

# EXETER DIOCESAN SYNOD

A meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Synod  
held at Westpoint, Clyst St Mary, Exeter on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 10.00

## Minutes

Introductory worship led by Dr Jennie Golding

The Acting Bishop of Exeter in the chair

### 1. Apologies & Notices

Apologies were received from 15 members of the House of Laity and 8 members of the House of Clergy.

- Mr. Costa Nassaris, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and the Revd Canon James Mustard, Canon Precentor of Exeter Cathedral were welcomed to the meeting for items 6 and 7 respectively.
- In the preparation of answers to the many questions submitted, an appendix of additional information (relating to Chancel Repair Liability) was inadvertently omitted from the bundle of tabled papers. The appendix will be circulated with the minutes sent to all members after the meeting.

### 2. To approve the minutes of meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Paper S/01/24**

The minutes of the meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 were approved without amendment.

### 3. Presidential Address

The text of Bishop Jackie's address is available at <https://exeter.anglican.org/who-we-are/addresses-letters/>

The Chair of the House of Clergy in the chair

### 4. To receive a report on a submission to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board

The Right Revd. James Grier, Bishop of Plymouth, reminded members about the history of applications to the Strategic Development Fund that had led to the receipt of substantial grant funding to support the development of Resource Churches in Plymouth (including three church plants on deprived urban estates), Exeter and Torbay (as well as, at an earlier stage, to run the 'Growing the Rural Church' project). The national grant funding regime

had recently changed, with there now being an emphasis on a holistic diocesan vision and strategy for growth expressed in a programme of related interventions and initiatives over a period of 6 – 9 years rather than stand-alone 5-year projects. It would be possible to make a series of connected funding applications over time, so the process could be commenced in 2024 and then supplemented after the arrival of the new Diocesan Bishop.

It was clear that the new arrangements were more flexible and responsive to local circumstances than had previously been the case. The approach would need to be co-ordinated through multiple phases and to recognise in its 'mission design' the specific needs of different area types (rural, urban and market and coastal towns) in the Diocese. Existing activities would continue to need to be funded internally but there was clearly an opportunity for the development of specialist ministries, such as employed chaplains to strengthen links between families, churches and schools. Also key to the mission design would be a significantly enhanced training offer for clergy and lay people (both licensed lay ministers and other authorised lay roles), perhaps via a new digital training hub. It was hoped that there would also be investment in work with children and young people, with church school leaders, in church planting and in nationally recognised areas of high deprivation, low participation and structural impediments to change and growth.

In discussion members sought clarification on how the application might assist with the challenge of there being so many church buildings in the Diocese, with complex and expensive procedures to be followed if there is a local desire to close a building for public worship and/or explore the possibility of developing new uses. It was also felt that there was an opportunity to be more systematic in rolling out the idea of Festival Churches and in exploring church planting in rural areas, although as with all church planting, the practice in a rural area would have to be context dependent, as a new initiative could sometimes have more negative implications for existing networks and relationships. Members also expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the school – church chaplaincy model in leading to church growth and about resourcing the employment of youth workers in churches. In the latter case it was noted that, although a lack of finance was a potential impediment, there were also supply-side constraints that applied (fewer youth workers are being trained) that meant that other models would need to be considered.

5. To receive a report on the implementation of the Diocesan Racial Justice Strategy

**Paper S/02/24**

The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, Diocesan UKME adviser and Christianity Deanery, reminded members that they had approved the Diocesan Racial Justice Charter and Strategy in March 2023 and that a commitment had been given to review its implementation annually. She noted that the General Synod had recently considered an implementation update arising from the report 'From Lament to Action', summarising progress made to date. It was clear that there was progress on a number of fronts but that it was uneven, with inconsistent reporting contributing to uncertainty about the implementation of the report's commitments and recommendations.

For the year ahead, the intention was to make progress on three issues in particular: exploration of the appointment of a Diocesan Racial Justice Officer (for which national grant funding was available and that might be in partnership with a neighbouring diocese), implementation of unconscious bias training and development of a system for collecting and analysing data (which itself would require more capacity than was currently available).

