



BIRMINGHAM DIOCESAN SYNOD (DS)

Saturday 15 March 2025 at 9.30am
The Trinity Centre, Church Hill, Mill Street, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1TF

MINUTES

1. Prayers and Welcome

Prayers and worship were led by the Revd Canon Becky Stephens, Priest-in-Charge at Holy Trinity Parish Church.

2. Welcome to New People, Apologies and Previous Minutes

The Bishop was delighted to announce the appointment of the Revd Nathan Mulcock, Canon Precentor of St Philip's Cathedral.

The Bishop acknowledged the apologies given before the meeting. With one amendment received from the Revd Canon Catherine Grylls, Synod approved the Minutes of the previous meeting.

Attendance lists are attached to the Minutes.

RESOLUTION: The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS 251116

3. Bishop's Presidential Briefing

Bishop Michael gave his Presidential Briefing, a copy of which is attached to the Minutes.

4. Annual Report from the Diocesan Board of Education

Synod noted the report circulated before the session and a copy is attached to the Minutes.

Dean Matt, Chair of Diocesan Board of Education (DBE), reminded members that a requirement of the DBE Measure is to report to Diocesan Synod on an annual basis and that the four key functions of the DBE as laid out in the measure are as follows:

- to promote or assist in the **promotion of education in the diocese consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England;**
- to promote or assist in the **promotion of religious education and religious worship within church schools;**
- to promote or assist in the **promotion of church schools within the diocese,** and to **advise the governors and trustees** of church educational endowments and any other body or person concerned on any matter affecting church schools within the diocese;
- to promote **co-operation between the Board and bodies or persons concerned in any respect with education** within the diocese;

The board completed the third and final year of the 2022-2024 business plan and the following key priorities had been identified. Achievements against these priorities are outlined in the report.

- Key Priority 1: To strengthen governance in Birmingham Church schools
- Key Priority 2: Support and develop DBE Structural strategy re Academies and MATs
- Key Priority 3: To lead and support Schools in aiming for the Agreed net Zero Carbon output goal of 2030
- Key Priority 4: To develop strong partnerships between Church Schools and their parish Church
- Key Priority 5: To develop the Board of Education for its role in the future.

The DBE has been re-elected/appointed for the 2025-2027 triennium and the key areas of focus for its work is as follows:

- Key Priority 1: Delivering the responsibilities outlined in Measure 2021
- Key Priority 2: To develop and implement a strategy to support whole school flourishing
- Key Priority 3: To ensure the Diocesan Education team is structured to deliver against its core functions
- Key priority 4: To raise the profile of Schools mission and ministry to support wider Diocesan strategy

Mrs Sarah Smith, Diocesan Director of Education, focused on how the mission and ministry of schools can support the wider Diocesan strategy. It's about transformation and transforming lives through education. Young people need to leave school with the best education possible and the advantage the church schools offer is to introduce Jesus and to share the stories he told with children. For the last two years, emphasis has been given to claim back what church schools are for and this has challenged our schools. There are 52 church schools in Birmingham and 18,000 children that take part in a daily act of Christian worship. This is a wonderful opportunity to talk about Jesus and his radical ideas which are so relevant today. Sarah also referred to the annual Schools Senior Leaders Conference which had taken place on 7 March 2025. Hearing the gospel and how Jesus reaches out to their roles is the heart of the Diocesan Board of Education. The DBE walks alongside headteachers. They are supported through the SIAMS process and assistance is given relating to raising standards, HR, governance and Net Zero. Sarah stated that it was a privilege to work with our schools and to support the clergy who work with them.

Bishop Michael gave his thanks to Dean Matt, Sarah, The Education Team and the Diocesan Board of Education for all their work.

5. Report of the Proceedings of General Synod – February 2025

The Revd Emma Sykes, General Synod Representative, gave her thanks to Bishop Michael for sharing his script from General Synod with members of Synod before the session. A copy of Emma's report is attached to the Minutes.

Bishop Michael gave his thanks to Emma and to the General Synod Representatives for their work on behalf of Birmingham.

6. The Future of Safeguarding

Dr Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary, stated that safeguarding continues to be a high priority in the Church of England Birmingham. In February 2025, General Synod (GS) debated and voted on two proposed models (labelled 3 and 4) for independent safeguarding in the Church of England. GS Members approved a motion (amended) that endorses 'Model 3' for immediate implementation while further work is carried out on the potential for 'Model 4'. Both models are outlined in paper GS2378. It was noted that under model 3 Safeguarding staff in the diocese will continue be employed by their Diocesan Board of Finance, but national safeguarding staff will move to a new independent organisation.

A video was shown of the lead safeguarding bishop, Joanne Grenfell, endorsing Model 4 followed by General Synod Representative, the Revd Philip Calvert, speaking to Model 3.

The floor was opened for questions and comments.

Dean Matt noted the complexity of implementing either model. He had been involved in the implementation of IICSA 8 and we are only just beginning to see this being carried out.

The Revd Al Barrett (Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery) stated that according to his understanding, there was huge confidence in our Safeguarding professionals and the way they work but he felt that there was a question of trust in the Archbishops' Council to whom the National Safeguarding Team are accountable. Model 4 had been seeking to remove the hierarchal system, and he asked how trust was being addressed in diocesan bishops.

