

DIOCESAN SYNOD
SATURDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2022
(St John's Church, Meopham)

MINUTES

BISHOP JONATHAN IN THE CHAIR

1. Welcome, Opening Worship and Presidential Address

The Bishop of Rochester, the Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs, welcomed members and visitors to the Synod meeting.

He went on to say that the Bishop's Chaplain, the Rev Lindsay Llewellyn-MacDuff, would lead the Synod in a short time of worship, adding that this would be last time she did so as his Chaplain, as she had been appointed as Associate Priest to the benefice of Penshurst, Fordcombe and the Chiddingstone Churches. The time of worship included the Presidential Address:-

Good morning. It is very good to be with you at this, my first, Diocesan Synod. I would like to begin by thanking everyone for the wonderful welcome that Toni and I have received since we moved to Rochester over the summer. We are so grateful for the warmth and kindness that have been shown to us and we have greatly enjoyed meeting people from across the Diocese, both at Bishops Court and as we have begun to get out and about in the parishes and deaneries.

I would also like to say a huge thank you to my colleagues, particularly in the Bishop's Leadership Team, for all they have done during the period of the Vacancy in See. They have worked incredibly hard during that time, and they have also made the start of my ministry in the Diocese as smooth and straightforward as anyone could wish.

At the same time, I want to say thank you to all of you here today, as well as to your colleagues, lay and ordained, in your deaneries, parishes, chaplaincies, schools, and countless other places and organisations – for all that you have done and are continuing to do, especially over these last two or three very difficult years. No-one should underestimate the challenges of ministry during the pandemic, never mind all that has followed as a result of the war in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis and everything else.

Thank you. Thank you for your persistence, dedication, compassion, and sheer hard work in the places where God has called you. The heart of the Church is not our diocesan structures (including, dare I say, our Synods!).

No, it is the praying, loving, serving people of God in each of our parishes and other communities, where we are seeking the coming of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. I mean that, and I know that from twenty-five years and more in local church ministry, and my ministry as your Bishop will be focused most of all on seeking to support and strengthen the life and mission of our local churches and parishes.

As Toni and I have begun to travel around the Diocese, whether for formal services or simply taking the dog for a walk and nosing around churches and churchyards, we have been struck time and again by the fantastic variety of the communities we serve and by the commitment and enthusiasm of our congregations – even after all that we have been through over the last three years. We have been to places as far apart as New Beckenham (which describes itself as a "frontier parish", being on the border with Southwark!). We've been to Rainham, and Tonbridge, and Pembury, and Sevenoaks. And last week we visited five churches on a dog-walking outing, including Leigh, Chiddingstone and Penshurst. The variety is fantastic – and the pubs and cafés we found are pretty good too!

We are, of course, only beginning to scratch the surface, but it has been great to meet with people in deanery clusters, to have the chance to introduce myself and to hear and respond to some of their questions. Bromley and Bexley are still to come later this month in case those of you from there were wondering! Each time I have been asked to say something about my background and my faith journey, my sense of calling to the Diocese of Rochester and, naturally enough, about my vision and my hopes for my ministry here, and it is to that I want to turn now.

The first thing any new minister needs to remember (whether priest or bishop) is that God was already at work here long before we arrived! Now that may sound obvious, but my point is that I am not starting with a blank canvas. A big part of what I need to do is to listen and learn, and to understand how things work and what God is already up to in this Diocese and all its varied parts. It's about learning how things work in different places – that Bromley is not Lamberhurst, is not Chatham, is not West Malling, and all the rest. I am so grateful for the way in which my colleagues, lay and ordained, are helping me to learn and understand "the way we do things round here". In particular, I am very conscious that you have already developed a shared vision of who God is calling you to be and of how he is calling you to serve him, under the heading "Called Together". That is a really important piece of work and one that I want to affirm very positively.

But of course, at the same time, I have come with my own history and experiences, with my own convictions about the life of the Church and what it means for us his people to serve him in our context in the third decade of the twenty-first century. And alongside listening and learning, I am also called here to share in leading this Diocese forward in the years ahead. And with this in mind I have already spoken on a number of occasions about three themes that I believe will be important for us in the coming years, as part of our fulfilling what it means to be Called Together to serve God in this Diocese.

