

Presidential Address to Synod
March 12th 2026

There are no rules for a presidential address. So I hope I am not pushing Synod's patience too far if, rather than reflecting theologically or addressing a particular theme, I use this short slot for a series of updates.

First, Kenya. Our Diocese has a series of linked Dioceses, many of which are simply too dangerous for westerners to visit. So in January we gathered the bishops of four of those dioceses at a neutral space to which all had permission to travel. We met at the Anglican Church of Kenya retreat house in Nairobi.

What a city that is! Vast, chaotic, vibrant, alive and wholly unpredictable. It is a place both of eye-watering poverty and staggering wealth. Some parts seem almost derelict, others parts are sites of enormous infrastructural development. One of the highlights for me was visiting a string of projects in the informal housing settlements which are part funded by Christian Aid, many using simple techniques to empower people who are living on less than a dollar a day. For example 'Imarisha Kilimo' or 'Strength through Agriculture,' a project that teaches women to grow plants on tiny patches of ground, using the profits to educate their children and to improve family life.

But the main purpose of the visit was to develop the friendships that exists between five Dioceses. Sadly, there is presently no Bishop of Braunschweig so only four of us were there, but the conversation was excellent and the contexts in which my colleagues work both alarming and inspiring. Bishop Joseph of Liwolo in South Sudan runs a diocese in a war zone, two thirds of his people still living in refugee camps in Uganda. Neither he nor his clergy receive any stipend and the pressures on him are crazy as he seeks to inspire the poorest people on the planet to rebuild their nation. Yet his faith and his trust in the Lord are electrifying and he speaks words of fire.

Bishop Leo of Multan in Pakistan serves a rural area of a majority Muslim country. His churches are alive and growing, but his people suffer from the Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan and from the growing persecution of Christian and other minority groups. Bishop Dintoe is from Free State, the oldest link for our Diocese and indeed one of the oldest in the Anglican Communion. His diocese still lives with the legacy of Apartheid. Indeed, many white Anglicans left the church when he was elected as the first black Bishop. But his wisdom and care brought so much to our gathering.

Those three bishops shared many of the same concerns. The impact of climate change on the communities they serve and the economic wellbeing of their nation. The scourge of gender-based violence and the need to educate boys and young men, including many within the Church, on how to manage anger. The impact of corrupt government and self-serving politicians in preventing nations from lifting themselves out of poverty. And for Joseph, the enduring chaos of South Sudan and the negative impact of Ugandan interference.

It made me realise how domestic we can be in the Church of England, how insular we can be in our concerns and priorities and how we have lost our voice in the public

square. We need to recover our prophetic voice as Christians, we need to be bolder in speaking up for the values that matter to us, we need to be more ready to engage with government and those in power as we live the kingdom of God today.

But the chief way in which these Bishops from the global south inspire is through their profound faith in Jesus Christ and their belief in the power of prayer. Faith that has been tested by prejudice, persecution and conflict is like faith that has been through the refiner's fire and we have so much to learn.

We spent time thinking about how we can develop our relationship and a letter will soon be coming out from all four of us with ideas and suggestions. We need to make a friendship between bishops into a friendship between dioceses without contributing to the climate change by constantly climbing abroad planes. But my time in Nairobi has been a precious glimpse of just how important our global partnerships in the Gospel are.

Second, Vision 2026 and beyond. We have commenced a process to evaluate the impact of Vision 2026 as we prepare to say farewell to a strategy that has had such a big impact in the Diocese over the past ten years. It does not formally end until the day we launch the new Vision, Joyful Followers of Jesus, on November 14th 2026.

But now is the time to do the learning. God has used Vision 2026 in extraordinary ways. The Fruitful app, the Lent and Advent devotionals, over 200 new congregations, three major SDF projects, the ALM scheme, M:Power, increased engagement with ministry to children and young people and perhaps most spectacularly the £25.5m investment in mission from the Strategic Mission and Ministry Board. And whilst the Vision has not led to the net growth in church attendance that we have prayed for, it is intriguing that over the past five years we have been on an upward trajectory with 3.7% growth in regular weekly attendance in 2025. That is around 500 people following our Year of Prayer for Growth and Renewal.

In terms of our new vision, we are now at crucial phase of moving from the 'what' to the 'how' and our next Synod meeting in July will be one of the most critical for our diocese for many years. Don't miss it!

