



Truro Diocesan Synod

A Guide for Members

2024 - 2027

This guide is in four parts:

Part one is an **introduction** from the Bishop.

Part two begins on page 4 and it gives the **background to synod**, what synod does and does not do, and how synod makes a difference.

Part three of the guide is on page 11, it gives background information about the wider diocese and explains how the different bits of the **Diocesan Board of Finance** work.

Part four starting on page 17 is the most “practical” part of the guide, it explains **how the meetings work** and what happens before, during and after each synod.

There is a **part five** lurking around on page 21, but seriously, who is going to read that far?

This guide was prepared for the 2024-2027 synod by the Diocesan Secretary, Simon Cade.

Part 1.

Welcome from Bishop Hugh

Dear Friends

Welcome to the 2024-2027 sessions of Truro Diocesan Synod

Welcome back to old friends, and welcome to those joining synod for the first time. I hope that this guide will be useful for those who are new, and for those who are more familiar with the ways of synod. Thank you for offering to serve the church in this important way.

This synod begins its work as we pray for a new Bishop of Truro and as the Church nationally and locally has many opportunities and challenges - it is an important moment in the life of our diocese. A moment when we are curious about new beginnings, a time when we remain faithful to the calling of the Church, and a time for working together, for mutuality. These three themes; faithfulness, curiosity, and mutuality, are significant themes for me, and I share them with you for your prayers and thoughts.

Faithfulness, because with new opportunities and persistent challenges it is vital that we remain focussed on Jesus and the faith we have received. We are called to be faithful as individuals, each in our own calling and vocation, and also as a synod, to keep returning to the wellspring of our faith, and indeed to be faithful in reading the papers, turning up, listening well, and saying our bit.

We are curious because God is bigger than any of us can imagine. God is at work in Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and in Devon, and being curious means wanting to find out what God is up to. Curiosity assumes that there is more to find out, more to discover, a future we cannot yet imagine but which is already safe in God's hand. If faithfulness encourages us to look back sometimes, curiosity reminds us that God is already ahead of us. Synod members may have to consider new possibilities, we may need to be explorers, curious about what is beyond the horizon.

As a synod and as the Church we are faithful and curious *together*; so mutuality, walking together, is important. We may be tempted to walk alone sometimes, to set our own pace or go our own way. There are certainly those in the Church who want to draw lines and to create new boundaries, but learning to live in mutual love, with respect and generosity, this will be part of the work of this synod.

Please pray for your fellow members of synod as we learn faithfulness, curiosity, and mutuality. Pray for those who think like you and always seem to make sense, as well as for those who see things differently.

I look forward to working and serving with you.
With my thanks and with every blessing

+ Hugh St Gemour

Part 2.

Background to synod; what it is and what it does

What is Diocesan Synod?

The word “synod” is from two Greek words that mean *together on the way*, so we are a group of people gathered with a common destination in mind. As a Christian synod our destination and focus is Jesus, it is our faithfulness to him that binds us together and which is our guide.

We are a synod for the whole diocese, not just for ourselves or our own churches. We are a synod for all of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly, and two parishes in Devon; the decisions we make are not just for our journey but for all of God’s people, and for God’s Church, in the diocese. Members use their judgement and discernment under God, we are not delegates told to vote this way or that by our parish or deanery (or by the bishop), we are members together of the Body of Christ discerning under the Spirit.

Church law sets out what diocesan synods do and how they operate.

The Synodical Government Measure 1969 says that the functions of the diocesan synod are to “**consider**” and to “**advise.**”

Almost any matter concerning the Church of England in the diocese can be considered. Synod might do something, start something or stop something, or it might simply express an opinion. *Almost any matter* includes things of both religious and of public interest.

There are two specific things that diocesan synod *must* consider; these are the annual budget, and the annual report of the Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd. Part three of this guide explains what the Diocesan Board of Finance is.

