

EXETER DIOCESAN SYNOD

A meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Synod
held at St Matt's Church, Lower Summerlands, Exeter EX1 2LJ
on Saturday 21st March 2026 at 10.00

Minutes

Introductory worship led by the Revd. Preb. Ruth Frampton

The Bishop of Exeter, the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, in the chair

I. Apologies & Notices

Apologies were received from 6 members of the House of Laity and 12 members of the House of Clergy.

- The Revd Nicky Davies (Honiton) was welcomed to her first meeting, as was the Revd. Jon Holder, minister of Cranbrook, for item 5

2. To approve the minutes of meeting of 11th October 2025

Paper S/01/26

The Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter, introduced the draft minutes of the meeting held on 11th October.

The minutes were approved on a show of hands.

3. Presidential Address

The text of the Bishop of Exeter's address is available at [The Bishop of Exeter's Messages and Ad Clerums - Diocese of Exeter](#)

Chair of the House of Clergy in the chair

4. To receive information relating to Pray Grow Serve 2035 and to consider the implications arising from the Diocesan Investment Programme funding award

The Right Revd. James Grier, Bishop of Plymouth, informed members about the very significant progress that had been made since the last meeting, culminating in a grant being awarded to the Diocese of Exeter for up to £24m over six years. He paid tribute to all those involved who had worked tirelessly to support the submission of the application and noted that the Diocesan Vision and Strategy that underpinned the application was an explicit continuation of what was already in place. The funding therefore represented extra

capacity for what parishes and mission communities were already doing rather than a new direction of travel. Moreover, the 'Pray, Grow, Serve 2035' diocesan vision and strategy was conceptualised over 10 years and therefore the grant funding could only be expected to support activities that were a sub-set of the whole. The five key strategic interventions provided for in the application would support the delivery of the five diocesan priorities in the vision and strategy, but they did not represent the totality of the work that would be undertaken. However, in respect of the funded activities and the wider vision and strategy, both were multi-year, long term programmes; it was not the case that everything had to be delivered in all places at the same time or indeed at the start of the period. Quantitative metrics and targets were an essential component of the application and indeed the application would not have been approved without them; in some ways though the most important thing about them was not the specific numbers but the intentionality to change and grow that they represented.

Members then participated in an extended time of engagement within a 'call to action' framework, following a process through that started with prayer and moved through exploration, discernment, discussion to experimentation. They were asked to adopt an 'appreciative enquiry' approach, identifying and valuing existing initiatives and considering how they could be improved. Local examples from parishes and mission communities around the Diocese were shared and it was noted that the key characteristics included a clear intention to build relationships and then to work with the opportunities that emerged as a result; many did not need significant direct financial support but all required time to be invested consistently in people. Sometimes a programme or branded initiative could assist with providing a point of focus in order to attract people's interest and create the opportunity for contact, but engagement was sustained relationally and by seeking to meet people's needs as they identified them.

In plenary discussion it was noted that a range of communications materials had been produced and these would continue to be updated and expanded as needed. This would include a template for discussion that could be used in deaneries that would follow a similar process to the one developed for this meeting. Concerns were expressed that the strategy might be received and experienced as 'more things for already busy people to have to do'; it was noted that there was a specific focus in both the strategy and the leadership development pathway on releasing spiritual vitality (including through discernment and prioritisation) before increasing community activity and engagement. Moreover, depending on the context, an increase in capacity might emerge from within the church community or outside.

In terms of reporting on progress, it was noted that a wide range of metrics would be tracked and communicated proportionately. The Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board required frequent and detailed reports; internal governance bodies, including the Bishop's Council and the Synod could not be expected to engage with all of the detail but could nevertheless receive regular updates. It was acknowledged that not all of the strategic interventions would be successful and that learning from things that did not work as hoped was part of the learning process.

Specifically with reference to the City of Plymouth, it was noted that the SMMIB had been very clear during the drafting of the funding application that they were expecting to receive proposals directly to address the relatively low Church of England participation rates in the city. In the end, about 30% of the funding awarded related to Plymouth, which was home to about 22% of the Diocese's population. In this context it was noted that Plymouth currently had the lowest per capita expenditure on stipends in the Diocese as well as the lowest per capita participation. This challenge had received national recognition and was part of the reason why the overall grant funding was set at the relatively high level that it was.