Third, centenary. Happy Birthday. I am really delighted that the emphasis in most parishes is on using our centenary as a springboard for the mission. We rejoice in the past hundred years, but we look forward to the next hundred with joy and with optimism. The energy going into planning mission weekends in September is especially good to see. Thank you for grabbing hold of this opportunity in just the right way, and see you in Blackpool on May 16th!

Fourth, the Church of England. I have written to Archbishop Sarah Mullally to assure her of our love and prayers as she prepares to be enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury on March 26th. The challenges she will meet in that role are formidable. I am deeply aware of the profound hurt that the Living in Love and Faith process has had on many people across our diocese for various reasons and we seem to have ended up in a place where nobody is happy. But the way in which we hold a Church together is not through endless

processes and management techniques but by keeping our eyes on Jesus and declaring his saving work with confidence to the world. My prayer is that the new Archbishop will bring fresh confidence to our proclamation, work to renew parish life and will seek to use her role to recapture the imaginations of our nation with the work and person of Jesus Christ.

And finally therefore, the Parish. The Parish system is the way we share the good news of Jesus Christ in the Church of England. There is no plan B. That is why everything we do in the Diocese of Blackburn is about the renewal of Parish life. It is has been so exciting to see the impact of the Diocesan Renewal Programme, of our new congregations and of our discipleship and evangelism resources in supporting parish renewal. It has also been wonderful to receive a huge gift of love from the Diocese of Gloucester recently who, wishing to share their inherited resource, have enabled us to fund two pioneering posts in communities where church life is weak or non-existent. But above all I want to thank God for our clergy for the purposeful and dedicated ministry they offer. It makes me very proud to serve as Bishop in a Diocese with such outstanding leaders. In my view the biggest threat we now face is not financial. It is vocations and it is recruitment. Please pray for the Lord to send labourers into the white harvest fields of Lancashire. We need clergy of all traditions who love the lord Jesus and love to make him known.

And thank you to each of you, lay and ordained, for all you do to serve Jesus and his Church. Yor service your ministry, your dedication matters massively. For as my colleagues in Nairobi reminded me constantly, the world's only hope is Jesus.

SMMIB UPDATE: IGNITE & LAY PIONEERS

Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery

SMMI PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

- Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment
- Wide consultation exercise to discern what Blackburn Diocese would apply for to catalyse Healthy Churches that Transform Communities
- Diocese of Blackburn application approved in 2024
 - Parish System Revitalised for Mission
 - Transformed Leadership Pipeline
 - A Church that Reflects the Communities it Serves

PROJECT SUMMARY AND AIMS



- Supporting 30 parishes to employ a Children's, Youth and Families Leader:
 - Funding tapered over 5 years to support employment costs
 - Central HR support
 - Central finance and fundraising support
 - Monthly training and networking
 - Regular mentoring
 - Additional study up to degree through Emmanuel Theological College
- Aiming to *more than* double numbers of <18s in active discipleship
 - Based on October RWA data – additional data collected to provide context to these figures.
- Reporting the number of *opportunities* children and young people have to become part of our church communities and respond to Jesus.
 - **Enable** – events aimed at increasing contact with children and young people
 - **Nurture** – events that build community and relationship, introducing worship
 - **Disciple** – regular Christian activity such as Bible study

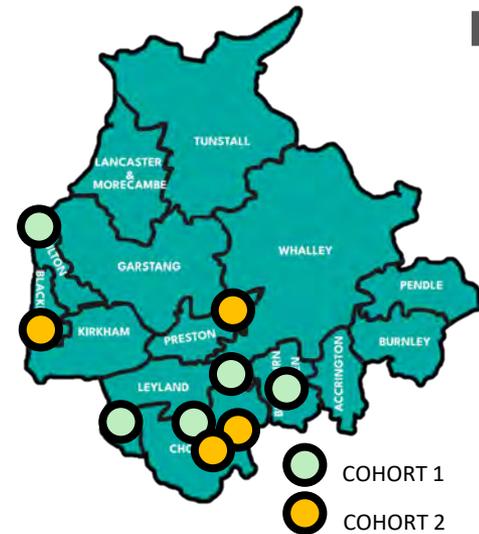
WHERE ARE WE UP TO?