Bishop Michael stated that he had voted against Model 3.5 as he supported Model 4. This is not a statement about his confidence in our Diocesan Safeguarding Team who he acknowledged do an excellent job, but to show his own commitment to implementing as rigorous a safeguarding process as possible.

Mr Mark Temple (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) stated that he was unable to discern any urgency to address the crisis in the Church and that he would have liked to have seen some timelines. He raised a concern that taking action is what has failed in the Church England, and he asked if the constitution was fit for purpose.

Mr Adam Chinery-North (Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery) felt that Bishop Philip North had frustrated the process by bringing in Model 3.5 when there was such support for Model 4. He asked that we should be careful and observant and that those abusing their power should be called out.

The Revd Dr Katie Stock (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) raised a concern about the vocations process and protection from the National Church for those who make decisions at local level, without exposing the diocese to legal costs.

The Revd Mike Darbandi (Handsworth & Central Deanery) was encouraged to hear that we are travelling forward, however, he raised a concern that doubling down on safeguarding and a review of the Clergy Disciplinary Measure (CDM) had potential to create a hole for more safeguarding abuse. He asked how the two processes would play out together.

Mr Geoff Shuttleworth (Handsworth & Central Deanery) registered his disappointment with the decision not to opt for Model 4 and felt that this would not raise confidence in the Church. He had seen a lot of prayer for victims but not huge amounts of prayer for making it fit for purpose for the Church.

Canon Dr Andrew Smith, Director of Interfaith Relations, asked who would be responsible for setting up the external body and who would protect the guardians and make it safe.

Dr Adam Bennett (Warley & Edgbaston Deanery) referred to the Gantt chart in paper GS2738 which suggested that local safeguarding bodies would be reconfigured and have regulatory power, but legislation would not be implemented until 2027. He asked how this would work.

Dr Rachel Jepson declared her interest as a General Synod Representative for the House of Laity. She reminded Synod that those on General Synod are volunteers and are doing their best. The nature of sensitive subjects that cannot be shared publicly often makes things tricky and the media are quick to fill the vacuum that this creates; not everything shared on social media should be believed. Safeguarding is a huge subject that is on every General Synod agenda and having worked with Bishop Joanne and the national Safeguarding team, she had felt a real sense of urgency. It takes time to work on the detail so that everyone is treated in a fair and caring manner. Some of the narratives are historic and those situations would not happen now. She urged Synod to celebrate the good things that are happening as well as grappling with trying to move forward. She felt that, ultimately, we needed to be at Model 4 but in terms of moving forward, she had voted in favour of the amended motion for model 3.5.

Mr Guy Hordern, General Synod Representative, stated that he had deliberated long and hard on the issue. After receiving the written statement from Steph Haynes, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, and having spoken to her at considerable length, his deeper understanding led him to vote for the amended motion for model 3.5.

Dr Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary, reported that the process of implementing IICSA 1 and 8 (the recommendations from the 2019 enquiry) have begun and that the move from Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser to Diocesan Safeguarding Officer is quite fundamental as this will give DSOs independence from Bishops (previously they were advisors to the bishops). Acknowledging how long change takes in an organisation as complex as the Church of England, Jan said that the implementation of Model 3.5 now while continuing to consider Model 4 would be the quickest way to see significant change. Because of the legal complexities of Model 4, waiting to do anything until this can be implemented would slow down the whole process.

Bishop Michael also thanked Rachel for her role on Archbishops' Council and acknowledged the work undertaken by everyone as a volunteer. He reiterated that safeguarding is a significant priority for the Church of England Birmingham and appears as a standing item at Bishop's Staff meetings, Executive Group and Bishop's Council. There is a lot of energy being given to this subject but there is still a long way to go. He reassured members that we are moving in the right direction as quickly as we can, and he had full confidence in Bishop Joanne and her leadership in this area.

Bishop Michael stated that an excerpt of this item of the Minutes will be sent to Bishop Joanne, and an update would be brought back to a future Synod.

7. Living in Love and Faith – How do we live well together?

Bishop Michael introduced the session and asked members to gather into their deanery groups. Two facilitators were appointed per deanery, one lay and one clergy. Members were invited to have a general discussion around how we might live well together despite holding different views.

In order for everyone to have a safe conversation, members were asked to observe the following framework for engagement:

- The discussion is about how we can live well together as CofE Birmingham – not individual views on sexuality
- Everyone needs to have chance to be heard, not just the voice(s) of the loudest
- Contributions must be offered respectfully

- Personal or abusive comments will not be tolerated

The Revd Canon Barrie Scott, a chaplain with the LGBT+ Chaplaincy team was present in a pastoral role.

At the end of the discussion each group was invited to share one note of feedback to Synod as follows:

Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery: Be encouraged by the diversity of views, supporting one another and speak well of each other.

Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery: We can live together well when we behave respectfully, and it is important to have public honesty about our local practice (even though the playing field is not level).

Handsworth & Central Deanery: We acknowledge that love should be central to how we live and work together but as such we are still not in full agreement of what is essential in respect of our Christian faith and understanding.

Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery (Group 1): To live well together we need clarity and openness, graciously expressed, about both the process and the content.

Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery (Group 2): The dysfunctionality in national debates and disagreement is unhelpful – uncertainty is a problem.

