

Diocesan Synod

14 March 2026

A report from a member of Diocesan Synod held at Esher Church of England High School

Recognising that it was just 11 days since Bishop Andrew passed away, all of us were in a state of shock, mourning and great sadness. It was only right that we began with a service of Holy Communion which Bishop Paul led with great dignity as he was obviously as sad as everyone. His sermon provided time for his reflection on Bishop Andrew's outstanding leadership and contribution to the diocese as well as the two remarkable letters that he had written about his severe illness and his positivity and great faith in praying for 'a good death'. He described +Andrew as his "Brother Bishop". It was also appropriate for Jo Winn-Smith, Bishop Andrew's Chaplain to lead the Prayers,

After Holy Communion, there was an opportunity to give thanks for the life and ministry of Bishop Andrew and the remarkable contribution that he made not just in the diocese but nationally and in the House of Lords. Synod Members wanted to know how the diocese would be run and the interim arrangements being put into place for the leadership of the diocese. With +Paul being Acting Bishop of Guildford, some asked if there would be an interim acting Bishop of Dorking appointed. +Paul was able to reassure members that all was in hand with both Archdeacons stepping up to give additional support by the tasking of some of his usual Suffragan responsibilities even before +Andrew's death and with his full support and Bishop's Council approval of delegated authority.

During this discussion and indeed during prayers, I had the feeling that +Andrew was looking down on us to see how we were as the really good Pastor that he was.

The usual Synod business followed after a short break to reflect on all that we had been told. Alex Tear, Director of Diocesan Education, gave an outstanding presentation on the DBE Annual Report 2025. It has been a really good year and the many church schools in the diocese are doing very well, especially with their links in the community. SIAMs' inspection reports were good. Alex appealed for new volunteer governors. However, he did alert members that some small Church Schools were now under threat because of low numbers on the school roll, a trend that is reflected nationally.

This was followed by a presentation from the Youth Catalyst Hub at Esher High & Diocesan Young Leaders Group by the Youth Catalyst Programme Leads. This was all good news with increasing numbers of young people coming to Church. The Youth Catalyst Project's annual youth worship event and conference for 11-18 year olds was held in January 2026 with an attendance of over 150 young people. However, the next stage of this exciting programme was at risk because of a lack of funding with an alternative proposal being put in place.

Revd Barnaby Perkins reported on the February General Synod where Guildford General Synod members led Evening Worship on the very day of +Andrew's announcement of his serious illness and how all the Guildford members came together to pray before Evening Prayers in the Church House Chapel. It had been an unforgettable day.

Andy Morgan, Head of HR & Safeguarding, presented a safeguarding update and introduced Vicki Boxall, the new Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, who had started work at the diocese that week. This was followed by the 'Safeguarding & Compliance' working group update. Diocesan Synod ended with a closing prayer and a blessing by +Paul.

I do not think anyone found this Diocesan Synod meeting easy to get through. I really did admire the way that +Paul held it all together ably supported by Dean Bob and both Archdeacons. In summary, we already were missing +Andrew who was a quite remarkable Bishop. In the end, members came

together, prayed and stayed together supporting each other at a time of great loss. As they say each year on Remembrance Sunday, we will remember +Andrew, that we can be certain of as we pray for +Paul, Geraldine Newbold and all at Diocesan House, along with Beverly Watson and her family.

Canon Peter Bruinvels CC
General Synod Member