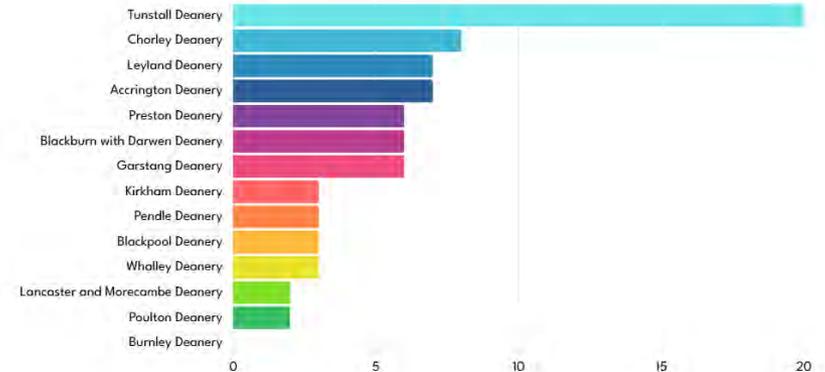
- Ignite Project Manager appointed in January 2025; Ignite Mentor and Operations Assistant appointed in March 2025.
- The first round of parish applications took place in March 2025, with five parishes awarded funding.
- Our first Ignite Leader started in post in July 2025; a total of seven have now been employed.
- At the second round of parish applications in October 2025, four parishes were awarded funding.
- Forge Days – monthly training and networking for Ignite Leaders – have been established and are providing opportunities for networking, professional development and growth in faith.

WHERE ARE WE UP TO?

- All parishes in round one have successfully appointed an Ignite Leader to their advertised roles.
- Both roles advertised so far in round two have also been filled.
- Over 1/3 of the Diocese have engaged in conversation about exploring an Ignite application; in most cases these are active discussions that either have yielded an application or are likely to do so in a future round.
- Only 6 parishes who have been considering involvement in the project have decided not to pursue an application; this mostly relates to the scale of the financial commitment.



INTEREST IN APPLICATION



WHERE ARE WE UP TO?



EARLY OUTCOMES



73

events and activities led each month in total by our first three Ignite leaders.

605

children and young people accessing Ignite-led events and activities each month.

159%

average increase in attendance at 'disciple' activities in the first three parishes between July and December 2025.

- 2025 October returns data provides the official baseline for Ignite parishes in cohorts 1 and 2, so formal impact data cannot be gathered until October 2026.
- Informal data collection alongside testimonies from Ignite Leaders and Clergy demonstrate early positive impact in parishes.
- Three Ignite Leaders started roles between July and September 2025; three more began between December 2025 and January 2026. *Early data comes only from the first three leaders in post.*

EARLY OUTCOMES



“ Our Youth Group has grown from 6 to 13! ”

“ I have had three young people take their first Bible from me. ”

“ A young person who started coming to youth group this term who wanted to start coming to church and has brought her family to some services. ”

“ There is a young person who started to come to church by himself one Sunday. He has started coming to Youth Group, which he loves... he is now talking with the vicar about baptism and then confirmation. ”

“ Our Sunday School has gone from being an arts and crafts club to somewhere where children open the Bible! ”

“ At times, I found the process overwhelming. It's not something to enter into lightly, but with much prayer and a clear sense of vision. Throughout the journey, however, your team's professionalism, guidance and unwavering support made all the difference. ”

WHAT IS COMING?

- Four more rounds of funding, with a total of 30 Ignite Leaders across the Diocese.
- An additional Ignite Mentor and Operations Assistant to be appointed in 2026 to support delivery of Forge Days and mentoring of Ignite Leaders.
- Regular discussions with the CofE's 30K Project team about how we can expand the reach and impact of the Forge Days beyond the Ignite Project from September 2026.
- Continued development of the partnership with Emmanuel Theological College to ensure we can deliver a bespoke academic pathway that complements the work in parishes.



URBAN  MINISTRY

M:POWER

LAY PIONEERS



URBAN  MINISTRY

M:POWER

LAY PIONEERS





“A church that reflects the communities it serves.”

URBAN  MINISTRY

M:POWER

LAY PIONEERS



Lay Pioneer Summary of engagement



Blackburn Archdeaconry

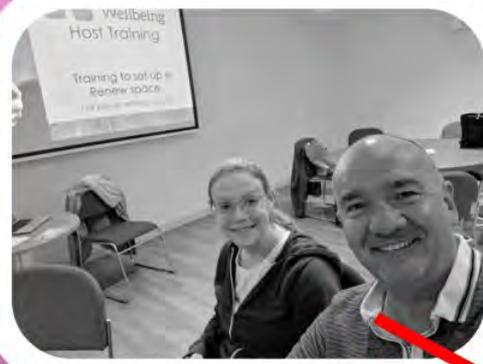
- 48 LInC churches in the archdeaconry
- 13 currently engaged with the Lay Pioneer process



Lancaster Archdeaconry

- 36 LInC churches in the archdeaconry
- 17 currently engaged with the Lay Pioneer process

WHERE ARE WE UP TO?



