

Leeds Diocesan Synod

Draft Minutes of the thirty first Synod of the diocese held at 9.30 am on Saturday, 14 June 2025 at Holy Trinity Boar Lane, Boar Lane, Leeds LS1 6HW

Chair: The Bishop of Leeds.

1. Opening worship

Worship was led by Dean Simon Cowling, The Revd Eve Ridgeway and The Revd Canon Rachel Firth.

The Chair noted that this Synod was Dean Simon Cowling's last Synod as he would be retiring at the end of July 2025. Dean Simon was thanked for his work in the diocese and the Synod.

2. Welcome, apologies and notices

DS25 06 01	Letter 16.5.25 re Act of Synod
DS25 06 01 01	Act of Synod Instrument 2025
DS25 06 01 02	Vacancy in See Regulations 2024 as amended Feb 2025

2.1 Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Synod and particularly mentioned The Rt Revd Malcolm Chamberlain, Bishop of Wakefield, consecrated on 11 June 2025.

The Bishop of Leeds outlined that once he had delivered the Presidential Address and proposed Item 5, Bishop of Leeds Instrument of Delegation item, he would be leaving the Synod to go home to rest as he had been unwell over the previous two weeks.

The Chair welcomed:

Assisting with the admin of the Synod: Katharine Greathead – Diocesan Internship Co-Ordinator.

The following were welcomed and given the Chair's permission to speak:

Item 7 Presentation and Motion: Annual Reports from the Diocesan Boards and Committees: Janet Edmond, Senior Stewardship Officer.

Item 7 Annual Reports from the Diocesan Boards and Committees; Items 9 and 10 2024 Leeds DBF Annual Accounts: Geoff Park, Chief Finance Officer.

Item 11 DAC Constitution Update: Lisa McIntyre, DAC Secretary.

Item 13 Barnabas update: The Revd Canon Jude Smith, Director of Mission and Revitalisation.

2.2 Apologies

26 Apologies had been received.

2.3 Notices

Extra item of business

An extra item of business had been added under Standing Order 21 by the direction of the President of the Synod, "Vacancy in See Committee update". This item will be considered as an Item 14 on the Agenda.

Proclamation of Act of Synod

DS25 06 01 Letter 16.5.25 re Act of Synod

DS25 06 01 01 Act of Synod Instrument 2025

David Whitaker, Diocesan Registrar, read out the Proclamation below:

"At the group of sessions of the General Synod held at Westminster in February 2025 the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024 in the form it takes following its amendment at that group of sessions was formally affirmed and proclaimed as an Act of Synod."

An Act of Synod is the embodiment of the will or opinion of the Church of England as expressed by the whole body of the General Synod. Copies of the Instrument proclaiming and affirming the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation as an Act of Synod have been sent to members of this Synod."

3. Motion: Draft Minutes of the last Meeting on 22 March 2025.

DS25 06 02 22.3.25 Diocesan Synod draft minutes

The Chair proposed:

"That the draft minutes contained in DS25 06 02 be accepted as a true record of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 22 March 2025".

There were no notified amendments.

The motion was approved.

Chair: Canon Matthew Ambler (Chair of the House of Laity of the Diocesan Synod)

4. Presidential Address.

The Bishop of Leeds gave his Presidential Address a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

The Chair thanked the Bishop of Leeds on behalf of all members of the current and former diocesan synods, over which he had presided. The Chair also thanked the Bishop of Leeds for all that he had done for the diocese since its creation in 2014. Particularly, for his wisdom, forbearance, and faith, and for negotiating the challenges of creating a new diocesan structure and for leading that process. The Chair wished Bishop Nick and Linda a happy retirement.

5. Motion: Bishop of Leeds s13(8) Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 Instrument of Delegation

DS25 06 03 s13 Delegation – Responsibilities as Diocesan Bishop

DS25 06 03 01 Report on s13 Delegation

Motion:

“That, pursuant to section 13 (8) of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, this Synod approves the proposed Instrument of Delegation to the Bishop of Bradford contained in DS25 06 03.”

Proposer: The Bishop of Leeds

The Bishop of Leeds outlined that the proposal was for the delegation of his authority to Bishop Toby Howarth for the period from 1 September 2025 to 30 November 2025. Bishop Toby would remain the Bishop of Bradford. Once Bishop Nick retires as Bishop of Leeds on 30 November 2025, Bishop Toby would then become the acting Bishop of Leeds until a new person legally becomes the Bishop of Leeds.

Questions of clarification

Barbara Smith (Brighouse and Elland deanery)

Remembering that Bishop Nick had said that being Bishop of Leeds and bishop of an episcopal area was too much for him, what measures are being taken to help the Bishop of Bradford deal with an area plus the whole diocese?

The Bishop of Leeds outlined that this scenario would be the case in any diocese where a suffragan bishop took on this type of delegation. Bishop Toby and Archdeacon Andy Jolley will assess how matters will be handled in the Bradford episcopal area and there is a strong episcopal team in the diocese and Bishop Toby could delegate some matters to others to take on. The Bishop of Leeds asked the Synod to look after the bishops.

