

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

held on Saturday 19 July 2025 at St Cuthbert's Fulwood

Present

3 Members of the House of Bishops (100%)
33 Members of the House of Clergy (48%)
36 Members of the House of Laity (56%)

Apologies

13 Members of the House of Clergy (19%)
13 Members of the House of Laity (20%)

1. Eucharist

The meeting commenced with the Eucharist led by **Bishop Philip**.

2. Welcome and Presidential Address

The meeting was chaired by **Bishop Philip** who welcomed Synod members to the meeting. His presidential address, which highlighted the importance of us being joyful followers of Jesus, is attached.

3. The Future Diocesan Vision

Carolyn Barton (Director of Vision Delivery) presented on the emerging high level future vision. The key messages from the feedback so far and the five key themes of the new vision are included in her presentation slides (attached).

Some groupwork followed. Synod were asked for their preferences regarding the wording of the title, subtitle and the five areas within the vision. The feedback from the groupwork was collected and will be used in the discernment process for working out the detail of our new vision.

It is intended that the final proposal will be brought back to Synod in October 2025 for approval, followed by the launch of the new vision in November 2026.

Questions were invited.

Paul Bye (HoC Kirkham Deanery) asked whether a theological piece would be made available to help deliver the Acting Justly strand of the new vision.

Carolyn Barton agreed this could be looked at.

Matt Guilder (HoC Tunstall Deanery) asked if the new vision would be accessible to all as well as being made simple to understand, highlighting the importance of it being translatable to British Sign Language.

Carolyn Barton spoke about the diverse range of members on Diocesan Synod and asked Synod to pass their thoughts on the accessibility and translatability of the new vision to her.

4. Safeguarding Audit Report

Stephen Whittaker (Diocesan Secretary) presented on the INEQE Safeguarding Audit Report.

The DBF had received a very positive report and the strong partnership between the Diocesan Team and parish safeguarding officers had been highlighted.

Work is already underway on the recommendations within the report which have been divided into priorities to form the basis of an action plan. Direct feedback from survivor representatives has also been sought.

The size of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team has already been increased to reflect the rise in the number of cases being dealt with. This rise is a direct indicator of the Diocesan Team and parish safeguarding officers working well together.

The DBF's Safeguarding Advisor is currently acting as Safeguarding Advisor for the Cathedral and the merging of the DBF's safeguarding provision with the Cathedral is currently being looked at.

The changeover from Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor to Diocesan Safeguarding Officer is underway. This change will take effect once the service level agreement has been finalised with the Cathedral.

Questions were invited.

Jonny Lee (HoC Blackpool Deanery) asked if the work being carried out by General Synod would impact on the work being carried out within the Diocese.

Stephen Whittaker confirmed that the work within our Diocese will complement the national proposals, including the proposed move to independent safeguarding. The increase in numbers within our Safeguarding Team should not be impacted.

5. Diocesan Board of Finance Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Finance followed. The minutes of this meeting were recorded separately.

6. Vocations

Anne Beverley (Director of Ministry) and **Jane Atkinson (HoC, Poulton-le-Fylde Deanery)** gave an update on the numbers of vocations to ordained ministry. Their slides are attached.

The goal is to have ten stipendiary incumbent status curates each year. Figures for 2026 are low with no internal candidates and five imported candidates. This will rise to seven internal candidates in 2027.

In 2025, four people will have moved through the training process for incumbent ministry, with approximately ten people starting their training in 2026.

The need to improve diversity among new starters going through the vocations process was highlighted.

Feedback on the following questions from Synod was sought using Mentimeter. Synod were asked to consider diversity alongside the questions when contributing their suggestions.

- What can the local church do to raise leaders?
- What can the diocese do to raise leaders?
- What can the national church do to raise leaders?

The feedback is attached and will be used to progress the work of the Vocations Team.

Bishop Philip encouraged Synod members to approach potentially suitable candidates for vocations training and to contact Anne for a discussion.

There were no questions raised from the floor.

7. Diocesan Advisory Committee Annual Report

Andrew Holliday (Chair of the DAC) presented the DAC Annual Report. He highlighted the expertise of the Committee and thanked Jen Read and the Diocesan Team for their part in delivering the strategic work which enables church buildings to be used in new and exciting ways to carry out mission.

There were no questions from the floor.

The DAC Annual Report was formally **received** by Synod.

8. Proclamation of Act of Synod

Stephen Whittaker (Diocesan Secretary) proclaimed the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024 as amended by the Vacancy in See Committees (Amendment) Regulation 2025. This had been formally affirmed as an Act of Synod at General Synod in February 2024.

Simon Cox (HoC Blackpool Deanery) asked for more information regarding the Act of Synod.

Paul Benfield (General Synod and HoC Burnley Deanery) explained that it is an amendment to the rules for electing and appointing a Vacancy in See Committee. He encouraged Synod to think about standing for the remaining vacancies on the Committee.

9. Questions

None.

10. Motions

There had been no motions for consideration at the July Synod. A motion had been submitted from Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery regarding church buildings which will be scheduled for a future Synod meeting.