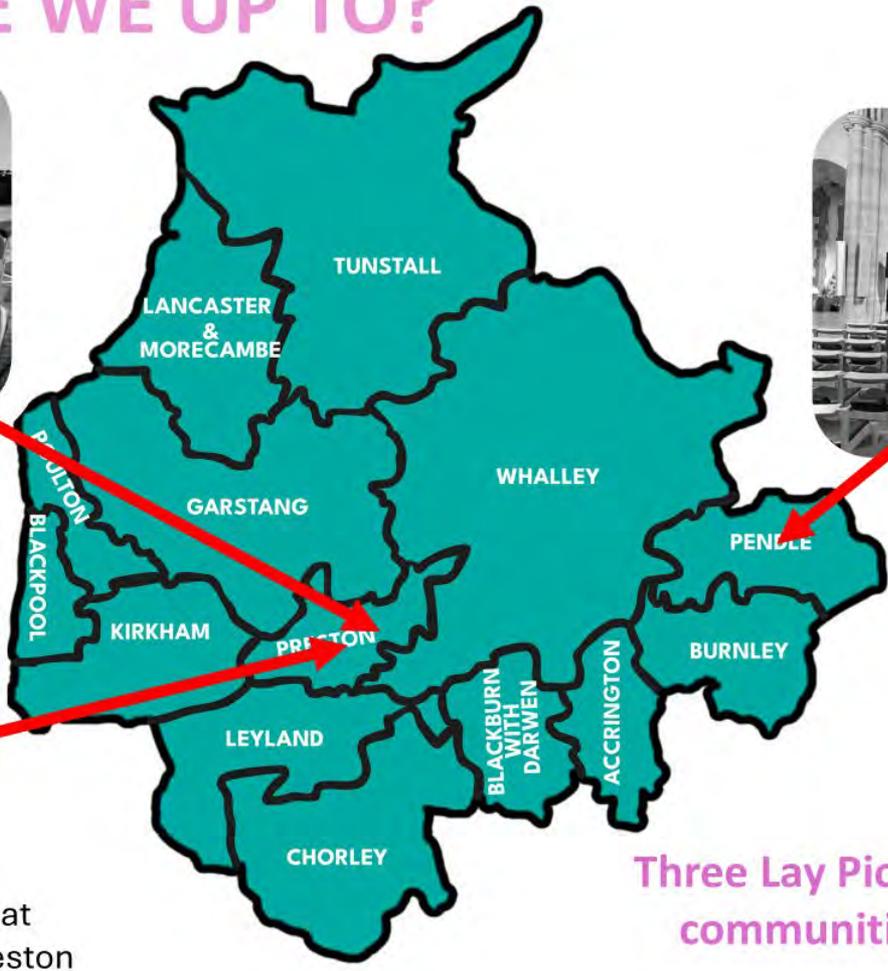
Well-Being Pioneer at Ribbleton Parish



Men's Evangelist at Holy Trinity Church Colne



Community Worker at St Stephen's Church Preston



Three Lay Pioneers employed in communities sharing Christ

WHERE ARE WE UP TO?



Danielle is teaching family budget meal planning and cooking



Bob is leading the men's 'Faith and Fitness' classes



Kate is running the 'Colourful Threads' group for women in the community



Three Lay Pioneers employed in communities sharing Christ



WHAT NEXT?