In discussion a desire was expressed to see the Racial Justice Charter and Strategy developed into a practical policy with a wider range of priority areas for action. Three particular issues were highlighted: support for clergy in dealing with the racism that they encounter in their parish ministry, consistency of wording of recruitment adverts for parochial clergy roles that encourages applications from people from UKME communities, and exploration of the Diocese becoming an overseas sponsor in order to facilitate the entry into the UK of people from, for example, the Global South, to take up internships, be employed as youth workers and fill other roles. It was noted that at this point, the Strategy had set the frame for the elaboration of a policy that would lead to agreed actions but that to see the process through to implementation, additional capacity was needed.

#### 6. To review the Diocesan Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Policy Statements

**Paper S/03/24**

Mr. Costa Nassaris, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, reminded members that the Synod was committed to review the Diocesan Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse policy statements every three years. The timing was less than ideal because there were relatively few amendments needed at this point but that there was a great deal of potential for change in the near future – for example arising from the ‘Report into the Future of Safeguarding in the Church of England’, by Professor Alexis Jay. This is likely to lead to significant amendments to the Diocesan policy statements in the relatively near future and the statements are likely to return to the Synod in relatively short order.

In discussion it was suggested that although there were mechanisms to ensure that those on the ‘leadership pathway’ (such as parochial clergy) undertook appropriate safeguarding training, it was less clear what measures could be applied in the event of resistance from PCC members or churchwardens. For the most part the tools available were relational: persuasion, provision of information (including around Charity Commission compliance and insurance) and engaging with common objections, with the Safeguarding Team and archdeacons available to support as needed. There was felt to be a risk that insisting too strongly might exacerbate the increasing lack of volunteers for local church lay leadership roles, and in particular for Parochial Church Safeguarding Officers (PCSOs). It was noted that there were already several PCSO vacancies and the network was relatively vulnerable to resignations because in multi-parish benefices it was often one individual who took on responsibility multiple parishes; accordingly providing effective support to PCSOs was a high priority for the Safeguarding Team.

In respect of the implementation of the recommendations of the Jay Report as they applied to dioceses and parishes, it was acknowledged that the degree of change would be quite

significant and that clear leadership, communication, training and reassurance would be necessary. It was noted that many church volunteer officers were already doing significant work not only amongst their congregations but also at the boundaries of the interactions between the church and wider local community and thereby serving and helping to keep safe a greater number of people than simply those present in church services and activities.

The Diocesan Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Policy Statements were approved.

## 7. To consider the impact of and responses to a potential national General Election

The Right Revd. Jackie Searle, Bishop of Crediton and Acting Bishop of Exeter, noted that a General Election would have to be held within the next 12 months, with some time in the autumn having been advised as the most likely period for it to take place. There is therefore currently an opportunity for a period of preparation, mindful of the Church of England's Marks of Mission and, in particular, the commitment to 'transform the unjust structures of society'. To that end, it was suggested that there would need to be three basic elements to our collective planning: people, issues and prayer.

Firstly, it would be entirely appropriate for individuals and churches to participate in the electoral process, encouraging and enabling people of whichever political position to engage in whatever way was most appropriate for them – campaigning, standing for election and voting. The Church of England as a whole, its dioceses and parishes, whilst not party political, has myriad opportunities to support the exercising of individual democratic rights and enabling as many as possible to play their part. The organisation 'Christians in Politics' has produced the 'Influence Course', covering in six sessions different aspects of the intersection between Christianity and politics.

Secondly, there are a vast array of international, national and local issues with which churches might engage. The Archbishops commissioned four specific areas of work with people from government, political parties, stakeholders and non-governmental organisations to produce reports and these might be appropriate starting points:

- 'Love Matters': The Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households was asked to explore what families and households of all shapes and sizes need to flourish, with ambitions to support and strengthen family life.
- 'Re-imagining Care': The Commission offers a vision of care, and a desire to build long-term networks and associations that will allow people to flourish.
- 'The Racial Justice Commission': is working to understand why disparities exist, what works and what does not, through listening and learning from processes of participative engagement, commissioning new research and engaging with stakeholders and conversation partners across and beyond the Church.
- 'Coming Home': This report sets out vital actions for the Church, Government and other Stakeholders to build better communities and more truly affordable homes.

