

Presidential Address to Diocesan Synod

October 11th 2025

Once when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?' He replied, 'Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.' (Joshua 5, 13-14)

Whose side are you on? That question seems to be one that confronts all of us right now.

We meet against a backdrop of serious threats to national unity and to social cohesion. One of our priests described to me a few days ago how his community has become a 'town of two flags' with one half festooned with the flag of St George, the other with the flag of Palestine.

We have seen huge marches for Palestine or against immigration. We are seeing growing anger with politicians and the political establishment and the accelerated rise of populism. So many people seemed to be locked into a mood of anger.

Then just ten days ago two people were killed in a terrorist-inspired attack on a synagogue in Manchester and in my correspondence with the rabbi who serves in St Anne's he has described to me the terror that is now a daily reality in the lives of so many of our Jewish friends.

Against such a backdrop, a world that understands only binaries demands that we take sides. Are you pro-Israel or pro-Gaza? Are you pro-immigration or anti-immigration? But of course, for us as Anglicans such binary choices are incredibly difficult to take. We are on the ground in every community so we hear and try to understand every voice.

We understand the desperate fear of asylum seekers driven from home, often for professing Jesus as Lord, and we want to offer a safe place. But we also understand the frustration of white working class communities who have seen change imposed on neighbourhoods they no longer recognise and who have endured years of an austerity economy which means work no longer pays.

We understand the fear of the Jewish community and want to stand with them in solidarity. But we also weep at the plight of Gaza and can hear the pain of Muslim neighbours who see the destruction of Gaza as a potent symbol of the global oppression of their faith.

The binaries don't work for those who have the cure of souls for every single person in their community. And that failure to take sides can make us sound and feel weak. 'Where is the voice of the Church of England?' people are asking. And it's a good question. The refusal to

take one side can lead to us being misunderstood or vilified on the assumption we stand for the other. Such a countercultural stance can be an uncomfortable place, a confusing and complex place, sometimes an isolating place.

Joshua was a binary thinker. In the passage with which I began this address, he met a strange warrior near to the city of Jericho and he asked, 'Are you one of us or one of our adversaries?' Or in other words, whose side are you on? But this man was not playing that game. 'Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.' I'm not on your side. I'm not on your adversaries' side. I'm on the Lord's side.

It is intriguingly unclear who this warrior is. Jewish tradition has seen in him the Archangel Michael. Christian authors have identified him as the pre-incarnate Christ. Whatever the answer, today his words should be our words. Are you one of us or one of our adversaries? Neither. We are on the Lord's side. That's not weak. That's distinctive Christian living.

We are on the Lord's side. So we pray. It's always tempting to leap straight into words or actions, but we must never forget that by far the most important contribution we make to the communities we serve is to pray for them. Pray for everyone, including those who are putting up flags or going on marches. Pray for everyone, especially those with whom you don't personally agree. And in your prayers, don't forget to ask. Ask for the Lord to intervene to bring healing and reconciliation and peace. Ask for the Lord to turn hatred into love and anger into joy.

We are on the Lord's side. So we reconcile. In a binary world, Jesus mixed with everyone: with Jew and Samaritan, with Pharisee and Sadducee, with Israelite and Roman. One of the great gifts we can offer is to listen to all sides and so help one side to understand another. Bishop Arun Arora is doing just that in Leeds by meeting up with the local leader of the far right. And I have heard of some of you chatting to those protesting outside asylum seeker hotels or meeting up with the leaders of different faith groups. In these encounters, the *fruit* of the conversation is the *fact* of conversation. Don't expect big results. What matters is the talking.

We are on the Lord's side. So we condemn hatred and violence. Jesus showed a different way of being alive, not the way of vengeance and hatred but the path of self-giving love. In his name we must stand firm in condemning racism, hatred and violence. For we know that every single person made by the Lord is beautiful and beloved. If we cannot make a stand for the dignity of the human person: Christian, Muslim, Jew, Asylum Seeker, flag painter and so on, then we really do have nothing to say.

We are on the Lord's side. So we declare Jesus. The evidence is increasingly clear that in a time of fracture in the world, people are looking to the Church for answers to their questions. And what they want is clear, definite and distinctive answers. The cross being carried in

procession at far right rallies is a clear warning that if we do not step in to fill the vacuum, others with other agendas will.

And that makes today significant as we continue with the process of framing a new diocesan vision. That vision statement must be a challenging one, even uncomfortable. It must motivate us to ever greater courage and entrepreneurship in our proclamation of the Gospel. The tension and unsettledness of the current times are symptoms of people struggling for security, for safety, for lives which have purpose. It is only in relationship with the Lord and through encounter with his cross that those deepest human needs can be met. The signs of the times are clear. Our local churches must be ready for the renewal for which we pray. Ready to welcome, ready to teach, ready to call to repentance and conversion, ready to change lives with the Gospel.