St Thomas' Blackpool will be employing a **Community Evangelist/CAP Debt Centre Manager**



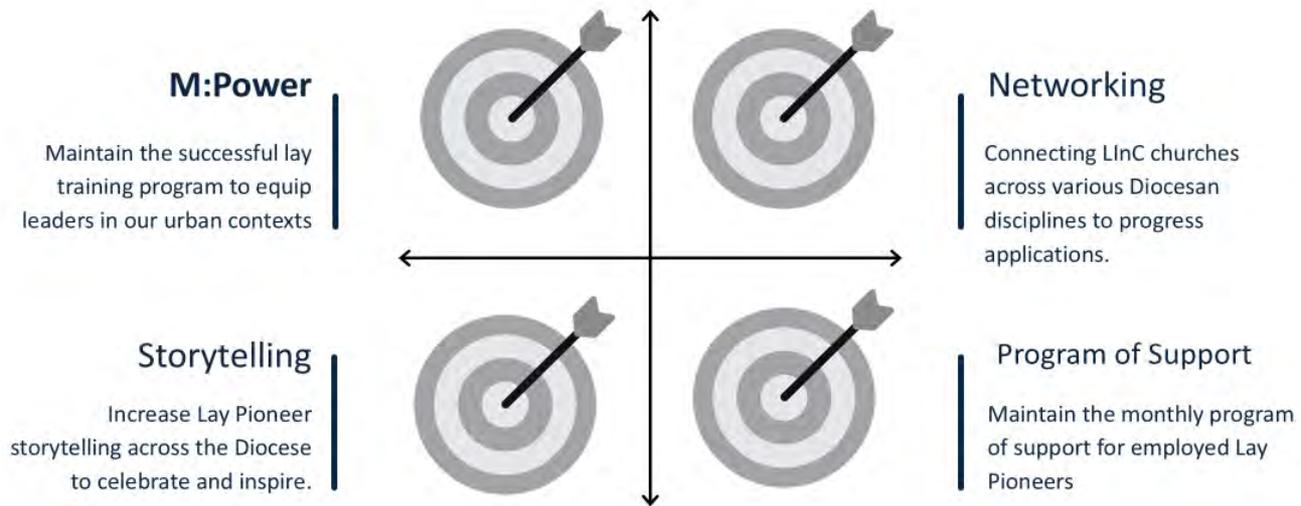
St Philips' and St Johns' Great Marsden will be employing a **Community Chef**



St Matthews Burnley will be employing a **Community Missioner**

PCCs and clergy across the Diocese preparing to employ their own Lay Pioneer

Steps to reach our targets



WHAT NEXT?



URBAN MINISTRY
M:POWER
LAY PIONEERS

Supporting churches in urban communities to build a vision for a Lay Pioneer



COMMUNITY NEED

Philippians 2:4:
"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others"



APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT

Proverbs 16:9:
"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps"



PIONEERING IDEA

Acts 1:8:
"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..."



SUSTAINABILITY

Philippians 1:6:
"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus".





What could a Lay Pioneer do in your parish?

URBAN  MINISTRY

M:POWER

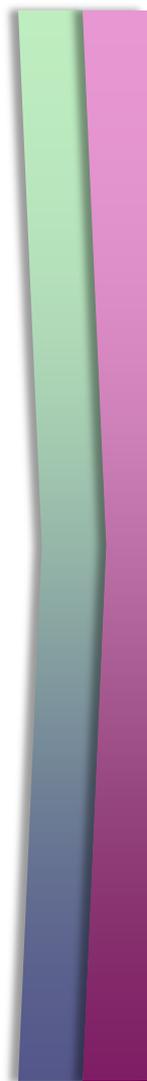
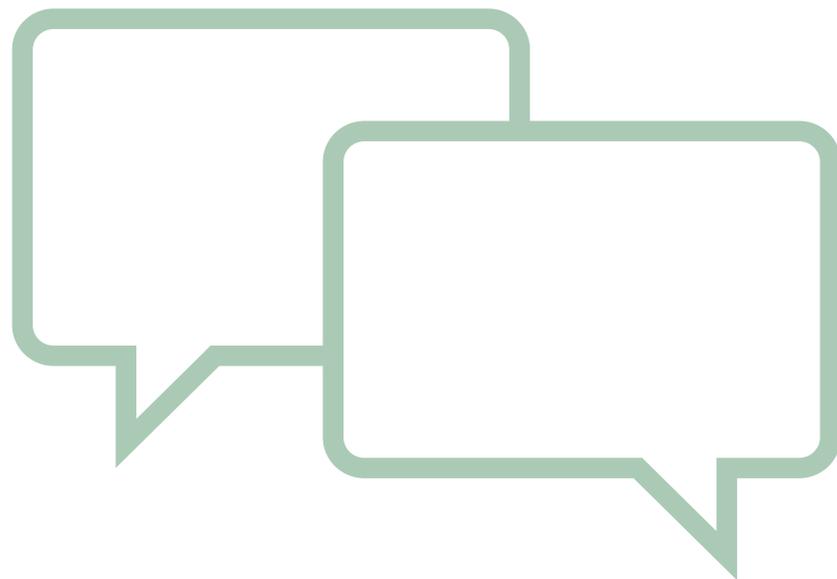
LAY PIONEERS

