



Report of the Diocesan Synod Meeting 14th March 2026



1. Opening Notices

Synod opened with formal announcements from the Registrar, including notification that the **General Synod (Feb 2026)** had resolved to enact several amending canons. These included provisions relating to literacy, chaplaincy, and other technical adjustments to church law.



2. Presidential Address

The Bishop delivered a reflective and pastoral address shaped by a recent **ecumenical pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi** with Anglican and Roman Catholic pilgrims.

Key themes:

- **Deep ecumenical fellowship:** Shared Eucharistic worship, preaching, and mutual hospitality.
 - **Pilgrimage insights:**
 - Praying at the tomb of Pope Francis II.
 - Encountering the simplicity of St Francis of Assisi.
 - **Christ the Good Shepherd:**

The Bishop used this image to explore the doctrine of Christ's full humanity and full divinity, emphasising that God saves the whole person — *“not just an ear or a leg... but the whole sheep carried home”* .
 - **Lenten encouragement:**

A call to face reality — both the grandeur of God and the reality of human sin — while holding fast to Christian hope.
 - The address concluded with a prayer and a transition to the next agenda item.
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3. Instrument of Delegation

With the Bishop's retirement approaching in the summer, Synod considered the **Instrument of Delegation** to ensure episcopal governance during the vacancy.

Key points:

- The CNC process is underway; a new diocesan bishop is unlikely before **late 2027**.
 - The Instrument designates **Bishop Rosemary** as the **Acting Diocesan Bishop** during the vacancy.
 - Synod approved the Instrument **unanimously**.
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4. Mothers' Union Presentation

Penny, Diocesan MU President, gave a rich and inspiring presentation marking the **150th anniversary** of the Mothers' Union.

Highlights:

- MU is now a **global movement of 4 million members in 80+ countries**.
 - Southwark has **800+ members** across 46 branches.
 - Core pillars: **ending violence, ending poverty, ending injustice**.
 - Local impact includes:
 - Care home outreach
 - Neonatal support at Evelina Hospital
 - Prison ministry (Belmarsh, Wandsworth)
 - Support for women's refuges
 - Afia holidays for families in need
 - International work includes:
 - Long-running **literacy and financial education programmes in Burundi**, reaching over 165,000 people.
 - MU remains rooted in **prayer**, including the Wave of Prayer and Lady Day celebrations.
 - Synod warmly received the presentation, with a suggestion to distribute Mary Sumner's prayer on cards.
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5. Financial Update

The Diocesan Secretary and Finance Director presented a sober but transparent financial picture.

Positive notes:

- **Parish Support Fund (PSF)** collection rate: **99.2%** — exceptionally strong.
- Investment managers met the **3.75% return** target after divesting from fossil fuels.

- Clergy costs and most budgets were on target.

Challenges:

- Inflation since 2019: **29%**, while diocesan income has risen only **1.5%**.
- Grants from external bodies (e.g., Trust for London) have declined.
- Rising costs:
 - Property repairs
 - Council tax
 - Water rates (up 30–40% in some cases)
- National church funding formulas (e.g., Lowest Income Communities Funding) currently give **Southwark no allocation**, despite significant deprivation.

Forward look:

- Without intervention, the diocese could face a **serious deficit within three years**.
- A strategic review is underway to ensure **sustainable ministry to 2030 and beyond**.
- The Bishop emphasised:
 - Parish mission remains the highest priority.
 - Decisions must be **strategic, not piecemeal**.
 - Halving posts is *not* a preferred solution — it saves little and harms mission.
 - Some reduction in stipendiary posts is likely, but only where necessary.
 - Parishes able to meet their ministry costs are encouraged to do so.

6. Sustainable Ministry Process

Archdeacons outlined the process for discerning sustainable ministry patterns across the diocese.

Approach:

- Begins **after Easter** with deanery-level conversations.
- Three guiding questions:
 1. What fruit is being borne locally?
 2. What is the context and need?
 3. What is the right provision for each place?
- Lay chairs, deanery leadership teams, and PCCs will be involved.
- Some areas may require **greater investment**, not reduction.
- Collaboration between parishes will be key.

Theological framing:

- The Archdeacon referenced Jesus' teaching on **counting the cost** before building a tower — a call to realistic planning rooted in faith.
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? 7. Questions from Synod

A wide range of thoughtful questions were raised, including:

- The role of lay leadership in the process.
- Whether parish mergers or building closures should be considered.
- Encouraging self-supporting ministry.
- Balancing cost-cutting with growth and innovation.
- Housing costs for clergy.
- Whether PSF uplifts should be percentage-based or based on deeper discernment of capacity.

The Bishop and officers responded with clarity, emphasising:

- This is **not** a “30 post cuts” exercise.
 - Growth and investment remain central.
 - The diocesan investment programme already touches **157 churches**.
 - The PSF remains a model built on **generosity and interdependence**.
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8. Closing

The meeting concluded with thanks, a reminder of the strategic work ahead, and a reaffirmation that **parish mission and ministry remain the heart of diocesan life**.
