Minutes of the meeting of Diocesan Synod 14 March 2026

Welcome & Apologies

CLERGY: 42 (67 Members) – 63% attendance
LAY: 44 (68 Members) – 65% attendance

New to Synod:

- *Alan Baker, General Synod Member, St Ninian's, Edinburgh*
- *Eden Anderson from St John's Prince's Street, Edinburgh*
- *Sally Mair, Alternate Lay Representative, Holy Cross, Davidson's Mains, Edinburgh*
- *Reverend Harriet Johnston, Rector, Dunbar*
- *Mo Clarke, Lay Representative, St Mary's Cathedral*
- *Peter Estibeiro Lay Representative, Christ Church, Duns*
- *Rosalind Stuart-Menteth, Alternate Lay Representative, Peebles*
- *Canon Alistair Dinnie, Lay General Synod Member*

Bishop's Address

The Address was given by the Most Reverend Mark Strange, Primus, as the interim Bishop of Edinburgh during the vacancy in see

Bishop Mark reflected that, having also been the interim Bishop during the vacancy in the Diocese of Argyll & the Isles, he had a great sense of being blessed with people within our church. In that role and also in his own Diocese of Moray, Ross & Caithness He had been more used to smaller and more remote congregations, so this had been a different challenge.

Bishop's Lent Appeal

Dawn Ward, Director of Children & Families, gave a presentation about the work of Aberlour Children's charity, the chosen recipients. In 2025, they had celebrated their 150th Anniversary. Their overarching aim was to work to beat children's poverty and discrimination. They deployed 60 services across Scotland. Synod welcomed the opportunity for charges to contribute to this valuable work.

Synod Minutes

The minutes of previous Diocesan Synods were approved as follows:

- 15 February 2025 - Full meeting; **APPROVED** with 1 abstention
- 25 June 2025 - Special Synod with changes to Canon IV; **APPROVED** unanimously

- 27 September 2025 - Special Synod (as part of the Electoral Synod) to elect a new Synod Clerk; **APPROVED** unanimously

Annual Reports

Standing Committee

Wilson Poon, Diocesan secretary, presented the Standing Committee report as the Interim Convener during the vacancy in See. He updated Synod by confirming that the new Diocesan Office would be located in the former stonemasons workshop at the cathedral.

Questions

The Reverend Peter Harris, Rector, Dalkeith & Lasswade. He queried the costs of the new office and asked whether cheaper accommodation had been looked at in locations other than the city centre?

Wilson Poon responded to say that an extensive search had been conducted over a long period of time, looking at a variety of locations. The ultimate decision had been that it should be located in Edinburgh.

The Reverend John Penman, Rector, St Vincent's Edinburgh. He noted that the workshop space was very small and queried where committee meetings would be held and whether the Bishop would have an office of a size to enable private meetings?

Wilson Poon confirmed that alternative space would be provided for large committee meetings, but that the Bishop would have a designated private office at the new location.

The Reverend Canon Bob King, Rector, St Andrew's Kelso. As a member of the Finance & Management Committee, he wished to assure Synod that many hours of discussion had been taken up with this matter and he was confident that all due diligence had been taken.

The motion that Synod approved the annual report of the Standing Committee was proposed by Wilson Poon and seconded by the Reverend Cannon Bob King. **THE MOTION WAS PASSED** with 1 against and no abstentions

Finance & Management Committee

Robert O'Riordan confirmed that the task of the committee was to not only collect money through quota but also to ensure that it was spent wisely. He reflected that there was a growing need to increase support for smaller congregations in their struggle with finding volunteers to formally run them as charities, particularly when

trying to recruit treasurers. The matter of governance had taken up a good deal of committee time, but it was valuable. Following the end of Godfrey Robson tenure, the roles of Diocesan Secretary and Finance & Management Committee Convenor had been split between two people. Although that had been helpful in one sense, it raised issues of lines of responsibility and authority, particularly at the point when work had to be enacted by the Diocesan Administrator. A small working group was looking at the Administrative Scheme in order to clarify those and to ease the lines of communication at committee and officer level. He then singled out Hannah Harcus, the Bishop's PA, to thank her for all the hard work she had done during the complex process to elect the new Bishop. Synod applauded. He also thanked The Very Reverend Frances Burberry for seeing the diocese through the Episcopal vacancy.

There had been good collaboration on the Investing In The Future work between the committee and the Mission & Ministry Committee. He hoped that, when the new Diocesan Office was up and running, members of congregations would visit and receive support from Simon Filsell and his team, which is what they were there to provide.