Warley & Edgbaston Deanery: Offer more space at chapter and deanery synod meetings for talking and getting to know each other better and for prayer. The more this can happen the better we are able to cope with our differences.

Yardley & Solihull Deanery: Differences should not be underestimated, and it does not feel a safe space here.

Facilitators were asked to collate the feedback of all the points raised in each group and these will be summarised and shared with Synod members in due course.

8. Written Questions

8.1a Question from the Revd Dr Al Barrett, Coleshill & Polesworth Deanery

Over the last few years, many people across the CofEB have received excellent training in coaching, mentoring and pastoral supervision. What steps are being taken to ensure that these new skills are put to good use, that such training continues to be rolled out in a sustainable way, and that clergy and laity across the diocese are both aware of these support offers and encouraged to make use of them?

8.1b Response from the Revd Canon Dr Mark Pryce, Director of Ministry the Revd Mark Bennett, Ministry Development Lead (Clergy) and Mr Ben Franks, HR Director

Training in Coaching and Mentoring was funded by a National Church SDF grant as part of Pathways Leadership Learning to resource leadership undergirding People & Places.

Across the funding period 2020-2023 some 40 lay and ordained leaders from all 6 deaneries, together with DBF staff and all Area Deans, engaged in training in coaching skills supported by a Coaching Lead and 3D Coaching. In addition, all Curates were given an introduction to coaching. A small number with coaching skills are progressing to Qualified Coach proficiency.

A mentoring training programme was commissioned for Pathways and 40+ lay and ordained leaders engaged in mentoring skills training. Conversations are in place about further cohorts of mentoring training led by volunteer tutors.

SDF funding for this initiative is now completed. However, the coaching and mentoring skills continue to inform leadership practice across CofE Birmingham, including the formation and development of Oversight Ministers and other contexts.

As a response to the CofE Clergy Wellbeing Covenant, Reflective Pastoral Supervision has been introduced to build on existing supervision for Curates and Training Incumbents. RPS training is funded by a grant from St Martin's Trust to benefit the wellbeing of clergy in Incumbent, Oversight Minister and substantial SSM roles. In partnership with Wesley House Cambridge, 8 people are engaged in training in RPS skills, providing a support capacity for 32 supervisees. The Revd Magdalen Smith has recently been appointed to the role of Pastoral Supervision Lead to co-ordinate the ongoing work and development across 3 years. All supervisors and supervision lead are volunteers, receiving fully funded professional supervision of their practice. RPS is

introduced as a pilot programme, and we envisage that an application for further grant funding to develop additional supervisors will be sought in due course.

The Revd Al Barrett gave his thanks for the response.

8.2a Question from the Revd Emma Sykes, Aston & Sutton Coldfield Deanery and General Synod Representative

To help understand how Church Commissioners money has been used to support Church of England Birmingham Strategy please can you explain:

1. *How the existing allocation of Lowest Income Communities (LINC) Funding from the Church Commissioners has been used across the Diocese and the rationale behind the allocation.*
2. *Which parishes and oversight areas have benefitted from Strategic Development Funding since 2020.*
3. *Which parishes and oversight areas are currently being approached to submit projects towards the current Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP) due to be submitted in May 2025.*

8.2b Response from Dr Jan Smart, Diocesan Secretary

1. LinC is an annual sum granted by the National Church to support ministry and mission in the most economically deprived dioceses. Birmingham has received, on average, £1.9m per annum in LinC. It is used to support our most deprived parishes (based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation) where otherwise ministry could not be afforded. It is allocated by looking at the ministry costs of the parishes with the highest IMD and covering the gap between the common fund and the cost of ministry. As a measure of our relative deprivation, it should be noted that over 60% of Birmingham parishes are in the 20% most economically deprived (according to IMD ranking) in the country.
2. Strategic Development Funding (SDF) has provided resources which have been made available to benefit all parishes and Oversight Areas. For example:
 - Full-time Area Deans and Deanery Support Officers supporting all Oversight Areas and parishes in each Deanery
 - Pathways learning including Curates, Readers, Youth (Flex) and Children's Leaders
 - Coaching and Mentoring
 - Oversight Area Formation facilitation for all newly formed Oversight Areas
 - Oversight Area Mission Planning (leading to the resourcing of mission plans)
 - Oversight Minister training
 - Generous Giving
 - Intercultural material has been developed and made available to all parishes.

Other elements of the funding have been used to benefit groups of parishes. For example:

- Anglo Catholic Missioner project is supporting 5 parishes
- CFMs were allocated to one parish per deanery with a wider deanery focus to every role
- Safe Spaces are being established in 9 parishes and 23 adult volunteers trained
- HR Parish Support has been provided to most employing parishes
- 18 parishes received the full Bookkeeping service and a further 10 have benefitted from a discount in using associated external data input services.
- The Parish Buildings Surveyors have had 243 separate contacts with parishes to enable support.
- 8 different parishes have been supported to start fresh expressions in this period.
- Establishment of a Church Army Centre of Mission in a particular parish.

SDF also funded some larger mission projects such as Church Planting/Revitalisation (for example Bearwood St Mary, Pype Hayes, St John Longbridge, St Mary St Ambrose Edgbaston, Summerfield, Gas Street South).

