The Diocese of Southwark

DIOCESAN SYNOD

BRIEF OUTLINE SUMMARY OF THE SYNOD'S 14 March 2026 BUSINESS AT ST PETER'S, BATTERSEA

Opening Prayer & Introduction to the Synod Meeting

79 Members of Synod were welcomed to the meeting, led in prayer by Adrian Greenwood (Lay Chaplain and Mentor to Diocesan Synod). Members were joined by guest speakers, Penny Lochead (Mother's Union), Mark Rhodes (End of Year Finance Update), Andrew Dickinson and Evan Cummins (Southwark Vision & Strategy Update), Michael Browne (Safeguarding Update), Weisi Dennis & Terence St Lewis (Racial Justice Update), The Revd Stephen Taylor (College of St Barnabas Lingfield) and Vernia Mengot (Vacancy in See Committee).

Presidential Address

The Bishop of Southwark gave the Presidential Address, saying that "When we offer service or ministry in Christ's name…we should remind ourselves that we do so only because we have been borne on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. We pass on only what we have received." The full text of Bishop Christopher's Presidential Address can be found at Appendix A and on the website. The Bishop also took time to remember the Bishop of Guildford and read from his obituary.

Bishop's Delegation

Following Bishop Christopher's retirement all his functions within the Diocese of Southwark would be delegated to the Bishop of Croydon who would serve as acting diocesan bishop until such a time as the election of a person to the See of Southwark is confirmed.

The Bishop of Southwark moved that:
"This Synod approves the Instrument of Delegation as shown in paper DS(26)04"

This motion was unanimously carried.

Mother's Union

Penny Lochead Chair of the Mother's Union gave a presentation on the work of the Mother's Union within the Diocese of Southwark. Covering the 150th anniversary of the Mother's Union, their local, national and global impact and their five year plan. A copy of the slides can be found at Appendix B. Members were encouraged to join and promote the Mother's Union with Penny noting "We welcome everyone – women, men, parent,

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grandparent, single or married…Positive change is built on the contributions of all members."

End of Year Finance Update

The Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, Sir David Beamish, The Archdeacon of Lambeth, Simon Gates with the Director of Finance, Mark Rhodes, and the Bishop of Southwark gave a presentation updating members on the End of Year Finance Update. The audit was underway and all findings would be reviewed by the Audit & Risk Committee in April 2025. The Accounts would then be approved by the Diocesan Council of Trustees in May for presentation to Synod in July 2026.

The PSF collection rate for 2025 was 99.2%, a wonderful result and a testament to the hard work of the Giving Team who had worked hard to support parishes in growing their contributions.

The Diocese's investment and property incomes were on budget, with the new investment portfolios achieving the targeted 3.75% return. Property repairs and council tax were rising and were a challenge for the diocese.

Revd Martin Hislop (Kingston Deanery), Revd Antonio Garcia Fuertes (Croydon North), Hugo Foxwood (Kingston Deanery), Revd Dr Nigel Griffiths (Reigate Deanery), Revd Helen Cook (Reigate Deanery), James Murdoch (East Lewisham Deanery), Revd Michelle Edmonds (Reigate Deanery) and Revd Jonathan MacNeaney (Tooting Deanery) spoke in this item.

Southwark Vision & Strategy Update

Andrew Dickinson gave his presentation on Southwark Vision & Strategy Update. Members heard that the team's priority was "enabling parish life, mission and ministry." Work was currently being funded in over 150 churches, about 50% of the Diocese. Andrew noted that this number would continue to grow but hoped that members would recognise that it was a huge achievement.



Andrew was then joined by Evan Cummins a Children and Young people apprentice whose role was supported by the Diocesan Investment Programme. Evan spoke about his experiences within the parish with youth groups, his time studying for his certificate in higher education and the growth he has seen in his own faith as well as his fellow apprentices.

Revd Antonio Garcia Fuerte (Croydon North Deanery) spoke in this item.

Safeguarding Update

The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer Michael Browne gave the Safeguarding update. Michael acknowledged the extraordinary work of Parish Safeguarding Officers in complex and often emotionally demanding situations. Many of them are volunteers and since joining the Diocese Michael had been working on strengthening the diocese's relationship with them helping to build confidence and reduce fear.

Work continued on the National Safeguarding Audit with On-site work beginning in June. Members were encouraged to complete the survey and take it back to their parishes, asthe responses are extremely valuable.

There had been progress in Serious Incident Reporting to the Charity Commission, with the team improving clarity, transparency and consistency in what is reported and how. All Church Safety plans were being reviews in an effort to reduce delays and minimise any distress caused by uncertainty. Members were asked to continue engaging with safeguarding training and encouraged to reach out to the team if they had any questions or needed any support.

Michael noted that it was also important to recognise the area of success within the Diocese. Support for survivors was strong, supervision within the safeguarding team was effective and investment in the team had also strengthened it further.

