



**Minutes of a Meeting
of
Blackburn Diocesan Synod**

held on Thursday 12 March 2026 at St Cuthbert's Fulwood

Present

3 Members of the House of Bishops (100%)
33 Members of the House of Clergy (52%)
32 Members of the House of Laity (48%)

Apologies

10 Members of the House of Clergy (16%)
18 Members of the House of Laity (27%)

1. Opening Worship

The meeting was chaired by **Bob Collins (Chair of the House of Laity)** who welcomed Synod members and the meeting commenced with worship led by **Bishop Jill**.

2. Welcome and Presidential Address

Bishop Philip addressed the Synod. His full presidential address (attached) included updates on his recent trip to Kenya, the diocesan vision, centenary celebrations, the new Archbishop of Canterbury and parish renewal.

3. Youth Forum Update

Bishop Philip's update on the Youth Forum was noted.

Bishop Philip explained that the Youth Forum's overriding concern was the drop in children and young people attending church after the age of 11.

Some groupwork followed as Synod were asked to discuss the question: "What can you do in your church to address 11+ drop off?". The feedback was collected in and will be fed back to the Youth Forum.

A number of ideas were highlighted including:

- The importance of linking in with what is 'cool' about finding faith.
- The need to stop pretending that young people want to come on a Sunday morning and the importance of making opportunities so that young people want to come to church.
- The need to like young people and want them to come.

- The Fusion Youth Club is working well in Burnley with young people from different backgrounds attending.
- The importance of worship that's done with young people and not to them.
- The importance of not underestimating what adults can do; talking to young people in church can make a big difference.

There were no comments or questions from the floor.

4. SMMIB Update: Ignite & Lay Pioneers

Carolyn Barton (Director of Vision Delivery) provided an overview of where we are up to with the SMMI programme. **Sam Lee (Ignite Project Manager)** provided an update on Ignite and **Jenny Dale (Urban Ministry M:Power Enabler)** provided an update on the Lay Pioneer programme. Their slides are attached.

Synod were invited to ask questions. Sitting on the Q&A Panel were: **David Picken (Archdeacon of Lancaster and Chair of the Ignite Steering Committee)**, **Craig Abbott (Head of Children, Youth and Chaplaincy)**, **Sam Lee (Ignite Project Manager)**, **Rebecca Roberts (Urban Ministry M:Power Lead)** and **Jenny Dale (Urban Ministry M:Power Enabler)**.

Jane Atkinson (Archdeacon of Blackburn) highlighted the lack of Ignite workers in rural parishes and how the model doesn't work particularly well for parishes in more rural areas.

Sam Lee explained he has explored the possibility of more than one deanery or parish being involved and is hoping to share something more collaborative by the end of the year.

Sam Dickinson (Blackburn with Darwen Deanery HoC) asked whether there could be any flexibility around tapering and the way funding for the roles is provided.

Rebecca Roberts confirmed this could be considered for lay pioneer applications.

Sam Lee explained that the Diocese can support parishes with finding external grant funding and confirmed that adjusting the tapering is a possibility.

David Picken pointed out that there has to be a sustainable model and clarity regarding what this looks like.

Rebecca Roberts commented on there being numerous external funders and opportunities for Lower Income Support (LInC) parishes.

Susan Witts (Chorley Deanery HoL) asked about the availability of suitable applicants for the roles.

Sam Lee confirmed that suitably qualified people do exist and he had been encouraged by the applications so far. The training and salaries offered by the Diocese are designed to make youth and children's ministry a career that can be accessed. He explained that the Diocese can advise parishes regarding how and where they are advertising

Craig Abbott confirmed that we haven't failed to appoint and that it is worth pursuing as there is a track record of recruitment.

Chris Krawiec (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) asked about the future vision for the Urban Pioneers and Ignite workers and if any further funding will be made available from Central Church.

Carolyn Barton replied that our application for funding was very large and will stretch until 2033 but there are no plans for it to be extended beyond then, although there is a separate funding application planned for Accrington and Burnley for £5m.

Chris Krawiec pointed out that the roles are about creating a legacy and it isn't a case of going in to do a job and leaving.

Jenny Dale explained the hope is for the roles to become self-sustaining and there is potential for them to generate some income and grow.

Graham Kelsall (Preston Deanery HoL) spoke about his parish having a new Ignite worker and their experience throughout the application and recruitment process. He described the diocesan officers as being very supportive throughout the process and the quality of applications as being good. He encouraged other parishes to reach out to the Diocese to explore this further.

5. Review of Diocesan Synod Membership

Fleur Green (Vice-Chair of the House of Clergy) introduced the paper. She explained that the advantage of having a low level of engagement at the Diocesan Synod elections means that anyone wanting a place on Synod can have a place. However, a low level of engagement also means that no one is democratically elected onto Synod. By reducing the number of places on Synod by one third, this would allow for a democratic mandate.

