

Diocesan Synod – 1st July 2025
Bishop's Council Report

27th March 2025

- The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss a response to a letter from the Charity Commission to Bishop Michael (and all diocesan bishops). The letter asked a question of Bishop Michael and the trustees, following the General Synod vote on safeguarding in February and required a time sensitive response. The question centred around the trustees' ability to carry out their duties in respect of safeguarding following General Synod's decision. A draft response had been prepared by the Registrar with input from Jonathan Hill, Nick Smeeton and Arun Kataria and this was discussed, comments were noted and the letter finalised by the Registrar.
- Meeting as the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, members noted that a proposal for the transfer of St Julian's Church Shrewsbury to the Greek Orthodox Church had been consulted upon via email and had been approved. This would allow the Church Commissioners to being a "Change of Use" process.
- Bishop Michael's nomination of the Revd Phillip Johnson to the role of Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee was endorsed.

27th May 2025

- An act of opening worship was led by the Revd James Gandon.
- Bishop Michael welcomed everyone and particularly new members Liz Jackson, Archdeacon of Walsall, Nick Watson, Archdeacon of Salop, and Sam Rushton, CEO and Diocesan Secretary.
- The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and it was noted that the renewal of the REVS BMO was in progress. It was also noted that there had been no response from the Charity Commission to the letter sent at the end of March.
- Sam Rushton was appointed Secretary of the Vacancy in See Committee.
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer gave a verbal update. He was pleased to report that, following discussion at the last meeting and by Budget Review Group, 3 new Safeguarding Practitioners had now been recruited (1 x full time and 2 x part time). These recruitments brought experience from police, probation and social work backgrounds and would start work on 23rd June. This was welcomed as these roles would now only increase capacity but add quality, enabling new ways of working. Also, the West Midlands regional representative, Mandy McPhee, had now audited some cases and was also satisfied with the format of our Safeguarding Scrutiny Panel. A Diocesan Safeguarding Conference was planned for 20th September and would be held at Telford Minster. This was primarily aimed at Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs), with a guest speaker on Trauma Informed Theology, and various workshops and resources. Bishop Michael thanked Neil and the team and also noted the importance of the work done by PSOs which was very important.
- Laura Lenander, Mission Lead at Telford Minster, gave a presentation and update, speaking about the inspirational work being done and the difficulties and delays faced during that period. She felt that the setbacks had seen God do amazing things, and over the last year 45 people had been baptised and 16 confirmed. The Average Weekly Attendance was around 300, with over twenty different first languages spoken and 72 under 18s who were Whole Life Disciples. The Minster was a resource for the town and community, with a vision to make Jesus known across Telford.

This would continue with planting new shoots, deepening discipleship and casting wide, seeking to be “missional oxygen” as was set out in the original funding bid, building God’s kingdom and giving away. Laura thanked members for their belief, prayers and resourcing of the Minster. After questions, at the invitation of Bishop Michael, Simon Foster led prayers for the Minster. Bishop Michael thanked Laura for her attendance and the update which had been encouraging, inspiring and heartwarming.

- Bishop Michael introduced an item looking at the process of when and how we respond to the request for Diocesan Synods to informally discuss Living in Love and Faith. Sam Rushton explained that this was a request from the national church for feedback, noting the need to recognise the pastoral issue we faced. There was discussion and members’ comments were varied but generally of the opinion that a discussion at this point would not be effective and could have a negative impact. More clarity on the proposals was needed to enable an effective discussion.
- The Chair of the DBF introduced the finance section of the meeting, including the minutes of the meeting of FAM on 14th May 2025. He thanked every parish for their Common Fund payments, noting that 378/445 had paid in full and 11 parishes had given more than their request. +MI noted the clean audit report in which no major issues had been raised, and he highlighted the work that had gone into achieving this.
- The Finance Director presented the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2024. After discussion these were unanimously approved.
- Meeting as the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, members noted a Schemes and Orders Update, Schemes and Orders Completed and a Suspensions and Restrictions update.
- The deemed election of the Revd Dr Henry Hope to the Board for the remainder of the term ending on 31st December 2030 was noted.
- The indefinite renewal of Telford Minster BMO was approved by a vote following some discussion, including around relationships with local clergy, and finance including staffing.
- A revised constitution of the Shrewsbury Area Mission and Pastoral Committee had been circulated, and this was approved as set out.
- Bishop Michael closed the meeting in prayer.