The Bishop of Leeds moved the motion in his name on the Agenda.

The Chair invited the Synod to debate the motion.

There was no debate offered.

The Chair read out the motion on the Agenda:

“That, pursuant to section 13 (8) of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, this Synod approves the proposed Instrument of Delegation to the Bishop of Bradford contained in DS25 06 03.”

Voting

For: All.

Against: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion was approved.

The Bishop of Leeds left the meeting.

Bishop Toby Howarth, Bishop of Bradford, joined the panel leading the Synod comprising the Chairs of the Houses of the Synod, the Secretary to the Synod and the Legal Adviser to the Synod.

6. Questions to Synod.

The Chair confirmed no questions had been received.

7. Presentation and Motion: Receive the Annual Reports from the Diocesan Boards and Committees **Presentation: Stewardship Team**

DS25 06 04 Annual Reports (Statutory content) from the Diocesan Boards and Committees

Motion:

“That the annual reports contained in DS25 06 04 are received.”

Proposer: The Ven Cat Thatcher (Archdeacon of Pontefract)

Archdeacon Cat Thatcher introduced the item thanking all who worked on boards and committees throughout the year along with those from the diocesan team who support them. Archdeacon Cat highlighted that the motion was *“That the annual reports contained in DS25 06 04 are received.”* and not that they be approved.

Janet Edmond provided an update on the stewardship team’s activities over the past 12 months, focusing on three main areas:

1. Parish Share Agreements:

- Significant progress has been made in developing the parish share agreements programme, including communications and project planning.
- A new Parish Officer, Ann Roebuck, has been appointed to lead meetings with parishes, supported by the other stewardship officers.
- The process would involve face-to-face meetings with all parishes to agree on three-year parish share commitments, starting in autumn 2025.
- Preparatory webinars and deanery-based scheduling have been implemented, with strong engagement from parishes.
- The initiative aims to strengthen relationships, improve communication, and provide targeted support to parishes.

2. Treasurer Forum Initiative:

- Quarterly forums for parish treasurers have been established, with over 60 attendees per session.
- A WhatsApp group for treasurers has been created to facilitate peer support and knowledge sharing.
- The introduction of treasurer ambassadors, now representing all Episcopal areas, had enhanced support and feedback mechanisms.

3. Stewardship Training for Clergy:

- Ongoing collaboration with the Director of Mission and Formation to deliver stewardship training on generosity, parish finances, and governance.
- Training has been incorporated into IME programs and CMD sessions, with additional support for new incumbents.
- Plans are in place to introduce a clergy induction program to further support clergy in stewardship matters with one-to-one meetings with a stewardship officer.

Janet concluded by noting the positive developments and ongoing efforts to support parishes and clergy in stewardship.

There were no questions of clarification on the motion.

Debate

Kay Brown (North West Leeds deanery)

Asked that it be put on record the Synod's thanks to all those volunteers who serve on the Boards and Committees of the diocese and others who work selflessly to ensure everything functions.

The Chair repeated the motion.

Synod voted on the motion:

For: Unanimous.

Against: None.

Abstain: None.

The motion was approved.

8. Presentation and discussion: Update on Living in Love and Faith.

DS25 06 05

LLF Spring 2025 Update

DS25 06 05 01

Update on LLF theological work 2025

Bishop Toby Howarth provided an update on the national Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process, outlining its development since 2017 and the current stage of informal consultation. While the scope of the consultation remains unclear, the Diocese opted to facilitate discussion among Synod members to explore local understanding and concerns.

Key points included:

- *Background and Timeline:*

The LLF process began following the rejection of a motion in 2017, leading to the development of resources and pastoral principles. Recent steps include the introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith and proposals for further implementation, with decisions expected by General Synod in February 2026.

- *Draft Proposals:*

- Opt-in mechanism for standalone services using Prayers of Love and Faith.
- Pastoral reassurance for those unable to support the proposals, potentially via delegated episcopal ministry.
- Consideration of lifting restrictions on clergy in same-sex marriages.
- A proposed three-year period of discernment and monitoring.

- *Local Engagement:*

Synod members were invited to discuss the implications of LLF in small groups, focusing on levels of awareness, clarity, and local conversations. Input was collected via a QR code-linked Microsoft Form or paper submissions. The questions discussed by the small groups were:

1. What discussions have taken place in your church (please circle)

- *No discussion*
- *LLF course*
- *Sermon series*
- *Other course/discussion*

2. What do you think the current level of understanding and awareness is in your church? (1 is low and 5 is high)

1 2 3 4 5

3. What, if anything, remains unclear?

4. Is there anything else you wish to comment on in relation to LLF?

- *Next Steps:*
A summary of responses may be shared with the national LLF team if requested. Further diocesan engagement may be required in autumn, depending on national developments.