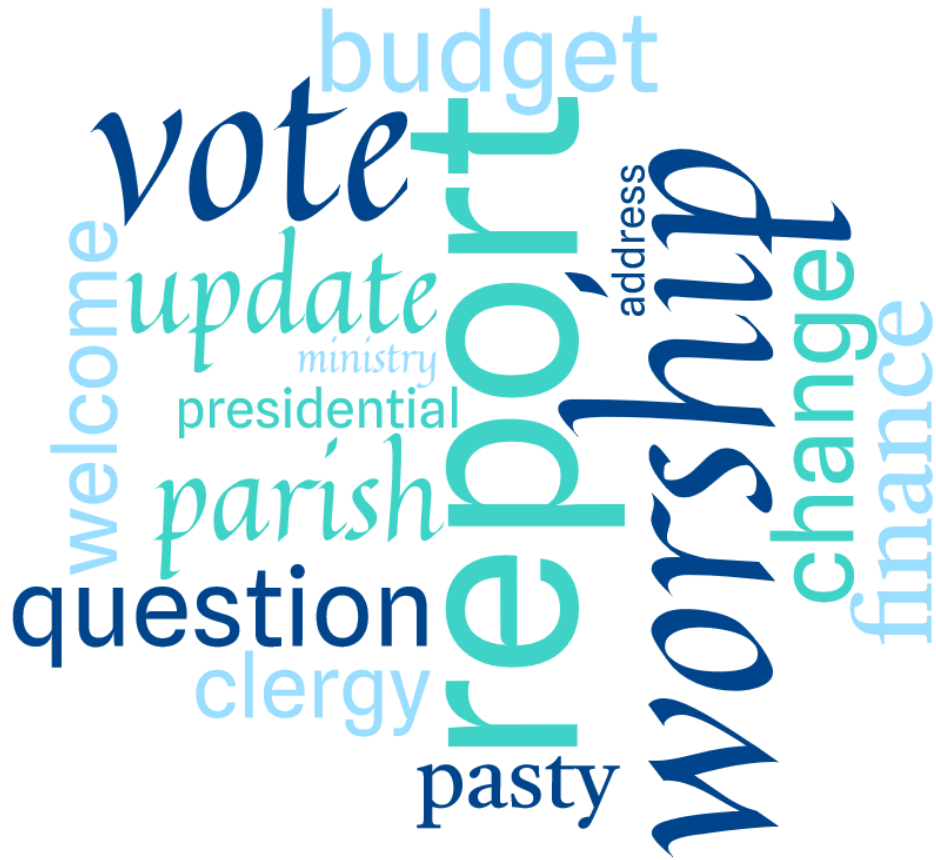
Usually “consider” will mean making a decision by voting yes or no to something.

The “advise” bit of synod’s work is to advise the bishop, the bishop has a duty to consult the synod on important matters.

Some of the consulting and advising is done in our synod meetings, and some is done by members of synod elected to serve on various Councils, Boards and Committees. Electing people to these boards and committees, and then hearing back from them and holding them to account, is an important part of the work of synod.

The members of Diocesan Synod are “Members” of the charity and the company - the Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd. That is a little like being shareholders in a company, the members don’t run the charity, but they do have an important role.

A wordcloud of synod agenda items



Who is diocesan synod?

Diocesan synod is made up of **bishops, clergy, and laity** - sometimes called the three “houses” of synod. Most laity and clergy on diocesan synod are elected members, elected by their deanery synods. There are also members who are here because of the office they hold (ex-officio) or because getting elected or appointed to something else makes them a member of Diocesan Synod. Finally, there are nominated and co-opted members.

Almost 100 members are elected by deanery synods, roughly equal numbers of lay and ordained. These elections take place every three years (the triennial elections that have just taken place).

The ex-officio members are the bishop(s), the dean, the archdeacons, the diocesan chancellor, the elected members of General Synod, the chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, and the chairs of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and Diocesan Board of Education (DBE).

As well as ex-officio and elected members there are some co-opted and nominated members. Up to ten additional members can be “co-opted” by synod (the members themselves decide if or how to do this), and up to ten members can be nominated by the bishop. Nominated and co-opted members are full members of synod and in each case there is a maximum of five lay and five ordained.

Synod usually appoints some ecumenical “observers”, typically one from the Roman Catholic Church and one from the Methodist Church or the Churches Together in Cornwall group, these are non-voting members.

The Diocesan Secretary is not a member of synod but is the “secretary” to synod and with a small team from Church House provides support for the meetings. Also from the Church House team, the Directors of Education, Change & Renewal, and Finance & Assets, usually attend synod but are not “members” and don’t have a vote.

Synods are usually public meetings, so visitors can and do attend, they don’t vote and they don’t have the right to speak unless they are specially given permission to do so.

What decisions does Diocesan Synod make?

The decisions that synod makes fall into four distinct groups, each is important in its own way.

- Electing and appointing people, and then holding them to account.
- Decisions for Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd.
- Advising the bishop, consulting, and expressing a view.
- Decisions that come from General Synod or Deanery Synods.

Electing and appointing people, then holding them to account

Diocesan Synod elect or appoint people to various roles, boards and committees (see pages 14-16). In most cases there is an open election process, this begins with considering whether you should stand for election and continues with candidates being proposed and seconded by members, in some cases the candidates will be nominated by another group or sometimes by the bishop.

One of the first decisions that you will be asked to make (even before meeting for the first time as the new synod) will be to nominate and then elect the Chair of the House of Laity and the Chair of the House of Clergy. The clergy members of synod, and the lay members of synod, vote separately. The two elected chairs become members of the Bishops Diocesan Council and trustees/directors of the Board of Finance, they take a share in chairing meetings of synod and a leading role in shaping the agenda for synod.

Following the election of the two Chairs of Houses you will be asked to elect members of the Bishops Diocesan Council (they become trustees/directors of the Board of Finance) and members to other groups and boards. In each case we send out nomination papers and details of the skills and experience that we are looking for.

