

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD

A summary of the fourth session of the nineteenth synod and general meeting of the **WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED** at Trinity Methodist Church, Kidderminster on Monday 10 November 2025

Opening prayers were led by Jacqueline Shalloe, Team Vicar in Kidderminster East.

There were a number of **questions raised under Standing Orders** from Adam Hadley, Sue Adeney and Kalantha Brewis. You can read the questions and the full answers given on this [separate document on the diocesan website](#).



Two questions were raised by Adam Hadley:

To the Acting Bishop of Worcester:



1. Given that the House of Bishops has essentially ended the Living in Love and Faith process and LGBTQI+ people are more vulnerable and marginalised in the Church of England than ever before, what specific steps will the Acting Bishop of Worcester do to ensure LGBTQI+ people in this Diocese are supported, protected, represented and heard in the ongoing life of our Diocese?

2. Out of the current list of Bishops working (Acting Diocesan and Honorary Assistant Bishops) in Worcester Diocese who would use the prayers of love and faith themselves, and can this list be made public?’

Following [Bishop Martin’s response](#), Adam asked a supplementary question as to whether the Assistant Bishops work under the diocesan bishop’s direction and if so to ask each Bishop to clarify their own theological position in relation to the Prayers of Love and Faith, so that incumbents can have that information when making arrangements for confirmations.

Bishop Martin responded that he would be happy to raise the question with Assistant Bishops, but that use of the prayers would always very much depend on each pastoral situation.

Sue Adeney asked:

‘In the light of the recent decision by the House of Bishops to stall the progress of bringing the Prayers of Love and Faith to be used more widely in the church for Christian same sex couples, what defence and explanation can you provide about this decision to the faithful people in our diocese, - clergy and laity, LGBTQ+ and straight who trusted in the promises made by Bishops in their previous support?’



Following [Bishop Martin’s response](#), she asked a supplementary question about the encouragement that could be given to ordained Self-Supporting Ministers whose incumbents have specified that the Prayers of Love and Faith must not be used in their churches.



Bishop Martin said that incumbents are inducted into the corporate position of the church, so can't just make your church available if they themselves don't feel that it's the right thing to do. It is understandably difficult for SSMs working alongside incumbents who hold a different view, but it is the incumbent who has the final say on what happens in any of the church buildings in their care.

The final question was from Kalantha Brewis on behalf of clergy in Worcester Deanery:

Noting

- *the attack on Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester, the arson attack on Peacehaven Mosque in Sussex, and the apparently racially-motivated rape of a Sikh woman in Oldbury*
- *the increase in racially motivated hate crime of 10% in West Mercia, which contrasts with the national average increase of 2%*
- *the fact that in September, Afghan Refugees living in a property owned by the Diocese had to be rehoused following incidents of deliberate intimidation*
- *that the clergy of Worcester Deanery Chapter, on October 21st, were asked by both Archdeacons not to send a letter to our local press, the text of which had been agreed by Sam Setchell, expressing our concerns about the current situation*
- *the absence of any public statement from the Diocese in relation to these issues*



What positive and public action is the Diocese taking

- *to confront the growing intolerance of, and hostility towards, our minority communities, and*
- *to offer public support to those affected?'*

[Read Bishop Martin's response here.](#)



Bishop Martin gave his **Presidential Address**, his final address as Acting Bishop of Worcester.

He said: "It's been a real privilege to fill the role, but I'm looking forward to +Hugh joining us. I want to say a big thank you for your prayers, your love and for your support over the last 15 months and for all that you do in the parishes, chaplaincies and schools across our wonderful diocese.

"Are you worried about the state of the world? I am! It so often feels an angry place, with all of us looking for who to blame. But in the end the responsibility is ours. What kind of a people do we want to be? We need courage and determination to build a better Britain where racism and hatred have no place. To become those people, we need, as Jesus said, to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. That love needs to begin with you and with me.

Thank God that he has that love for us. His love never fails. Fifty years ago, the then Archbishop of Canterbury said in a Call to the Nation that we need to 'Put God first, others next and self last'. We need to hear that call afresh today. I need to hear that call afresh today." [Read the full text of Bishop Martin's address.](#)

Diocesan Director of Finance, Sarah Powell introduced the item on **Consideration, for approval, of the 2026 DBF budget.** [Find her slides here](#)

Sarah began by looking at how 2025 is currently going. At 31 October 2025, £3,099,127 has been received against the 2025 Ministry Share request. This equates to 70% of the net Ministry Share request.



The budget for 2026 will include a similar net operating deficit as 2025 of £1.6m, which will be offset with planned use of reserves.

The National Church has recommended increase of 10% for clergy stipends. This is largely funded by national church through LiNC and other support both ongoing and time limited, with the time-limited element being spread over nine years (heavily weighted to years 1-4). The unfunded element results in a 1.5% increase in Gross Ministry Share request (ie before grants). (The National Church recommendations come into effect in April 2026, but our budget runs from January 2026 and the increase in Ministry Share will cover this gap). We plan to continue to make use of the Ministry Support Fund, which is expected to last into 2027.

Expenditure on clergy housing also includes another £150k of net zero carbon improvements and we are looking at finding ways of funding this through reserves so that it will not impact the operating result.



Synod asked a number of questions on the budget, including clarifying the Ministry Share increase, the impact of LinC funding, reliability of the national funding and the planned increase in wages for diocesan lay staff.

The Director of Finance moved that:

“This Synod approves the budget presented by the Bishop’s Council and Standing Committee for the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited, which provides for operational expenditure of £8,548, 982 in 2026, and operating income of £6,894,471.”

