

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

held on Saturday 11 October 2025 at St Cuthbert's Fulwood

Present

3 Members of the House of Bishops (100%)
33 Members of the House of Clergy (50%)
39 Members of the House of Laity (57%)

Apologies

11 Members of the House of Clergy (17%)
12 Members of the House of Laity (18%)

1. Opening Worship

The meeting commenced with worship led by **Susan Stewart (Garstang Deanery HoL)**.

2. Welcome and Presidential Address

The meeting was chaired by **Bishop Jill** who welcomed Synod members.

Bishop Philip addressed the Synod, highlighting the current unrest in the world and explaining what our response as Christians should be. His full presidential address is attached.

3. Motion from Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery

Chris Krawiec (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) presented a motion regarding church buildings that had been agreed at Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery in June.

Chris explained the story in his deanery was the same as many across the country with buildings constantly in need of repair and the ceaseless need to raise money. In communities with high deprivation this can be crippling; buildings can be enormous burdens instead of places fit for mission and ministry. He explained that when parishes submit competing bids for grants to maintain their buildings, it puts other churches at a disadvantage.

Comments were invited.

Carol Backhouse (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) pointed out that with warm, well-lit houses of God we can serve our parishes in the best possible way. She invited Synod to ask their contacts in other dioceses to bring the motion to their synods, emphasising that by working together we can meet our needs.

Matt Guilder (Tunstall Deanery HoC) agreed that many families do not have enough money to spend on building repairs.

Anne Beverley (Kirkham Deanery HoC) asked what the next steps for the motion would be.

Andrea Titterington (Preston Deanery HoL) asked what churches are doing with the whole church site in terms of using buildings alternatively, raising money and using land to develop affordable housing.

Cindy Rigney (Tunstall Deanery HoC) commented on the added burden in rural communities with less than 500 people having to raise money for repairs.

Richard Carter (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoL) spoke about the extra conditions imposed on parishes with Grade I listed buildings and the need for the CofE to put pressure on the Government to give this consideration.

Lorelli Hilliard (Pendle Deanery HoC) spoke about her parish being in a deprived area and how they would be crippled without a modern church building.

Peter Jackson (Tunstall Deanery HoL) highlighted the disadvantages of a cold church and constant fundraising getting in the way of prayer and mission. He shared his views about the money being available but not going to where it is needed.

Paul Benfield (Burnley Deanery HoC) confirmed that the motion's wording is already in a good format to go to General Synod and should not be changed.

Peter Lillicrap (Blackpool Deanery HoC) pointed out that money within community funds has already been spent in Blackpool. Churches across the deanery have had to be closed and demolished.

Susan O'Brien (Tunstall Deanery HoL) expressed concern about families keeping churches in her deanery going and the constant worry of raising money.

Andrew Holliday (Chorley Deanery HoC and Chair of the DAC) paid credit to the talent and knowledge of DAC members. He described churches in a neighbouring diocese being closed to centralise mission and raised the importance of seeing parishes as beacons of ministry.

Chris Krawiec summarised that this is a national, heritage and government issue. Although there is no plan in place at the moment, it is important to get people talking so that the problem can be fixed.

Chris Krawiec moved:

"That this Synod:

- acknowledge that many PCCs are struggling to maintain church buildings which are in poor states of repair and are not designed for mission and ministry in the 21st century;
- recognise that parishes in areas of high deprivation find it especially hard to meet these costs through fundraising alone, and that the current system of grant applications may set neighbouring parishes in competition with one another for funds;
- request the National Church Institutions to develop a national strategy for the preservation, maintenance and development of our buildings which serve our communities not just on Sundays but throughout the week."

The motion was carried unanimously.

Synod were invited to pass the motion to other Dioceses for raising through their own synodical processes.

Bishop Jill encouraged other deaneries to bring their own motions to Synod.

4. The New Diocesan Vision

Carolyn Barton (Director of Vision Delivery) presented on the proposed new Diocesan Vision. Her slides are attached.

The ideas that came from the Vision session at July Diocesan Synod had been prayed over and discussed, and the high-level wording was now being brought to Synod for decision. Over the next year, more text and theology will be added as the delivery of the new Vision is planned.

There will be an emphasis on undergirding the new vision with prayer. This will be a main feature as more information comes out over the next year.

Questions were invited.