APPLICATION PROCESS

- Applications are completed with the support of the Ignite Project Manager/Urban Ministry Enabler and submitted for consideration by the Grant Allocation Panel, who meet twice a year.
- The Grant Allocation Panel includes the Archdeacons of Lancaster and Blackburn, a representative from the Board of Finance and the Board of Education, representatives of the urban church and young people, and is chaired by Charles Hadcock.
- Applications are assessed on five criteria: Parish vision, local support, resourcing, finance and safeguarding.
Parishes must have achieved level 3 on the safeguarding dashboard in order to apply.



Roles Available	Application Deadline	Panel Meeting	Roles start
6 Ignite 6 Lay Pioneer	February 2026	March 2026	July 2026
5 Ignite 3 Lay Pioneer	August 2026	October 2026	January 2027
5 Ignite 3 Lay Pioneer	February 2027	March 2027	July 2027
5 Ignite	August 2027	September 2027	January 2028





Ven. David Picken
*Chair, Ignite
Steering Committee*



Revd. Craig Abbott
*Head of Children,
Youth and
Chaplaincy*



Sam Lee
Ignite Project Manager



Revd. Rebecca
Roberts
*Urban Ministry
(M:Power) Lead*



Revd. Jenny Dale
*Urban Ministry
(M:Power) Enabler*





Sam Lee

Ignite Project Manager

sam.lee@blackburn.anglican.org

07484 073113

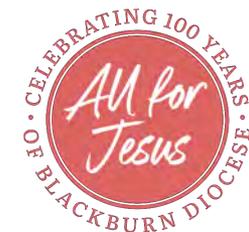


Revd. Jenny Dale

Urban Ministry (M:Power) Enabler

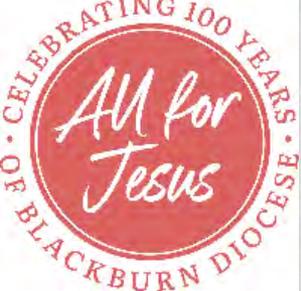
jenny.mpower@blackburn.anglican.org

07483 905674



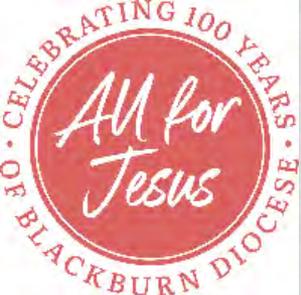
NET ZERO UPDATE

**Dave Champness,
Net Carbon Zero Senior Project Manager**



Creation Care update March 12th 2026





Creation Care update

March 12th 2026



To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom



To teach, baptise and nurture new believers



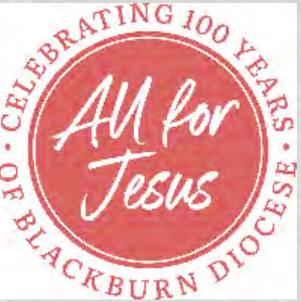
To respond to human need by loving service



To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation

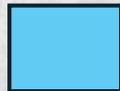


To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth



Creation Care update March 12th 2026

The Creation Care Steering Group are interested
in your informal feedback

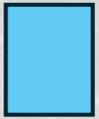


Question 1

How do you view Creation Care as a mark of mission?



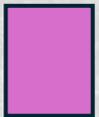
It is the most important mark of mission and needs greater focus



It is of equal status with the other four marks of mission



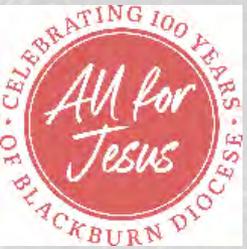
I can see its merit, but there are more effective ways of sharing faith



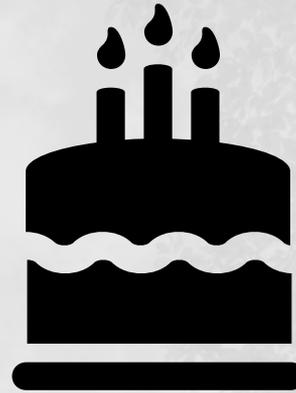
I don't see how Creation Care could bring someone to faith in Jesus



Don't know/No opinion/Other



Creation Care update March 12th 2026



10 years old

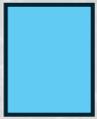


Question 2

What stage is your church at on the Eco Church journey?