I will say a little more about each of these in a moment, but I do want to explain that I don't see these themes as replacing the work that has gone into Called Together, so much as giving this a particular focus, which in turn can help us to identify where we are trying to go and what we need to do to get there – more about that in a few moments.

These three words, as many of you will know already, are Change, Serve, and Grow. Now, please don't worry if you have heard these elsewhere in a different order – the order is much less important than the content – though I do think there is a particular logic to starting with them this way round.

Change, as we all know, is not something that comes easily to Anglicans (nor to many other people, come to that)! But change is at the heart of the Christian faith – the change that comes when we accept Jesus' invitation to follow him, the change that comes where we grow more and more into the likeness of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit within us, the change that follows as God's kingdom comes a little more here on earth as it is in heaven.

And all around there is change – not all of it for the best – in the world in which we live. There is change, too, in our churches, as many of us have seen a significant decline in numbers attending, in our income (not least during COVID) and in our capacity to do all the things that we used to take for granted. If we are to address and meet these challenges, then we need to be willing to change – to find new ways of doing things for the sake of the gospel and the kingdom of God; sometimes that will be alongside what we are doing already, but sometimes it will have to be instead of things we have done for many years. The hardest question can sometimes be, how do we stop doing some things, so that we can do something else even better?

Serve is both about our attitude to one another within the Church and our orientation towards the world outside the Church. It is about the way we behave, and it is about directing our energies to engage with the needs of the wider world – expressing and making visible the love of God in tangible, practical and spiritual ways. Many of our churches are already doing this in a whole host of ways, not least during the pandemic and now as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. But maybe we need to change the way we think about how we serve, either by developing new ideas and projects, or by thinking about how we could join with others to enable things that we and they could not possibly do on our own.

This is about taking the life of our churches out into the community, and about bringing the community into the life of our churches, as places of welcome and warmth, of friendship and fellowship, perhaps also working with other partners to make a difference to the lives of those around us, whether it's running a foodbank with the Trussell Trust or a money course with Christians Against Poverty, or whatever else. This is about having the confidence to look outwards and to build bridges over which the love of Christ can flow and, in turn, people can discover the hope we have through him.

And finally, Grow. Growth in the Church comes in many forms. It is about people coming to faith and joining our congregations. It is about people becoming more like Jesus, more loving, more caring, more compassionate. It is about increasing the impact of our churches in their communities, making a difference to those around us, and becoming part of the glue that can help fractured communities find greater cohesion and security.

It is about releasing resources through generous giving and careful stewardship, so that our churches have the means to go about their work and are also able to support God's work in other parts of our Diocese and in other places, including our partner Dioceses in other parts of the world.

We all know that many of our churches have been in numerical and financial decline over many years, and the challenges we are now facing have not made that any easier. But I do believe that it is God's intention and desire that his Church should grow in all the different kinds of ways that I have talked about. And I also believe that, for all the difficulties, there is a great opportunity right now for us to help bring this about – in part precisely because of the turmoil and uncertainty that our world is facing at the moment.

You see, we have something that the world does not have. We have hope in and through Jesus Christ. We have hope because Jesus Christ has risen and has conquered the power of death and hell. We have hope because he has promised that his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven – and because he has commanded us to pray for that.

This is not simple optimism – that somehow or other things will get better. No, it is the hope we have because we know that God is with us always and that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the hope that God will guide us and show us the way ahead, even when things are dark and the future uncertain. We have hope. And that hope can give us confidence when others are fearful – confidence to change and to try new things, confidence to serve and to step outside our comfort zone, confidence to believe we can grow and to have a go, knowing that, even if we fail, God is there to pick us up and set us on the way once more.

I don't know exactly what all this will mean, and it will inevitably look different in different places, but there are a few things I do believe we should be looking to see and make happen across our Diocese, at least as a start:-

- We should be working clearly and intentionally towards our congregations and our leadership becoming on average both younger and more diverse, so that they reflect more fully the communities that we serve.*
- We should be seeking to grow our congregations and to grow new ones, working in partnership with and supported by our existing churches, not in competition with them.*
- We should be seeking to increase our impact in our local communities, so that we are making a bigger difference to the lives of those around us, demonstrating the love of Christ in practical and visible ways.*

There will be many more things beside these, but what I would like us to do over the next few months is to begin to explore these things together, with the aim of refining and sharpening our shared vision, so that we set some clear objectives for what we want to achieve under God and also a clear plan for how we intend to bring these things about. That is what we will be doing between now and roughly next Easter, by when I hope we will be ready to unite around a new set of priorities that express what it means for us to be Called Together to serve God in the Diocese of Rochester over the next few years.