Over 2/3 of the funding has been used for diocesan-wide support and initiatives with only 1/3 for specific parish focussed church plants or revitalisations.

In addition, it is important to remember National Church Funding has also provided us, from funds other than the SDF, with resources for Net Zero project management, Buildings for Mission (several parishes are benefitting from quick wins funding and other funds for net zero work) Racial Justice collaboration, strategic ministry funding for curates and funding towards an incumbent's post at Allen's Cross where none was previously budgeted for.

3. The next bid due to be submitted in May 2025 continues the strategic journey of growing churches at the heart of each community, with the themes of:
- Structure and Culture Change (The ongoing formation of Oversight Areas and Oversight Ministry)
 - Church Planting and Revitalisations – opportunities for planting/revitalisation present through an understanding of different contexts and identifying gaps (such as rural, urban, different traditions) and also through parishes expressing interest in these processes and working with the Mission Support Team and Archdeacons on the plans. It should be noted that the new approach to working in partnership with the National Church means we are looking over a broad 9 year horizon with detailed plans for only the first 3 to 6 years.
 - Parish Growth – All parishes in Oversight Areas have the opportunity to work on Oversight Area Mission Plans and the new bid is seeking funding to support the plans that arise. There are also funds being requested for tried and tested projects such as Launchpad
 - Financial Sustainability – a diocesan wide approach to rebuilding our baseline platform for growth to deliver a sustainable CofE Birmingham in the next 10 years. As this rolls out, every parish will be involved in conversations about sustainability. There is also a major element of funding being requested to cover (in a tapered way) our operating deficit over the next few years to allow us to release our own Mission Fund for missional activities.

The Revd Emma Sykes gave her thanks for the full response; however, she asked which parishes relating to point 2 had received the funding, how had the money been distributed and how had learning been shared? Jan responded that she would be happy to provide a list of parishes who had received funding. In terms of learning, when funding is received from the National Church, reports are provided which feed into the national learning and inform future work.

8.3a Question from the Revd Claire Turner, Kings Norton, Moseley & Shirley Deanery

In November 2024, Synod received a Strategy Update which reported that our current diocesan priorities (growth, structural change and sustainability) will form the basis of a detailed, 10-year funding bid to the national church. What specific programmes, projects and initiatives form the basis of this bid, how have these things been discerned and what outcomes and outputs are we promising in return for the hoped-for investment?

8.3b Response from Andy Winmill, Director of Mission Support and Steve Cook, Director of Strategic Transformation

What's in the bid?

Diocesan colleagues are finalising an application for funding from the national church. Proposed elements will be approved through the Bishops, Archdeacons and senior team and then presented in preliminary form to colleagues from the national church therefore the detail may change but at present the following components are included:

- Oversight Area accompaniment for Mission & Discipleship
- Developing 'Celebrating Disciples' to amplify local stories
- Microgrants for local mission
- Resources to support mission and new worshipping communities in schools
- Safe Spaces for Young People (open access youth provision) with discipleship pathways
- Training and coaching to develop good quality youth and children's work
- Initiatives such as a possible Mission Apprentice scheme to develop local leaders and increase local capacity
- Funding to plant or revitalise more churches (details outworked at local level)
- Increased, fixed term, diocesan capacity to support this process of growth
- Investment to address our current structural deficit, and protect our local mission fund, while we seek to grow

Some context regarding the funding:

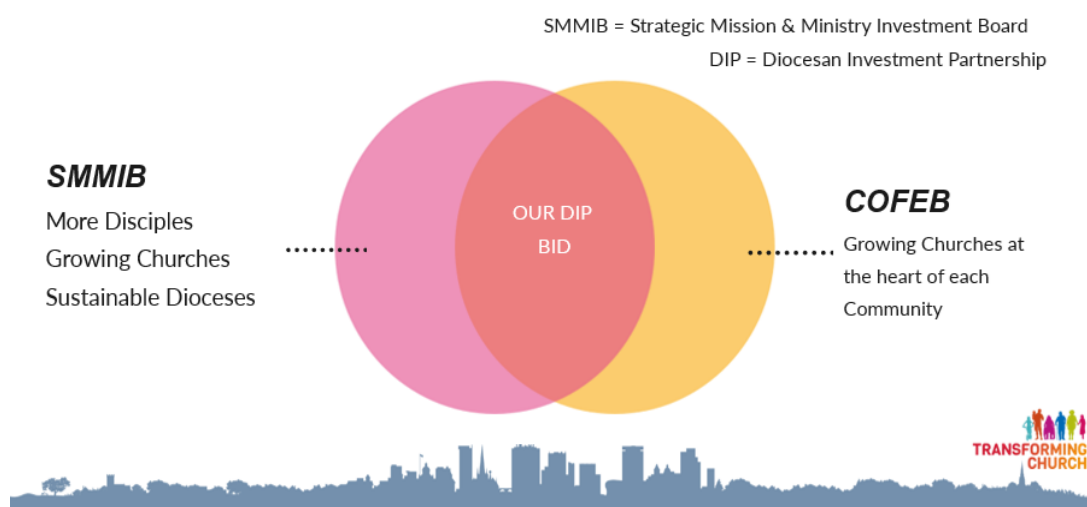
Aside from specific initiatives including Racial Justice, the Environment and Housing the national church has reorganised its approach to funding through the formation of a Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). They in turn administer a fund called the Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP) SMMIB have set key priorities for DIP which we understand locally as:

1. More Disciples
2. Growing Churches
3. Financially Sustainable Dioceses

Rather than applying for individual projects we have been invited to apply for funds that support the development of our longer term strategy where it is in keeping with SMMIB priorities and geared towards activity that is seen as tried and tested (i.e. evidence within Birmingham or beyond that the particular approach is effective) but with some provision for new ideas and initiatives. This is illustrated through the Venn diagram below: how can we ensure that we are led by God rather than funding and how do we identify useful overlaps between national priorities and local vision?