We already have an Eco Church award: bronze or silver



We have registered but not got an Eco Church award, yet



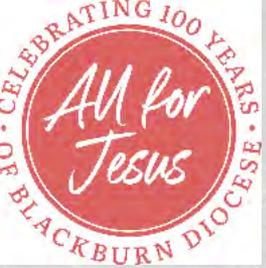
We have not registered yet but will do soon



We have not registered yet and have no intention of doing so



I don't know our status/Other response



Creation Care update March 12th 2026



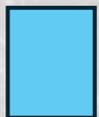
[https://youtu.be/
OQGiZbKpSjM](https://youtu.be/OQGiZbKpSjM)

Question 3

What's your view about climate change?



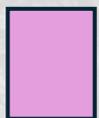
I'm concerned about the impact on my brothers and sisters in the global south especially and am doing what I can to make a difference



I'm concerned but I don't know what to do to make a difference



It's not something that I have really thought about much



It's all a hoax/there are bigger issues to deal with in this world



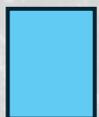
Don't know/Other response

Question 4

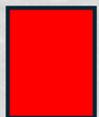
How many tonnes of CO₂ makes a church a high emitter?



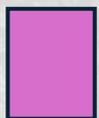
32



16



8



4



2



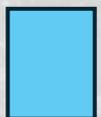
1 tonne = 5,000 miles
travelled in a Ford Fiesta
(125g/km CO₂ emissions)

Question 5

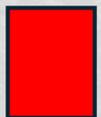
What stage is your church at on the journey to net zero?



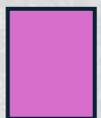
We are taking steps on our PCC plan that will take us towards net zero



We like the concept but need more local resources to plan and/or implement (including faculty paperwork) and/or fund the next steps



We're interested in the concept but don't know where to start



We're not interested – it's too expensive and/or time consuming



Don't know/Other

Question 6

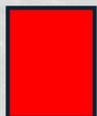
How many tonnes of CO₂ does an average UK person emit?



32



16



8



4



2



1 tonne = 5,000 miles
travelled in a Ford Fiesta
(125g/km CO₂ emissions)

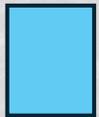
Question 7

What are you doing at home to reduce your CO₂ footprint?



At home I have 'done' at least four of:

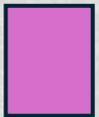
a) Fitted LED bulbs b) have an EV/hybrid car c) flown less d) bought less stuff e) bought local f) switched to a renewable electricity tariff



I have 'done' two or three of the list above



I have 'done' one of the list above



I'm not interested in changing my lifestyle



Other/Don't know/I don't have influence on what we buy

If you'd like for someone to visit your PCC to discuss



E-mail: Dave.Champness@Blackburn.Anglican.Org

For help with completing the energy footprint tool by **30th June** e-mail:
Joy.Rushton@Blackburn.Anglican.Org

Diocesan Synod on 12 March 2026

Questions Received

From	To	Question	Response
Paul Bye (HoC Kirkham Deanery)	Andy Meeson or Anne Beverley	Recognising that in many deaneries, especially where there are vacancies, a smaller number of clergy with PTO often cover services in multiple parishes or regularly for one parish, please can you confirm what frequency is meant by 'occasional' cover in Levels 2 and 3 in the recent changes to Permission to Officiate? Will this change limit the ability of clergy of PTOs to provide significant levels of cover in many deaneries?	The PTO levels are designed to be permissive and flexible rather than restrictive. The wording of "occasional cover at other parishes" in level 2 is not designed to limit the amount of cover PTO clergy are permitted to offer across a deanery but rather to distinguish this ministry from that of level 3. Level 3's wording of "providing sabbatical or vacancy cover outside of your home church" refers to a more substantial and prolonged period of continuous ministry in a parish where a PTO clergy person essentially takes on responsibility for most services in a parish for the duration of a vacancy/absence.
Joseph Brookfield (HoL Preston Deanery)	Stephen Whittaker	Does the diocese pay all its staff a wage that is at the level of the real living wage or above?	At the time of this Synod all staff are paid at least in line with the Living Wage Foundation's figures. The LWF announce in the autumn and the DBF and DBE implement the change on the 1 st April of the following year which is within the guidance of the LWF. Decisions on the application of the award in April 2026 has been delayed pending further review and so employees will all receive a set cost of living award with a decision due later in the Spring and any additional award being back dated to the 1 st April.