At the first meeting of the new synod the bishop will nominate a candidate for Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance. This important voluntary role has already been advertised widely with candidates shortlisted and interviewed against the person specification and role description, the bishop's nomination is based on that process. Although you only get one candidate to vote for, the successful candidate remains someone elected by synod, they report to you and can be held to account by you.

Synod can hold officers, boards and committees to account. This might be informally in correspondence or conversation, or through scrutiny and questions when reports are given, or by asking formal questions addressed to a specific officer, board or committee.

Decisions for Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd.

As members of the company and charity, there are two main decisions that you are asked to make.

Firstly (usually at our November meeting) you are asked to debate and approve the budget for the following year. The first stage of this takes place over the summer when the Bishops Diocesan Council will consult members of synod and others on their thinking about the budget. We take the feedback from that consultation very seriously; it helps to shape the budget that will be presented to synod. Remember that synod will also have elected some of the members of the Bishops Diocesan Council and so can contribute indirectly in that way. Before the November debate we send members the detailed budget proposals and usually offer briefings in advance of the meeting to help unpack what is being proposed. At the meeting itself members debate the budget and are asked to approve it.

The second key decision made by synod *for the company* is to receive the annual report. The report tells the story of the previous year, it tells you the key decisions made by the directors and trustees and how this has affected the Board's financial position. This is a key opportunity for the members to hold the officers and trustees to account.

Advising the bishop, consulting, and expressing a view.

Synod spends most of its time advising the bishop, being consulted, and expressing its view. Synod receives reports at every meeting, either written reports in advance of the meeting or presentations at the meeting. You will receive a regular pattern of reports as well as the Annual Report. The bishop is also expected to consult synod on matters of significance either by presenting something themselves or by asking officers to do so.

When synod receives reports or is being consulted it is important that you are able to have your say. Our experience is that most people prefer to speak in small groups and then feedback - so we do that at most meetings. Another way to have your say is to comment by email or letter before a meeting, every report that you receive should tell you who wrote it - you can respond to them or other staff to raise questions, put a point of view, or ask for more information. The agenda for the meeting should show whether a report will be debated, and if there will be a vote. Sometimes when a decision isn't synod's responsibility, but when synod needs to express an opinion, the vote may be to "take note" of a report.

If there is something that you want to hear about or that you think should be discussed by synod then let us know. Synod discussions or debates allow the bishop and other leaders to "test the water" and to do so among people from a wide range of backgrounds and from many different churches.

Decisions that come from General Synod or Deanery Synods.

Sometimes diocesan synod is described as the “parliament” of the diocese, in this role it has a legislative function to take part in the work to make rules or church law. Sometimes this is no more than a rubber stamp of a decision made elsewhere (usually at General Synod) but at other times synod will be asked to make a substantive decision on an important matter.

The Church of England has a process for legislative work that goes in two directions, so motions that start at parish, deanery or diocesan level can end up before General Synod and become the law of the land, as well as working in the opposite direction of course!

How Diocesan Synod makes a difference.

Many of the decisions for the life of the church are made locally in each parish or deanery, or they are made by the bishop or by the Bishops Diocesan Council. Synod makes a difference because of who it appoints and holds to account, through the key budget decisions that it makes, and through its role giving advice and being consulted.

A good example of synod making a difference would be the Diocesan Synod of November 2019, this was the “budget synod” where members considered the budget for the following year. Members approved the budget but were strongly of the view that future budgets needed to be “more radical” - there was concern about the low level of MMF receipts being budgeted for with not enough action to address the reasons for this, and that the increasing overall deficit seemed to be funding unplanned costs. The bishop and diocesan leaders were left in no doubt that change was needed. Synod members played an important part in what eventually became plans for Change and Renewal. Diocesan budgets are now based on planning that began at deanery level rather than just revising what happened last year.

Another good example of the role of synod was in the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal itself. The plan was largely the responsibility of the trustees of the DBF - the Bishops Diocesan Council - but they needed to consult synod and to gauge support or lack of it. So the plan came to synod in May 2023 for debate and for a formal “take note” vote. This allowed members to raise both concerns and enthusiasm, and to record their overall support for the direction of travel. Comments made by members were noted and have been worked into further revisions, for instance several speakers described parishes needing more support from the DBF - this contributed to the Assets Strategy that followed later that year.

At every synod, members can and do ask questions. Sometimes questions come over the pasty or at breaks, sometimes in debates or in feedback, and sometimes in the formal opportunity of “Questions under Standing Orders”. These are all important chances to question officers and the people you elect or appoint, and to hold them to account.

Who reports to Diocesan Synod?

The trustees and directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance - the Bishops Diocesan Council - report to synod. They do this formally once a year for the “annual report and financial statements” but they also report to each meeting. You can ask questions about any of these reports, and you can ask the trustees to report on particular matters that you think are important.

