

A SUMMARY OF THE WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD
the Fifth Session of the Nineteenth Synod
and a general meeting of the
WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED

Held at St Peter's Baptist Church, Worcester on Saturday 7 March 2026

Bishop Hugh opened the meeting in prayer

There were a number of **questions raised under Standing Order 71** covering the subjects of the Prayers of Love and Faith and Project Spire. [You can read the full questions and answers here.](#)

Bishop Hugh gave an **address to the Synod**, thanking everyone for making him feel so welcome in the Diocese and expressing a deep sense of joy about being Bishop of Worcester. At the end of week six, he offered some initial reflections, focusing on who we need to be as Kingdom People.



Bishop Hugh talked about the fact that the phrase Kingdom People drew him to our diocese. He said: "It's clear to me that the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of heaven, is at the heart of what Jesus came to be and to do. That he didn't come to start the Church of England, or to give the world some pithy wisdom – but to tear open the veil that lies between heaven and earth, so that the way things are in heaven, pours down onto earth, so that 'God's kingdom might come, on earth as it already is in heaven.' And I want to be part of that."

He continued to explain that he believes the call to be Kingdom People, means that church is for three things – a learning community for Kingdom living (through opening scripture and in discussion with each other), signposts or witnesses to the Kingdom (attentive and curious) and builders of the Kingdom (joining in with God's work, or trying to bring more love, compassion, justice and freedom).

He continued: "Kingdom learners, kingdom witnesses and kingdom builders – that's what I think it means for us to be Kingdom People. And I honestly cannot think of anything better to give our lives to. And in case you're thinking – 'yes, but where's evangelism on that list?' – It's all evangelism. To be Kingdom People means doing all that learning, witnessing and building in the name of Jesus Christ...inviting people to know him and to be part of his Kingdom People."

[Read the full text of Bishop Hugh's address](#)



Synod were encouraged to have a discussion on their tables around: what they felt most spoke to them in Bishop Hugh's address and what questions it raised for them; what was particularly important in what he said and what might be missing; and which elements could members share in their own contexts and what did they not feel they could. There was then a chance to offer feedback.

Bishop Martin, Kashmir Garton and Lynn Nichol offered an **update on General Synod**.

Lynn spoke about different elements of work around inclusion, including around mental health, working class clergy and a very moving moment when Archbishop Sarah gave her first address. General Synod also spent a lot of time talking about the Living in Love and Faith process and there was a real sense that no one is particularly happy about where this has got to. That process has now been brought to an end and a new one started.

There was a real sense of the voice of the local with the debate around sustainable church flowers. There was also a debate about increases to parochial church fees, including a proposed uplift of £1,000 to burial fees which was rejected.

Other topics included a national register of lay ministers, and the new clergy conduct measure, which had been referred back to synod by Parliament. Synod voted to reverse the presumption of private hearings so that tribunals and courts will normally sit in public.

Kashmir spoke about the move to make safeguarding in the Church of England independent. The plan is to establish a new charity which will be independent from the church, a standard complaints process and a new ombudsman-style system. It is hoped that this will make the work of safeguarding teams more visible. General Synod supported this direction of travel, and the details will now be worked out and presented to July's meeting.



Bishop Martin talked about the membership of General Synod and encouraged those present to think about who might stand to be our representatives for the next quinquennium. He has been asked to look at a process to ensure that acting diocesan bishops can also be members while they are in this role. Bishop Martin also spoke about the sustainable church flowers debate which generated a significant amount of interest in the run up to synod. He paid tribute to Kate Hurst, member of diocesan synod, churchwarden and local flower grower who was part of

the Sustainable Church Flowers team who helped pull the motion together. It was a great example of a motion which started in a PCC, went through deanery and diocese before being presented to General Synod.

Tim Reid, Diocesan Director of Education, gave a summary of developments in **work with schools throughout the Diocese**. He reminded synod that there are 22,000 children in 99 church schools across the diocese which represents huge potential.