Joseph Brookfield (HoL Preston Deanery)	Stephen Whittaker	Are Parishes that receive funding from the diocese to employ staff encouraged to pay a wage that is at the level of the real living wage or above?	All roles that receive grant funding are advised to meet at least the LWF and most are much higher.
Simon Cox (HoC Blackpool Deanery)	Bishop Philip	In the light of the House of Bishops statement about non-PTO retired clergy recently circulated, what is the anticipated penalty for a retired clergy person without PTO who, drawing on a lifetime of experience, leads a House group Bible Study in their own house?	Ordination confers an authority and perceived trustworthiness. As such, clergy should have the correct permission and appropriate safeguarding training to conduct any public ministry. This is why it is best if a priest maintains PTO for as long as possible and we would hope that a priest who is able to lead a small group will also be able to keep up their PTO. The guidance about the restrictions on clergy who do not have PTO comes from the National Safeguarding Team and so the diocesan team needed to communicate it. Questions of a penalty would only be relevant if a complaint was received by the bishop that someone was ministering without appropriate permissions. As with all such complaints, this would be dealt with on its merits and according to the appropriate processes.
Rachel Fielding (HoC Blackburn with Darwen Deanery)	Carolyn Barton	Is there going to be a published review of the now finished Diocesan 2026 strategy - sharing things to celebrate and things to learn?	The first stage of the discernment process for our new diocesan vision was to consult with all parishes, schools and chaplaincies to understand the impact that Vision 2026 had had, as well as holding longer facilitated conversations with Area Deans and the Bishop's Council in relation to what went well, was missing or could have been better. The consultation elicited very helpful key themes in relation to things to celebrate and lessons learnt with the feedback then informing the discernment of the emerging new diocesan vision. The consultation was, however, essentially an internal exercise running the risk of missing something that an external eye would see. Following discussion with both the diocesan Vision and Strategy Team and Bishop's Council in January 2026, it was agreed that we would ask a new member of the national CofE Vision and Strategy Team to offer an external evaluation of the

			<p>Vision which took place in March 2026. The overall report summarising both the internal and external feedback on things to celebrate / lessons learnt is currently being brought together into one document and will come to Synod to note in July at the same time as the draft Vision Implementation Plan for the new 'Joyful Followers of Jesus' vision is brought for discussion."</p>
<p>Carol Backhouse (HoC Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery)</p>	<p>Stephen Whittaker</p>	<p>What proportion of LICF in the diocese are facing costs of £ PCCs 750,000 or more for work to buildings to sustain them as fit for ministry and mission in the next 10 years? How can we find out what parishes need to support them through the necessary grant applications, fundraising and project management, as well as the burden of such work?</p>	<p>The diocese doesn't hold the data in that way and only has data for the next 5 years and then beyond 5 years. In either category none of the LICF(LInC) PCCs are facing costs of £750,000</p>
<p>Carol Backhouse (HoC Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery)</p>	<p>Stephen Whittaker</p>	<p>How do the number of Weddings and Funerals conducted in parish churches within the Diocese compare between 2015 and 2025? What pastoral and financial consideration has been given to the reasons for this change?</p>	<p>We don't have the figures yet for 2025 and so the data below covers 2014 to 2024.</p> <p>The wedding data includes marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriages.</p> <p>There have been various anecdotal reasons given at parish level including the movement to secular wedding and funeral provision at cost effective levels, the variety of ways that funeral and weddings can happen, the difficulty in getting hold of priests in some areas for funerals leading to funeral directors contacting the most available and a general move away from people seeing the relevance of Christian services. Other than informal feedback we have not undertaken a formal exercise to gather feedback from parishes</p>

Marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriages										
2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1100	1040	960	890	750	650	180	560	590	440	370

	Funerals										
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Funerals in church	2050	2100	1940	1900	1780	1820	1330	1760	1710	1620	1610
Funerals in crematoria/cemeteries	1660	1650	1350	1220	1110	970	1400	930	790	740	680
Total	3710	3750	3290	3120	2890	2790	2730	2690	2500	2360	2280