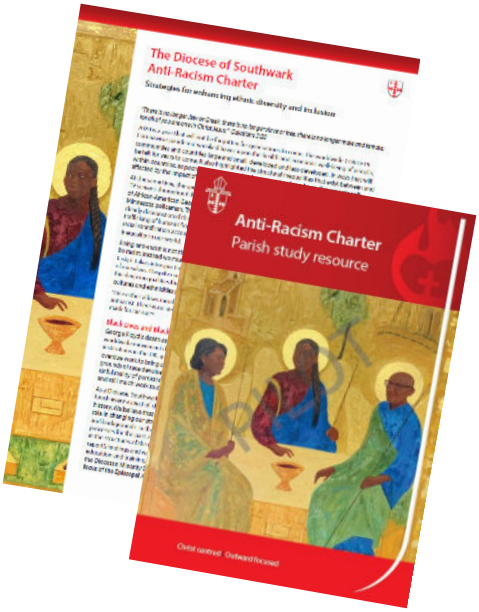
At a national level the Charity Commission had called for greater independence, consistency and transparency in the Church's Safeguarding system, this included an Independent Safeguarding Authority and a standardised complaints system. These were both a work in progress with timelines and planning still developing at national level.

Chris Elliott (Reigate Deanery) and Revd Justine Middlemiss (Croydon South Deanery) spoke in this item.

Racial Justice Update

Bishop Rosemarie and Weisi Dennis, the Racial Development Officer, gave the Racial Justice Update. Since the Diocese approved the Anti-Racism Charter in 2021 the team had adjusted to the changing world and completed a refresh of the Anti-Racism Charter pack, it now included new Parish and School Study cases and updated resources to support local engagement. The refreshed packs were seated for members.

There had been significant progress in encouraging diversity within leadership and vocations with a marked increase in GMH candidates recommended for ordination. Looking ahead the diocese would continue to build upon training pathways; strengthen the role of Area Racial Justice Groups; support community bases research projects. The team was also preparing resources for clergy relating to Christian Nationalism, public demonstrations and other issues likely to arise in coming months.



The Education Officer at Palace for Life Terrance St Lewis celebrated the Equal Eagles schools programme which had reached more than 750 children and a further 30 schools set to join the programme. The six-week programme helps children explore inclusion, social media literacy and fairness as well as building confidence and awareness for others. Feedback had shown noticeable improvements in respect and pupil voice. Work with the SDBE remained a priority for the Racial Justice Team.

Tim Davis (Kingston Deanery) spoke in this item.

College of St Barnabas Lingfield

The Revd Stephen Taylor presented on the College of St Barnabas Lingfield. Founded 130 years ago the college was described as a residential community for retired clergy and church workers and was called home by about 55 residents aged between 69 and 104. It is able to offer a range of support from independent living to fully regulated care.

Christian Faith and communal life were a core tenet of the college with the chapel placed at the centre of the site. Worship is held twice a day, with the refectory below hosting meals three times a day. Despite the diversity of backgrounds and expectations the college has thrived for 130 years and is likely to for another 130. This is due to its commitment to its distinctive faith-based pattern of life.

Members were encouraged to share information about St Barnabas Lingfield with anyone who might suit its setting or be thinking about their post-retirement living arrangements.

Worship

The Eucharist was followed by This Time Tomorrow led by Adrian Greenwood and Weisi Dennis. The Reading was given by Joseph Goswell.

General Synod Update

The Revd Jonathan MacNeaney, General Synod member, gave a brief presentation and update on the February General Synod's Group of Session. A copy of his paper can be found at Appendix A. Updates included recognising the martyrs of Libya, sustainable flowers in churches, Lowest Income Communities Fund, Clergy Misconduct Tribunals, Living in Love and Faith and Parochial Fees. The proceedings can be watched here.



Revd Erica Wooff (Lambeth North Deanery) spoke in this item.

Vacancy in See Committee

The Chair of the House of Laity Rebecca Chapman and Editor & Communications Manager Vernia Mengot spoke to the Vacancy in See Committee item. Members were informed that work had already begun ahead of Bishop Christopher's retirement in the summer. The Vacancy in See Committee was required to produce a statement of needs, a job profile that describes the character of the Diocese and the qualities, experience and priorities it sought in the next Bishop.

Rebecca and Vernia highlighted the significant amount of work that had already been undertaken and thanked the staff who were supporting the process. A diocese-wide consultation had opened two weeks earlier to gather views on what people believe the next Bishop should be like. More than 800 responses had already been received but members were strongly encouraged to promote the consultation across their parishes. There were a wide range of resources available, including accessible material for children and young people.

To further support the consultation, Synod members broke out into small groups to discuss the consultation questions together. Exploring what they value in the diocese, what challenges and opportunities lay ahead and what qualities they believe the next Bishop will need. The session concluded with a prayer, and a reminder to promote the consultation before it closes on 1 April.

Formal Questions

Fifteen formal Synod Questions were received for written answer. A copy of the Questions Notice Paper, including any supplementary questions, can be found on the diocesan website.