Questions were invited

Stephen Boyall (Preston Deanery HoL) asked how the numbers would be apportioned.

Peter Lillcrap (Chair of the House of Clergy) stated that Blackpool Deanery had filled all its places on Synod.

Carol Backhouse (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) stated she was happy to support this but questioned the level of engagement and why people don't come forward to stand. She asked if Synod is perceived as a cascade mechanism or a place to get together and have a say in what happens. She asked if people would be more willing to engage if they felt their voices were heard.

Simon Cox (Blackpool Deanery HoC) said he opposed a reduction in numbers and stated that Blackpool Deanery always has a full complement of numbers. He commented that reducing the numbers would reduce diversity because people who are best known will get elected and younger people won't get a place. He pointed out that in his deanery, he played a proactive role in filling vacancies with younger candidates.

Amanda Birchall (Whalley Deanery HoL) stated that Whalley Deanery has a full complement of numbers on Synod. She asked how their voices would be heard if numbers were reduced.

Anne Beverley (Kirkham Deanery HoC) spoke in support of reducing the numbers. She pointed out that parishes struggle for volunteers and being democratic will raise the profile of Diocesan Synod.

Carolyn Eames (Tunstall Deanery HoL) said that instead of reducing numbers, people need to be aware of what Synod does and that no one explained to her what she should be doing.

Fleur Green said she would feedback that the profile of Synod membership needs raising as well as where Synod sits within the Diocesan structure as this may help people decide if they want to stand. She acknowledged the arguments for and against a reduction in numbers and pointed out that even if numbers were reduced by one third, there would still be vacancies across the Diocese.

Fleur Green moved:

“That this Synod agrees to reduce the total number of places on Diocesan Synod by one third in order move to a position where each member is elected by a democratic mandate.”

The motion was **defeated** with 20 votes in favour, 36 votes against and 1 abstention.

6. Net Zero Update

Dave Champness (Net Carbon Zero Senior Project Manager) gave an update on progress with Net Zero. His slides are attached.

Peter Lillicrap (Chair of the House of Clergy) raised a point regarding the reference made to the Five Marks of Mission in the presentation. He pointed out that the First Mark, ‘Proclaiming the News of the Kingdom’, functions as the primary lens through which the other four are understood.

Synod was asked to provide some informal feedback for the Creation Care Steering Group by responding to several questions on Creation Care. (The questions can be found in the attached slidepack.)

Carol Backhouse (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) shared her experiences regarding Christ Church Lancaster’s 10 years as an eco-church. Despite being a high carbon emitting church, they have still experienced a big reduction in their energy bill and their primary school has become completely decarbonised. Carol explained that they currently have a silver Eco Church award and would like to work towards a gold award. They have a very active Eco Church Group that would be happy to share their stories with other churches.

A short video from Christian Aid followed which demonstrated how climate change affects many communities in the global south.

Churches who are interested in becoming an Eco Church should contact Dave Champness who would be happy to arrange a visit.

Parishes were encouraged to complete the energy footprint tool with 2025 data by the end of June 2026.

7. Blackburn DBF General Meeting

Standing orders were suspended.

A General Meeting of the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Finance followed. The minutes of the General Meeting were recorded separately.

Standing orders were reinstated.

8. Proclamation of Canons

None.

9. Questions

Seven questions had been received. The questions and the answers provided are attached.

Supplementary questions were invited.

Simon Cox (Blackpool Deanery HoC) asked, given that PTO is granted at the sole discretion of the Diocesan Bishop without appeal and in the light of the description by the House of Bishops of a non-PTO clergy person having less scope to minister than an non-DBS lay person and that even Archbishops have found themselves refused PTO, should a warning to that effect be given prior to ordination?

Bishop Philip responded no.

Carol Backhouse (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) said she is aware of two parishes in her own deanery that are facing building costs of over £750k. She asked if an answer could be given to how many other parishes are facing building costs over this amount and what could be done to support them.

Stephen Whittaker (Diocesan Secretary) said this will be looked into and reported back to Synod.

Carol Backhouse asked if any consideration has been given to setting up a working group to address the problem with the dramatic decline in the number of weddings and funerals taking place in church.

Stephen Whittaker said he was aware of the work that had taken place in Liverpool Diocese and consideration had been given regarding whether Blackburn Diocese could do something similar although it is difficult to get clarity of reason regarding the reasons behind the decline.

Bishop Jill said the work at Liverpool had not increased the number of funerals taking place in church but she would support some action to look into what we might do about it.

10. Motions

None.

The meeting closed with a blessing.

Signed:

+ Philip Blackburn

Dated: 25.03.2026