The LLF team would be hosting Zoom webinars for General and Diocesan Synod members to clarify any factual enquiries about the proposals on 23 July 2025 11 am to 7 pm and 17 September 2025 11 am to 7 pm.

Members needed to register for the webinar or with any further feedback or questions to llf@churchofengland.org

Synod broke for refreshments after the small group discussions.

Chair: The Revd Canon Rachel Firth (Chair of the House of Clergy of the Diocesan Synod)

9. Presentation and discussion: 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements

DS25 06 06 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements

DS25 06 06 01 2024 Statutory Accounts Covering Note

Presenters: Richard Pattinson (Bowland and Ewecross deanery) and Geoff Park

Motion:

"That the 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements are received."

Proposer: Richard Pattinson (Bowland and Ewecross deanery)

Geoff Park presented highlights from the diocesan accounts, noting the following key points:

- **Financial Position:**
The underlying financial position remains challenging, with a deficit of approximately £1.8 million in 2024.

- The deficit is being managed through property sales and use of reserves, which remain at the top end of the desired range.
- Income and Expenditure:
Parish share now accounts for around 60% of income, but has declined since 2019, while inflation has increased costs. Expenditure on stipendiary ministry has increased as a proportion of the budget.
- Restricted Funding:
Restricted income, mainly from strategic development funded projects from the national church, now represents nearly 15% of total income and is vital for strategic projects.
- Pensions and Accounting Changes:
The lay pension scheme is now in surplus, resulting in significant savings. The adoption of total return accounting has released additional funds to support ongoing operations.
- Property and Reserves:
Most assets are held in property, with only a small proportion available as cash or investments for day-to-day use. Property development is being pursued more intentionally, balancing financial, social, and environmental goals.
- Current Year Update:
As of April, income is behind budget, particularly in parish share and property sales, with the deficit expected to remain around £1.5 million for 2025.
- Actions and Outlook:
Ongoing actions include participation in national funding reviews, strategic investment in mission, property development, cost control, and the parish share agreement process. Collaboration between the national church, diocese, and parishes is emphasized as essential for financial sustainability.

Robert Haskins (Harrogate Deanery)

Robert Haskins asked about the recent announcement by the Archbishops' Council of a 10% increase to clergy stipends. He thanked Geoff Park for his work managing the figures and queried whether this increase had been factored into the diocesan financial planning.

Geoff Park explained that the announced increase refers to the movement between the current national stipends benchmark and the recommended future benchmark, which is a 10.7% increase. However, many dioceses, including Leeds, do not currently pay the national benchmark, so the actual increase for Leeds would be 9.1%. The final decision on stipend levels rests with the Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance, and the diocese is awaiting further details from the national funding settlement. Geoff noted that while the announcement is positive, the precise financial impact is not yet known.

Michael Laycock, (Harrogate Deanery)

Michael Laycock sought clarification on the reported surplus in the pension fund, asking whether this meant the fund was taking in more money than it was paying out, or if it indicated adequate provision for all future pension commitments.

Geoff Park clarified that all pension matters are managed by the Pensions Board in London. Both the clergy and lay pension schemes are currently in surplus, meaning that the assets in the fund exceed the expected future commitments, as calculated by professional actuaries. This surplus gives confidence that all future pension obligations can be met.

Michael also asked about total return accounting, specifically whether capital gains are calculated with an adjustment for inflation.

Geoff Park confirmed that capital gains are indeed calculated with an adjustment for inflation. The diocese targets a return of inflation plus 4–5% (net of fees), and only a portion of the capital growth is accessed, ensuring the real value of the underlying assets is protected over the long term.

Roger Lazenby (North West Leeds Deanery)

Roger Lazenby asked whether the parish share agreement process would enable parishes that have benefited from strategic development funding to have their share calculations updated to reflect their improved financial health, thereby allowing the diocese to benefit from increased contributions.

Geoff Park responded that the parish share agreement process is intended to facilitate such conversations. Where strategic investment has led to improved parish finances, the diocese hopes to adjust share expectations accordingly. While this may not be common, it is an example of how successful investment can bear fruit for both the parish and the wider diocese.

Robin Newsam (Wensley Deanery):

Robin Newsam asked about the tension between selling property to balance the books and developing property for long-term value, and how the diocese manages this balance.

Geoff Park acknowledged the tension and stated that the diocese aims to avoid selling assets with long-term development potential. Property sales are focused on houses no longer needed for clergy ministry, while land with development value is retained for future opportunities. The diocese is also exploring creative uses for land, such as renewable energy projects, to maximize returns without compromising future value.

David Ashton, (General Synod and Dewsbury and Birstall Deanery)

David Ashton expressed his appreciation for the professional and engaging way Geoff Park presented the financial report, noting that the subject could easily have been very dry.