The motion that Synod approved the Annual Report of the Finance & Management Committee and its pendant committees was proposed by Robert O'Riordan and seconded by Philip Sawyer. **THE MOTION WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**.

Cathedral Accounts

The Very Reverend John Conway, Provost, presented the accounts covering the period July 2024 to July 2025. He reminded Synod that he was always keen to refer to St Mary's as "your cathedral". There had been an increase in recurring income, now reaching £804k. This was mainly due to an increase in visitors and tourists alongside increased giving. Expenditure was £904k due to cost increases and the launching of new music programmes. This produced a £100k deficit. Investments had not performed as well as expected. Nevertheless, the increasing engagement across the city indicated that they were doing something right.

Safeguarding

Hannah Harcus, Diocesan Protection Officer, presented the Annual Report alongside the Reverend Canon Marion Chatterley, Convener of the Provincial Safeguarding Committee and Vice Provost of the Cathedral.

Questions

Robert O'Riordan, Convener, Finance & Management Committee. Having noted that two members of the safeguarding team in the General Synod Office had left, he sought assurance that all support routes and resources were available to Hannah?

The Reverend Canon Marion Chatterley confirmed that interviews for a new Head of Safeguarding were already underway, and the recruitment of the Assistant would commence as soon as the senior post was filled.

The Reverend Canon Bob King, Rector, St Andrews Kelso. He had recently applied for a Permission to Officiate in Manchester Diocese. In order to be granted permission, ee was required to complete eight online courses. He very much commended the process.

The Reverend Ollie Clegg, Rector, St Mungo's Balerno. He asked for confirmation that the replacement Head of Safeguarding would be a permanent post.

The Reverend Canon Marion Chatterley confirmed that it would be permanent.

Elections

The following were elected:

General Synod

1. The Revd Simon Schofield
2. The Revd Philip Blackledge

Provincial Panel for Episcopal Elections

- The Revd Canon Dean Fostekew

Diocesan Standing Committee

- Philip Sawyer

Diocesan Finance & Management Committee

- The Revd Matthew Rushton

Mission & Ministry Committee

The Reverend Canon Dr Sophia Marriage, Convenor, presented the Annual Report. She highlighted various events and developments during the year:

- support for authorised ministry including Continuing Ministerial Development Days, Ministerial Reviews and the Annual Clergy Conference
- the Adventures in Faith programme had been re-launched
- Further Trustee Training, delivered by Gavin McEwan, Diocesan Chancellor, for Vestry officers

She made a plea to share with the Diocesan Office what good things were going on in charges so that they could be showcased wider as exemplars. The Adviser for Christian Life, the Reverend Fiona Reynolds, had done much work amongst youth and children including making the "Roots" online resources available across the diocese. A trip had been organised to Taizé alongside other events for young people. There had

been good work to develop relations with partner dioceses. There had been a visit to the partner diocese of Espoo in Finland as well as visits from representatives of that diocese to Edinburgh. The diocese maintained its close contact with Dunedin Diocesan Office with online meetings between administrative staff. Much of the committee's work had involved the Investing In The Future initiative, facilitated by the funds produced from investments through the work of Godfrey Robson when he was Diocesan Secretary. The purposes of the project remained:

- To support development of congregations in current difficulty but where we see longer term prospects for growth and development, with a change in ways of doing the ministry
- To develop our presence in areas of significant housing and population growth
- To support charges in areas of social need, which might or might not become completely self-supporting in time.

The Diocesan Companions for Investing In The Future came from both the Finance & Management and the Mission & Ministry Committees, working in collaboration to monitor and evaluate the use of the funds. There was then a presentation by the Reverend Gill Hitchen, on the impact of the support funds for Roslin, which were made available from March 2024. The next projects being considered for Investing In The Future were Blindwells (a new village near Haddington), Shawfair and Millerhill near the Edinburgh Bypass as well as the western extension of Edinburgh.

The St Hilda's Small Charges Fund had supported a number of projects of mission including those at Galashiels and Melrose.

The motion that Synod approved the Annual Report of the Mission & Ministry Committee was proposed by the Reverend Canon Dr Sophia Marriage and seconded by the Reverend John Penman. **THE MOTION WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Legacy Slavery

Miriam Weybie, Provincial Church Relations Officer, introduced the new Legacy Slavery Project which was intended to understand how Christian history had been shaped by the trafficking and enslavement of Africans for the European countries. The initiative had been instigated by the Bishops' Statement on Racism and Slavery. A working group had been appointed in 2025 and a researcher began their work in 2026.