Joseph Brookfield (Preston Deanery HoL) spoke about Loving Our Neighbour and the work that the Justice Church had carried out in this area.

Carolyn Barton explained that Bishop Philip is leading on this strand and will look at this.

Carol Backhouse (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) asked if the whole life of the Trinity could be reflected in the vision.

Bishop Joe replied that it would be difficult to include this in a short strapline and the way we know the Father and Holy Spirit is through Jesus.

Bishop Philip added that the trinitarian work will be covered in the commentary surrounding the vision and the information on its delivery.

Jacqueline Stamper (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoL) asked if the words agreed at Bishop's Council could be included: "As His Joyful Followers we will serve our communities by meeting and walking with people at this point of need...."

Carolyn Barton responded that this will be taken on board. As the strands are taken forward, a lot more context will be added.

Liz McLean (Whalley Deanery HoC) asked why the word 'justice' had been removed.

Carolyn Barton explained that it was felt to be too broad a word with some misleading connotations.

Bishop Philip added that after talking to the Racial Justice Group it was decided that Loving Our Neighbour covers what is needed.

Gregor Stewart (Garstang Deanery HoC) suggested that Loving Our Neighbour should come before Sharing our Faith because people need to feel that they are loved and heard before they listen.

Bishop Philip expressed his approval.

Chris Krawiec (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) was concerned that the word 'prayer' was absent and felt that this was key.

Carolyn Barton said that the Vision and Strategy Team would look at this.

Paul Bye (Kirkham Deanery HoC) liked the order of the wording as it is. He spoke about Sharing our Faith, commenting that this is the faith, not just our faith and asked if this could be included.

Ian Sarginson (Leyland Deanery HoC) felt the vision should be about seeing lives changed. He asked for some clarity regarding what it means to be a Joyful Follower of Jesus and how this is quantified.

Carolyn Barton explained that more information will be provided in the detail yet to come.

The mood from around the room was in agreement that Loving Our Neighbour should be moved to bullet point two.

Paul Benfield (Burnley Deanery HoC) suggested that all motions be included on the agenda in future.

Bishop Philip moved:

"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
- Loving our Neighbour
- Sharing our Faith
- Inspiring Young People
- Forming Christ-like Leaders."

The motion was **carried** nem con.

5. 2025 Revised Budget and 2026 Budget

(a) 2025 Revised Budget

David Barlow (Chair of the Board of Finance) explained that a motion was passed by Synod in 2024 permitting the DBF Board to vary budget expenditure by up to 1% to allow flexibility in managing the budget. Whilst it was intended this would also be the position for future budgets, this was not made clear.

Synod were asked to consider the first motion to accept a revised budget for 2025 and a second motion allowing the DBF Board to vary budgeted expenditure by 1% for future years.

Questions were invited.

Jonny Lee (Blackpool Deanery HoC) asked about the percentage change for Whalley Abbey in the 2025 budget. He also asked for clarification on what the percentage change would mean.

David Barlow explained that substantial repairs and a need for changes at Whalley Abbey came to light after the budget had been signed off. He assured Synod that the budget would never be intentionally manipulated and there would always be areas over and under budget. As Synod only meet 3 times a year, it would allow flexibility to act when necessary.

Jonny Lee asked if Synod could have scrutiny of any changes to the budget.

David Barlow said he would not object to this.

Stephen Whittaker (Diocesan Secretary) asked what a sensible minimum level for reporting changes would be.

Hannah Boyd (Leyland Deanery HoC) spoke against scrutiny and said the DBF Board should be trusted with the variance.

David Barlow suggested a minimum level of £100k and that the second motion be changed to a 1% total variance, pointing out that he already reports areas of shortfall and outperformance annually.

David Barlow moved:

“This Synod accepts the revised parish share budget for 2025 with changes to expenditure shown in the report totalling a reduction of £65,753.”

The motion was **unanimously carried**.

David Barlow moved:

“This Synod accepts the Directors do not consider a 1% total variance on budget expenditure significant and may vary the expenditure during the year in question, and can do so in future years, as required to meet the needs of the organisation. Any variance will not impact on Parish Share requested.”

The motion was **carried unanimously**.

(b) 2026 Budget

David Barlow (Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance) presented the proposed 2026 Budget. His slides are attached.