And that is also why our Centenary year must be a year not of nostalgia or backward-looking reminiscence, but of confident proclamation. Our title, 'All for Jesus,' will make it a year when we can each discover anew the joy of personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. And as we discover that afresh in our own lives, we can invite others to know him too.

It was bold of Bishop Sarah Mullally to address exactly these complex issues of social cohesion and the response of the Church when it was announced that she is to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury. She brings with her a strong track record as a reconciler and a pastor and our prayer for her must be that she can inspire the Church into a new age of confident evangelism.

For we don't need to make binary choices. We have another way. The Lord's way. We are on his side. We are his joyful followers.

+Philip Blackburn

11.09.25

VISION REFRESH

Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery

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Joyful Followers of Jesus

*Seeing lives changed and communities
filled with hope through:*

- Knowing Jesus
- Sharing our Faith
- Loving our Neighbour
- Inspiring Young People
- Forming Christ-like Leaders

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The Rt Rev Philip North (Bishop of Blackburn) will move that this Synod approve that the wording of the next Diocesan Vision will be:

Joyful Followers of Jesus

Seeing lives changed and communities filled with hope through:

- Knowing Jesus
- Sharing our Faith
- Loving our Neighbour
- Inspiring Young People
- Forming Christ-like Leaders



**THE
DIOCESE
OF
BLACKBURN**
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE

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VISION2026
HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES



**THE
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OF
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BUDGET 2026

David Barlow
Chair of the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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Vision 2026

‘Healthy Churches Transforming Communities’

- We desire to make the Good News about Jesus Christ more widely known, because we believe:
- He is the One who brings ‘life in all its fullness’
- Healthy church communities have a positive and transformative impact on our society
- We will work together to achieve this by making disciples of Jesus Christ; being witnesses to Jesus Christ, growing leaders and inspiring young people for Jesus Christ

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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Background to the 2026 Budget

- **Significant changes in the Funding formula from National Church Institutions net benefit to Diocese circa £500k**
- **Significant Increase in Stipends of 10 – 12% recommended by the National Church Institutions.**
- **Increase in Lower Income Community Funding of some £566k linked to inflation in the future**
- **Significant Time limited Funding from the National Church Institutions for 6 years or so, as we implement our own vision from 2026 onwards.**

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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Main Budget Points for 2026

- **Increase in stipends and related pensions £638k**
- **Review of staff salaries to a maximum of 11.72%**
- **Strengthening of the Safeguarding Support for Parishes**

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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Main Budget Points for 2026

- **Stipends and related housing costs again 73%**
- **Central support and governance costs remain low at 7%**
- **Total Parish Share Request Increase 0%**

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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Synod Motion 3004/3

This Synod accepts,

the 2026 budget presented in the
supporting papers with expenditure of
£16,977,000

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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Synod Motion 3004/4

This Synod accepts,

- The socio-economic multiplier in the parish share calculation being between 0.9 and 1.1, meaning the more deprived receive a 10% reduction on their calculation and those in the least deprived areas contribute towards this by an additional 10%.
- To expand those parishes receiving the Lower Income Communities funding from the bottom 20% by income (Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) income rate) to the bottom 25% by the same measure.
- Parishes in the 20-25% group will receive a diminishing grant so that those most deprived get most support reducing the 'cliff edge' that currently applies if the demographics of the parish change impacting on the IMD rating.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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THE BLACKBURN DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

Iain Parks 11th October 2025

'When You Ask, Something Happens'
1 Thess 5:16-18



Duties of the DBE Measure 2021

The DBE for each diocese must—

- promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England;
- promote or assist in the promotion of religious education and religious worship in schools in the diocese;
- promote or assist in the promotion of church schools in the diocese;
- promote co-operation between itself and other persons concerned with education in the diocese



Additional duties assigned by Synod

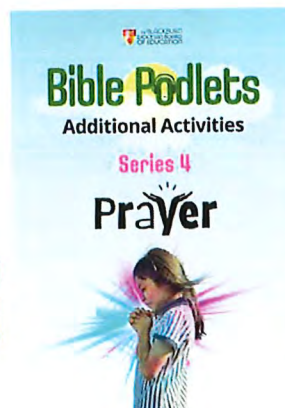
16. In addition to the functions provided for in the Measure, the Diocesan Synod confer the primary responsibility to the Board of Education for the following:

- (a) The development of youth and children's work across the Diocese
- (b) The support and development of Christian spirituality in Further and Higher Educations institutions in the Diocese
- (c) The support of chaplaincy provision to places of learning across the Diocese, including church based institutions