The Diocesan Board of Education reports to diocesan synod usually at least once a year. Other boards that regularly report to diocesan synod include the Board for Change and Renewal, and the Environment Board.

Synod receives regular reports, at least once a year, from some key teams including the safeguarding team and the ministry team, although these reports come from officers rather than a committee or board, members can still ask questions and raise issues.

Synod is one of the places where bishops, archdeacons and other senior clergy and lay leaders can be held to account. Sometimes this might be in the context of a report or proposal, or perhaps as a stand-alone question.

Members have formal rights to ask questions or request reports from other committees and groups, for instance the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), the Mission and Pastoral Committee, the Property/Parsonages Committee and the Glebe Committee.

Anyone elected or appointed by synod can also be questioned or asked for a report.

It is worth noting that just because members have a right to ask something, it doesn't mean that the committee or individual has an automatic duty to answer in the way you were hoping for, but these are important responsibilities on both sides.

Where do all these rules come from?

You wouldn't be the first person to think that a Diocesan Secretary might be making things up as they go along, but in fact most of the rules for synods are either in English canon law, for instance in the Synodical Government Measure 1969 which has the force of law, or in the Church Representation Rules (part of the same rules that set out how your PCC works) or in our own sets of rules, mainly the Articles of Association for the Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd and the Standing Orders for Truro Diocesan Synod. We will provide you with copies of these last two documents. The other rules that shape how synod works are in company law and charity law because the Truro Diocesan Board of Finance is a limited company, and a registered charity.

Part 3.

What you need to know about the Diocesan Board of Finance and how “the diocese” works

The Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd (the DBF) is a charity and a limited company set up to support the work of the Church of England in the diocese.

The DBF's charitable aims are focussed on supporting stipendiary ordained ministry and supporting parishes and church schools, captured in the phrase “promote and assist the work and purposes of the Church of England in the diocese”. It does these things by paying clergy stipends and pensions, and by providing housing, training and various compliance requirements. For parishes the DBF provides support through various governance and organisational functions. Some of the other charitable aims of the DBF are to provide church schools and to promote RE in the diocese, and to support the ministry of the archdeacons. The DBF holds some of our common or shared assets (for instance the glebe estate and parsonages) and looks after them with the same or similar charitable aims.

Of course, the DBF is not the same as “the diocese” and it is important for synod members to remember that their responsibility goes beyond just the DBF; members can ask about, be consulted on, and expect to advise the bishop on, a much wider range of issues that go beyond just money and the Board of Finance.

Money and assets

The DBF has assets of about £120million, to give that some context, the “Shelterbox” charity has assets of about £20million - so you can see that the DBF is a reasonably large charity by Cornish standards.

The assets are all used to support the objects of the charity, roughly half are in various investments or financial products, the other half is land and houses.

About half of the £120million is the value of houses, mostly parsonages. We own more houses than we need, so we are selling some of the surplus houses to release funds, the funds released will allow us to upgrade the houses that we are keeping, as well as support stipendiary ministry in other ways. We will keep enough houses so that we can still increase the number of clergy up to and beyond our current plans.

The glebe estate is valued at about £20million, it is mainly agricultural land across Cornwall and the income is used to support stipendiary ministry.

Roughly £30million is held in various managed funds and other investments in stocks and shares.

What we spend, and where the money comes from

The DBF budget is about £9million per year, again for comparison, Shelterbox spends roughly £15-20million in a typical year.

The biggest single source of income is MMF, around £3million.

We receive roughly £1.7million a year from the national church (that is a much higher proportion of national funding than most dioceses).

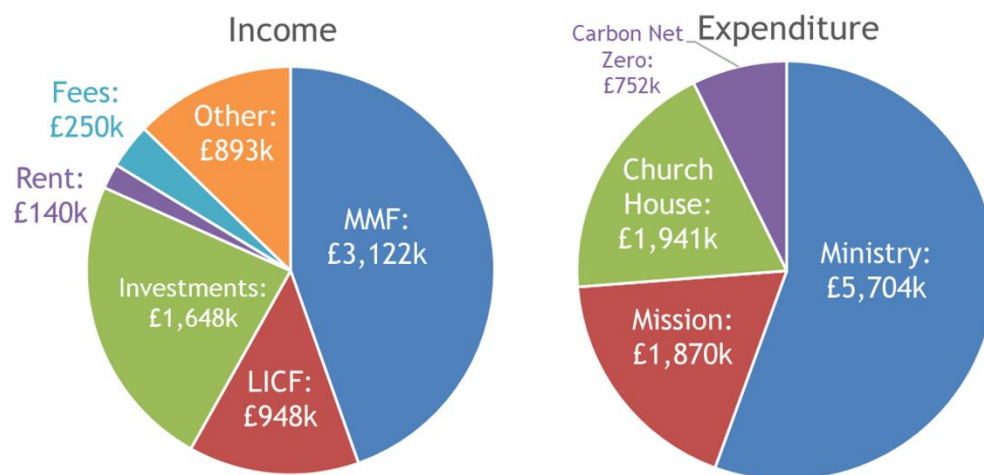
We make our assets work hard, renting out vacant properties, managing the glebe estate and making wise financial investments, bringing in almost £2million per year in total.