This was passed with one vote against.

The meeting moved to be the **Annual General Meeting of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd** and the Director of finance moved that:

“The Company hereby approves the budget of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited for 2026, as approved by the Diocesan Synod in its immediately preceding business.”

This was also passed with one vote against.

The Revd David Morris, Chair of CARL, and Geoff Sansome, former Head of Agriculture for National England and member of CARL, presented an update on the **work of the Chaplaincy for Agriculture and Rural Life.**



David began by explaining some of the background to both CARL and the Muddy Boots Rural mission Area. Geoff then added some context about UK agriculture and the farming community, explaining that in the UK there are 102,000 farmers (0.2% of the population). 6,000 farmers left the industry last year; many subsidies have been removed, and many farms would be running at a loss if they relied only on income from agriculture.

The Chaplaincy for Agriculture and Rural Life helps with knowledge exchange and training for clergy and laity in rural areas, provides support for Rural Mission Areas, and uses a faith lens to help connect people in different organisations. Parishes are encouraged to join in with services representing the different points of the agricultural year – Plough Sunday, Rogation, Harvest – as well as work with young farmers in their area.



David explained that we are at a crossroads. With a new bishop comes new opportunities in a largely rural diocese. He offered a challenge to synod to think about how we should continue to support the rural church to become more missional and what comes next for CARL.

The Diocesan Leader for Transformation and Change, Nikki Groarke, and the Transformation Programme Director, Damian Herbert, presented an **update on progress with the Transformation Programme**.



Nikki began by explaining that we are entering Phase 2 of the Transformation Programme and will be continuing with our priorities which we continue to believe are the right ones. She expressed thanks to all those who were involved in our health and sustainability conversations and explained that these provided helpful feedback which will be included in Phase 2 planning. As a diocese, we are absolutely committed to our transformation journey.

Damian discussed the learnings from the Health & Sustainability conversations in more detail. Through the conversations, key themes kept being highlighted which have been distilled into five missional challenges - discipleship & leadership gaps, aging congregations, declining attendance, low missional energy and unsustainable churches.

Leadership gaps have been identified as the root cause of these challenges and as a result Equipping Ministers for Mission will become the key focus for the next phase of our transformation journey.

Nikki explained that areas where we are seeing growth seem to be those places where there is visionary leadership and we are joining in with where God is already at work. The direction of travel involves the same priorities with sharper focus and increased focus on Equipping Ministers for Mission as we develop a culture of coaching. Please pray for the journey of transformation and change. Only God makes things grow.



The Director of Education, Tim Reid, presented the **Annual Education Report**, explaining that the DBE has clear priorities which are linked to the diocesan priorities. There is also a strategy towards full Academisation.

98 schools are good or better on their SIAMS inspection and are effective church schools and 46 schools have had a good or higher Ofsted inspection. The team have a key focus on school improvement with the majority of schools signing up to a service level agreement to receive training from the team. There is also a key focus on becoming net zero

Carbon. Ten schools have so far been awarded a Church School Partnership award – the number of schools and parishes applying continues to climb steadily since it was launched last year.

Seun Cole, Data and Administration Officer for the **West Midlands Racial Justice Initiative**, presented an item seeking feedback from members of Synod. She began by introducing the regional initiative, which is a partnership between six dioceses across the West Midlands. Seun also explained why collecting data matters to ensure that voices are listened to and to inform decisions. She said: "By understanding data we understand who we are and what we can do together." Synod members were encouraged to complete a survey for the Racial Justice Initiative to help with their data collection. More surveys will be distributed for parish completion – Seun asked synod members to encourage others to get involved.



The Director of Church Buildings & Net Zero, Mark Carter, presented the **annual Net Zero Carbon Emissions Report**, explaining that there were some inaccuracies in the 2024 data with the national church allocating more clergy houses to our diocese than we actually have. The 2025 data is expected early next year, and it is hoped that this will be much more accurate.



Alongside the emissions report, Mark gave an update on how the National Church's triennium funding plans have meant that some net zero Carbon funding has been moved into a future triennium. This is likely to have an impact on the 2030 target. Mark said: "We continue to work towards the target, but there are important questions to be raised."

Mark's report also discussed Eco Church and the fact that we are close to reaching one of the milestone targets to become a Silver Eco Diocese. There are currently 24% churches in our diocese with an award and 46% of our churches have registered. Mark continued: "We hope to exceed our 2026 targets next year which is a sign that people in our churches are taking the climate crisis seriously."

A more substantive item on climate crisis is planned for the next synod.

Arrangements for the **new Bishop of Worcester** were presented by Bishop Martin. He said: "Bishop Hugh is very much looking forward to joining us. The Confirmation of Election when Hugh legally becomes the Bishop of Worcester takes place on 28 November. However, he doesn't join the Diocese until after his welcome service on 17 January at 2pm in the Cathedral, to which all are welcome. This will be a celebration of the whole diocese and what's already happening here."

Hugh Richards, Chair of the House of Laity expressed his thanks to Bishop Martin for all he has done as Acting Bishop of Worcester, saying that "we have been blessed to have you during this time". Synod prayed for Bishop Martin and presented him with a small gift to say thank you.

Bishop Martin closed the meeting in prayer.

Date of next Meeting

The Fifth Session of the Nineteenth Synod and General Meeting of the DBF will be held on Saturday 7 March 2026 from 9.30am, venue to be confirmed.