The Budget reflected significant changes in National Church Institution financing of Dioceses which had impacted positively on Blackburn Diocese. It was hoped that the budget would help parishes address some of their financial challenges in 2026 and into the future.

The four main areas in the Budget impacted by the NCI's changes in financing were:

- Changes in the funding formula reducing the monies paid by the Diocese to the NCIs by £500k.
- A recommended increase in stipends for parish clergy of 10–12%.
- A substantial increase in Lower Income Community Funding of £566k, totalling over £2.1 million in 2026.

- Time limited funding of £743k in 2026 estimated to reduce over six years to circa £120k in 2032 (smaller grants may be granted in 2033 and 2034) in recognition by National Church Institutions of the disparity between Diocesan reserves and the importance of parish ministry.

The following points from the budget were highlighted:

- A continued commitment to maintaining stipendiary clergy numbers.
- Total increase in Stipends and related pension costs of £638k, recognising that to maintain this in line with inflation could be a challenge in the future.
- Inclusion of an increase in salaries of 11.72%, subject to an independent review of the salary structure whereby the percentage cannot be increased but may reduce.
- Inclusion of a number of posts to strengthen the Safeguarding Team, following the recommendations of the INEQE Safeguarding report.
- Continued assurance to maintain housing stock to a good quality, with housing and stipends being the main areas of expenditure in the budget.
- Central support costs of 7% (3% below the average for charities of a comparable size).
- No increase to the overall parish share request, despite total share receipts being £800k below the level required for a balanced budget, but recognising the significant investment into the Diocese.
- An increase in share request for approximately a quarter of parishes due to the changes recommended to LInC and SEM.

David Barlow remarked on the generous support from the National Church Institutions and reminded Synod that the majority of funding, excluding grants comes from parishes.

He thanked parishes for their continued support and urged them to consider regularly sharing their financial position with the congregation, not just to encourage generous giving but to highlight the impact on ministry at local level. Parishes struggling to contribute their share request in 2026 were encouraged to contact the team at Clayton House for a parish share meeting.

The Bishops Leadership Team, Budget Scrutiny Team, the DBF Board, Ruth McGaughey and the Diocesan Finance Team were also thanked for their contributions towards preparing the Budget.

There were no questions from the floor.

David Barlow moved:

“This Synod accepts the 2026 budget presented in the supporting papers with expenditure of £16,977,000”.

The motion was **carried unanimously**.

Nick Aves (Vice Chair of the Board of Finance) presented a motion containing three recommendations from the DBF Board which resulted from the increase in LInC funding.

Due to an increasing number of wealthier parishes struggling to contribute full share, the first proposal was a reduction in the surcharge applied to wealthier parishes when calculating parish share. The second proposal was to widen the definition of what constitutes a poor parish for the purposes of LInC funding from those parishes where income levels are in the bottom 20% to 25% nationally. The third proposal was to taper the funding for parishes falling into the 20-25% bracket to avoid those parishes moving out of the bottom 20% nationally from losing all their LInC funding immediately.

Questions were invited.

Joseph Brookfield (Preston Deanery HoL) asked when the new SEM would come into effect.

Nick Aves confirmed that the 2026 budget had been based on the existing formula but the new formula would be used for future budgets.

Cindy Rigney (Tunstall Deanery HoC) asked for clarification on what constitutes a “wealthy” parish.

Nick Aves replied that it is based on average income levels for a parish as a whole, although this might not necessarily be representative of everyone.

Nick Aves moved:

“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. “

The motion was carried nem con.

6. Vice Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance and Amendment to Standing Orders

David Barlow (Chair of the Board of Finance) explained that Nick Aves was retiring from his role as Vice Chair of the Board of Finance and Chair of the Finance Committee.

The recommendation from the Board of Finance Directors was to appoint Wendy Walker as their new Vice Chair. Wendy had served in the Police for many years and was Assistant Chief Constable for the last 7 years. She currently undertakes work for a number of charities.

David Barlow moved that:

“Wendy Walker be appointed as the Vice-Chair of the DBF Board of Directors.”

The motion was **carried unanimously**.

David Barlow explained that the Vice Chair of the Board of Finance role would be split from the Chair of the Finance Committee role. In order for the new Chair of the Finance Committee to serve on the Board of Directors it would be necessary to amend the Standing Orders.