10. Motion: 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements

DS25 06 06 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements

DS25 06 06 01 2024 Statutory Accounts Covering Note

Presenters: Richard Pattinson (Bowland and Ewecross deanery) and Geoff Park

Motion:

“That the 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements are received.”

Proposer: Richard Pattinson (Bowland and Ewecross deanery)

Richard Pattinson (Bowland and Ewecross Deanery) presented a summary of the financial position, highlighting the following:

- The underlying unrestricted deficit stands at £1.8 million, with a projected cumulative deficit of over £7.5 million across the next five years if no action is taken.
- Parish share remains at approximately 60% of income, but has not kept pace with inflation, resulting in a significant gap between income and rising costs.
- Recent years have benefited from exceptional items such as pension surpluses, but these are not sustainable solutions.
- The short-term financial position is manageable, but the medium-term outlook is unsustainable

without intervention.

- Measures to address the deficit include the diocesan finance review, strategic investment, property development, ongoing cost control (notably at Church House), and the rollout of parish share agreements.

Richard Pattinson then moved the following motion:

“That the 2024 Leeds Diocesan Board of Finance Annual Report and Financial Statements are received.”

There were no questions of clarification or debate offered by Synod.

The motion was put to Synod and carried unanimously.

11. Motion: DAC constitution update

DS25 06 07

Proposer & Presenter:

DAC Constitution update report

Andrew Hall (DAC Chair)

Motion:

“That the revised constitution for the Diocesan Advisory Committee contained in appendix 3 of DS25 06 07 be approved.”

Proposer: Andrew Hall (DAC Chair)

Andrew Hall introduced the report seeking consideration and approval of a revised constitution for the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), following a review to bring it in line with the Church of England’s Miscellaneous Provisions Measure 2020 and the 2024 measure.

He outlined that the proposed amendments, prepared by the DRC Secretary and endorsed by the DAC, primarily reflect terms in section 35 of the measure and include minor but significant corrections and typographical updates.

Key changes highlighted:

- Addition of an acknowledgment of environmental protection in the preamble, reflecting net zero and environmental considerations.
- Removal of the requirement for consultation with local authority associations regarding committee appointments (clause B2).
- Addition of a requirement that at least one appointee has knowledge of environmental matters (clause 5).
- Ensuring at least one member has expertise in accessibility for disabled people (clause 6).
- Tidying up of clause 38 regarding previous local authority requirements.
- All other amendments were minor and typographical.

Andrew Hall confirmed that these changes bring the constitution into line with the 2024 measure, especially regarding environmental matters and accessibility. He moved the motion:

“That the revised constitution for the Diocesan Advisory Committee contained in appendix 3 of DS25 06 07 be approved.”

The Chair invited questions of clarification.

The Revd Canon Joyce Jones (General Synod)

Revd Canon Joyce Jones expressed concern that the DAC should maintain its mission focus alongside heritage preservation. Drawing on her experience with church reordering, she noted that while the DAC ensures proper preservation, there is sometimes a perception that amenity societies' views are given more weight than the needs of the community. She urged the DAC to remember its duty to support parishes in using church buildings for community benefit and mission, and to help parishes feel supported in this process.

Bishop Anna Eltringham (Bishop of Ripon)

Bishop Anna echoed Joyce Jones's comments, noting the importance of environmental protection and mission as reflected in the constitution's preamble. She suggested that, in clause 5, consideration be given to explicitly including a commitment to the mission imperative of the church among the required areas of knowledge for appointees.

Response

Andrew Hall responded that the DAC spends significant time considering the uses of church buildings and the needs of the community, and assured members that community use is recognized as important. He agreed to take the points raised back to the committee for further consideration. Regarding the suggestion to add a mission imperative to clause 5, he noted that all archdeacons are members of the committee and would ensure the core purpose of church buildings is maintained.

Jonathan Wood (Secretary to the Diocesan Synod)

Jonathan Wood clarified that the constitution is determined by General Synod as a measure and cannot be amended locally. Any changes would require rejection by Synod and a motion to General Synod, which would be a lengthy legislative process. He noted that the preamble already reflects the importance of mission and worship, and that the constitution as drafted is consistent with these principles.

Catherine Shelley (Halifax and Calder Valley Deanery & General Synod)

Catherine Shelley informed Synod that both she and Revd Canon Joyce Jones serve on General Synod committees working on the new Mission and Pastoral Measure, which may address some of the issues raised. She assured Synod that they would keep members apprised of relevant developments.

The Chair reminded members of the motion:

"That the revised constitution for the Diocesan Advisory Committee contained in appendix 3 of DS25 06 07 be approved."

Archdeacon Bill Braviner (Archdeacon of Halifax)

Clarified that the appendix reference in the motion should be to "Appendix 1", there was no Appendix 3 in DS25 06 07.

Vote

The Synod voted on the motion to approve the revised constitution for the DAC:

For: All in favour

Against: None

Abstain: None.