Our biggest area of expenditure is on parish ministry, roughly £5.7million, that includes stipends, pensions and housing costs for clergy as well as training and support for clergy and lay leaders.

The DBF supports parish ministry through mission grants, through supporting deanery plans (Change and Renewal) and through mission projects like TM, these add up to about £1.9million a year.

The central “Church House” costs - mostly salaries and employment costs - are about £2million - roughly 20% of the total budget, this is in line with similar charities, but a higher proportion than in many other dioceses because we are a very small diocese.

Overall DBF budget



From the 2024 budget presentation to the Diocesan Synod.

“LICF” is money received from the national church to support ministry in communities experiencing deprivation.

Strategic decisions

The trustees and directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance have made some key strategic decisions, these have been reported to synod and they shape the ongoing reporting.

The two key decisions are:

- to approve the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal, this supports deanery plans and helps to support parishes in their ongoing fruitfulness and sustainability
- to approve the Assets Strategy, this releases £22million of DBF assets to support parish ministry and deanery plans

The Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal is based on the Deanery plans and it describes three main themes:

- **Changing patterns of ministry.** Deanery plans call for a reversal in the decline of numbers worshipping in our churches. We know that in too many places clergy are too thinly spread and so we are increasing the number of stipendiary clergy in the diocese. We know that even with more clergy patterns of ministry still need to change and each church will need local leadership that is trained, resourced and well led. This is leading us to what is often called “oversight ministry” which builds on local leadership models going right back to Bishop Bill and the “People of God” initiative of the late 90s and early 2000s.
- **Growing the number of children and young people worshipping alongside us.** Every deanery plan included ambitious plans for work with children and young people.
- **Serving those most in need.** Deanery plans call for a shift of resourcing towards the mission of the church in communities experiencing deprivation, sometimes by directly resourcing stipendiary ordained ministry, sometimes through lay roles, or by working with partners.

You will hear much more in synod about how these plans are developing and being put into action as well as supporting PCCs in their stewardship of buildings, the challenges facing small churches, and work to cherish creation and cut carbon. These are other important themes in the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal.

The Assets Strategy followed the diocesan plan. It recognises that as the assets of the Diocesan Board of Finance have grown in value (that balance sheet) so the worshipping communities and churches the Board is meant to serve have often been struggling. So the Assets Strategy plans to use £22million of diocesan assets to support parish ministry and deanery plans over the ten years to 2033.

Introduction to the Boards and Committees

Episcopal College

The bishop's leadership team. The Bishops of Truro and St Germans, the Dean of Truro and the two archdeacons, with the Diocesan Secretary, the Diocesan Director of Education, the Director of Change and Renewal and the bishop's chaplain. Often abbreviated "EC" this group set the overall vision for the diocese and leads on ministry and mission for the diocese.

The Bishops Diocesan Council (BDC)

BDC combines several important functions in one group, it is chaired by the bishop and reports to synod.

BDC are the board of **directors and trustees of the company and charity** (Truro Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd). The trustees / directors have the legal responsibility for the running of the Board of Finance and are accountable for the use of charitable assets.

The BDC is also the **Standing Committee of Diocesan Synod**, it can conduct the business of synod between meetings if necessary, it sets the agendas and makes arrangements for the work of synod.

Every diocese has to have particular **statutory committees or boards**, these include a Diocesan Board of Education, Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, a Parsonages Committee, and a Diocesan Glebe Committee, our BDC fulfils all these formal roles but delegates operational responsibilities to other boards or management committees.

BDC also fulfils the functions of a traditional **Bishop's Council** - this role is to advise the bishop, make appointments to various boards and groups, and to formulate strategy and policy for the wider diocese often beyond the remit of the Board of Finance.

Finance, Assets and Risk Committee (FAR)

FAR does some of the scrutiny for BDC, looking in detail at financial reporting and proposals, as well as overseeing risk on behalf of the trustees. FAR is chaired by the Chair of the Board of Finance, and reports to BDC.

Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP)

Includes independent chair and professionals from statutory services alongside representatives from parishes and diocesan organisations, DSAP's main role is to advise the bishop and the trustees on the effectiveness and fit for purpose of safeguarding policy, resources, and strategy.

Diocesan Board of Education (DBE)

The DBE is a committee of the DBF but with a direct link to synod, it oversees work to support education across the diocese, in church schools and in all the schools and colleges serving the people of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The DBE has a particular role in promoting RE in the diocese, again not just in church schools but across education.

Diocesan Board for Change and Renewal

Because of the complexity of change across the diocese, and the large sums of money being made available to support parishes and deaneries implement their plans, we are taking a “project-based” approach to leading change. This is the programme board that co-ordinates and oversees that work.