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Children's Work Resources



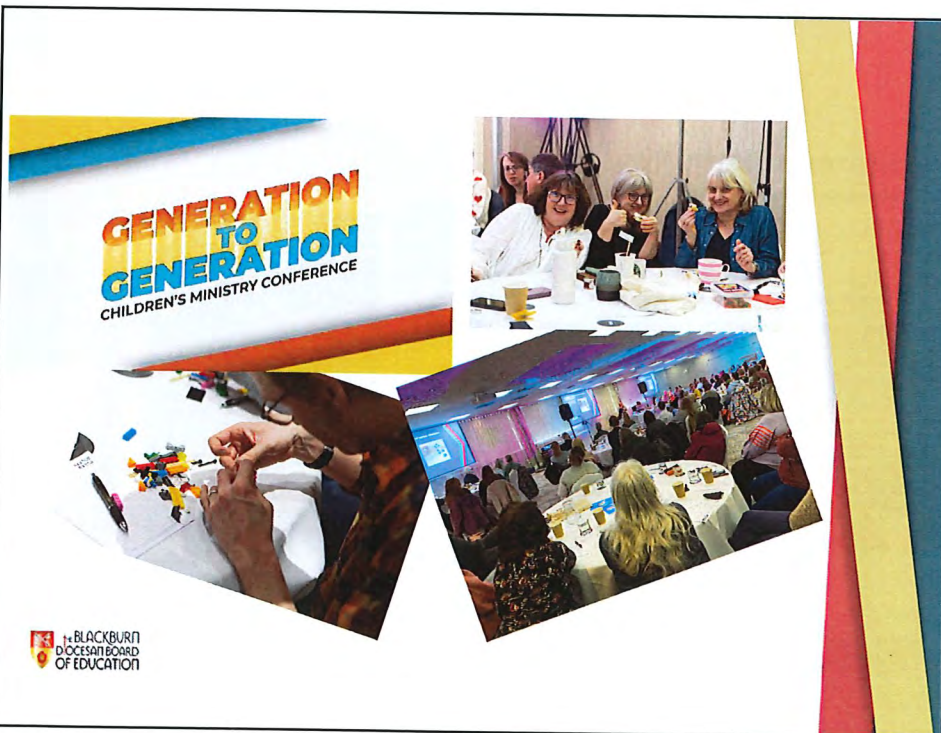
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Flourishing Children, Young People and Family Ministries Event

Why are some dioceses more fruitful in their ministry with children and young people than others?



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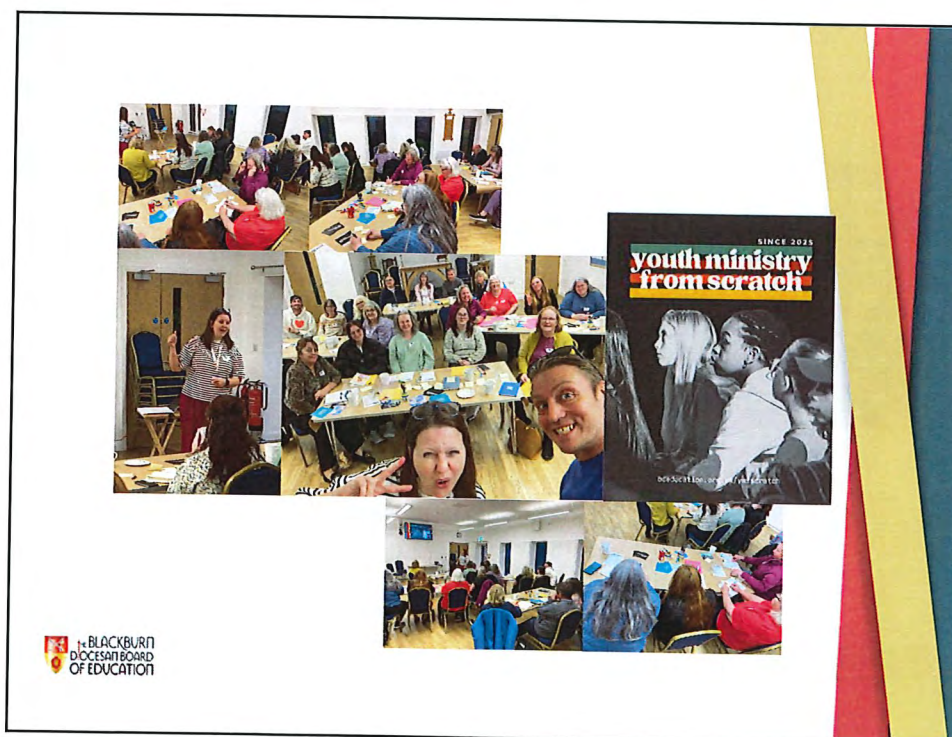


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- The Ignite Project has officially launched with five parishes in round one.
- Round two parishes have been allocated and will be recruiting during the Autumn.
- Forge – the monthly training and networking days – is underway and we aim to open this offer to the wider diocese in time.
- Interest in the project is positive, with 35 expressions of interest in the first two rounds of application.
- Applications are coming from churches across a range of contexts, with diversity of churchmanship, size and relative wealth.
- Relationships are building with national networks to develop shared approaches across all CYPF ministry and recruitment.

