

Questions and Answers under Standing Order 69

21st March 2026

Mrs Heather Salter (Ottery) to ask the Bishop of Exeter

'I wonder if at least one of the Synods during the year could be extended to finish at 3 pm for two reasons: to allow networking over lunch as well as more time for discussion of the agenda items which, to me, can feel rushed due to time constraints?'

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

'Historically we used to hold two meetings of the Diocesan Synod each year, in March and October, and these would normally include an afternoon session. More recently we've held three Synods a year (introducing the June meeting so that the Synod has the opportunity for formative input into the diocesan budget) but tried to keep them a bit shorter so as not to take out 3 full Saturdays for members (some of whom vote with their feet and leave at lunchtime anyway). It would be perfectly possible within the new pattern for one or more of the Synods to incorporate an afternoon session if that is what members want and subject to there being sufficient suitable business to be included on the agenda.

If desired, it would be possible to hold a straw poll to gauge the balance of members' views on the subject.'

Supplementary question from Mrs Heather Salter

I was reading your answer, and I think it would be a good idea to have a show of hands. I'm a fairly new representative and I haven't got the experience of some others but it struck me that sometimes I feel that there has been a lack of time. Today I think the pace has been very good, but it depends on the agenda items and the complexity of those items.

Response from the Bishop of Exeter, the Rt Revd Dr Mike Harrison

The suggestion is we have a show of hands for the possibility of one of the synods extending to finish at 3:00 in the afternoon for the reasons mentioned in the question, allowing networking over lunch and more discussion of the agenda items.

I'm going to suggest that we vote on this, if that's ok. Can I have a show of hands for those in favour of extending one of the Synods to finish at 3 pm in the afternoon? Those in favour, and those against. Do we need to count them? I think there is more for No than Yes, do you all agree that? I don't want to be seen to be railroading. So, I think it's 'No' at the moment.

Mr. Jonathan Porter-Goff (Christianity) to ask the Diocesan Director of Finance

'At the October 2025 meeting of Diocesan Synod, during the discussion of the diocesan budget, reference was made to a *'planned review of the Common Fund scheme of assessment, scheduled to commence in autumn 2026'*. (Item 7, page 4 of the draft minutes). Please may the following points be clarified:

1. What are the terms of reference for this review?
2. Who will lead the review?
3. What are the names of the trustees of the DBF Charity who will be engaged with the review?
4. Can others (members of Diocesan Synod or drawn from a wider pool) be involved?
5. What is the timetable, with milestones, for the review to be completed?'

Response from Mr. Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance

'The Common Fund review is scheduled to commence in autumn 2026. The review has been commissioned and will be overseen through the Diocese's normal governance arrangements, with recommendations brought to Diocesan Synod in due course.

Terms of reference: these will be drafted and agreed before the review begins, and will be subject to approval by Bishop's Diocesan Council. They will cover (1) the scope of the review and options to be considered, (2) consultation arrangements, and (3) how and when recommendations will be reported to Bishop's Diocesan Council and Diocesan Synod.

Who will lead the review: I will act as the lead officer for the review, including responsibility for research, modelling and preparation of briefing papers.

EDBF trustees involved: a small number of EDBF trustees will be appointed to a steering group for the duration of the review; names will be confirmed once that group is constituted.

Wider involvement: as with the 2018/19 review, the intention is to consult widely through Deanery Synod consultation sessions, and to invite PCC treasurers to participate. Written submissions will also be welcomed as part of the consultation process.

Timetable and milestones: the current intention is to complete consultation and develop recommendations for Diocesan Synod consideration in June 2027, with any agreed changes implemented from 1 January 2028.'

Supplementary question from Mr Jonathan Porter Goff

Looking at the Common Fund leaflet that is currently on the Diocesan website, more than 50% of the diocesan income comes from ecclesiastical charities and churches that are represented here. How about having representatives from the churches involved at the beginning of this process when you're setting up the agenda, rather than consulting treasurers later on in the process?