Due to our financial situation, and the encouragement of SMMIB, we are committed to submitting an application to the June Board (unless changes in the national church affect this). This means all documents being submitted at the start of May. This is a very tight timescale and our approach reflects this.

DIOCESAN BID



How have we discerned our approach?

As Church of England Birmingham we continue to express our Transforming Church vision of 'Growing Churches at the Heart of Each Community' and build on the Oversight Area structure and culture that has been developed through People & Places. A strategic review, begun by Bishop David and taken forward by Bishop Michael, has set our strategic focus for this season to increase the number of disciples.

Missionally, this is growing out of local conversations through Area Deans, through Oversight Area mission planning, and through Archdeacons. This has informed the work of the Archdeaconry Change Boards and the Executive Strategic Change Board (made up of Bishops, Archdeacons, Diocesan Secretary, The Dean, The Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, Directors of Ministry, Mission and Strategic Transformation) which is chaired by Bishop Michael and operates with delegated authority from Bishop's Council.

Guiding questions have included:

- Which churches are in a position to support others?
- Which churches would benefit from and welcome external leadership and support?
- Where are there areas of population that might benefit from a fresh expression of church?

Many of the initiatives within the bid are now well-developed while others are more embryonic. The 'tried and tested' parameter within DIP means that a Church Planting & Revitalisation approach will be more readily understood and supported by the funder. In this type of mission, we have looked for churches who have the vision and desire to work in this way and the willingness to release a team from their congregation to begin something new. Over the next decade we want to expand the range of churches that are involved in church planting and revitalisation activity.

One of the principles of the Mission Support team is that mission is primarily local. We are seeking resource to provide sufficient capacity to support parish and oversight area activity in a coherent way that can assist local leaders in mission, discipleship and Growing Younger.

Working towards financial sustainability, we have responded to the offer of support through DIP to address a structural deficit while we seek to grow and to more strategically deploy Low Income Community Funding to support the cost of ministry in economically deprived areas. We are developing a holistic project, with a range of stakeholders, the aim being to engage with every parish to explore ways to move us together to a sustainable financial position.

Outputs & Outcomes

A concern has been expressed that we will become loaded with unrealistic targets that burden our parishes and oversight areas. All parish and oversight area initiatives are developed through local consultation and mission planning with the Director of Mission Support and Archdeacons checking that the agreed outputs and outcomes are viable. The relevant PCC(s) sign off on the agreed plans.

We want to be a blessing in every parish and we want to see the church grow through people coming to faith in God and through all of us deepening in discipleship. We hold this alongside Bishop Michael's consistently expressed commitment to the diversity of parishes in Church of England Birmingham, to having a recognisably Anglican ecclesiology, to discerning where the Spirit is at work, and to encouraging small as well as large initiatives.

We acknowledge that DIP is not everything but is useful in helping us grow healthily and appropriately. DIP cannot fund every parish or every initiative, but neither is it the only source of resource. While avoiding being driven by finances, we do need to build sufficient financial capacity of our own to enable us over time to be able to prayerfully discern how God might be leading us and have the resources to express this without relying solely on external funding that necessarily comes with conditions.

Investing *somewhere* is not in opposition to what God is doing *elsewhere*. Investment *anywhere* in the diocese is intended to build up the long-term resources of CofEB so that we can, in time, resource mission *everywhere*.

The Revd Claire Turner gave her thanks for the full response; however, she wanted to stress that she was not 'anti-strategy', or 'anti-bid' and she recognised that over the years, Rubery had received financial support and resources from what was the SDF. She expressed her frustration that offers of help and support from DBF staff was not what was needed and her concern that her parish had not been asked what it needed during the bid preparation. . She believed that 'buy in' necessitates consultation but she was increasingly concerned that consultation is not written in to our process leaving us with something that can be experienced as very 'top down'.

Andy Winmill responded that for bidding purposes, the challenge was identifying areas that lay within the overlap of both our priorities and those of the National Church. Andy gave his reassurance that decisions were being made in good faith, with conversation and with a holistic approach to mission and discipleship.

Bishop Michael added that he had visited Kings Norton, Moseley and Shirley deanery and had reassured deanery members that the CofEB is committed to offering more to parishes. There is a vision to grow, and there is a strategy to enable that to happen. The National Church have money available for funding and there is an opportunity bid for some of that funding, however, priorities need to aligned with the priorities of the National Church and therefore, a strategy is required that will enable us to get some funding within the diocese. He reiterated that this was just one sliver of what is happening in the CofEB and hopefully there would be more funding opportunities going forward. Bishop Michael understood the frustrations but gave his reassurance that they were invested in the Kingdom of God in Birmingham. He asked for prayers and hoped that we would move together well.