Finally, once a General Election has been announced, there will be national resources made available for bible study and prayer. A booklet is planned with 21 days of readings and prayers, and a scheme for intercessions for different aspects of society.

The Revd. Canon James Mustard, Precentor of Exeter Cathedral, described the process of holding election hustings, of which there are two basic types: selective and non-selective. The latter, in which all candidates in an election receive an invitation to participate or there are impartial reasons for not inviting all of the candidates (which could arise, for example, as a result of not having enough space or there being time constraints), are more straightforward to organise. Selective hustings, on the other hand, need to be declared to the Electoral Commission.

Whether the hustings are selective or non-selective, both of Electoral Commission and Churches Together in England provide guidance and resources. Good practice recommendations include requesting written questions submitted in advance, letting attendees know who is not present and why, making sure that there is a reasonable spread of views being represented with all participants having a fair opportunity to answer the same questions and to respond to any direct comments.

Mrs. Chloe Axford, the Diocesan Director of Communications, then provided some suggestions for effective engagements in the elections process for local churches. These included to be positive and non-political, to write to all candidates to thank them for standing and offering to pray for them, to stage or support a hustings event, to remind people to register to vote and to provide lifts to polling stations. It was notable that local media organisations have to adhere to reporting rules but church activities and events can be an interesting way to illustrate issues in a non-political way. Social media also provides an opportunity to model kindness and disagree courteously.

There were then discussions at in small groups, with Standing Orders suspended, about issues facing local communities, and the priorities for engagement that might be highlighted in parishes and more widely across the diocese.

The Acting Bishop of Exeter in the chair

8. To receive an update on diocesan elections taking place in 2024

**Paper S/04/24**

The Revd. Preb Mike Partridge, Chair of the House of Clergy, and Mrs. Annie Jefferies, Chair of the House of Laity, reminded members that the synodical triennium would be coming to a conclusion in August 2023. They noted the timetable for elections that would need to be delivered in deaneries, with support from the Synod Office. In the light of the level of vacancies on Diocesan Synod, particularly in the House of Clergy, members were encouraged to consider what could be done to enable existing members to continue offering their time and expertise; and what could be done to invite new people to stand for election. It was noted that the current membership reflected an under-representation of women clergy and of UKME members in both of the houses of clergy and laity. Finally,

members were invited to e-mail the Chairs of the Houses with suggestions as to how to encourage more people to stand for election.

In discussion, clarification was sought on who was able to be elected to the Diocesan Synod as a lay representative of the deanery synod. It was confirmed that candidates did not already have to be lay members of the deanery synod but that anyone aged 16 or over whose name was on the electoral roll of a parish, cathedral or mission initiative in the deanery could stand for election.

#### The Chair of the House of Laity in the chair

##### 9. To receive a report from General Synod

**Paper S/05/24**

The Revd. Preb. Rosie Austin (General Synod) introduced the reports from the November 2023 and February 2024 Groups of Sessions of General Synod (the former having been written by the Revd. Preb Karl Freeman, who was unable to be present). The February sessions had proven to be somewhat more gentle in tone than previous meetings, with substantial emphasis on reconciliation and an emerging commitment to keep listening (including to those people who did not necessarily have the loudest voices). Members particularly engaged with issues of particular relevance to their ministry contexts and representatives from Exeter had spoken on a wide range of subjects.

In discussion, a concern was raised about two points made in the November report: firstly that the Lead Bishop for the 'Living in Love and Faith' process should have been named as Bishop Martyn Snow not Bishop John Inge and secondly that the views attributed to the Revd. Dr. Ian Paul needed appropriate contextualisation in order to fairly represent the balance of contributions within the Synod. It was suggested that at times there appeared to be a disjunction between the issues typically discussed at the Synod and the main concerns of ordinary parishes. It was accordingly noted that it was perfectly possible to promote motions from parishes and deaneries to the Diocesan and General Synods, which would help to focus debate on grassroots' issues.