Diocesan Environment Board

This group oversee our ambitious plans to achieve carbon net zero emissions, a target set by the national church, as well as the wider agenda of “cut carbon, cherish creation, speak out!”

Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)

Familiar to many as the Church of England’s in-house church building planning and heritage group. The “advice” bit in the name is technically to advise the bishop or chancellor, but they also offer informal advice to parishes in their stewardship of church buildings.

Church Uses Committee

Another committee set up by church law, this one looks after redundant or closed churches in the diocese on behalf of the DBF. The work involves seeking future use for the buildings as well as overseeing maintenance.

Property Management Committee

Legally the property committee and glebe committee are the same as the BDC. In practice BDC set the policy and the budget, then the legwork, the management of the portfolios, is overseen by the two management committees. The property management committee looks after clergy houses, parsonages which are owned by the incumbent and “board houses” that are owned by the DBF.

Glebe Management Committee

(see the note for property above) This management committee oversee the management of the 2,000 acre £20million glebe estate which is an endowment established to support stipendiary ministry. The estate is managed for income as well as to identify opportunities for development that will support local communities.

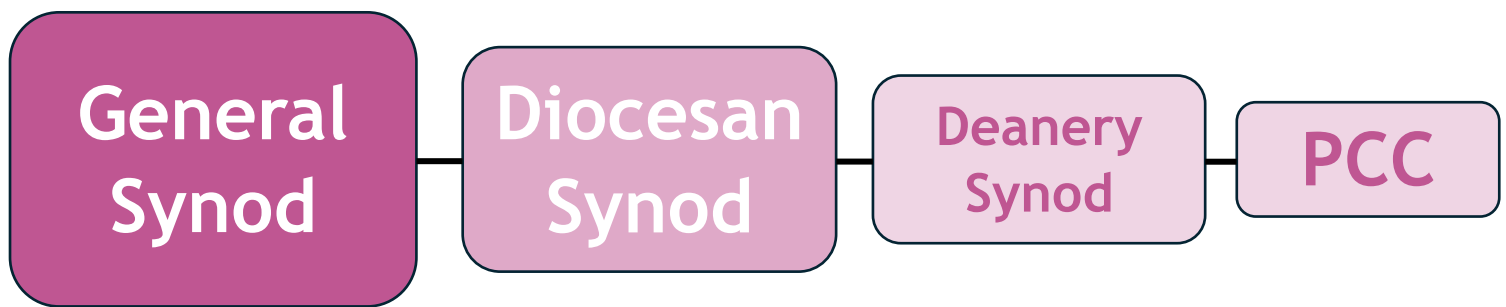
Investment Management Committee

This committee oversees more than £30million of investments held by the DBF in managed funds, stocks and shares. Funds are managed to generate long term income and to fulfil our environmental, social and governance objectives.

Mission and Pastoral Committee

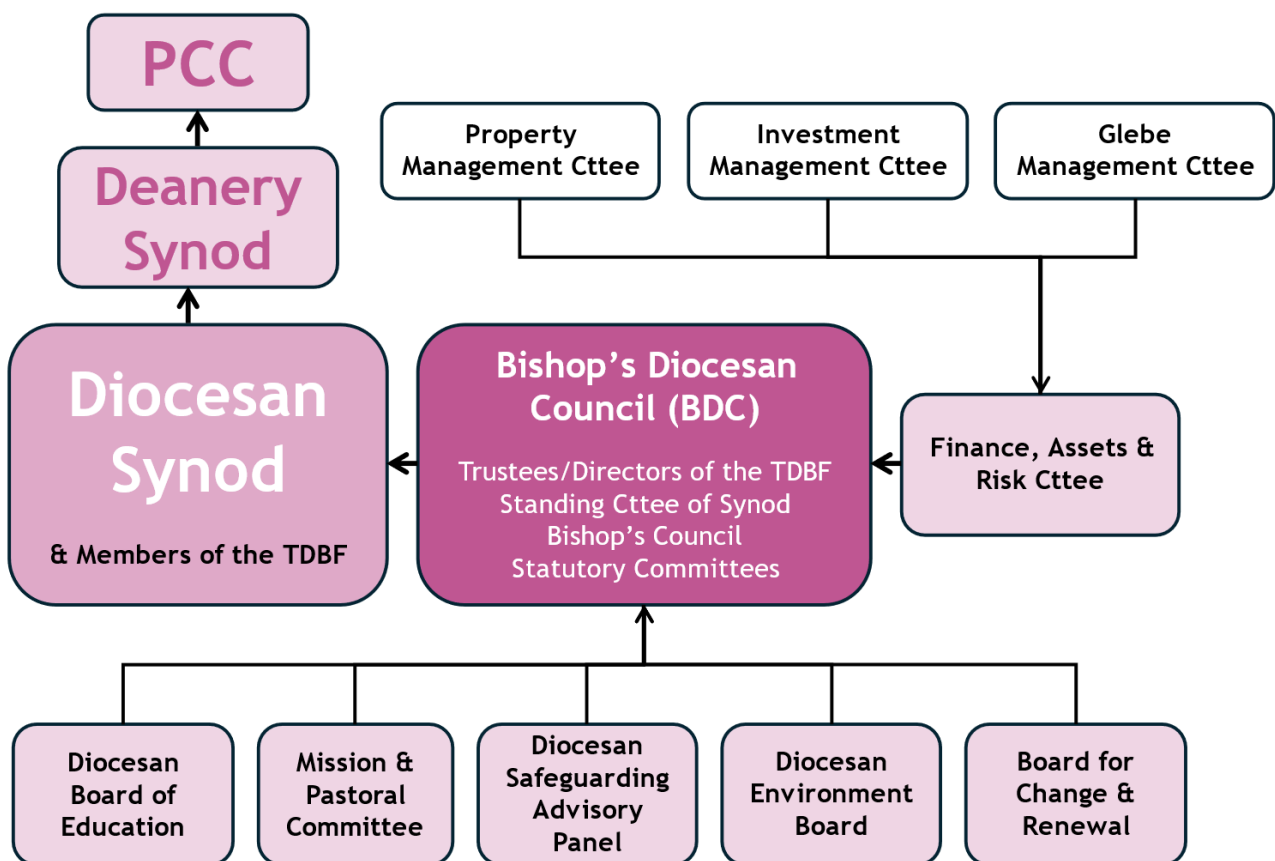
Another one of the committees where the BDC is the legal body, but where a specialist scrutiny committee do the legwork. In this case the committee look at proposals under the church “Pastoral Measure” - usually to change parish or benefice boundaries or new parsonage arrangements.