I just want to say one more thing as I close. I do not believe that the Kingdom of God is a zero-sum game. In other words, just because we say that certain things are our current priorities does not mean that other things no longer matter. The Kingdom of God can be about both/and, and not merely either/or. So if we say we want to become younger and more diverse, that does not mean that our existing congregations and the way they do things is any less valued – though of course it may mean at times that we have to make some hard choices between different priorities.

And that same message – that when we are dealing with God (and when he is dealing with us) then things are never just a zero-sum game – I believe can and should apply to some of the other challenges we are facing as a Church at the moment – including over some of the difficult issues that threaten to divide us. The Kingdom of God is not a zero-sum game – God is full of surprises and is able to open new and unexpected possibilities that we have not begun to imagine. That is because he is the God of Hope, who invites us to go forward with him and to share in the adventure with him.

Thank you for inviting and allowing me to be part of this journey with you. I am confident that, however bumpy the ride may be at times, God has great things in store for us in the years ahead. Thank you.

THE REV CANON JEREMY BLUNDEN IN THE CHAIR

The Rev Canon Blunden, on behalf of members, welcomed Bishop Jonathan to his first Diocesan Synod meeting in Rochester.

2. DBF Budget 2023

Mr Nigel Pope, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, began by urging members to look at the Annual Report & Accounts for 2021 on the diocesan website, if they had not already done so, as they set out much of what the Diocese and its parishes were doing and how that work was backed with finance.

As the Annual Report noted, diocesan officers were working towards a financially sustainable model of mission for the Diocese, and in 2019, prior to the pandemic it was clearly on a trajectory to achieve that, with a £500,000 deficit predicted to reduce further the following two years leading to a balanced budget. But the pandemic and then the cost-of-living crisis meant that was not achieved. However, the plan to reach that balance remained, and required a partnership between the Diocese, the National Church, parishes, and churchgoers – called together to build God's kingdom.

Offers from the parishes underpinned the Indicative Offers system, which provided 77% of diocesan income, and were absolutely critical to building the kingdom, and Mr Pope thanked parishes for their generosity.

In 2022, the following hardship grants for clergy were made available, to help offset the rising cost of living:-

- £300 per clergy household was offered March 2022, funded by Designated Ministry and Mission Support Fund and 91 clergy households applied.

- A further £340 per clergy household was offered October 2022, funded by a £64,000 grant from the Church Commissioners' Ministry Hardship Fund, and 96 clergy households applied.

Rochester Diocese was one of the very first, if not the first, to address the financial pressure with its own funds, in the shape of the £300 grant to clergy. The scale of the response to the March grant showed that a further provision later in the year would be needed. The two grants taken together represented an additional almost 2% on the 2% inflation increase on stipends. That was almost 3% more than budgeted and was contained within the overall spend in 2022.

The closing date for grant applications was 30 November 2022. There would be further information on grants for 'Warm Spaces' when the Called Together Manager reported on the Environment and Sustainability later in the meeting.

Looking at the forecast for 2022, Mr Pope said that a deficit of £1.64m was anticipated, compared with the budgeted deficit £1.54m. One of the variances arose because a 1% increase in clergy stipends and staff salaries had been budgeted for, whereas - for a number of reasons - it was later agreed that an increase of 2% should be awarded instead in April 2022, at an additional cost of £84,000.

Parish Offers for 2022 were forecast to total £7.75m, which was £500,000 lower than budgeted. To July 2022, a fall in offers had been experienced of 10.4% on 2019 levels, the average reduction across the Church of England was 8.1%.

Moving to the 2023 Common Fund Budget, Mr Pope informed members that it showed a deficit of £1.49m. The Financial Strategy plan was to move, post Covid pandemic, to a sustainable financial position for the Common Fund, but the recovery of Parish Offers and DBF Fees was critical to this, as they made up 81% of diocesan income.

