

Diocesan Synod - November 2025

Bishop Martyn's Presidential Address

The modern diocese of Leicester was founded on 12 November 1926. We meet almost exactly 99 years since its founding - this time next year will be our centenary, and February 2027 will be the centenary for the Cathedral - previous St Martins Parish Church.

In reality, the church in Leicestershire is much older – The first bishopric was in 680 and the Anglo-Saxon cathedral was probably located close to (if not on the site of) the present cathedral.

We were then invaded by the Danes around 870 and the seat of the bishop was moved to Dorchester in Oxfordshire.

From Dorchester, the See was later moved to Lincoln in 1072 under King William I, the diocese then becoming the Diocese of Lincoln. Henry VIII divided the larger dioceses at the time of the English Reformation, and the Diocese of Lincoln was divided in three. Peterborough was chosen as the seat of a diocese and Peterborough Abbey as the cathedral.

Leicester was then an archdeaconry within the Diocese of Peterborough, until Bishop of Peterborough, Cyril Bardsley, with great foresight petitioned for the creation of a new diocese. He moved from Peterborough and became the first Bishop of Leicester - his move ensuring that various endowments and land were moved to the new diocese - something which didn't happen in some other dioceses created at that time.

I was asked recently: What's your vision for our centenary year? I'm not sure that I have a vision for how we celebrate the year itself (there's a small group preparing various low-key events / resources for parishes). But what I think is much more important is to think ahead for next 100 years. I doubt that many of us will still be here, but what do we need to do to ensure that the diocese can celebrate its bicentenary?

One factor more than any other will determine whether we are still here in 100 years - not finance (I'll say more on that in moment) - but one factor above all others is the degree to which we pass on the faith to children and young people.

Currently we live with a very mixed picture. Numbers of children and young people in church are very small. There are some notable exceptions - Our Cathedral choir and a handful of others (including new communities that we'll hear about later). But our 320 churches average one child per church.

Yet, there are 23,000 students in our 97 church schools – in which I have observed children leading worship, studying bible together, exploring moral and ethical questions, and answering our 3 Key Questions.

What do we do when we see God at work in this way? How do we join in?

Synod, my belief is that, in order for our diocese to celebrate 200 years, we must decide now that we will resource work with Children and Young People (CYP). Please hear me – I'm not saying, "stop resourcing parish ministry" but rather "resource parish ministry in such a way that clergy and lay ministers can spend the majority of their time with people under 35."

So how do we do this?

- 1) Minster Communities can be an opportunity to integrate schools. This has not been possible in the initial phase - but I am determined it will happen in the next phase.
- 2) An Intergenerational Hub in each Minster Community – (See handout)
- 3) Funding
 - (1) National church settlement (see questions paper) A motion was passed at General Synod to do further work on how the Church Commissioners grant to national church is used.
 - (2) LINC Grants – Which are applied to the lowest income parishes. An increase to this in 2026 is very welcome. It's still being working out exactly how it will be applied.
 - (3) DIP Grants – A much smaller amount is available (3 million rather than 15 million which we were initially encouraged to apply for). Plus, there is a huge amount of work to prepare and to monitor. So, trustees have decided not to apply at this point in time.
 - (4) Local funding - The sale of land. In view of (3) and (4) trustees decided not to apply for DIP and instead to use new money to develop intergenerational hubs. We are still working on the details of this.

We have a complex picture - with some parts being much better than we thought, other parts being not so good. But overall, it's encouraging that we are moving towards a balanced budget AND we should be able to resource parishes to develop work with CYP.