

Notes of Oxford Diocesan Synod held 13th June 2026

The second Oxford Diocesan Synod of 2026 was online, with Bishop Gavin as president following the retirement of Steven Croft as Bishop of Oxford.

An immediately prior meeting of the House of Clergy, elected Rev'd Canon Catherine Butt to succeed Rev'd Canon Geoff Baylis as the new Chair of Clergy at the conclusion of Synod.

These notes are a short summary of the main points arising from a long agenda.

Opening Items

Synod commenced with 'Dwelling in the Word' on John 17, followed by a time of worship.

Presidential Address

For his presidential address, Bishop Gavin reflected on "What Three Words". For Oxford Diocese we have the three words of Contemplative, Compassionate and Courageous. For his personal ministry he chose Unity, Growth and Joy.

Vacancy in See Committee – Closing Report

The Vacancy in See Committee process involved meetings from December to March. The statement of needs document is available at <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are/how-we-are-governed/vacancy-in-see/statement-of-needs/>. Six representatives have been elected, to join the Archbishops and six national representatives, to form the Crown Nominations Commission for Oxford. Following shortlisting and interviews later this year, an appointment may result in February.

Vacancy-in-See Prayer: Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church and illuminate our path as we seek a new Bishop. Help us to work together for the good of your kingdom and all who live, work and study in the Diocese of Oxford. Give wisdom and listening hearts to those who have influence. Send out your Holy Spirit to call one who will faithfully teach, pastor, care for and equip us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Finance – Draft Budget 2027 and Share Apportionment.

Chair of the Board of Finance, Sir Hector Sants, presented the Draft Budget and Share Apportionment for 2027. A deficit of £ 757k is proposed. There are several above inflation increases, the biggest of which is increased clergy stipend and ordination training costs. Currently the Diocese is receiving 94% of allocated Parish Share.

The allocation for 2027 for Amersham Deanery is 2% higher than that for 2026 – below inflation.

Synod approved the budget.

Safeguarding

This topic was introduced by the independent chair of Oxford Diocese Safeguarding – Andrew Bickley. 2025 saw a rise in referrals with an average of 100 enquiries and 30 referrals per month. Management of the approach to safeguarding has identified key risks of:

- Workload on Parish Safeguarding Officers as essential volunteers
- Scale and complexity of the Diocese
- Sustained pressure on safeguarding resources hindering preventative approaches

Strategy for Milton Keynes

Bishop of Buckingham, Rt Rev David Bull presented the paper on Milton Keynes. MK is the largest city in the Diocese, and is set to grow in population from 250k to 410k. Large new housing developments are already in hand both in MK and the neighbouring Newport Deanery.

'There is no Anglican church with a single congregation of over 200 – which is unique for a city of this scale. There are only three Church of England schools among the 113 schools in and around the city. And perhaps most tellingly, the ratio of clergy to population is an average of 1:20,000, compared to a national average ratio of 1:8,000. This ratio will continue to increase as the population grows – by 2050, 62.5 Full Time Equivalent clergy would be needed to match the national 1:8,000 ratio. Historic decisions by deanery and diocese to reduce resources, rather than invest in, this growing city have had significant consequences, and this context presents both huge challenge and exciting potential. This moment represents a once-in-history opportunity to ensure the long-term future of the church in Milton Keynes, our biggest city. It represents the chance to reimagine how we can be church and to learn valuable lessons as we journey forwards. This is an opportunity to be seized.'

Bishop Dave highlighted three strategic outcomes of:

- Renewed leadership
- Renewed mission
- Renewed structures

Focus on Schools

There were a series of presentations from the CEOs of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust, and Oxford Diocesan Bucks School Trust. ODST consists of 43 schools with over 8000 pupils. A statement on ODBE statutory accounts was presented in a pre-read paper.

Oxford Diocese Annual Review 2026

Circulated as a pre-read. <https://oxford.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/annual-review-2026-web-version.pdf>.

Looking Ahead to General Synod Elections.

This year represents a one-in-fifteen-year event, when the three-year Deanery Synod elections coincide with the five-year General Synod elections (which is relevant as, broadly speaking, Deanery Synod membership forms the lay electorate). There is also a new, mandated national timetable, which is tighter than in previous years and is set out below. The Diocese of Oxford will, as in 2021, have 10 places for elected clergy and 9 for elected laity.

Dissolution of the current General Synod is expected on Tuesday 14 July 2026 with the inauguration of the twelfth General Synod on Tuesday 17 November 2026. The full election timetable begins on Tuesday 14 July and ends on Monday 19 October 2026. Invitations to nominate will be issued on 14 August 2026 and work is currently underway to confirm the electorate for both Clergy and Lay representatives.

Those standing for election will be invited to produce an election address and then to answer a set of questions, both of which will be published on the diocesan website. Unlike in 2021, there will be no video election addresses.