A number of key assumptions had been made in preparing the budget for 2023:-

- Parish Offers in 2023 of £8.00m, anticipating recovering parish contributions as churches returned towards a steady state.
- Average stipendiary clergy posts in 2023 of 160, with a 6% vacancy rate.
- Diocesan Office staff numbers of employed of 47.4 FTEs, noting that staffing had been contained at a time of increasing regulatory requirements.
- The Diocesan Office headcount included 5.8 FTE staff on the DBF payroll who were not funded by the Common Fund (inc. Generous Giving Adviser)
- An increase of 5% in clergy stipends and Diocesan Office staff salaries.
- Parsonage repair and maintenance maintained at the 2022 budgeted level of £750,000 (including insurance), and £500,000 additional work budgeted for major capital parsonage expenditure.

On the matter of Indicative Offers, Mr Pope referred to one parish's comment on the 10% of gross income. He said that the calculation used was a guide, and the request to parishes was to aim to be as generous as they could be.

It was recognised, however, that there were many challenges that parishes faced and that they might need to make adjustments for their local running costs. So some changes were introduced to the system, following consultation, and which were communicated to incumbents and treasurers at the end of July and again referred to in a recent letter about Indicative Offers, namely:-

- The wider mission element was now calculated as 10% of gross income from the prior year as reported on annual Finance Returns;
- All minor adjustments had been removed from the calculation, eg for associated costs, and benefices could make their own adjustments when considering their offer;
- 10% referred to unrestricted legacies in the year of gift; and
- The cap on gross income had been removed but was still provided as a guide for low-income benefices because, in some cases, the jump was too big in one year. Whilst it was agreed to remove the cap, the timetable for that removal was not set and would be reviewed by the Parish Offers Review panel as it sought to build on the transparency and learning of the Indicative Offer System.

There was a reduction in Diocesan Support Costs which could, in part, be due to the reduction in the full time equivalent headcount of 11.4%.

The timetable for the Indicative Offer process was:-

- Calculation of the Indicative Offer by 31 October 2022
- A formal resolution by the respective PCC(s) and submission of Parish Offer by end November, if possible
- Review of Parish Offers by the Parish Offer Review Panel in early 2023

The aspiration was that each benefice exercised generosity and met its combined Indicative Offer.

For 2023, there was a projected cash balance at year end of £3.8m, which compared to the liquidity policy minimum of £5.25m, and a projected net cash outflow of £2.9m. A key assumption within this was property disposal proceeds of £7.8m (including Upper Beckenham for around £4.5m which would be re-invested in market investments). £1.6m expenditure was forecast for property additions and capital expenditure, and £2.2m on projects. The 2023 budget forecast that the Common Fund would reduce to £3.7m by the end of 2023, which was below the policy minimum of £5m and excluded the proportion of any fall in market investments which currently stood at around £1m.

The Diocese was facing a time where reserves were needed to be used but there was also a list of mitigations, ie, projects which could be postponed or not done, should cash requirements become tight.

In conclusion, Mr Pope said that the budget continued to be impacted by the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. However, actions that had been taken to manage the financial situation together, together with national assistance, provided confidence in the Diocese's ability to contain the deficit.

Difficult times had demonstrated the resilience shown by everyone, and now was the time to look forward – to change, to serve and to grow.

There being no questions, the Chair of the Board of Finance MOVED:

"That the Synod authorises the expenditure of a sum for the Common Fund not exceeding £13.5m".

On being put, the motion was carried with one abstention.

3. Lay Representation to Deanery Synods

Bishop Simon introduced the item, saying that the elections to deanery synods would be taking place in 2023 and, in line with Church Representation Rules, Diocesan Synod was responsible for fixing the formula used to calculate how many representatives each parish could elect to their deanery synod. The formula suggested was based on the number on electoral rolls. The formula in front of Synod was that used previously, and he did not feel that it distorted or interfered with the workings of deanery synods.

Mr John Garthwaite (Paddock Wood Deanery) asked if there was some mechanism for deputies to be nominated when a member was unable to attend a meeting.

The Rev Nigel Bourne (Gravesend Deanery) said he would welcome a deputy attending a deanery synod if a parish would otherwise be unrepresented.