The Bishop of Exeter in the chair

5. To receive a verbal report from Cranbrook Church

The Right Revd. Moira Astin, Bishop of Crediton, introduced the Revd. Jon Holder, Minister for Cranbrook, and noted that the DBF Executive had recently taken the decision to release capital assets to enable the building of a church in the new town of Cranbrook. This was a significant milestone in the life of an ecumenical missional project that been established for the best part of 20 years and that represented a very significant strategic investment into a community that would grow to around 20,000 people once fully developed. There were other funding parties also committed to the process and opportunities were being identified to seek grant funding in addition.

The Revd. Jon Holder then described the development of the Church in Cranbrook, an ecumenical project (partnering with the Methodist District and the URC Synod) that had served Cranbrook since its inception. For the most part it had operated in and through the first primary school in the town, which had a Church of England foundation. It's life and work had been shaped by the demographics of the community (a very high proportion of young children and their parents, as well as a high percentage of affordable housing) and also by the relative lack of facilities provided in the town. As the church community had grown and gained capacity it had increased in its ability to offer hospitality, service and care to the community at large. This had created a virtuous cycle as some of the people who had benefited from the service provided had, through nurturing and relationship building, felt able to join the church and then increase the service offered to the community. That said, the level of activity was such that the major constraint on growth was the lack of a suitable facility, particularly one that was available to be used at all times of day throughout the week. Constructing a church building was the next logical step in developing the worshipping, witnessing, serving life of the church.

Mr. Holder then described the sort of facility that had emerged from the design process and how it was hoped it would physically embody the nature of the church community it is welcome and invitational attitude.

6. To approve a Diocesan Code of Conduct for Elections

Dr. Kerry Gilbert, Chair of the House of Laity, and the Revd. Preb. Mike Partridge, Chair of the House of Clergy, introduced the draft Code of Conduct for Diocesan Elections. They noted that it was aimed primarily at the elections to the General Synod in the summer of 2026 with the intention, informed by previous experience, of helping electors and candidates to engage constructively in the process. The code was structured through the lens of the five diocesan values and reflected aspects of the General Synod's code of conduct and also the Nolan principles in public life. The aspiration was for the Synod to 'own' the document in word and action, to draw a line under past difficulties, and to commit to its implementation at a personal as well as a collective level.

In discussion support was expressed for the code and there was a recognition that a fresh start would be beneficial. It was suggested that although framed primarily in terms of the elections to General Synod (and also motivated by them) the code was generally applicable to all elections held in a diocesan context. It would therefore be helpful for the framing to be inclusive of General Synod elections and also elections to the Diocesan Synod and related boards and committees, and also to the elections of Chairs of bodies as appropriate.

The Diocesan Code of Conduct for Elections was approved (subject to the agreed amendments) on a show of hands.

7. To receive a report from General Synod

Paper S/03/26

The Revd Preb Rosie Austin and Dr. Vivien Southall introduced their report from the February 2026 Group of Sessions of the General Synod. They noted that the synod sat for around 10 hours a day and that in addition there were further opportunities to engage in fringe and other network meetings. The agenda was varied, ranging from the motion on sustainable church flowers, which had emerged from a PCC and progressed through its deanery and diocesan synod before reaching the General Synod, to debates that touched on the relationship between the established Church of England and the state, in the form of the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament. The core work of the Synod was centred around set piece debates but arguably some of the more interesting and enriching elements could sometimes be found in ancillary events (for example on rural issues, which had been hosted in the House of Lords).

In discussion the prominence on the agenda of the working through of the Living in Love and Faith process was noted. The Synod had reached a final conclusion with almost a two-thirds majority in all three houses in favour of concluding the current phase of the process, and re-commencing consideration during the next quinquennium. It was noted that the motion on sustainable church flowers had provoked a range of reactions with some supportive of the principles involved, others pleased that a motion that had started with a PCC had made it to the General Synod, and still others feeling that the subject matter was of relatively little importance compared to the weightier issues that were being, or could have been, discussed. A motion to close had been proposed and rejected, so clearly Synod

members thought that it was worth the investment of time and effort to consider the issues involved.

8. Questions

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

Deemed Items

9. To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Board of Education Committee

Paper S/04/26

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

Paper S/05/26

11. To receive the annual report on the implementation of the Diocesan Racial Justice Strategy

Paper S/06/26

12. To receive meeting dates for Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Diocesan Council for 2027

Paper S/07/26