##### 10. To approve the Diocesan Environment Policy

**Paper S/06/24**

The Ven Jane Bakker, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, introduced the Diocesan Environment Policy. She noted that the policy was intended to provide a framework into which existing workstreams would fit, co-ordinating creation care work and work aimed at achieving the agreed diocesan net zero carbon target. Staff and governance arrangements were already in place to deliver the policy and there would be a further advantage in adopting the policy in that it would enable the achievement of the Eco Diocese Bronze Award.

In discussion members sought to clarify the resource implications in parishes, for clergy in their houses and the wider diocese. It was noted that the vast majority of environmental

impact could be achieved at the most local level and that initiatives that built local capacity and assisted cultural change (such as the match funding available through the 'Give to Go Green' programme) were very much to be welcomed. There was thought to be a continuing need for education and calls to action in parishes and mission communities. It was important, however, that one part of the diocese, in seeking to advance an environmental objective, does not displace or transfer the impact or detriment of a policy or decision onto another (for example around the cost and effectiveness of different heating systems in vicarages or the heating and lighting of a large highly listed church building). There would always be competing interests (for example, in relation to the wilding of churchyards) that would need to be resolved. In terms of funding, it was noted that national grant funding streams related to net zero carbon were still to be rolled out; there would also be an important opportunity to consider competing needs and benefits when it came to the attribution of funds gained from Total Return through the diocesan budget from 2025.

The Ven Jane Bakker then moved the following motion:

'This Synod approves the Diocesan Environment Policy'

In the absence of any debate, the motion was put to the vote and the Diocesan Environment Policy was approved.

## II. To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Board of Education Committee

**Paper S/07/24**

The Ven. Douglas Dettmer, Archdeacon of Totnes and Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education Committee (DBE), introduced the DBE's annual report. He reminded members about the recent amendments to the DBE's constitution (whereby it has become a formal committee of the Diocesan Board of Finance) and noted that the new working arrangements were becoming firmly established. The DBE would continue to report annually to the Diocesan Synod; there were 134 church schools in Devon and around 90 community schools with which those church schools were working in partnership in multi-academy trusts (MATs) and federations.

Mr. Dettmer then encouraged members to focus on the role of SIAMS inspections in holding schools accountable for translating their theologically-rooted vision into the day-to-day practice of delivering high quality education. Core evaluative questions, extracts from inspection reports and examples of exceptional practice were demonstrated, from an international schools' partnership about the impact of climate change on oceans (a film was shown featuring children of The Beacon C of E primary school, Exmouth, that had featured at COP 28) to the development of a team of pupil school chaplains, that was not only supporting the life of the school but also influencing how the parish church was delivering its own ministry. The DBE was seeking ways to develop further the Growing Faith agenda of linking churches, schools and households, shaped by the themes of inclusion, equality, leadership and space. Notably, research had been undertaken in a rural Devon MAT with pupils in a community secondary school that demonstrated that those who had attended a

church primary school on average self-identified as Christian more often than those who had come from community primary schools.

## 12. To approve schemes of representation for Plymouth Partnership in Mission

**Paper S/08/24**

The Ven Jane Bakker, Archdeacon of Plymouth, introduced the proposed schemes of representation on the Plymouth City Deanery Synod. She noted that it had previously been decided to delay the introduction of the schemes until the church plants were in a position to sustain representation and direct involvement in the life of the deanery synod. There was now sufficient local capacity to do so, as well as to regularise this aspect of the mission initiatives' governance arrangements.

In discussion, clarification was sought as to whether the church plants were paying Common Fund contributions. It was confirmed that they would commence phased entry into the Common Fund system from January 2025.

The Ven Jane Bakker then moved the following motion:

‘This Synod approves the schemes of representation for the Plymouth Partnership in Mission.’

In the absence of any debate the motion was put to the vote and approved.

## 13. Questions

All questions and their answers, as well as supplementary questions and their answers are available in Appendix A.

### **Deemed Items**

## 14. To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

**Paper S/09/24**

## 15. To receive meeting dates for Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Diocesan Council for 2024

**Paper S/10/24**

## 16. To receive an update on the Crown Nominations Commission for the Diocese of Exeter

**Paper S/11/24**

The meeting closed in prayer.