The Diocesan Secretary responded that, whilst he was not aware of any such provision in the Church Representation Rules, the matter would be looked into.

Mrs Sarah Poole then MOVED:

"That the Synod approves the current formula to determine the lay representation on Deanery Synods, as given below:-

<i>No on the Electoral Roll</i>	<i>No of Representatives to Deanery Synod</i>
<i>1-50</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>51-150</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>151-225</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>226-300</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>301 or over</i>	<i>5</i>

On being put, the motion was carried with three abstentions.

4. Deed of Delegation

The Diocesan Secretary reminded members that it had been seen over the last year just how vital the Deed of Delegation had been. However, it was time limited and therefore a new one was needed if Bishop Simon was to continue offering support to Bishop Jonathan in that wider capacity. The Rev Canon Mark Barker, before moving the motion, thanked Bishop Simon on behalf of Synod for his work

during the recent vacancy in see. Synod returned a resounding round of applause in agreement.

Canon Barker, upon the recommendation of the Bishop's Council, then MOVED:-

"That this Synod RESOLVES to approve pursuant to section 13(8) of the Dioceses Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 the attached form of Deed of Delegation whereby the Bishop of Rochester will delegate powers to the Bishop of Tonbridge to carry out such functions of the Diocesan Bishop as the Bishop of Rochester may from time to time direct".

On being put, the motion was carried with one abstention.

5. The Environment and Sustainability

The Called Together Manager, Miss Claire Boxall, reminded members that one of the Diocese's Five Priorities, and a mark of mission was protecting creation's life for future generations. It was part of our prophetic calling, being committed to speaking about our role in caring for God's creation, working for the protection of the natural world and equipping Christians and churches to care for it.

Today she wished to update Synod on the Diocese's carbon emissions data, some Eco Church figures, and finally to share some ways in which energy use could be reduced.

The provisional headline data from the Energy Footprint Tool showed that:-

- **33%** of churches completed or partially completed the Energy Footprint Tool (up from 23% in 2020) – thank you!
- **The net CO2 emissions for churches** was 2,187 tonnes in 2021 compared to 3,100 tonnes in 2020 (a reduction of 913 tonnes)
- With the inclusion of schools, housing, offices and other buildings our total emissions was **6,676 tonnes in 2021**, compared to 7650 tonnes in 2020 (a reduction of -974)

However, Miss Boxall admitted that she did not have enough detail to be confident in the figures – too many were estimated (all the housing, for example), and she was not sure of the impact of closures due to the pandemic. So, whilst she would like say 'look, the numbers are going in the right direction', they had not yet been analysed enough to understand the story they were telling. She urged parishes to keep completing the Energy Footprint Tool, to keep asking about property changes which would improve energy efficiency (many of which no longer needed DAC approval), and to keep asking about funding for property improvements which would reduce energy use – because that way change would come.

On the issue of churches engaged against total carbon emission in tonnes, in comparison to other dioceses Rochester had fairly low engagement rates but it also had comparatively low carbon emissions compared to, say, London. Overall there was still a long way to go.

The latest statistics from the Eco Church team showed 64 churches in the Diocese of Rochester had registered for Eco Church, 16 had achieved the Bronze Award, and 3 the silver award, which left 39 churches that had registered but not completed the questionnaire and applied for an award. It was good to see that many had registered in recent months.

Miss Boxall went on to say that the [National Church website](#) was full of helpful advice and support around reducing energy usage. The webinars and case studies were really helpful to share with others.

The new '[Practical Suggestions](#)' material included tips on how to check bills, keeping housekeeping up to standard (dusty heaters being less efficient, for example), monitoring usage, and also some things that individuals and parishes could do collectively – eg, heat the person not the space; sit away from the walls, doors, and any drafts; or use an alternative venue for some activities, to name just a few.

The Rev Amanda Maskell (Gillingham Deanery) asked what the target position for the Diocese to aim for should be with regard to emissions. Miss Boxall responded that a high engagement rate with very low emissions would be the ideal.

The Rev Roger Bristow (Bromley Deanery) asked if the presentation could be made available to members, and added that his parsonage had new insulation installed in the previous week as part of the recent diocesan initiative to increase insulation in parsonages, and they were already noticing the difference it had made.