David Barlow moved that:

“The Standing Orders of Diocesan Synod will have an addition of the phrase “the Chair of the Finance Committee” to section 48.3 (d) with all other aspects of the Standing Orders remaining unchanged.”

The motion was **carried unanimously**.

David Barlow paid a personal tribute to Nick and thanked him on behalf of the Board for the positive impact he has had on the Diocese, for the tremendous wisdom he has brought and for his great sense of humour.

Nick Aves thanked everyone who has supported and helped him over past 16 years, commenting on the broad range of skills and experience held by the current Board of Directors.

Bishop Jill reiterated the thanks to Nick which Bishop Philip had included in his Presential Address in July. She led the Synod in a song to the ABBA words: “Thank you for Nick Aves”.

7. Diocesan Board of Education Accounts

Iain Parks (Director of Education) presented the 2024 Board of Education accounts. His slides are attached.

Some of the main highlights of the last year had included:

- The Children’s Ministry Conference held in March 2025. The next Children’s Ministry Conference will move to Fulwood Free Methodist Church on Saturday 28 February 2026. The theme of the conference will be Generation to Generation.
- Abide Firm Foundation saw 180 young people plus their leaders come in Chorley in March 2025. Abide 2026 will be taking place at St Michael's High School in Chorley on Saturday 10 October.
- The Diocesan Youth Forum which continues to meet termly.
- The Youth Leader Conference held on Saturday 11 October 2025 at Blackpool Church St John’s.
- Youth Ministry from Scratch launched in September seeks to help parish leaders explore how they can shape vision for ministry with young people in their parishes.
- The Ignite Project currently has 10 parishes involved. Those wanting to know more should contact Iain.
- The Headteacher’s Conference and the support offered to schools and teachers at different points in their careers.

A major cause of strain within schools at present is the challenge involved with meeting the needs of children with special educational needs. The DBE has provided extra help to support this.

Chaplaincy roles are now filled at all three university sites in the Diocese.

School buildings remain a challenge, but CofE schools are better looked after than all other schools in the Diocese.

The DBE’s finances are in a healthy position.

Iain thanked Synod for their prayers and urged them to pray for our young people.

There were no questions from the floor.

The accounts were **received** by Synod.

8. Mission and Pastoral Committee Annual Report

David Picken (Archdeacon of Lancaster) presented the report for information, expressing his thanks to Faye Gunn for her outstanding work.

There were no questions from the floor.

Diocesan Synod **received** the report.

9. General Synod Notification of Elections

Stephen Whittaker (Diocesan Secretary) notified Synod of the forthcoming 2026 General Synod elections and asked Synod members to encourage suitable candidates to stand.

Carol Backhouse (Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery HoC) asked Synod to consider approaching women and younger people to stand for diversity purposes.

Paul Benfield (Burnley Deanery HoC) clarified that the dates for future General Synod meetings within the paper are windows where meetings will take place rather than actual dates of meetings.

Synod members were encouraged to contact Carol or Paul for more information on what is involved.

10. Deanery Synod Elections 2026

Stephen Whittaker presented the proposed allocation of lay membership for the 2026 Deanery Synod elections, which followed the pattern of previous trienniums.

Bishop Jill moved:

“This Synod approves the allocation of lay membership of Deanery Synod in Blackburn Diocese in accordance with the Schedule on paper DS 3009.”

The motion was **carried unanimously**.

11. Questions

Two questions had been received from Simon Cox (Blackpool Deanery HoC). The questions and answers are attached.

Supplementary questions were invited.

In connection with the first question, **Simon Cox** asked if the PTO clergy officers would be involved in the process.

Bishop Jill replied that they would be and that the arrangement would enable a more formal structure in future.

In connection with the second question, **Simon Cox** said he welcomed the response and hoped the committee would be more visible in the Diocese.

Bishop Jill announced that link dioceses will be meeting together in Kenya, It is hoped this will raise the work of the link dioceses in the future.

Bishop Philip explained the idea is to have a family of dioceses united in ministry. He is keen to see what the meeting will bring for the future and hoped to be inspired by the other dioceses involved. The profile of our link dioceses is also being raised annually through the harvest appeal.

12. Motions

None.

The meeting closed with a hymn and a blessing.

+ Philip Blackburn

Signed:

Dated: 23rd October 2025