Response from the Director of Finance, Mr Neil Williams

Thank you, Jonathan. I think it's a really good question because at the moment I'm just trying to discern how to put together a steering group which is a much smaller group, but then how do we effectively engage with everybody across the whole church and as you rightly say there'll be the intention to have those formal consultations with deanery synods as we did previously and also

need to think through how we get exactly that type of input because the more people we try to involve too early, it just makes it massive. So, it's trying to get the key issues that people want to discuss into those terms of reference. Certainly, my view and expectation on that is that it will not be a narrow review; it'll be a review looking at all the different options, the different models and then to try to understand from different places. The challenge always with the Diocese of Exeter is its diversity both of size and churchmanship, cities, market towns, rural, and how do we have a system that we all feel we can buy into that will work. I'm very happy to engage with anybody in terms of how we shape that question so that we get those different insights and to familiarize ourselves with how models work in different places, so that we can understand how it would work if we were to do something different here but we're absolutely looking to hear from as many people as possible

Mr. Jonathan Porter-Goff (Christianity) to ask the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance

'Context for this question: draft minutes of Meeting of diocesan Synod (October 2025), Item 7 page 5: 'Concern was also expressed about the nature of the relationship between the Diocesan Board of Finance and the PCCs in the Diocese, which were discrete charities with their own objects; it was suggested that serious consideration be given to the responsibilities of charity trustees if they thought that the charities' objectives were insufficiently aligned'.

I assume that the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance (Charity no. 249798) agrees that it is a charity's trustees who are responsible for ensuring that *their* decisions are in line with *their* charity's objectives as registered with the Charity Commission. So, how in Exeter, can we model a new way of collaborative working between the DBF Charity and Church Charities (PCCs) to comply with the Charity Commission's guidance CC34, (which encourages charities to work together to improve efficiency and impact, provided trustees manage risks, maintain independent decision-making, and ensure the collaboration aligns with their charity's purposes)?'

Response from Mr. Giles Frampton, the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance

'I agree trustees of each charity are responsible for ensuring that their decisions further their own charity's purposes, and that where charities collaborate they must do so in a way that manages risk appropriately, preserves independent trustee decision-making, and remains aligned with their charitable purposes (as reflected in Charity Commission guidance such as CC34).

You ask how in Exeter, can we model a new way of collaborative working between the DBF and PCCs. This presupposes the current arrangements are not working. I do not accept that to be the case. There have been, are, and, no doubt, will be differences of opinion but that does not mean the system has broken down.

In Exeter, as in other dioceses, collaboration between the EDBF charity and PCC/JCC charities is modelled through the synodical system and deanery/mission community/parish structures, which enable diocesan-wide engagement, consultation and shared decision-making.

A practical proxy for the effectiveness of that collaborative working is the Common Fund itself. In 2025 EDBF received 93.6% of the amount requested, 85% of parishes making their full contribution - evidence of broad participation across the Diocese as a whole, albeit recognising that there will naturally be a range of views and circumstances.

It is of course, important to keep the relationship between EDBF and PCCs at the forefront of our Christian Journey on the road together. Looking ahead, the planned Common Fund review (from autumn 2026) will provide an opportunity to consider whether there are additional ways to strengthen collaborative working further - while maintaining trustee independence and ensuring that any collaboration remains properly governed and aligned with each charity's purposes - before any recommendations are brought forward through the normal governance channels.'

EDBF Objects

'The objects of the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance are to advance the religious and other charitable work of the Church in the Diocese.' (paragraph 7 of the Articles of Association)

PCC Objects

Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956, section 2 states:

'2. The functions of parochial church councils shall include:

- (a) co-operation with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical;
- (b) the consideration and discussions of matters concerning the Church of England or any other matters of religious or public interest, but not the declaration of the doctrine of the Church on any question;
- (c) making known and putting into effect any provision made by the diocesan synod or the deanery synod, but without prejudice to the powers of the council on any particular matter;
- (d) giving advice to the diocesan synod and the deanery synod on any matter referred to the council;
- (e) raising such matters as the council consider appropriate with the diocesan synod or deanery synod
- (f) appointing sidesmen (who are also known as assistants to the churchwardens).

Mr. Tim Hamilton (General Synod) to ask the Diocesan Secretary

‘During the General Synod election for the House of Laity in 2021, the Diocese had to request legal advice from Stephens Scown LLP regarding emails sent by candidates to all lay electors and between other candidates. How much did this legal advice cost the diocese, what did the legal advice state and what further guidance was communicated to all lay candidates?’