The Rev Lindsay Llewellyn-MacDuff (General Synod) had recently read that European ICT use accounted for 10% of electricity usage, and that emails had a similar impact on the environment as aircraft. She wondered if the Diocese could be more ambitious about looking at its ICT. Miss Boxall responded that servers and computers where data was stored were not a big issue in terms of energy usage.

The Rev Ian Smith (Sidcup Deanery) had just switched energy providers and the bills were projected to jump from just over £2,000 to in excess of £10,000. He had found very little support in finding suppliers. They had approached Parish Buying who said the church was not big enough in terms of its usage to register. He wondered if there could be some kind of joined up work undertaken to help parishes in the search for energy providers.

One members said his parish was only just about keeping its head above water financially. Miss Boxall responded that, whilst National Church had announced funding would be available, it had not yet detailed what it would be for or how it would be allocated.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

MRS SARAH POOLE IN THE CHAIR

Mrs Poole, on behalf of the laity, reiterated the welcome to Bishop Jonathan.

6. Healthcare Chaplaincy

The Rev Ruth Bierbaum, Lead Chaplain at Medway Maritime Trust, shared her experience of hospital chaplaincy and the impact of Covid on chaplains, patients, as well as healthcare staff and organisations.

She spoke about her own calling, and how she saw her role as being about sharing person-centred care and reminding organisations about the humanity of the patient.

Ruth explained how, in recent years, there had been a move to healthcare chaplaincy being a particular calling, rather than an extension of parish work, and that chaplains were very much specialist coordinators of pastoral and spiritual care. That meant healthcare chaplains were very embedded in their healthcare organisation, but also that there was an imperative on chaplains to maintain connections with the parish and diocesan structures.

She went on to say that the pandemic had changed things, crystallising the distinct nature of the Healthcare Chaplain. Now, more than ever, chaplains had a distinct skill set, on top of the religious licence and know how. For at least a decade it had been moving towards professionalisation, and the voluntary professional register – the UK Board of Healthcare Chaplains – set a high standard.

In normal circumstances, healthcare chaplains offered pastoral care to all, listening to people as they asked those existential and spiritual questions. The pandemic, however, had forced them to think outside of the box, with different hospitals finding different solutions, always in consultation with the appropriate faith-leaders. Sometimes prayers were provided and said by clinicians who were happy to do so; sometimes a phone would be held to a dying patient's ear and prayers spoken remotely. There had been a move away from that since, but the legacy of the experience was a new resource of end-of-life prayers from various faiths and traditions. So if an appropriate faith leader cannot be found in time, the prayers could be given to a family member or a member of staff from the same faith group for them to use.

Looking at staff changes due to the pandemic, there had been a staff turnover like never before. Covid was a trigger for huge numbers of staff to review their work/life balance, and many left. Some had to leave as family member became sick, many were off sick themselves. Many colleagues died and many of the staff who were left at the end of it all were traumatised in a particular way. Medway Maritime Hospital had planted trees in memory of colleagues.

To deal with the loss of so many staff, others were being recruited from overseas. But this meant that much of the collective memory of hospitals had been lost. And some of those new staff had been displaced from their own support group, culture, language, and plunged into busy wards to look after very vulnerable people. There had also come about new levels of busy-ness. Chaplains now

found themselves racing against time with multiple deadlines to be prioritised and met.

Ruth concluded by saying that the pandemic had forced new ways of working, new systems, new ways of auditing, reporting, and checking, and created new levels of business, which had had an impact on everyone, highlighting the need for space and respite. It was, however, a highly rewarding role and she urged anyone interested in becoming a chaplain to be in touch with her, and asked members to pray for those already in post.

The Rev Pat Dickin (Gillingham Deanery) asked if there were links with Anna Chaplaincy, and Ms Bierbaum responded that there were. Mrs Dickin then asked if there was any way within hospitals that local priests could be included in the bereavement care policy, as there were time when they were not contacted at all. Ms Bierbaum said that the huge turnover in staff had made this falter, but training was ongoing and she hoped the situation would improve.