12. Motion: Publication of Diocesan Synod members' names and deaneries on the diocesan website

DS25 06 08 Publication of DS members' names and deaneries on the diocesan website

Proposer: The Ven Paul Ayers (Archdeacon of Leeds and General Synod)

Motion:

"That for every Diocesan Synod member over the age of 18 years, during membership of the Diocesan Synod the first name and surname of the Diocesan Synod member is listed on the diocesan website and that for Diocesan Synod House of Clergy members and Diocesan Synod House of Laity members, the member's deanery is also listed."

Archdeacon Paul Ayers introduced the motion that, for every Diocesan Synod member over the age of 18, the first name and surname, along with the member's deanery, should be listed on the diocesan website. He noted that such lists are already public in many other dioceses and emphasised the importance of transparency and accountability. He acknowledged the need for discretion in exceptional cases, such as safeguarding concerns.

Questions of Clarification

Barbara Smith (Brighouse and Elland Deanery)

Barbara Smith requested clarification that the name used should be the one by which the member is commonly known, rather than their legal first name.

David Corps (Huddersfield Deanery)

David Corps asked whether there would be a provision for members to opt out, particularly in cases where being publicly identified could present a risk.

Debate

Helen Eskriett (Inner Bradford Deanery)

Helen Eskriett raised the issue of under-18 members, suggesting that their inclusion should be at the discretion of the parent or guardian.

Elaine Wilkes (Dewsbury and Birstall Deanery)

Elaine Wilkes highlighted the importance of an opt-out clause for those at risk, such as survivors of domestic abuse.

The Revd Catherine Shelley (Halifax and Calder Valley Deanery)

Revd Catherine Shelley supported the principle of the motion and suggested a mechanism for members to request exclusion from the list for good reason, similar to Charity Commission practice. She also raised the need for support for members who may face hostility as a result of their names being public.

Robert Haskins (Harrogate Deanery)

Robert Haskins suggested using "Christian name" rather than "first name" in the listing.

Angus Maude (Wensley Deanery)

Angus Maude expressed strong support for the motion, noting the practical benefits of knowing who Synod members are.

Response

Archdeacon Paul Ayers agreed with the use of the name by which a person is normally known and supported the idea of discretion for those who do not wish to be publicly listed, to be managed by the Diocesan Secretary. He confirmed that under-18s would not be included, in line with safeguarding advice. He noted that no formal amendments had been received.

The Chair reminded members of the process for submitting amendments and confirmed the wording of the motion to Synod:

“That for every Diocesan Synod member over the age of 18 years, during membership of the Diocesan Synod the first name and surname of the Diocesan Synod member is listed on the diocesan website and that for Diocesan Synod House of Clergy members and Diocesan Synod House of Laity members, the member’s deanery is also listed.”

Vote

For: Majority

Against: None

Abstain: Three

The motion was approved.

13. Presentation: Barnabas update

The Revd Canon Jude Smith presented a comprehensive update on the Barnabas programme, reporting that approximately 51% of parishes are now meaningfully engaged. While the overall number of engaged parishes has not increased significantly since March, Canon Jude explained that the depth of engagement has grown, with many parishes returning for further support. In total, there have been 335 individual engagements, with some parishes participating in up to six different Barnabas activities.

Canon Jude provided a detailed breakdown of engagement across several key areas:

- Clergy Leadership Development: Activities to build confidence and skills among clergy for leading mission, including leadership courses and mentoring.
- Missional Leadership Development: Support for groups within churches to discern and plan next steps in mission, often through facilitated workshops and group sessions.
- Structural Development: Practical support for church buildings and governance, including the work of the Church Building Support Officer, Eleanor, and advice on building projects and compliance.
- Children, Young People, and Families Development: Efforts to help churches reach and support families, including direct support from the Barnabas team, though Canon Jude acknowledged this remains an area for further growth and innovation.
- Developing New Worshipping Communities: Encouragement for parishes to explore new forms of worship and outreach, especially for those not currently engaged with existing church activities.

Canon Jude highlighted three key encouragements:

1. Depth of Engagement: More parishes are engaging at a deeper level, taking multiple steps in their journey of mission and discipleship, and returning to Barnabas for further support.

2. Growing Confidence: Lay leaders, in particular, are reporting increased confidence as a result of Barnabas activities. This is measured through pre- and post-course evaluations, with participants noting greater readiness to lead and innovate in their parishes.
3. Signs of Growth: Early statistics suggest that parishes with deeper Barnabas engagement are experiencing faster growth in mission and attendance, as evidenced by diocesan statistics for mission.

To illustrate the impact of Barnabas, Canon Jude shared a video featuring reflections from attendees of the Personal Growth and Leadership (PGL) course. The video highlighted the positive experiences and increased confidence of those who had participated, with several lay and ordained leaders sharing how the course had equipped them for ministry and encouraged them to take new initiatives in their parishes.