Response from Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary

‘During the 2021 election for the House of Laity, the Presiding Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer became aware of email correspondence circulating between candidates which raised concerns about the risk of unfair prejudice and/or defamation. Guidance was issued to candidates by reference to the national election guidance, including (among other points) that hustings are not regulated by the election rules, that online facilities should be moderated to avoid unfair prejudice/defamation, and that the presiding officer can require changes to an election address only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. if defamatory or otherwise unlawful).

The Diocesan Registrar was kept informed at the time given the possibility of formal defamation allegations arising from the content of the emails. Any costs associated with registrar input sat within the registrar’s paid retainer.’

Mr. Tim Hamilton (General Synod) to ask the Diocesan Secretary

‘During a lay election in 2024, emails were shared with electors that breached General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). As a data controller, how is the Diocese of Exeter compliant with the Data Protection Act 2014 and what GPDR safeguards does it have in place to protect users’ private data?’

Response from Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary

‘The relevant UK legislation is the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 (not the Data Protection Act 2014). The Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance Limited (EDBF) is the data controller for the personal data it processes; the Diocese’s Data Protection Policy and associated Privacy Notice set out the basis on which personal data is processed, including data processed for elections under the Church Representation Rules and related election rules.

In relation to the 2024 matter referenced: this was not a personal data breach by or on behalf of EDBF. The matter was raised with diocesan officers; no formal complaint was received. Following this incident, officers offered to work with others on voluntary protocols for election conduct. That work has been incorporated into a diocesan code of conduct for elections, which is being brought to this meeting of Diocesan Synod for approval.

Further details of how the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance complies with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 can be found at <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/data-protection/> ‘

Dr. Francis Sansbury (Christianity) to ask the Bishop of Exeter

'General Synod has voted to bring the LLF (Living in Love and Faith) programme to an end. You have indicated (e.g. in a November 2023 statement from you and other bishops) that you regard issues of same sex marriage and sexual intimacy as adiaphora – matters of indifference - and not as a credal issue. For some, including me, who hold to the traditional and plain reading of scripture, they cannot be adiaphora, nor can fornication, adultery or any of the other issues such as greed to which 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 refers be adiaphora. My question though is that if these issues were adiaphora and not a credal issue, then why does not 1 Corinthians 8 apply? If these issues were not sin, but the weaker brother regards them as sin, is it not incumbent upon those who would consider them not to be sin (who have "knowledge") to give way to their weaker brethren, and not press ahead with seeking to change the traditional doctrine of the church, which developed in a time no less sexually licentious than our own? I would be grateful please for an explanation that is clear, including to neurodiverse believers like me.'

Response from the Bishop of Exeter, the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison

'I do not recognise the description of my position in the question that is asked here. Nowhere have I said or written that matters of sexual intimacy are matters of indifference or adiaphora and neither is it the case that I regard fornication, adultery or any other matters such as greed as adiaphora. Anyone who has attended my Bishop's teaching mornings on the Sermon on the Mount (in Barnstaple, Exeter and Plymouth) will know this. Anyone who listens to the vlogs I have been recording reflecting on the New Testament weekly for the past ten years will know this (see my Facebook history!). Anyone who read the 2023 Statement referred to in the question will know this. That statement nowhere describes sexual intimacy as adiaphora. For the avoidance of doubt I attach the contents of that letter below.

I fear that the question makes the false presumption that those who are regarded as "progressive" on the matter of same sex marriage are ethically laissez-faire across the board, which is simply untrue. Neither are those holding such a position to be caricatured as neglecting the authority of scripture or a number of other caricatures. (And to be even-handed "conservatives" have also been wrongly caricatured, as for example being "Homophobic"). Rather through consideration of the scriptural texts Christians have come to different conclusions regarding what is and is not being said about same sex relationships (see the discussion in *Living in Love and Faith* (CHP 2020) pp 273-309 for an introductory overview of different approaches and interpretations of some of the biblical material). For some of us the conclusion we reach is that what is needed is the opportunity for gay people to have faithful, monogamous, stable covenanted relationships – not overturning the institution of marriage and the family for an 'anything goes' approach to sexual ethics but actually affirming marriage by extending its goods to same-sex couples.

For the avoidance of doubt can I reiterate that matters of sexual intimacy are NOT adiaphora on my understanding.'

The letter to the Church Times of Nov 2023:

We write to reaffirm our commitment to the Living in Love and Faith process in light of the motion passed at General Synod in February this year, by which the General Synod agreed to lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQIA+ people, commended

our continued learning together and looked forward to the House of Bishops further refining, commending and issuing the Prayers of Love and Faith, such that the final version should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.