The Rev Paul Filmer (Rochester Deanery) was interested what percentage of a chaplain's ministry was to staff. Ms Bierbaum responded that 20% of her time was spent on staff care.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

7. Safeguarding

(a) Diocesan Update

The Archdeacon of Rochester reported that, since his last report to Synod, the Safeguarding Team and the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel had been focusing on the learning actions required by the Past Cases Review and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. Reports on those would feature in the new diocesan Safeguarding Action Plan currently being developed.

Alongside that, the Team continued to support victims and survivors, investigate new and ongoing cases, support the establishment of safeguarding agreements, consider anonymised responses to DBS checks, and offer and support safeguarding training. He expressed the Diocese's gratitude to the Team for all that they did to help the Diocese and parishes to be safe and welcoming places.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

(b) Updated Guidance Document

On the recommendation of the Bishop's Council, the Diocesan Synod ADOPTED the updated [Guidance on Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults](#).

The Archdeacon reminded members that it was part of their responsibility to ensure that their parishes and PCCs were aware of the new guidance and put it into practice.

8. Time for Questions

(1) Question from Mr Cameron Clark (Cobham Deanery)

The Diocesan Secretary must be congratulated on producing very full, clear, and timely minutes of Synod. However, they are not sent to Synod members until the agenda for the following Synod is published. Earlier publication would be very helpful to Synod members when following up matters raised or reporting to Deanery Synods and parishes.

- (a) What is the reason for delaying publication?
- (b) Would consideration please be given to circulating the approved minutes to Synod members and publishing them on the Diocesan website as soon as they have been agreed by Bishop's Council?
- (c) The minutes have recently been in a PDF scanned image format; therefore hyperlinks do not work. Can they be produced as PDF text with live hyperlinks, which was the practice before this year?

Response from the Diocesan Secretary

- (a) On the issue of Diocesan Synod minutes, you are quite right that they have previously been much delayed in sending to members. However, the June 2022 minutes were sent to members by email on 15 July, just two days after the Bishop's Council approved them, having identified we needed to turn them around quicker.
- (b) As happens sometimes, things are in hand when the question is asked and, in this case, we had this in hand. You should now find approved minutes on the website through this link:-

<https://www.rochester.anglican.org/about-us/governance-and-synods/>

We will continue to publish these following approval by the Bishop's Council.

- (c) Thank you also for spotting that the hyperlinks did not work. This was because they were a scanned copy of the signed copy. We have instead now uploaded a pdf of the unsigned version so that the links work. We are of course able to provide a scanned signed copy as well if needed.

Finally, my thanks are due to Suzanne Rogers for her diligent recording and drafting of the minutes which enables me to produce those clear and timely minutes.

2. Question from Mr Cameron Clark (Cobham Deanery)

Rapidly rising energy costs are having a serious impact on parish finances.

- (a) What advice and financial help is available to assist parishes in reducing their energy bills? In particular, to change from oil-fired heating and to install solar PV panels and battery storage?
- (b) Do parishes and clergy have access to help to acquire electric vehicles and install charging infrastructure at clergy housing or churches?

Response from Claire Boxall, Called Together Manager

- (a) The cost of energy is among the many financial pressures churches are under in these current times of high inflation and economic uncertainty. The Diocese is responding by offering grants from a new Energy Costs Support Fund. Details of the fund were shared with Incumbents, Treasurers, and PCC Secretaries in October. To help get resources to where they are needed quickly, parishes have been asked to respond, via a simple form, by 30 November 2022.

The money for this fund has been drawn together from a number of places; the national church (£249,000), the repurposing of our previous Covid Support Grants fund, some designated and restricted funds, and releasing some of the historic gains we have made on investing through our Total Return approach. This gives us a total fund of £549,000. From this pot we are offering grants directly to every benefice. In the coming weeks we also plan to offer further grants to help with the costs specific to Warm Spaces hospitality through the winter months. Through this dual approach we hope to share the resources as widely as possible, but also ensure it helps those who need it most.

Taking our lead from the Church Commissioners' allocation of funding across the country, the distribution of the Energy Costs Support Grants is on the basis of two criteria: the indices of multiple deprivation in each parish, and the population of the parish. This formula seeks to balance out the church buildings' focus of heating bills, with the need to help poorer, generally more urban and more populated areas.

Information on grants for churches running Warm Spaces will be available in the coming weeks.