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Schools



Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools – SIAMS

School Visits



Every Blackburn Diocese Church School inspected in the last academic year was judged to be living up to its foundation as a church school and a place where pupils and adults, flourish.



SENDCo Conference

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Governance Support



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Chaplaincy University Chaplains are now appointed in:

- **University of Cumbria** partnered with **The Priory, Lancaster**, ordained member of staff
- **University of Central Lancashire** has a new lay Chaplain
- **Lancaster University** (part time - as an interim arrangement)



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School Buildings

- The SCA system has been run effectively this year.
- Costs have risen through the year leading to reduced ability to deliver the number of programmes that had been hoped for.
- A full programme of capital work has been planned and delivered to meet school needs. As in previous years, the level of need outweighed the funding envelope by around three times the amount.
- The DBE has sought to register a number of titles with the Land Registry for school properties
- The DBE continues to research trusts and land of church schools to build a complete picture of the school estate and ownership of land.



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Summary position at the end of the year 2024

Unrestricted Funds:	£2,641,000
Designated Funds:	£2,816,000
Restricted Funds:	£685,000
Endowment Funds:	£94,000
Reserves policy	£1,824,000
Free reserves above reserves policy	£297,341

(directors will designate this figure to meet the commitment of £700 000 to underwrite the DBE grant should the need arise in 2026/27)



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Diocesan Synod on 11 October 2025

Questions Received

From	To	Question	Response
Simon Cox (HoC, Blackpool Deanery)	Bishop Philip	What progress has been made with the implementation of the agreed actions following the report on deployment and development of PTOs in the Diocese since I last asked this question and who is the lead person assigned to the implementation?	There is now capacity within the Diocesan Team to advance this piece of work and it is in hand. As of September, this is being overseen by Bishop Jill and led by Canon Anne Beverley and held within the Growing Leaders Team.
Simon Cox (HoC, Blackpool Deanery)	Bishop Philip	Following the change in the Bishop's Chaplain, what will be the arrangements for the Diocesan Link Committee going forward, and how can the work of the Committee and the links it fosters be made more visible and effective in the Diocese?	The Revd Sam Cheesman, who brings a great passion for the global church, will continue to chair the links Committee. He has overseen an increase in its size and a refreshing of its membership. As members of Synod will be aware from recent communications, our overseas links are in a healthier place than for many years. • Rather than a small number of 'link dioceses' we are moving towards a family of dioceses from across the globe who share a mutual commitment to prayer and mission. • We have established a new link with the Diocese of Multan in Pakistan and with its Diocesan Bishop, Leo. This brings the experience of a church that lives with persecution. The Revd Munawar Din along with Lubna Din and our Director of Education, Iain Parks visited Multan last year to experience the work of the Diocese. They also experienced

			some of the harder aspects of being a Christian in that area of Pakistan. • We have established a new link with the Diocese of Liwolo and its Bishop, Joseph and many were deeply moved by his visit to the UK in 2023. Liwolo is a Diocese still in part in exile following the 2017 conflict and they live with the constant reality of armed struggle. • Our Braunschweig link (an ecumenical link) was renewed by my own visit in August 2023, accompanied by Iain Parks. Bishop Christoph has since retired and we await news of the election of a new Bishop. • Joy Rushton led a group to the Diocese of the Free State last year which has again renewed many friendships. This link has been more complex in recent years because of issues within the Diocese but now feels in a stronger place. • Our Harvest Appeal now supports a link Diocese every year. In 2023 it went to Liwolo, in 2024 we supported projects and schools in Multan and this year we are supporting projects to support vocations and to combat gender-based violence in the Free State. Synod members can donate here. • In January 2025, all five bishops will meet together for a retreat in Nairobi and we will also be joined by local Bishops including Bishop Julius, the Bishop of Theke, with whose diocese many of our parishes have an association. Christian Aid are supporting the event and we will visit some of their projects. The heart of the retreat will be to build relationships, pray and study the scriptures together. But we will also spend some time planning how we can grow our friendship into the future. I am immensely grateful to Sam Cheesman for the energy and vision he continues to bring to this work.
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