We are writing this statement following the publication of the paper GS2328 ahead of the November General Synod. We wish to convey something more of our commitment as members of the House and the College, firmly set within our calling as bishops to be ‘shepherds of Christ’s flock and guardians of the faith of the apostles, proclaiming the gospel of God’s kingdom and leading God’s people in mission.’

We rejoice that we have agreed to commend the Prayers of Love and Faith, and warmly support their use. Many of us regret that the authorisation of the separate Service Structures and Sample Services has been delayed, and we will work within agreed processes to secure that authorisation as soon as possible.

We recognise the complexities of the Pastoral Guidance in relation to ministry, and also the need for a swift end to the current uncertainty for LGBTQIA+ clergy and ordinands. We look forward to Guidance being issued without delay that includes the removal of all restrictions on clergy entering same-sex civil marriages, and on bishops ordaining and licensing such clergy, as well as granting permissions to officiate.

We are seeking together to make pastoral provision in a time of uncertainty, deeply aware that this direction of travel, which has been the increasingly pastoral and inclusive response of many in the Church of England over many years, is not accepted by some of our brother and sister bishops, clergy and laity in the Church. As members together of the Body of Christ we are all summoned to witness to God’s love and to work for the coming of God’s kingdom, serving Christ together within the Church, and for the sake of God’s world, committed to living and sharing the gospel of Christ. We know that we will not all agree, but it is our longing that we will find a way that will recognise and honour our different perspectives and the gift we are to each other within the life of the Church of England, such that no one is expected to act against their conscience or theological conviction.

In all of this we long for the day when LGBTQIA+ people will know themselves to be unquestionably included in the life and all ministries of our Church, and the contributions of each one of us fully accepted and celebrated as simply the offering of a fellow Christian. The Lord calls us all to serve and to witness to the God in whose image each of us is made and it is through God’s grace we are all called, together, ‘to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ’ (Eph. 4.13).

Signed:

The Bishop of Aston and Acting Bishop of Birmingham, Anne Hollinghurst

The Bishop of Barking, Lynne Cullens

The Bishop of Bedford, Richard Atkinson

The Bishop of Birkenhead, Julie Conalty

The Bishop of Bristol, Vivienne Faulk

The Bishop of Buckingham, Alan Wilson

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Guli Francis-Dehqani

The Bishop of Colchester, Roger Morris

The Bishop of Crediton and Acting Bishop of Exeter, Jackie Searle

The Bishop of Croydon, Rosemarie Mallett

The Bishop of Derby, Libby Lane
The Bishop of Dorchester, Gavin Collins
The Bishop of Dudley, Martin Gorick
The Bishop of Dunwich, Mike Harrison
The Bishop in Europe, David Hamid
The Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek
The Bishop of Grantham, Nicholas Chamberlain
The Bishop of Huddersfield, Smitha Prasad
The Bishop of Huntingdon and Acting Bishop of Ely, Dagmar Winter
The Bishop of Lincoln, Stephen Conway
The Bishop of Lichfield, Michael Ipgrave
The Bishop of Liverpool, John Perumbalath
The Bishop of Lynn, Jane Steen
The Bishop of Kingston, Martin Gainsborough
The Bishop of Kirkstall, Arun Arora
The Bishop of Manchester, David Walker
The Bishop of Middleton, Mark Davies
The Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher
The Bishop of Oxford, Steven Croft
The Bishop of Portsmouth, Jonathan Frost
The Bishop of Ramsbury, Andrew Rumsey
The Bishop of Reading, Olivia Graham
The Bishop of Ripon, Anna Eltringham
The Bishop of Salisbury, Stephen Lake
The Bishop of Sherborne, Karen Gorham
The Bishop of Shrewsbury, Sarah Bullock
The Bishop of Southwark, Christopher Chessun
The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Martin Seeley
The Bishop of Stafford, Matthew Parker
The Bishop of Stepney, Joanne Grenfell
The Bishop of Taunton and Acting Bishop of Coventry, Ruth Worsley
The Bishop of Tewkesbury, Robert Springett
The Bishop of Thetford, Ian Bishop
The Bishop of Worcester, John Inge

Supplementary question from Dr Francis Sansbury

Thank you very much for all your help but I'm not sure you have actually answered the question. You've explained what you do not think, but should there be a 'giving away', as it were, for the weaker brethren? Thank you

Response from the Bishop of Exeter, the Rt Revd Dr Mike Harrison

I think that I probably also struggle with your polarisation, and it is a polarisation of credal and adiaphora, because there are plenty of issues which are neither credal or adiaphora such as mission, such as the eucharist, such as eschatology and so on which are deeply serious matters; they are not credal in the sense that they are exhaustibly described in the Creed, but are

certainly not matters of indifference. I suspect if I am to get a handle on what you mean, we're going to have to have a further conversation.

