

Created in God's image: Diocesan Synod Summary – 6 June 2026

Diocesan Synod met on 6 June 2026 for wide-ranging discussions focusing on emerging technologies, financial sustainability, and the Church's mission in diverse communities.

The meeting began with worship led by the Jessie Tang and Michael Ravuri from the Intercultural Worshipping Communities (IWC) programme team.

Presidential Address

In his presidential address, Bishop Martyn invited Synod to reflect on the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and the deeper theological and human questions it raises. Drawing on recent national engagement, including participation in public debates, he noted how AI is already embedded in everyday life, from the content we see on our phones to advances in healthcare, engineering and communication, and will become even more prevalent in the years ahead.

While recognising the scale of opportunity, Bishop Martyn also highlighted the moral and ethical questions that accompany such rapid technological change. AI, he suggested, is morally neutral in itself, but its impact depends entirely on how it is developed, governed and used. Questions of human dignity, responsibility and the common good therefore become central.

Particular emphasis was placed on the experience of children and young people. Synod heard that younger generations are already navigating this new landscape, often ahead of adults, and that the Church's role is not simply to restrict or prohibit, but to help form wisdom, resilience and discernment. Young people themselves are calling for adults to model healthy patterns of behaviour and to equip them to engage well with technology, rather than withdrawing from it.

The Bishop concluded by returning to a theological perspective: that human beings are created in the image of God, with capacities for relationship, empathy and presence that cannot be replicated by machines. AI must therefore be shaped to serve humanity, not diminish it. For the Church, this creates an opportunity as well as a responsibility to contribute thoughtfully to public debate and to help society navigate these developments in ways that uphold human flourishing.

Annual Report and Accounts

Synod received the Annual Report and Accounts for 2025. Members heard that the Diocese's financial position is improving, with the net deficit reduced to £1.75 million, compared with £2.4 million in 2024 and £3 million in 2023.

DBF Chair David Palmer explained that, despite this progress, significant challenges remain. Income continues to rely heavily on parish contributions, which are declining in real terms and not keeping pace with inflation, while expenditure reductions have required difficult decisions regarding clergy and staff numbers.

Discussion reflected the ongoing tension between financial sustainability and sustaining clergy numbers for mission; the importance of transparency over the use of Lowest Income Communities Funding; and the possibility of renewing efforts to access national funding.

Barclays Banking Arrangements

Steve Gorton, Chair of the Resources and Compliance Committee updated the Synod on discussions following the Synod vote in March to consider withdrawal from banking arrangements with Barclays. Members were reminded of the complexity involved in any potential change, including operational risk, cost and the length of time such a transition could take. It was noted that the discussion continues to balance ethical concerns with the practical responsibilities of managing diocesan finances, and further work is underway to assess options.

National Funding (Hereford Motion)

Synod considered the wider financial position of the Church of England and, in that context, debated and voted on a formal motion relating to national funding, which has been discussed by General Synod and is sometimes known as the “Hereford Motion”. Members heard about the scale of the financial challenge facing dioceses collectively, with significant deficits across the Church and declining income linked to falling participation. There was discussion about the role of the Church Commissioners, including how national resources are distributed and the need for ongoing conversation about fairness, sustainability and support for local mission.

Following the debate, the motion was put to a vote and carried by a substantial majority. The full text of the motion can be found below.

Children and Young People

Matt Long, Youth Engagement Lead provided an update on developing a new approach to engaging children and young people. A revised consultative model aims to broaden participation through schools and other settings, enabling a wider and more diverse range of voices to be heard. Matt Long reported that young people have identified key themes for future discussion, including friendships, social media and mental health, and this work will become a regular feature of Synod in future.

Intercultural Worshipping Communities (IWC)

Jessie Tang and Michael Ravuri led a substantial presentation on the Intercultural Worshipping Communities (IWC) project, which is reaching the end of its current funded phase at the end of June. The programme has worked intentionally with a number of core and partner churches to explore how congregations can become more reflective of the cultural diversity of their local communities and to develop new patterns of ministry and leadership.

People who have been involved with IWCs shared a range of experiences. These included the development of new relationships and communities, growth in confidence among lay and ordained leaders, and the creation of spaces where people from different cultural backgrounds can worship, lead and belong together. Stories illustrated how relatively small initiatives, such as shared meals, multilingual worship, and community activities, can have a significant impact in fostering connection and belonging.

Synod also heard about the importance of leadership shaped by service, listening and mutual learning, and the ways in which intercultural ministry challenges traditional assumptions about church life. Furthermore, that evaluation findings suggest that the project has led to a genuine shift in culture in participating churches, creating environments where experimentation is encouraged and where diverse expressions of faith are valued.

While the formal project is concluding, there was a strong sense that this is not an endpoint. Rather, the learning, relationships and confidence developed through the programme will continue to influence diocesan life, with opportunities to embed this approach more widely across parishes.

General Synod Update

Members received a brief update on the General Synod election process which will take place through the summer and autumn.

Safeguarding Audit

Andy Brockbank provided information about the independent safeguarding audit currently underway, noting that evidence gathering has begun, in anticipation of the visit of the INEQE audit team in early October. Members were encouraged to support engagement with the audit, including participation in surveys and support for Parish Safeguarding Coordinators. The process will examine both practice and culture, and Synod was assured that feedback will be taken seriously.

The meeting concluded with prayer led by Bishop Saju.

The ‘Hereford’ Motion - full text

“That this Synod,

(1) having noted, through information presented to and debated at General Synod in July 2025, the precarious financial position of many dioceses, concerns about the approach to National funding, and the increasing challenges of sustaining stipendiary ministry in dioceses;

(2) calls upon the Church Commissioners to continue to make available the maximum sustainable level of distributions in support of parishes and the work of clergy and other ministers;

(3) calls upon the Archbishops’ Council and the Church Commissioners to ensure that the General Synod has a more formal role in the development of the future Funding Framework; and

(4) calls upon:

(a) the General Synod through its Business Committee to schedule early in the next triennium a full debate that will enable the General Synod to express its view on the approach to disbursing funding, including support for local stipendiary ministry, based on robust financial modelling and that adequate time and opportunity is provided for full consideration of the proposed modelling, including examination of statutory core allocations to diocesan stipend funds as distinct from discretionary or time-limited support;

(b) Archbishops’ Council, the House of Bishops and the Church Commissioners to ensure that the robust financial modelling, for which the General Synod has called to inform the development of the Funding Framework; to include:

(i) national, diocese-by-diocese modelling of the financial support required from the Church Commissioners, not only to prevent the collapse of the diocesan and parish systems but revitalise the parish system across all of the dioceses;

(ii) specific examination of projected clergy numbers and deployment requirements across diverse contexts (urban, ‘market town’, rural) to support evidence-based decisions on how the Church can meet its mission objectives in every community;

(iii) modelling to be undertaken, over appropriate time horizons (indicatively 25 years (generational), 7 years, 3 years and 1 year (for fine-tuning via short-term adjustment)).

(c) the Archbishops’ Council and the House of Bishops to establish a suitable, representative team from the dioceses and the National Church Institutions to engage directly with all dioceses in finalising this modelling and determining the financial needs of local ministry; and

(d) calls upon the House of Bishops, in consultation with the Archbishops’ Council, to develop a strategic plan, as part of this review, for sustainable and ongoing growth in clergy numbers, to break the current cycle of managed decline and honour the covenant between the Church and those offering themselves for ordained ministry, ensuring this plan informs both the financial modelling and the development of the Church’s future Funding Framework.