Questions

Robert O'Riordan, Convenor, Finance & Management Committee. What were other church denominations doing on this subject?

Miriam Weiybe confirmed that the Methodists, Church of Scotland and others were all looking at their own approaches and responses.

Net Zero

Neil Rawlins, Provincial Net Zero Team, updated Synod on the work in 13 charges across the diocese. Much data had been collected from Edinburgh Diocese and across the Province. In Edinburgh, there had been good reductions in carbon emissions between 2023 and 2024. However, it was noted that some increases in emissions in certain churches might indicate increased activity in those buildings which was equally positive. He emphasised the importance of the Environmental Footprint Toolkit data and urged charges to continue to complete their returns.

Liturgies

The Reverend Rosie Addis introduced the item, as Convener of the Provincial Liturgy Committee. The changes covered a second reading of the new Blessing of Marriage liturgy at General Synod in June. A few minor comments were offered for consideration at the second reading and Rosie agreed to take those forward.

Bishop Designate's Message

Bishop Dagmar Winter had recorded a short video message which was then played to Synod.

Finance

Ian Lawson, Diocesan Treasurer, reminded Synod that he would normally be talking about the latest accounts but, as there had been no full meeting of Synod in October 2024, the previous year's Accounts had not been formally presented.

In 2024 there had been a deficit of £168k but this was mainly due to the spending associated with the Investing in the Future grants. There had also been the £50k cost of the Registration of Controlling Interests In Land. He then introduced an analysis of expenditure which showed:

- Provincial Quota 26%
- Office of the Bishop & Dean 14%
- Support & Governance 19%
- Grants 30%
- Mission & Ministry 11%

The new method of analysis, advised by the auditors, enabled a focus on spending related directly to "charitable activities". However, this was difficult to apply as there were elements within the budget which applied those activities as well as general governance and it was difficult to discern where the split should be.

In 2025 there had been an operating deficit of £32k. Investments were continuing to make gains but not as substantial as in the past. There was a General Fund surplus of £40k. Within the Designated Funds there had been a £36k surplus in the St Hilda's Fund. The St Paul's Fund saw a deficit of £2k due to its use for the £5k matching grants for the Provincial Rectory Green Fund. This matching funding requirement had been placed on dioceses with little consultation, so had not been budgeted for. A new Flagstone account, operated by the Charities Aid Foundation, had been opened in order to invest excess cash during the year. A new fund had been set up to enable the diocese to help charges with any short-term bridging loans. A protocol was in place for applicants.

Looking forward to 2026, there had been significant Bishop's Search costs but a proportion of those would be paid by the Province. The Diocesan Office move involved an investment in stripping out and fitting the former Stonemasons Workshop. The anticipated expenditure of £108k would be deducted in 13 equal measures over the 13-year lease. The rent of commercial office space would have been around £35k per annum with service charges added to that. The new arrangement at the Cathedral would not only avoid such service charges but would also keep the rental monies within the diocese.

Questions

Howard Thompson, Lay Representative, St Peter's Musselburgh. He noted that 40% of provincial quota income was paid by Edinburgh diocese and queried what the Province spent £600k on?

The Primus responded that much of the expenditure went back to individual dioceses through support and the award of grants.

The motion that synod approved the 2024 Accounts was proposed by Ian Lawson and seconded by the Reverend Canon Dr Sophia Marriage. **THE MOTION WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The motion that Synod approved the 2025 Accounts was proposed by Ian Lawson and seconded by Philip Sawyer. **THE MOTION WAS PASSED BY A MAJORITY** with one against.

Ian Lawson was thanked for his hard work in not only presenting the accounts but his financial work throughout the past year.

Dean's Report

The Very Reverend Frances Burberry presented various highlights of her year including:

- attendance at the Consecration of the new Bishop of Glasgow & Galloway, where the preacher had noted "a new Oasis of hospitality" and that "a diocese should not expect their new Bishop to be excited by their complaints but that they should expect them to fan into life the flame that is in you"
- work on compiling the Diocesan Profile for the Bishop Search. She was immensely grateful to Profile team Gavin McEwan, Hannah Harcus, The Reverend Canon Dr Sophia Marriage, The Reverend Canon Liz O'Ryan, Cathy Ballantine and Godfrey Robson.
- the farewell in August to Bishop John on his retirement

Looking ahead, Dean Frances was now getting back on track with postponed work, including visitations.

Shirley Green, Lay Representative St David's Edinburgh, proposed a vote of thanks to the Dean for all her work in the past year during the vacancy.

THE BISHOP CONFIRMED THE ACTS OF SYNOD