The meeting closed with a hymn and a blessing.

+ Philip Blackburn

Signed:

Dated: 1/8/25

Presidential Address to Diocesan Synod

July 19th 2025

You will say on that day:

I will give thanks to you, O Lord,

for though you were angry with me,

your anger turned away,

and you comforted me.

²*Surely God is my salvation;*

I will trust, and will not be afraid,

for the Lord God is my strength and my might;

he has become my salvation.

³*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* ⁴*And you will say on that day:*

Give thanks to the Lord,

call on his name;

make known his deeds among the nations;

proclaim that his name is exalted. (Isaiah 12, 1-3)

Major conflict in Gaza and Ukraine causing perhaps the greatest threat of global war since 1938. Heatwave and drought indicating global warming. Trade wars spooking the money markets and threatening every national economy. Growing inequality with over one in five of Lancashire's children growing up in poverty. And yet here in Synod we are going to be discussing joy. Are we crazy? Are we hopelessly out of touch? No, we just believe in the scriptures.

The prophet Isaiah at the start of Chapter 12 draws us right into the heart of our salvation. God was angry with us because of our sin. But there is comfort and there is salvation. With joy we will draw water from the wells of salvation. And what is that well? Of course it's Jesus. It's the living water that flows from his heart pierced on the cross. That's the source of our joy. And because the triumph is won, that joy is inalienable. The changes and chances of this fleeting world can't touch it. Our joy is not some thin, self-generated happiness. It is gift, pure gift, poured out upon us through the saving work of Jesus.

That's why any diocesan vision must have Jesus at the centre. We are joyful followers of him. I was chatting to a priest a few weeks ago to ensure they had no plans to leave the Diocese and they said, 'Why would I leave? This Diocese believes in the parish and in Jesus.'

We believe in Jesus. Regardless of tradition, our faith is Him. Not some vague disembodied message of love. Not some philosophical concept of the divine. But Jesus, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God. As we celebrate 1700 years of the Nicene Creed, we are reminded of the utter scandal of the Gospel. That God has taken a human body and by so doing has been able to die and so set us free. That's the good news. Not a message, but a person. It's in him that we rejoice.

And we also believe in the Parish as the best means available to us to declare Jesus. We relish the cure of souls to remind us that nobody is beyond the radar of our ministry. We treasure our schools to form the young in the faith. We value stipendiary clergy to declare Jesus in word and sacrament. We love our buildings because they point us to the divine. And above all we need joyful communities of faithful lay Christians in every part of the Diocese who can make known the love of Jesus through their worship and fellowship, through their commitment and generosity, through their lives of service and their new congregations.

We have a really important job before us at Synod this morning. Today is a key stage in the long process of listening to God as we discern our new diocesan vision. The new vision will run until 2033 and note that year. Two thousand years since the cross. Two thousand years since water flowed from the side of Jesus and filled to overflowing the deep wells of our salvation.

And that surely must emphasise the heart of our task today. This new vision is not about what we are going to do for Jesus. It is about what Jesus has already done for us. And so it is about what Jesus is still doing for us through the Holy Spirit here, now in Lancashire. How we hear that and where we join in.

And we do that discernment confident in the knowledge that Jesus has already won the victory and the future is already his. There is no jeopardy today. Our task is not to rescue the church or work out how to save an institution we have grown fond of. No, our task is to be joy spreaders. It is to point to Jesus, the source of our joy. We don't need to make Jesus present. He already is. We don't need to build the kingdom. He's done that already. Our task is to invite to the party, to help people find that joy which is his gift.

So our joy is not something we generate. It is something we live. But at the same it is all too easy for Christians to undermine that joy through anxiety or faithlessness or sin. In the Church of England in recent years we have come to see how our failures to be a safe church have stripped from so many survivors the joy of the Gospel and that is an egregious failing.

Recently our Diocese received the report published by INEQE into the quality of our safeguarding and we'll be discussing this later on our agenda today. It shows significant progress in changing the culture of the Diocese and I especially want to pay tribute to Cath Smith and our safeguarding team, to our Diocesan Secretary Stephen Whittaker whom INEQE especially praise and to clergy and PSOs in our parishes. We are already working to address the recommendations which will grow our safeguarding team and help us to embed a safeguarding culture into every area of our life.

The report on our Cathedral, a separate charity which has chosen to make safeguarding arrangements separate from the Diocese, was more challenging. The Diocesan Board of Finance is offering all the support that it can to the Cathedral and will continue to do so. I am delighted that Canon Andrew Horsfall has agreed to serve as interim Dean and I would ask you to keep him and the whole Cathedral community in your prayers.

Another joy blocker is exhausted and undervalued clergy. I am so grateful to Canon Neil Kelley, our Assistant Archdeacon for Clergy Wellbeing, who has helped us better to

understand the complex set of factors that enable our clergy to flourish in ministry. Our DIP funding has helped us to make changes here including regular sabbaticals for clergy and strengthened support in ongoing formation from Mike Print and the Growing Leaders team. But it is also excellent news that the new financial arrangement agreed by General Synod at the weekend introduces a single national stipend for all Church of England clergy which will lead to stipend increases next year.