Simplified governance charts



The chart above shows how General Synod, Diocesan Synod, Deanery Synod and the PCC are all part of the core governance structure of the Church of England. There are 42 Diocesan Synods, and in the Diocese of Truro there are 12 Deanery Synods, and about 200 PCCs.

The chart below shows a (very simplified) picture of how the Bishops Diocesan Council, Diocesan Synod, and PCCs fit together. There are more groups and committees than this at every level! The arrows show the reporting lines.



Every deanery also has a Deanery Implementation Team (DIT) to implement their deanery plan, we sometimes get asked where these fit. DITs were set up by the BDC to support the implementation of deanery plans and oversee the use of diocesan funds (LICF and Mission Funding). DITs report to Deanery Synod on the implementation of the plan, and to the BDC via the Board for Change and Renewal on the use of funds and overall progress.

Part 4.

How Diocesan Synod meetings work

Who sets the agenda?

The agenda and the arrangements for synod are the responsibility of the Standing Committee - which is the BDC. From time to time the Standing Committee consult members on the shape of agendas, timing of meetings, and the venues that we use.

The detailed planning is overseen by the bishops and the two chairs of houses who sign off the contents, order and timings of every agenda.

How do I get something onto the agenda?

Any member can ask for an item to be discussed by synod, just write or email or speak to the Diocesan Secretary. A deanery synod can also ask diocesan synod to discuss a matter, this happens from time to time, for instance in 2023 the Trigg Minor and Bodmin Deanery Synod asked diocesan synod to think about the work of churchwardens, which we did early in 2024. The final decision on the agenda rests with the Standing Committee.

A typical agenda

No two agendas are the same, but they all include a time of worship, usually at the beginning of the day and from different traditions.

Almost every synod includes a “Presidential Address” which is an opportunity for the bishop to share their vision and thinking.

Most synod meetings include some groupwork, both for those online and those meeting in person, we find that this allows more people to “have their say” and contribute.

There might be different sorts of business, including:

- **Reports** that say “this is what is happening, this is how it is going.” Sometimes a report gets debated, sometimes it is provided in the pack for your information. There is always an opportunity to ask questions and engage with the report, either because the item is on the agenda for discussion or, when the report is not on the agenda as a separate item by asking a “Question under standing orders” (described above).
- **Consultations** where we want synod to contribute ideas and sometimes to come to a decision.
- **Proposals** where members are asked to make up their minds and vote on something,
- **The Annual Meeting and the budget meeting** are the meetings where the annual report is debated and received by synod, and the proposals for DBF budgets are debated and put to the vote.

Meetings usually start at 9am or 9.30am and typically finish at about 3pm, we provide tea and coffee and a pasty at lunchtime for those meeting in person.

When do the papers go out

We give all members the provisional dates for each Diocesan Synod with venues in the autumn of the year before the meeting. If possible we also give members our thinking about what subjects will be covered in each meeting (although agendas often get moved around). Each synod meeting is then confirmed with date, timings, venues, and subjects to be discussed along with any known formal business 6 weeks before the meeting.

