

7 May 2025

Dear Friends, members of Truro Diocesan Synod,

This comes to you from Bishop Hugh as President of Synod, from the Revd Laura Bushell-Hawke the acting chair of the House of Clergy, and from Roger Smith, chair of the House of Laity.

We want to write to you because the Bishop's Diocesan Council, acting in their role as the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod, have given thought to arrangements for Diocesan Synod and we want you to know about this in plenty of time in advance of our next meeting; not least because you may want to contact us regarding these matters.

As you know, this triennium sees forty new members of diocesan synod, and our last meeting at St Erme saw near record attendance with 51 members in person, with 18 members joining online. This is great news, we noted that the "character" of synod has changed and that we need to think about how we reflect this change in arrangements for meetings. Several members helpfully made suggestions at or shortly after synod, and we are grateful for that, and we note the responses from the online survey of members.

In particular we noted that more members want to speak up in synod, that there is more appetite for debate, but also that there are lots of members who might not know or remember the background to some of our decisions. The Council noted that quite often a big chunk of the time allocated to an item is taken up with a presentation, in other words, members being spoken to - rather than members speaking, and that it wasn't always clear when synod was being asked to make a decision, when we were just being asked to give feedback, or when we were being informed about something.

The meeting of the Bishop's Council was also aware, of course, that we will very soon welcome a new diocesan bishop who will be President of Synod and who will bring his own style and approach to things, so we may want to revisit these decisions in due course. The Bishop's Council went back to the legal basis of diocesan synod, noting that the 1969 Measure makes it clear that the main role of synod is to "consider" and "advise" and that the decision-making role is limited. We set this out in more detail in the "Guide to Synod" that you have all received.

The survey of synod members was clear; a strong majority want meetings to be "hybrid" with most comments about how synod works at the moment being positive. A small number of comments asked for "better papers" with more information and more time to make decisions.

So what did the Bishop's Diocesan Council, acting as the Standing Committee decide? We decided that the basic shape and structure with three hybrid Saturday meetings a year was right, but that we need to pay attention to where we meet, particularly if we continue to see higher numbers attending in person. Some of the venues we have used in the past, like County Hall or Heartlands, are no longer available to us, but if you know of a great venue with space for about 75 people to meet, mingle and eat, with fast fibre broadband and good wifi, nearby parking and level access.... please let us know!

We need to be much more clear with you about if an item is for decision, for consultation, or for information, and the papers and supporting work should reflect that. So, for instance, if there is a major decision to be made, such as approving the Annual Report, or approving the DBF budget, we will offer online briefing meetings in advance so that the time for the item isn't taken up by officers speaking. We will also assume that you will have read the papers and not spend time running through things that you probably already know (or should have already read).

We know that some members really value work in small groups, it allows more people to "have a say" and less confident members who don't want to stand up in front of the whole room to be heard. But we know that they don't work for everyone - so when there is important work to be done in groups, for instance when we want to gather lots of feedback, we will make sure that the groups have facilitators who can help to keep the group focussed and who can gather and pass on the feedback.

With more members speaking, and more members who want to intervene, we need to change the way that we chair meetings. With the support of the Bishop's Diocesan Council, at our next meeting we will adopt a slightly more formal style that is tighter on process, this should make sure that everyone who wants a say can be heard, but it stops a handful of individuals dominating the room. We will ask members who want to speak to come to the lectern. We won't be tempted to start having conversations with members from the chair and we will ask you to respect the process that we follow. This will be new for us too, so please bear with us!

We clearly need to work out how to manage the approval of minutes which exercised synod for some time at our last meeting. We don't think that spending time poring over the minutes in synod will be time well spent, but equally we think there is real value in the full minutes we currently receive rather than a much briefer record of business approved. The Bishop's Diocesan Council noted the clear view of members at our last meeting that you want a say on the minutes. We will look for a way through this where draft minutes are available to members for comment, but the Bishop's Diocesan Council continues to approve the minutes acting as the Standing Committee of Synod.

We had a good debate on this at the Bishop's Diocesan Council; remember that most members of BDC are themselves members of synod, and that plenty are elected by you, it isn't some remote group. Synod has changed over time, and will continue to change no

doubt, so we want to try these adjustments and pray that through our work together on the way (what the word synod means, remember) that we will better serve God and the people of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and the best parishes in Devon.

Many blessings,

Bishop Hugh  
President

Revd Laura Bushell-Hawke  
Vice Chair of the House of Clergy

Roger Smith  
Chair of the House of Laity