Canon Jude encouraged members to attend an upcoming online taster session for the PGL course, scheduled for the evening of Wednesday 27th, and provided contact details for those interested in participating or recommending the course to others.

Canon Jude also drew attention to the significant volunteer workforce supporting children, young people, and families — 945 volunteers across the diocese. The Barnabas team is available to support parishes in this area, whether they are starting from scratch, restarting after a pause, or seeking to engage with local children and families in new ways. Canon Jude emphasized the importance of valuing and encouraging these volunteers, noting that the team holds events to support and thank them. The next such event is scheduled for 6th September at St George's, Wakefield.

Canon Jude concluded by commending the Barnabas programme to Synod members, encouraging further engagement, and inviting anyone interested in leadership development or support for children and families to contact the Barnabas team. He also reminded members that the team is available for conversations and support, whether parishes are just beginning their journey or looking to take the next step

Extra item added under Standing Order 21 by direction of the President of the Synod – Vacancy in See update

Paper: None.

Presenter: The Rt Revd Dr Toby Howarth (Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee).

Bishop Toby Howarth provided a comprehensive update on the work of the Vacancy-in-See Committee, emphasizing the importance of transparency, consultation, and prayer in the process of appointing a new diocesan bishop. He explained that this update was included as an additional agenda item due to its significance for the whole diocese.

Background and Process

Bishop Toby outlined that the Church of England follows a structured and regulated process for appointing diocesan bishops, which is intentionally thorough to ensure broad consultation and discernment. He humorously compared the process to the rapid appointment of a new Pope, noting that the Church of England's approach is more consultative and involves both diocesan and national church bodies. The process is governed by recently updated regulations, as highlighted by the diocesan registrar at the start of Synod. He stressed that this process is not only an administrative necessity but also a missional opportunity, allowing the diocese to engage with people both within and beyond the church about the future direction and

leadership of the diocese.

Role and Tasks of the Vacancy-in-See Committee

The Vacancy-in-See Committee is a standing committee in every diocese, convened only when a diocesan bishop's post becomes vacant. The committee has two primary responsibilities:

1. Preparing a Statement of Needs:

This document provides a descriptive overview of the diocese and outlines the desired profile and qualities for the new bishop. Bishop Toby described it as a “shop window” for the diocese, useful not only for potential candidates but also for anyone interested in the life and mission of the diocese. The statement will be developed through a robust process of consultation and will be made visually engaging, potentially including embedded videos.

2. Electing Diocesan Representatives to the Crown Nominations Committee (CNC):

The committee is responsible for electing six diocesan representatives (three clergy and three laity, excluding bishops) to the CNC, which will participate in the selection and interviewing of candidates for the bishop's post. Bishop Toby noted that the Leeds Vacancy-in-See Committee is the largest in the Church of England, with 41 members. He serves as Chair, with Joyce Hill as Vice Chair and Jonathan Wood as Secretary. The committee's membership will be published and made publicly available.

Committee Structure and Workstreams

The committee is working in three streams:

- **Prayer:** Led by Dean John Dobson (Dean of Ripon), this stream encourages and resources prayer across the diocese for the discernment process. Bishop Toby urged all present to promote prayer for the process in their parishes, ecumenical groups, and organisations such as Mothers' Union, and to make use of the diocesan prayer cycle.
- **Consultation:** Led by Canon Jane Evans and Archdeacon Bill Bradford, this group is organizing a concentrated consultation in July, aiming to reach as many people as possible—including clergy, laity, schools, chaplaincies, and other groups—to gather input on the qualities and priorities for the new bishop. The consultation will be accessible to individuals and groups, with a simple survey featuring three open questions and space for additional comments. Bishop Toby encouraged Synod members to act as ambassadors for the consultation, promoting it widely and ensuring broad participation.
- **Statement of Needs:** This group will bring together the results of the consultation into the formal Statement of Needs document, which will be finalised in September and approved in October.

Timeline

- **July:** Consultation phase, gathering input from across the diocese.
- **August–September:** Collation and drafting of the Statement of Needs.
- **September:** Finalization of the Statement of Needs.
- **October:** Approval of the Statement of Needs and election of diocesan representatives to the CNC.

Requests to Synod Members

Bishop Toby made three specific requests:

1. Pray for the process and encourage others to do so, making use of existing prayer networks and the diocesan prayer cycle.
2. Participate in and promote the consultation survey, ensuring that as many voices as possible are heard.
3. Encourage others to respond to the survey, including parishes, deaneries, chapters, and other church groups.

Questions and Clarifications

Helen Wilson (Dewsbury and Birstall deanery)

Asked what the split was between bishops, clergy and laity diocesan elected representative members to the CNC.

Bishop Toby clarified that the six diocesan representatives to the CNC must be elected from within the Vacancy-in-See Committee (excluding bishops), with three clergy and three laity, in accordance with national regulations. He emphasized that the election process would follow the required procedures exactly.