Dr. Francis Sansbury (Christianity) to ask the Bishop of Exeter

'General Synod has voted to bring the LLF (Living in Love and Faith) programme to an end, and as part of that vote, "to commend the House of Bishops' proposal to establish a Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group and Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Pastoral Consultative Group." General Synod at an earlier meeting voted not to acknowledge in the motions it passed (by rejecting an amendment from Ed Shaw) that there are some people and churches for whom in conscience some of the issues raised by LLF are not matters on which we can simply agree to disagree (i.e. are not adiaphora), even though such issues put people out of fellowship with one another. Please could you say firstly how you would aim to support Christians with such a conscience issue in your input to the Working Group and Pastoral Consultative Group, and secondly how you plan to support them in the diocese, including as we review Common Fund (noting that that giving is an expression of fellowship)?'

Response from the Bishop of Exeter, the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison

'Thank you for the question. I should clarify that I am not a member of the Working Group that the question mentions (as far as I know!) and that my input as such will be through the mechanisms of the House and College of Bishops and General Synod, as for many others. I would look to support those for whom "we cannot agree to disagree", whether they are of a "progressive" or "conservative" persuasion to ensure their views have representation within the working group. Within the diocese I would support them as I have endeavoured to support those across the whole spectrum of views on these matters, again by looking to ensure representation and proper hearings and understanding of the different perspectives, without caricature or misrepresentation.

In terms of the Review of Common Fund, I would support the agreed statement from the House of Bishops in January 2026 and part of GS 2426, namely in section 31 that *"A number of parishes have responded to the introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith and the prospect of further change by withdrawing from some diocesan events and worship and/or diverting or reducing parish share. We recognise such gestures of protest have been made in good conscience. However, at this point, we would together urge all parishes to uphold the call to worship and walk together, and to uphold the principles of mutual support and a common fund administered by and through dioceses into the future."*

The Revd. Graham Hamilton (Newton Abbot and General Synod) to ask the Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

‘How many faculty applications have been made, and whether granted or not, for replacing existing church heating systems with new boilers of the same kind (Gas/oil)? How many faculty applications have been made, and whether granted or not, for replacing existing church heating systems with electric systems such as heat pumps or under-pew heating?’

Response from Mr. John Scott, Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

‘Since 1st July 2022, when the Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules which required a Faculty for the like-for-like replacement of fossil fuel boilers came into effect, the DAC has advised on **five** fossil fuel boiler Faculty applications: one (received July 2022) has been granted by the Chancellor; one emergency Faculty has been granted for a time-limited installation; two applications are currently awaiting a DAC recommendation pending the receipt of further information; and one is at the public notice stage and awaiting submission to the Registrar.

Since 1st July 2022, the DAC has advised on **seventeen** Faculty applications for non-fossil fuel heating systems: twelve have been granted by the Chancellor; two are currently awaiting a DAC recommendation pending the receipt of further information; one is awaiting the Chancellor’s determination; one is awaiting submission to the Registrar; and one is currently with the Registrar.

Note: this does not include stand-alone heaters or underpew heating to post-1850 pews not deemed of historic interest, which are determined by the archdeacon under the List B procedure set out in the Schedule to the Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules, 2022.’

The Revd. Graham Hamilton (Newton Abbot and General Synod) to ask the Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

‘Has any research been done into the effectiveness ‘customer satisfaction’ of such new systems?’

Response from Mr. John Scott, Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

‘While the volunteer DAC specialist advisers and church buildings officers provide direct advice to parishes, research is not undertaken at a diocesan level. There is extensive material and information available from the national church [Net zero carbon church | The Church of England](#) and from Historic England for example [Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency - Historic England Advice Note 18 | Historic England](#).’