9. Meeting Dates 2025 followed by The Blessing

Members of the Diocesan Synod noted the meeting dates for 2025:

Saturday 28 June 2025 at 9.30am

Saturday 15 November 2025 at 9.30am

On behalf of Diocesan Synod, Bishop Michael thanked the Revd Canon Becky Stephens and members of Holy Trinity, Sutton Coldfield for hosting the meeting.

Synod adjourned at 1pm with prayers led by Bishop Michael followed by the Blessing.

Summary of Resolutions

Agenda Item	Resolution
2.	The Diocesan Synod approved the Minutes of DS241116

Diocesan Synod Presidential Address
15 March 2025
Rt Rev Dr Michael Volland, Bishop of Birmingham

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.” He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!’ (Luke 13: 31-33)

So opens the gospel reading for tomorrow, the second Sunday in Lent.

As we travel through Lent together it is good to reflect on Jesus’ example of **absolute focus** on the work to which God had called him. Jesus didn’t allow fear or anxiety about Herod’s hostile plans to trouble his heart, cloud his vision or distract from his purpose. He was focused on offering powerful signs of the coming kingdom of God and on arriving in Jerusalem where he offered up his life for the salvation of the world.

This example of clarity of calling and single-minded pursuit of God’s purposes has the power to encourage and release us. Jesus’ focus is a living inspiration as we offer ministry in the parishes in which God has placed us.

As we gather, we are acutely aware of the historic failings of the Church of England in relation to **safeguarding**. We lament the ways in which the church has failed to be welcoming to victims and survivors of abuse and the harm they have experienced and continue to experience in the church. We acknowledge that victims and survivors of abuse are present in this synod. We want to believe that efforts really are being made to make the church safer for all. We all know there is a great deal to do and a long way to go.

I commit myself and Church of England Birmingham to ensuring the church is – and is seen to be – a place of safety and flourishing for all. In the coming months and years, as work is undertaken locally and nationally to implement the decisions about safeguarding taken at the February General Synod, we will play our part with focus and energy. We will be single-minded, as Jesus was, in our determination to reach our destination and achieve our purpose of demonstrating the love of God by being a church that has done the hard work and practices what it preaches.

Another area in which the church locally and nationally is called to retain its focus, as we see Jesus doing in Luke’s gospel, is in relation to our journey with **Living in Love and Faith (LLF)**. As a church, we have spent many years thinking, praying and sharing about what it means to be human, to be sexual, and to be made for relationship. We have sought to understand what the bible has to say to us and to live individually and together in a way that honours God and reflects his love and purposes for our lives.

There has been much to give thanks for in the LLF journey. There has also been a lot of pain and frustration and disappointment. We have all heard the various arguments and

points of view. And the fact is, some of us have one understanding, others of us think differently, and yet others hold another view. We do not agree. In fact, our disagreements are profound and, in many cases, simply unreconcilable. It is not the first time Christians have disagreed and it absolutely will not be the last. The question now is, what do we *do* about our disagreement? *How* do we proceed, and on *what* basis? Equally as important, as I said when I arrived over a year ago,

Considering these differences and disagreements, the way we choose to live together as co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17) and to obey Christ's command to 'love each other as I have loved you' (John 15: 12) is the heart of the matter for us.

We disagree. But as Christians and as Anglicans we are called to witness to Christ in the way we live together. I don't believe we have any choice but to acknowledge our deep differences and to commit ourselves to seeking to discern ways of living well together. That is why, at today's Diocesan Synod, we have planned to spend some time considering the question, **'How can we live well together?'**

If your answer, whatever your view, is, *'I simply cannot live well with those whose understanding is different to mine on this matter'*, then, shared with gentleness and compassion, this is a view that needs to be expressed. There is no point in us shying away from saying difficult things to one another. Although in all our listening, speaking and acting, we are obliged to consider deeply the example and character of Jesus Christ, the one whose name we bear and to whom we are committed to witnessing.

Notice that the question is not, **'How can we have unity?'** Of course, as followers of Jesus we are united in our baptism. But in our thinking on LLF and PLF we are not unified. Given the depth of disagreement across the whole Church in relation to these things, a pretence at unity would be a farce. Unity based on stating that our differences of understanding are, 'not that important', or which relies on avoiding discussion would lack all integrity and, in fact, would not be unity at all. Those of us gathered this morning are from different parishes, oversight areas, and deaneries. Together we are Church of England Birmingham. We are already living, working and witnessing together. I assume we are each committed to striving to continue to do this as well as possible under God.

I hope and pray that today's discussions are fruitful and provide part of the basis for us to move forward in a way that pleases God. I also pray that we are able, like Jesus setting his focus on Jerusalem, to keep in single-minded view our calling to point to the coming kingdom of God through the radical way in which we choose to love each other – *with* our deeply held differences.

The way we choose to approach our thinking, speaking and decision-making with Living in Love and Faith will be symptomatic of our commitment to God and each other and will signal something important about our values and our trajectory. Pray with me that God would have mercy on us, would enlarge our hearts and minds and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, give us grace to live well together for the sake of the communities he has called us to serve and witness to in Jesus' name.