That whole package of measures is good news for us as a Diocese and will help us in setting healthier budgets in the next few years. But in this regard we are also helping ourselves. The sustained giving from ordinary laymen and women in this diocese has been beautiful and heroic. We are one of just two dioceses in the country whose share income increased in 2024. That is remarkable and a wonderful testimony to the joy that Christians across the diocese find in the Gospel. I am also enormously grateful to David Barlow, the Chair of our DBF, and Nick Aves, the Chair of the Finance Committee, whose tireless work at countless Parish Share Meetings has changed the atmosphere. Nick Aves will soon be stepping down after a heroic shift as Chair of the Finance Committee. Nick, we are so grateful to you.

Lancashire is a county of wells. So today, as we discern our vision, let's imagine a county filled with wells of joy. May every single one of our parishes, our schools, our chaplaincies be a well of joy, flowing over with the life and love and saving power of Jesus. The world says the church is a busted flush, faith in an interventionist God crazy superstition, belief in the power of prayer for the deluded. And they are wrong. Many Christians are tempted to despair, to believe the lies that the game is over and that we need to reduce, cut back, plan for decline. And they are wrong. There is only one source of salvation for a thirsty and dangerous world and it is Jesus Christ, the living water flowing forth from every church and school and chaplaincy in Lancashire.

So let's keep our vision big as we discern who the Lord is calling us to be as his people in Lancashire. Let's imagine a county where living water flows free and refreshes every part of our county. Our task is not to tinker or maintain or to survive. It is to transform, to change lives, to let justice roll down like a river and righteousness like an everlasting stream, to revivify arid lives with the water of life that is Jesus. As we join in with his work, may every single person in Lancashire draw deeply from the well of salvation that is Jesus and in so doing find life.

+Philip Blackburn

July 19th 2025

THE FUTURE DIOCESAN VISION

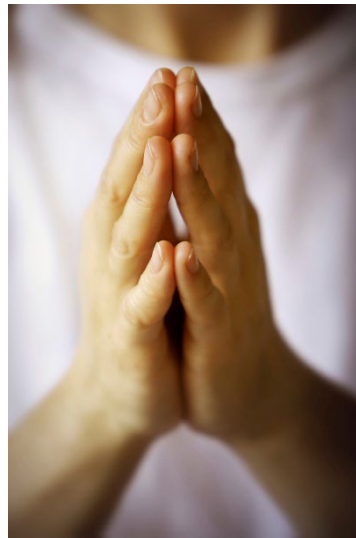
Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery

Phase 1: Discerning High Level Vision

- *Sept – Dec 24:* Consultation with all parishes and also CofE schools

 - *Jan – April 25:*
 - Deanery Synods
 - Headteachers & Incumbents
 - Half-day Bishop's Council meeting
 - Youth Forum
-plus other key groups across the Diocese.

Listening to God & Discerning His Direction



- *May 2025: Diocesan Vision and Strategy Group Residential*
- July 2025: Consult Diocesan Synod on emerging high-level vision with final proposal to come to October 2025 Synod for sign off

Phase 2: Working out the Detail – how will we get there?

- *Sept 2025 to April 2026: Consultation*
- *July/October 2026: Diocesan Synods*

Launch of New Diocesan Vision:

November 2026



Key principles from the feedback:

- Build on the foundations of Vision 2026 and don't lose the core themes
- Recognise our reliance on the Holy Spirit
- A vision for the whole Diocese – churches, schools, chaplaincies and beyond
- Keep the wording simple

Joyful Followers of Jesus

Seeing lives changed and communities filled with hope through:

- Knowing Jesus/Abiding in Jesus/Knowing and Loving Jesus
- Sharing our Faith/Sharing the Faith/Sharing the Good News/Sharing Jesus
- Living God's Justice/Acting Justly
- Inspiring Young People/Inspiring God's Children/Inspiring Families
- Releasing Christ-like Leaders/Forming Christ-like Leaders/Forming Leaders

Next Steps:

- Bring high-level vision proposal to October Diocesan Synod
- Prepare for the development of the Vision Implementation Plan

GROWING LEADERS VOCATIONS PIPELINE

**Anne Beverley, Director of Ministry and
Jane Atkinson, Area Dean Poulton-le-Fylde**

Blackburn - Deacons to be Ordained

Year	Internal Candidates		Imported Candidates	
	Incumbent	Associate	Incumbent	Associate
2026	0	3	5	0
2027	7	2	3 required	
2028	1	0	9 required	

Numbers in the Vocation Process

	Incumbent			Associate		
Training start date	2025	2026	2027	2025	2026	2027
Number currently in process	4	10	3	2	4	
Number under 30	0	4		0	0	
Number UKME	0	1		0	0	

What can the local church do to raise leaders?



What can the Diocese do to raise leaders?



What can the national church do to raise leaders?