94 of our schools are good or outstanding and 96 are in the top category for SIAMS. 93 schools buy into the service level agreements which enables the team to provide high quality training during the year. That training is open to clergy, lay leaders and children and youth ministers throughout the Diocese, and Tim encouraged those present to make use of it.

All of our schools are signed up to 'Let's Go Zero' environmental focus – but there is currently little money available to be able to change their buildings.

The Government has also published two education-focussed White Papers, including a consultation for full-scale change around SEND provision. Tim explained that this is needed and a good thing, but it needs to be properly funded. The worry is that there could be a new Government before these ideas are implemented.

The Church and School Partnership Award continues to grow. 11 schools have now received the award with over 65 schools and parishes registering interest.

Tim reported that schools are facing increased complexities around governance, and finance in schools is also a challenge with many schools setting deficit budgets.



There was a chance to feedback questions to Tim as well as have discussions in small groups and offer feedback to specific questions.

David Hewlett, Chair of the Diocesan Climate Crisis Task Group, briefed Synod on developments in the Diocese's work in relation to **environmental sustainability and climate justice**, inviting strategic input from Synod.



He began with a reminder of the current challenge with rising temperatures. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries on earth with only 53% of our biodiversity remaining. Tipping points across the world are being reached, including the coral reefs in the Pacific now past the point of being recoverable. The only credible way to reduce the list is to accelerate to zero emissions and stop burning fossil fuels.

There is a gospel imperative to choose life over death, and at the moment we are not. This is God's world, he loves it and wants to see it flourish.

The diocesan climate crisis task group has set a number of priorities.

- On Eco Church we are reaching our targets and hope to be in a position by the end of the year to apply for accreditation as a Silver Eco Diocese. We continue to encourage churches to participate, particularly larger churches.
- On our journey to net zero there are some good things happening with significant projects underway, but there is little or no funding for capital projects for churches so progress may stall. We need to be ready if and when funding opportunities arise.
- We have made small steps in our hope to offer public witness in the area of the climate crisis.

Synod was asked where climate change should fit into our diocesan priorities and to give an indication of where funding should be prioritised.

Damian Herbert, diocesan Transformation Programme Director, presented an update on **progress in the Transformation Programme** to date, and an overview of work towards a Phase 2 funding bid to the Diocesan Investment Programme.

He gave an insight into the impact that we're seeing, including with:

Children Young people and Families – our current statistics show that the AWA has stayed the same across 2023 & 4, however, we have halted the previous decline. Learning from phase 1 suggests that our current interventions might not be enough to impact on culture change and phase 2 might require more targeted placement and a clearer sense of how these interventions are being used.

New Worshipping Communities - There have been 56 NWCs established and the team has spent some time focussing on governance and making sure they are embedded in the parish. We now hope to refocus on growing new opportunities and are planning to work with Greenhouse to establish a learning community for leaders. Indications show that AWA has grown but Sunday attendance may have shrunk slightly, which could be evidence that parishes are trying new things.

In our *renewal churches*, adult AWA rose from 487 to 674. Visionary local leadership has been shown to be key, but building projects have slowed mission. There has also been learning from phase 1 about the importance of operational staffing to enable leaders to focus on mission.



Phase 2 will be continuation of our strategy. Targeted interventions are planned in Droitwich, Pensnett, Evesham, Kidderminster and Worcester and there will be increased resource for our underpinning priority of Equipping Ministers for Mission. The team are also looking at a diocesan wide strategy for how we address unsustainability.

We are planning a submission in the second half of the year for national funding for our Droitwich and Pensnett interventions. A further phase 2 submission for national funding will happen in subsequently. However, Damian noted that the level of available national funding will be less than had been previously hoped.

Discussion around tables – with synod members exploring the following questions:

1. How can we as a Diocese work together to foster a culture of lifelong growth in discipleship?
2. How can we as a Synod model putting children, young people and families at the heart of our work?
3. What do you believe is the right balance between listening to what is emerging from parishes and providing clear diocese-wide strategic direction?
4. What do you believe the Diocese most needs to be brave about over the next 3 to 5 years?

The synod was closed by sharing the Eucharist together.

