing and diocesan offices, as resources allow. The remaining 10% will be offset using offsetting schemes verified by the national Church of England.

A further target for work-related travel will be set in due course once the baseline data has been established.”

In debate, concern was expressed about whether there was sufficient information to establish secure baseline data (as at 2010); it was confirmed that the information was available for issues within the control of the DBF, but not issues under its influence. Furthermore, there was concern that PCCs and people in parishes may not understand or appreciate the difference between control and influence. Accurate and repeated communication would be a priority. It was noted that the financial implications of adopting the target were substantial, even with significant grant funding being made available from the national Church, but it was explicitly understood that actions to achieve the target would ultimately depend on the availability of resources.

The motion was put to the vote and passed by a large majority.

The Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, then moved the following motion:

‘This Synod agrees to align as far as possible the development and implementation of policy to achieve its Net Zero Carbon target with the national Church of England ‘Routemap to Net Zero Carbon.’

In debate, concern was expressed that alignment with the Routemap might have the effect of tying other legal bodies (such as PCCs) into the national target. Reassurance was provided that the effect of such a decision in this context would only relate to the Diocesan Board of Finance and that the commitment to follow it was intentionally ‘as far as possible’ and not absolute. The function of the Routemap was to provide a comprehensive sequence of milestones that could be translated into a Diocesan Action Plan; producing a different

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\* The Greenhouse Gas Protocol is the international standard for measuring emissions [Greenhouse Gas Protocol | \(ghgprotocol.org\)](https://ghgprotocol.org)



diocesan version of the Routemap would be costly and time consuming to little practical effect. Alignment with the Routemap would also assist with accessing national funding. The ultimate intention was to enable the DBF to act to the best of its ability and as appropriate, in the knowledge that doing so would take it as close as possible to its adopted target.

The motion was put to the vote and passed by a large majority.

9. To receive an update on developments in the life of the Cathedral

The Very Revd. Jonathan Greener, Dean of Exeter, presented a summary of archaeological and building works currently being undertaken in the Cathedral, as well as those planned for the year ahead. These included works preparatory to the construction of cloisters (on the footprint of the original pre-Reformation cloister) that would open up the life and work of the Cathedral to a wider range of people. The end result would be an increase in the amount of space available, making provision for new toilets, robing facilities, a new shop and a treasures gallery, which would enable the public display of articles from the library and archive's collection. It was hoped that as a consequence, visitor numbers would increase and the Cathedral would become more financially sustainable. Works were also anticipated in the Quire after Easter, including taking up the floor and installing new heating, laying a new floor and improving lighting and sound.

Work was also underway in relation to the Cathedral's constitution and statutes, as necessitated by the Cathedrals Measure 2021. A Nominations Committee was being established and the role of the College of Canons was being enhanced. It was hoped that the process would be concluded by mid-2023.

10. To receive the annual report on women in ordained ministry

**Paper S/07/23**

The Revd. Preb Samantha Stayte, Dean of Women in Ordained Ministry, noted that this was her first report since being appointed to the role and also that it had been held over from the previous meeting of the Synod. The principal focus of the report was on ordained ministry but for context it also contained in an appendix information on the representation of clergy and lay women as members of diocesan boards and committees. The report was produced annually in a consistent format so that comparisons could be made and progress tracked easily, alerting members to issues that needed on-going attention and action.

It was notable that on the issue of vocational discernment, which had been a focus for intentional activity in recent years, there were signs of substantial progress, with a near parity of young men and young women entering the discernment process and proceeding to training for ordained ministry. However, some differences remained (for example in relation to the mode of training) and there were still too few female training incumbents, at least in part because of the low number of female incumbents overall and their relative absence from some sorts of ministry contexts. It also continued to be the case that female incumbents were over-represented in non-stipendiary roles and rural, multi-parish

benefices. Few women were incumbents of large church, single parish, urban benefices or of resource churches or other nationally-funded projects. In part there was a need to connect people together in their dispersed locations and to celebrate and value the specific gifts, skills and experience needed to minister effectively in those contexts. In addition, there was a need to ensure that women could progress and broaden the contexts in which they were called to ministry, and that there was nothing structural (other than in those places where there was explicit provision) holding them back from being so appointed.

In discussion, concern was expressed about the campaigning stance of the organisation WATCH, which had provided some of the data quoted in the report. It was noted that the data itself was neutral and that where possible it was corroborated by diocesan data and information provided by the national Church. It was suggested that some aspects of the data might better be presented in a different format, for example when calculating the proportion of female incumbents to remove from the calculation parishes that had passed resolutions that they would not, as a matter of theological conviction, appoint a woman as their incumbent. It was noted, however, that for comparability purposes (between dioceses and across time) it was logical to maintain consistent criteria. The existence of a diocesan policy on clergy couples was noted, particularly in respect of the potential situational vulnerability of the female spouse of a male incumbent. Finally, it was suggested that the report should lead to the development of an action plan and the delivery of actions to achieve specified targets. In response it was noted that with actions having previously been taken and still on-going, the priority was to embed good practice and listen closely to the context. New actions could be expected to emerge in due course from that process.

As an addition to the appendix on committee membership, it was noted that the newly formed DBE Committee that had just met for the first time, had 5 female and 5 male members (coincidentally also 5 lay and 5 clergy members).

## 11. Questions

All written questions (including supplementary questions) and their respective answers are detailed in Appendix 1.

### Deemed Items

- 12. To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches  
**Paper S/08/23**
- 13. To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Board of Education  
**Paper S/09/23**
- 14. To receive meeting dates for Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Diocesan Council for 2024  
**Paper S/10/23**