Dean John Dobson led Synod in prayer for the process, giving thanks for the leadership of Bishop Toby and Jonathan Wood, and praying for the diocese as it seeks to discern God's choice for the next Bishop of Leeds. He encouraged the use of the diocesan prayer cycle and prayed for unity, creativity, and faithfulness throughout the process. Dean John also thanked Bishop Toby and Jonathan Wood for their leadership and commitment during this period of transition.

14. Bishop of Leeds Blessing and Close.

The Revd Millie Cork (General Synod) led the closing prayer and blessing.

Diocese of Leeds

Thirty-first Diocesan Synod, Saturday 14 June 2025

Presidential Address

Whenever I was in the Chris Evans Radio 2 studio with famous special guests, I would try to smuggle into my script as many song titles by the guest as I could. I once managed to get fifteen Barry Manilow titles in while the great man sat there and smiled. It was just a bit of fun and the script always made perfect sense.

Well, I face this morning with a number of memorable lyrics offering themselves as nails on which to hang my last presidential address as the Bishop of Leeds. The one that wins is Bruce Cockburn's line from 'Pacing the Cage': "I've been around so many times the magnetic strip's worn thin." It's time to replace the card.

The first eleven years of this diocese have not been boring and yet I believe we can gather today for this synod with confidence in our future. We have much to thank God for in our life and mission together. There have been – and will continue to be – challenges; but, as we discovered during the Covid pandemic, this is where we find the creative energy to change and build and imagine. Crisis can be a gift.

And, through it all, our fundamental vocation as Anglicans has not changed – whatever the noises around us clamouring for our exclusive attention.

Yesterday I re-read my first presidential address from November 2014. The word 'challenging' does not begin to do justice to what we were faced with then; but, God is faithful, we worked hard, and we were determined not to be put off by naysayers or complainers or professional discouragers. As I remarked at the time, you don't get a degree for spotting the problems; we need people who want to get a PhD in finding solutions. We were blessed with plenty of them. And, as time has passed, many of those courageous people then have since moved on and a new generation now takes us into the future.

So, although our agenda today takes us through what some might think of as 'nuts and bolts' items, we never lose sight of what we might call 'the point of it all'. Apart from finance, accounts, stewardship, the DAC constitution and other matters, I will present an instrument of delegation which will allow me to hand over to the Bishop of Bradford with effect from 1 September – thus allowing him and me three months in which he can begin to exercise the jurisdiction of the Ordinary while I am still around to advise, if requested to do so. I will retire on 30 November from which point Bishop Toby will become legally the Acting Bishop of Leeds. This has been planned in order to facilitate a wise transition. I will say farewell to the diocese on Sunday 23 November at Ripon Cathedral as I finally lay down my pastoral and legal responsibilities.

Now, I have heard a number of 'reasons' why I am retiring at this point – two years before I have to. Some speculations are amusing, others not so. So, I want to be clear: I am retiring now because it is clear that the diocese needs to be moving on in a way that it cannot while I am still here. Nothing malicious – just how the world works. When I asked last November

for the business case for when the diocesan bishop should go, I was told September. It wasn't what I had in mind; but, it was right. Although I have had personal health issues to deal with more recently, they are coincident and not a reason for finishing. I want this to be clear. The diocese needs me gone in order to focus on the next stage. That is my judgment and that is the sole reason for my decision.

This 'closing down' of my ministry coincides with an 'opening up' of other new ministries. Today we welcome the new Bishop of Wakefield, Malcolm Chamberlain, who was freshly minted only four days ago in York. He brings wide experience of parochial, chaplaincy, archidiaconal and now episcopal ministry. Please welcome him to the diocese as he finds his feet and learns a new order as well as a new geography. Bishop Malcolm's consecration marked the point when, as the last member of the Bishop's Staff Team to change over, my leadership-of-change job has been done. As the last person to have been part of one of our historic dioceses, I can now head off into the wilderness; now the entire diocesan leadership has been appointed to the Diocese of Leeds. It is a significant milestone.

Yet today we mark another departure. Simon Cowling retires at the end of July as Wakefield Cathedral seeks a new Dean. Simon picked up the baton in Wakefield from Jonathan Greener and has contributed strongly and effectively in managing legal change in cathedral life whilst building our unique 'three cathedrals in one diocese' model. I am hugely grateful to him and wish him and Anne a richly relaxing and rewarding retirement here in Yorkshire.

I could easily speak about all my colleagues, about clergy and lay leaders across the diocese, about parishes and chaplaincies where the kingdom of God is to be found and the mystery of God encountered. I might spot successes in evangelism and growth at the same time as learning where things have gone wrong and we have failed. I could draw attention to the importance of making the right appointments – see what Jonathan Wood has brought to us in the last five years. But, under it all lies the fact of God's faithfulness to us and his call to us to be faithful to one another as ministers of the Gospel. As I always emphasise to ordinands: our primary vocation is to be human beings, made in the image of God; our discipleship of Jesus derives from our humanity; any ministry we are called to exercise as Christian disciples must derive from our discipleship (not the other way round) and be rooted in our humanity. One of the glaring messages of the gospel narratives is that when religion loses sight of humanity its protagonists object to healing because it takes place on the wrong day.