We also need to maintain a Christlike focus on **many other things** that are part of building God's kingdom here in Church of England Birmingham: our work with children and young people in our churches, schools and communities; our ministry to and with friends of other faiths; our attention to racial justice, our efforts towards climate justice, moving towards financial sustainability, and our church revitalisation and planting plans to name but a very few.

Rooted in Jesus' instruction to 'abide in me' I am more and more convinced of our profound need to be a people of prayer. And particularly a rediscovery of the riches of contemplative prayer. I'll be sharing about this at two significant prayer events in the city in the coming week. And I am beginning to think with others about how to bring a vision for a greater commitment to expectant prayer into focus in Church of England Birmingham.

I have shared my **4-part prayer** in several settings. I will conclude with it here by way of encouragement to you to join me as we journey through this penitential season of Lent.

Since arriving in Birmingham in late January 2024, my prayer has been that God would,

- Have mercy on the city and region
- Give us great love for the city and its people
- Break the power of evil in Jesus' name
- Bring many to faith in Christ

We have important work to do and all sorts of tasks to attend to. In and through and over and above all of this, I believe God is calling Church of England Birmingham to be a missionary people profoundly shaped by prayer. The bible tells us that, '*the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective*' (James 5:16). We are also invited to, '*Be still and know that I am God.*' (Psalm 46:10).

And so, as we seek guidance for the work that lies ahead, I invite us to hold two minutes of stillness to pay attention to the voice of the Spirit of God in our midst.



Annual Report to Diocesan Synod

The board completed the third and final year of the 2022-2024 business plan.

Key Priority 1: To strengthen governance in Birmingham Church schools

The Deputy DDE oversees all governance responsibilities, working closely with governing boards to: appoint new governors efficiently, provide bespoke training, support schools with senior leader appointments and attending governor meetings to share the DBE's vision for education. Communication and training programs are well-established, including online training sessions for foundation governors and chairs and a termly newsletter. Governing boards actively engage in the 'Leading for Equity' programs to increase diversity in our school staff and Governing Boards. School Governing Boards are improving their understanding of compliance, particularly regarding building responsibilities and permissions. A spreadsheet of trust deeds is being compiled which has led to the DBE reviewing its admission's guidance and subsequently removing church attendance as an acceptable over subscription criteria

Key Priority 2: Support and develop DBE Structural strategy re Academies and MATs

The Diocesan MAT strategy has been devised and agreed by DBE and shared with Bishop's Council. Efforts are underway to understand the development of existing MATs, focusing on their capacity to take in additional schools and improve their offers. Following All Saints MAT joining with the Fioretti Trust we now have two strong MATs. Support is being provided to a group of Church schools to establish a third Church-majority MAT. Further work is taking place with academies to clarify their responsibilities to members and the DBE. The change in government policy will impact schools' future plans to academise.

Key Priority 3: To lead and support Schools in aiming for the Agreed net Zero Carbon output goal of 2030

Initial briefings have informed Governing Boards of their responsibilities, with a plan to track actions taken by schools. Regular Chairs' briefings now feature a Carbon Zero slot. The DBE's environmental policy has been approved, and Carbon Audits have been completed in all VA schools, with resources allocated to non-VA academies. Jill Stolberg has become the Environmental Support Officer, meeting with schools and developing resources to assist schools in progressing with their actions, including a 'padlet' of helpful materials. Achieving the Net Zero target will require an investment of around £40 million, with JS's work supporting schools in reaching key environmental goals.

Key Priority 4: To develop strong partnerships between Church Schools and their parish Church

A task and finish group, including clergy and headteachers, explored Church school partnerships. Findings were shared on the new website, with supporting resources and good practice examples. The project was launched at the 2024 Senior Leader Conference, attended by clergy. Church-school relationships are positive, with strong collaboration and support from churches. A protocol for clergy appointments has been developed, with the DBE involved in most appointments. Clergy attendance at the network meeting has increased.

Key Priority 5: To develop the Board of Education for its role in the future.

The DBE is working more efficiently, with clearer roles, effective committee structures, and well-organised processes on Governor Hub. Job descriptions are reviewed as vacancies arise, and contracted officers have supported the board successfully. Jill Stolberg (Church School Distinctiveness Advisor) retired at Christmas, replaced by Keith Farquhar in January 2025. Susan Crosthwaite retires at Easter; her replacement has been appointed. The website is live, and social media presence has improved, with regular posts on Facebook, Instagram, and X.

The DBE has been re-elected/appointed for the 2025-2027 triennium.

The Key areas focus for its work are

Key Priority 1: Delivering the responsibilities outlined in Measure 2021

Key Priority 2: To develop and implement a strategy to support whole school flourishing.

Key Priority 3: To ensure the Diocesan Education team is structured to deliver against its core functions

Key priority 4: To raise the profile of Schools mission and ministry to support wider Diocesan strategy

Sarah Smith on behalf of the Diocesan Board of Education

March 2025



**Birmingham Diocesan
Board of Education**

Report from February Sessions (10th – 14th February 2025) – Revd Emma Sykes

Grateful to +Michael in allowing me to share the script of his weekly update video that he gave a few days after Synod. This helpfully gives a summary of the key items that were on the agenda, and I hope you've all had a chance to watch the video or read the script included in your papers. I don't want to duplicate what is said, especially as safeguarding and LLF are on the agenda today. Instead, I would like to share something of the tone around the debates and some of the themes that I think run through them.