We also continue to share other useful information on our website and in The Digest including:

[Addressing your own church's energy cost concerns](#) – A section on our Cost of Living page signposting to advice on how churches can reduce their own energy usage and costs.

Practical energy saving tips for parishes – The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division has prepared practical suggestions to help parishes save energy and money. You can download either the booklet as a [print version](#) or [interactive version](#).

The issue for funding for environmental improvements is a trickier one. We know that currently the cost of changes to infrastructure (eg from oil fired heating to renewable energy options) is prohibitive to many (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/10/10/church-englands-net-zero-plan-peril-due-high-costs/> and The Times on the same day). We do not have funding available in the Diocese to support churches but offer advice on external funding sources on our website <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/for-parishes/grants/>.

There is also very helpful information on the national church website at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/fundraising-for-net-zero-carbon#na> – the webinar is a good place to start. We are hopeful that more funding will become available in the near future and have been talking to partner organisations who may be able to support this important work.

- (b) Yes, parishes and clergy can seek permission to install EV charging points at clergy housing and churches. Funding for this is currently not available from the Diocese, as we are focusing on energy efficiency improvements to the buildings themselves, as this will cut emissions and bills. Within our limited resources this is one of the difficult choices we currently have to make.

Supplementary Question from Mr Cameron Clark

What further measures will parishes need to take to help the Church of England meet its commitment to zero carbon by 2030?

Response from the Called Together Manager

Since Diocesan Synod last met, General Synod had met and approved the pathway to net zero, which was about churches and what they could do practically. The route map was a national document which broke down into what the National Church was doing, what dioceses needed to do, what churches needed to do, what schools needed to do. It gave quite a lot of detail and milestones that needed to be hit along the way. The information was on the [National Church website](#).

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

9. General Synod Report

Ms Jane Rosam reported on the July 2022 sessions of General Synod, saying that the July sessions took place in York. There were a number of fringe events alongside the main sessions, which covered many topics such as rural church, the environment, and vision and strategy. One member noted that, if one had to preach the papers received for the Synod, it would take 83 hours.

There was a call for a Code of Conduct for members, as conduct – particularly around the bigger issues – had not always been loving.

Members considered the target of net carbon zero by 2030. There had been stalls from different chaplaincies. The budget item saw members being told of a challenging financial picture in a bleak economic climate and that inflation was the enemy of ambition. The war in Ukraine was discussed, as was the Crown Nominations process.

There was a lot of talk around safeguarding. Many questions were raised around that issue, and the Bishop of Chester delivered a note of caution on taking business outside the Synod chamber. It was noted that there was a backlog of several reports that Synod had not discussed, from the death of Fr Alan Griffin, the handling of safeguarding generally, the IICSA Report, the Devamanikkam report, and the Makin Report, and the continuing controversy over Christ Church, Oxford. The Independent Safeguarding Board was now tackling significant questions, which was widely welcomed.

Living in Love and Faith had an overarching theme. There were some good group work sessions and a week-long exhibition on the campus relating to the journey so far.

Each day Synod began and ended with worship but sadly there were other factors at play. At both ends of the day the chamber largely ended, particularly before Compline. On Sunday everyone went to York Minster for the Eucharist, where the Archbishop of York invited everybody to experience a Living in Love and Faith installation behind the altar ahead of the afternoon group work. Many, many Synod members chose to attend an alternative service.

Finally, 60% of members were newly elected last year, and for some the synodical structures and governance were challenged by burgeoning, bureaucratic layers. A year ago there was a newly-founded fringe group called 'Save the Parish', the membership of which was now in the hundreds and, ahead of the July sessions, the lay conference in York was packed. The group was looking at the growing concerns of national oversight.

In conclusion Ms Rosam said that, at times the questions raised around Living in Love and Faith were adversarial and bruising for many. Many felt the time was right of LLF to be debated thoroughly – the delay due to the proximity of the Lambeth Conference having passed – and for leadership to be forthcoming from the Archbishops and Bishops, following their period of discernment.

The Synod TOOK NOTE.

At this point, the agenda paused and Mr Philip French informed members that Mr Iain Ambler, diocesan IT Manager, was moving on to work for the Church Commissioners. The Synod thanked Mr Ambler for his service to the Diocese since 2015.

10. Closing Prayer

The meeting closed with prayer at 12:15pm.