One of the first things I had to do after Easter Day 2014 was to set up a meeting in each of the new episcopal areas. Each of the five evenings began with me and the clergy – lay leaders joining us later on. I have to be honest: these were not easy meetings. Some people were keen to offend. Given that we had nothing else – and very little time to prepare – I was very straight and honest: we had no mission statement, so I tried to articulate one. I apologised that it wasn't very sexy or original. "We want to be a vibrant diocese (that is, vibrating between the winds of the world and the wind of the Spirit), equipping confident clergy to grow confident Christians to live and tell the Good News of Jesus Christ in our region."

I have often worried about whether we should renew it, but I never get very far.

This formulation eventually became the threefold dynamic behind appointments and any formulation of diocesan strategy: 'Confident Christians – Growing Churches – Transforming Communities'. Again, this keeps things simple and clear. It also provides the bedrock upon which we have built Barnabas as a vehicle for growing confident Christians who grow churches which seek to transform communities in God's world.

We then identified our values as: 'Loving. Living. Learning'. The next Bishop of Leeds might wish to articulate our vision differently; but, I have not been able to improve it.

It seems to me that the key to all this is simplicity, clarity and coherence. It is for you to judge whether or not this has been effective thus far.

Whereas almost every person on my team has changed - some more than once – since Easter Day 2014, two people have walked this journey almost from the beginning. John Dobson was appointed Dean of Ripon as the new diocese came into being. He has been a fantastic colleague, adviser and friend from whom I have learned a huge amount. (Above the Library on the outside of the cathedral our sculpted faces smile at each other, his finger on the white Yorkshire Rose and mine on the Liver Bird.) The second is Bishop Toby who spent a year commuting from London before we had a house for him and who has been the most excellent colleague and friend during this whole journey. (Other bishops have come and gone, and we now have a strong and diverse college of bishops for whom I am grateful to God.)

Bishop Toby will be picking up the mantle from 1 December as the Acting Bishop of Leeds whilst remaining the area Bishop of Bradford. Transitions are complicated. Please support him: in prayer, with encouragement, with respect and love. I hand over the reins with confidence and enormous gratitude to him. He will be well supported by a strong team of bishops, archdeacons, deans and lay and clergy staff.

I will conclude shortly, but want to come back to what at the beginning of this address I called 'the point of it all'. Today we will discuss one contentious issue: LLF. I make one point to set the tone and context for this discussion: if we are not at liberty to pick and choose which scriptures we take seriously, then we cannot simply ignore the High Priestly Prayer of John 17. The one thing Jesus prayed for before going to his death was the unity of his friends. He prayed this having washed the feet of his betrayer, his denier, his doubter and his deserters. None of them had the liberty to agree to unity only on certain conditions. The witness of the disciples – as people called by Jesus – was how they lived and loved together ... despite each other. Not one of them had a veto over who else Jesus would invite into the boat. We don't get to pick the Jesus we prefer or the one who, funnily enough, agrees with me on everything.

Sisters and brothers, we need to keep our biblical perspective when we confront conflicting understandings of theology and anthropology. We also need to keep a sense of historical perspective. The brilliant Luther biographer Lyndal Roper has just sent me her latest book, entitled 'Summer of Fire and Blood'. We can too easily fixate on the Reformation itself as a theological phenomenon whilst ignoring what it produced. The German Peasants War 500 years ago this year cost the lives of 100,000 people. Luther, having bravely stood his ground

against the church establishment a few years previously, now advocated the execution and slaughter of peasants who had taken his theology seriously only to find that perhaps he hadn't thought through the implications of 'freedom'. The passions of then look different now.

The point is that we do not have the complete vision and we have not spoken the final word. LLF was devised as a process of encounter, listening, relationship and humility; it soon became a process for political decision-making and mutual threats – power games, language that does not reflect the Gospel, a clamour for 'protection' that I still find bizarre on a number of fronts.

Whichever way you bend on these matters, you cannot escape the direct stare of John 17 and the refusal of the crucified one to accept easy excuses for separation from others whom Jesus has called to walk with him for the sake of the world.

Enough. This is not a sermon. But, I encourage this synod to do its business - the mundane as well as the extraordinary – with love, mercy, integrity and grace. And with the genuine humility, derived from a reading of scripture, that *I might be wrong*.

Thank you for your patience with my presidency and leadership over these eleven years. I will never cease to thank God for you and to pray for your faithfulness into the future. I have been blessed to be the first Bishop of Leeds. The next Bishop will be blessed to serve with you in this part of the world to which God has called you at this point in history. May God bless you in all that lies ahead.

The Rt Revd Nicholas Baines
Bishop of Leeds

14 June 2025