Tone of this synod. It was very different from July, as you know since then, continued failings around safeguarding coming to light (highlighted in the Makin report), leading to the resignation of Justin Welby and increasing pressure on others to resign, including the Archbishop of York. Then the week leading up to the February sessions, it was announced that the Bishop of Liverpool had resigned over sexual misconduct claims, with one of the claimants being the Suffragan Bishop of Liverpool, Bishop Bev. Understandably, this led to a very intense lead into synod with some speculation about whether protests would be held during Archbishop of York's presidential address as well as a plea from one not to have the presidential address at all. In response to that, the decision was made to begin synod with an act of penitence in recognition of not just past failings but ongoing issues around safeguarding. It was penitential and contrite in tone, and at times, I found very moving especially in the silences and acknowledgement of the survivors of abuse. It did not end with, "now we are all absolved and can move on" attitude, but instead the churches continuing need to repent, especially from those with power and responsibility, and to work harder to do better and to keep survivors voices front and centre.

It within this context and tone that AB of York then gave his presidential address – he did not make comment on specific cases, he was not able to, as these are ongoing investigations.

The afternoon of the first day was a discussion about the Makin report and it was here that some themes emerged that arose on other items on the agenda:

- the lack of awareness around trauma informed responses to abuse, and the need to pay attention to this more
- the need to pay attention to power (many debates often came back to this whether it was spoken or unspoken)
- the need not to "protect our inner rings" at the expense of making the right decisions – this was in relation to safeguarding but also came up again when debating changes to the Vacancy in See committee.

On the Second day we heard an update and next steps from the "Lament to Action Report" on Racial justice - +Michael has written in some detail about this, I just want to add a comment made about the need to consider Intersectionality in the debate (that many people from Global Majority Heritage also experience overlapping struggles such as economic inequality and gender). By continuing to make progress on Racial Justice, we are also need to see how this overlaps into other areas as well.

The second part of the morning was taken up with debating the proposed safeguarding model it was intense and many gave thoughtful, at times moving and considered contributions in favour of both model 3 and model 4 and we ended with model 3.5 (there will be more about this on this agenda today). In the afternoon we had a report of the Crown nominations commission, an update on

diocesan finances review and a bit of light relief with a discussion on sports and wellbeing ministry in which +Michael gave his now called debut speech (rather than maiden).

Wednesday began with an address by an ecumenical guest, Most Revd Urmaz Vilma, the Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church from Estonia and we heard from The Most Revd Anne Germond, Primate of the Anglican Church in Canada – always sobering as we heard the challenges from another part of the global Anglican Communion and puts what we do in perspective. If you think we are strapped for cash, take heart that there is one Diocese in Canada where the only paid member of staff is the Bishop!

We then had the private members motion on a Strategy for Working class ministry. As someone who ministers in a predominantly working class area I found this encouraging and a reminder to us all to celebrate and encourage the calling of all God's people.

This was followed by the approval of the new clergy conduct measure – and helpful to note (as it has been a question from a member of this Diocesan Synod) that the new CCM includes the provision of a constraint order for those making continuous vexatious complaints.

Thursday began with a presentation by Kenson Li about Growing Younger and more Diverse, a welcomed motion to enable the voices of younger people to be heard more fully at Synod. The sobering statistic was that according to the latest figures 5 members are under 30, average age is 58 and 65 members are over 70. This was followed by the LLF update.

The most hotly contested debates were the possible changes to the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC), which nominates future diocesan bishops and also the proposals to the Vacancy in see committees. Changes had been recommended due to the failure to appoint recent diocesan Bishops in Ely and Carlisle due to deadlocked decisions and a concern around the lack of women being appointed as Diocesan Bishops and the perception that the voices of certain traditions in the church of England were having a greater voice in the decision making. These debates took longer than their allotted times and meant other items on the agenda had to be removed. But this is where themes of power arose again and again. What I noticed was that those arguing both for and against the changes were doing so on the basis of greater representation and the need to reduce the power in certain groups. Same argument but different conclusions. The need to avoid the temptation to “protect our inner rings” came up again.

It was a long and exhausting day to the end of a very full and intense week (and there are lots of other areas discussed and fringe meetings that took place that I just don't have time to include).

I want to offer a final thought and it comes back to intersectionality – there are times at synod where I heard things spoken and analogies used that I vehemently disagreed with by people who I know and have friendships with. The challenge I find is not to suddenly see them in terms of that issue and to want to distance myself from them, the challenge is to understand why they say what they say and see them (as I hope they would see me) as a loved child of God and follower of Christ. When Jesus heals the blind man at Bethsaida his first attempt is responded with *“I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.”* It's only when Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and looks intently that the man's sight is restored.

What I am learning from Synod, is not to see someone in terms of the issue they speak about and perhaps at times to see “only trees walking” a fuzzy representation of what I think they are about, but

instead as Jesus did, to look intently to seek not just knowledge but understanding, so that respect and valuing people as it the heart. We will still disagree, and it will hurt, but I hope we can improve the quality of our disagreement understanding that it is God's love that draws us together.