The detailed agenda with notice of any motions, and with papers and reports to support formal business, is circulated 21 days before the meeting. Members might immediately ask questions about what has been circulated, they may wish to amend a motion or propose a different or new motion based on the agenda, members have up until 7 days before the synod meeting to do this.

Members can also ask a formal question, this can be about anything (not just about what is on the agenda) and can be addressed to the President of Synod (the bishop) or to any other officer or any of the boards or committees appointed by synod. Questions like this (usually called “Questions under standing orders” should be sent to the Diocesan Secretary to be received at least 7 days before the synod meeting.

Finally, usually on the Monday or Tuesday before the synod meeting we will send out a final agenda with more detailed timings and sometimes with any last minute papers or reports.

We use email for most of the paperwork, unless members don't have access to this in which case we post everything out in hardcopy. We can have paper copies available on the day if that helps, but please let us know if this will be useful, we don't usually do a big print run for “just in case”.

Other key documents

At the beginning of the three-year synod term (triennium) we will email members a copy of the Standing Orders and the Articles of Association, or show you where they are on the website. We can send paper copies if that is helpful to you.

We will also make some other key documents available, such as the current budget and last annual report, as well as the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal and the Assets Strategy that grew from it.

We also publish a list of members showing whether they are elected and if so from which deanery, and if nominated then by whom, and if ex-officio then by which office. This list is kept updated and is with the pack for each synod published online.

Where we meet

We use different venues around Cornwall. If you want us to come to your church then let us know!

We try to use venues (not just churches) where there is good parking nearby and adequate loo and kitchen facilities. Over the course of the triennium we move around the diocese but remaining fairly central, mindful of those who will need to travel from the far corners.

Online or in-person?

Our meetings are hybrid, meaning that members should be able to participate fully if joining online using Zoom. We ask those joining online to have their microphones muted unless they are called to speak. We use a large screen in the venue so that those present in person can see those joining online.

Voting

Arrangements for voting do sometimes change, but for now those present in person simply raise a hand to vote, while those joining online need to have their camera “on” and show a voting card for their vote to be recorded. We aren’t currently using the online voting system in Zoom.

Visitors at synod

Most meetings are joined by visitors at some point, visitors to synod do not usually speak in debates but can take part in groupwork.

Asking questions, and Asking a Question!

If a paper or briefing goes out in advance it should have the author's name on it, some members raise a query, comment, or ask for more information ahead of the meeting - we welcome that.

You can ask a question about any of the papers or reports that we send you, either in the debate or discussion if the paper is on the agenda or as a "Question under standing orders".

"Questions under standing orders" is an opportunity on every agenda, it gives members the right to raise questions. You can address the question to a specific person, at one synod a member asked the bishop to change the date of Easter, the reply was one word beginning with "n", or if you don't know who to ask then we can work out who is best placed to answer.

Here is an example, if you are interested in how Reader ministry is supported and wondering why we tend to talk more about ordained ministry and new lay ministries, but not about readers, you might ask "how many new readers have been trained in each of the last five years". If you send in a Question under Standing Orders then you have the right to ask a supplementary question on the same subject. If you let us know in advance what the supplementary might be then you will probably get a better answer, so along those lines if we tell you about reader training and then you say, "thanks, but how many readers retired in each of those years?" then we would need a day or two to gather the answer. Receiving questions in this way helps us to understand what members want to see on the agenda, or of course you can also mention to the Diocesan Secretary or to the bishop or one of the chairs that you think this should be on the agenda.

Questions have to be sent to the Diocesan Secretary at least seven days before the synod, they have to be actual questions, and it has to be possible to answer the question (not just give an opinion). "How many" works better than, "don't you think that...."

What can we do to help you?

Members can claim reasonable expenses from the DBF for attending synod. We can cover mileage if you drive, fares on public transport (including from the Isles of Scilly if that is where you live) the cost of parking, and if you need to arrange childcare or other cover for carer's responsibilities, we can contribute to those.

We won't buy you a new ipad, but we will help with any of the practicalities of joining online if that is tricky for you, including a "dry run" with one of us a few days before synod to make sure it all works for you.

Afterword

Where is “the diocese”?

There is a tale about a tourist who spends a day looking around Cambridge. He sees Kings College Chapel and the Great Court at Trinity College. A student guide shows him the tree where Sir Isaac Newton threw apples at C.S. Lewis, they go punting on the Cam and swoon at the Bridge of Sighs. At the end of the day the tourist thanks his guide, and asks, “but where is the University?” and of course it was all “the university”....

I’m reminded of this story sometimes when people talk about “the diocese” as if it is somewhere else, as if it is nothing to do with them, not us, or not here, not my church.

Diocesan Synod isn’t here to serve the central organisation of the diocese, although some of its work does touch on that. The core purpose of synod goes back to “*together on the way.*” Together, we wait on the Lord. Together, we listen for God’s calling to the church in Cornwall. Together, we step into the future that God has prepared for us.

Together we discover what it is to lead as servants called by Christ.