

# Lay Representative Report 2024 for St. Cuthbert's Episcopal Church

This is my first report as the lay representative to Synod for St. Cuthbert's Episcopal Church, Edinburgh. In 2024, I attended two meetings of the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Edinburgh, Scottish Episcopal Church. The first was held on Saturday, February 24, and the second on Thursday, October 24, both at St. Paul's and St. George's Church in Edinburgh. I also attended the Edinburgh South & West Area Council meeting just prior to the February Synod. It was an honour to represent St. Cuthbert's and to gain a deeper understanding of the work and governance within our Diocese.

## Initial Impressions and Atmosphere

As a frequent visitor to Diocesan Synod in the past, and previous experience as Alt Lay Rep for St Marks Portobello back in the early 2010s, I knew what to expect in terms of the business of synod. What stood out to me then - and is still true today - is the warm and collegial atmosphere of these gatherings. Synod provides an opportunity to connect with fellow lay and clergy members, fostering a sense of community that extends beyond individual congregations. The energy in the room was positive and engaged, with participants ready to contribute and share their perspectives.

I was also impressed by the strong and effective leadership within the Diocese. Bishop John Armes, along with the Diocesan Secretary, Administrator, Treasurer, and Dean, demonstrated their dedication to maintaining a well-organized and forward-thinking Synod. Their efforts, combined with the various committee convenors, created an environment that balanced business with prayerful reflection.

## Synod Structure and Process

As a lay representative, I am a voting member of the House of Laity, representing St. Cuthbert's. Our duties, alongside those of the House of Clergy, are governed by the Canons, which outline our shared responsibilities. The meetings involved proposing and discussing motions, where participants could voice questions and opinions at an open microphone. The process was thorough, with motions put to a vote and approved measures becoming Acts of Synod, subsequently confirmed by the Bishop.

The sessions included reports from key individuals and groups: the Bishop's Report, the Dean's Report, along with a wide variety of Diocesan Committees. These foundational reports provide transparency and accountability, ensuring that the Diocese's activities are well-communicated and aligned with its mission.

## Key Highlights from 2024 Synods

### February Synod (24th February 2024)

One of the significant moments at the February Synod was the recognition of John Stuart and Godfrey Robson as new Lay Canons. Their extensive service—John Stuart’s **28 years** as General Secretary of the Scottish Episcopal Church and Godfrey Robson’s recent tenure as Diocesan Secretary—was acknowledged with gratitude. The Synod supported these appointments wholeheartedly.

Bishop John began the session with a moment of silence, marking the second anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and reflected on global conflicts, including the situation in Gaza. He emphasized our shared moral responsibility and the importance of working towards peace and justice, aligning with Christian values.

The Bishop also introduced the Lent Appeal, which aimed to support the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, providing therapy and treatment for children affected by the conflict in Israel and Gaza. This appeal reflected the Diocese’s commitment to compassion and outreach.

The Safeguarding report highlighted the appointment of John Wylie as the new Provincial Safeguarding Officer and noted improvements in training initiatives. Changes to the PVG scheme were also discussed, emphasizing the new five-year validity and the legislative requirement for checks before appointments.

The Mission & Ministry Committee, presented by Sophia Marriage, provided updates on funding allocations and the continued emphasis on projects supporting carbon net-zero goals. Sophia underscored that the “Investing in the Future” initiative (that my predecessor Margaret spoke in great anticipation of from the last Diocesan Synod) was fundamentally about people rather than infrastructure.

Following on from Sophia, we were treated to an introduction to the borders by our former curate Lesley.

In a presentation dominated by biscuits, Lesley spoke enthusiastically about the newly linked congregations of Galashiels and Selkirk. There have been a number of external organisations that have come to them, including the ATC which Lesley will be chaplain to (given Nicki's involvement in the local armed forces, it seems the curate doesn't fall far from the training incumbent), and she is also the first female padre for The Institute of Craftsmen. Lesley ended with a quotation from Psalm 71:18 which she re-interpreted as ***never underestimate the power of people with grey hair!***

Environmental initiatives were bolstered by the introduction of the new Convener of the Diocesan Environmental Group. He, alongside the team, aimed to support congregations in transitioning to carbon net-zero. A focus was placed on identifying

churches with failing or recently renewed heating systems and introducing resources like the Heat Hack program to reduce energy consumption.

## October Synod (24th October 2024)

The October Synod reiterated the importance of environmental stewardship, highlighting that no grant requests had yet been made under the new green grants, which required matched funding from the Province and Diocese.

The introduction of the Rectory Green Fund, aimed at energy-efficient rectory upgrades contingent on an EPC rating of C or higher, was a key topic. The grants offered up to £5,000 in funding, matched by the Diocese. There was some disquiet in the hall that there may be an underestimation of the amount of time & money required to keep ageing rectories at the C rating (i.e. installing double glazing in a listed Georgian building isn't quite as easy as other properties), a subject that is all too familiar at St Cuthberts.

Compliance with the Registration of Controlling Interests (ROCI) was stressed, with severe penalties for inaccuracies. Vestries were urged to ensure correct registration, and the Diocese is taking on all of the costs associated with ensuring the registrations are submitted accurately and on time.

The October Synod is often affectionately known as the "Budget Synod" due to the discussions of accounts for years past, a reflection on the current position for the present year, and acceptance of the budget for next year. The big news item for this year is the sizable *uplift* in Quota, which represents a re-balancing from depressed Quota increases during the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. It was decided to re-balance in the coming financial year as there is due to be a significant *decrease* in pension contributions as an outcome of decisions made at the provincial pensions committee. The synod appreciated the thoughtful timing of this necessary re-balancing to lessen the shock.

## Reflections and Moving Forward

I am grateful for the opportunity to represent St. Cuthbert's and to contribute to discussions that shape the future of our Diocese. If anyone wishes to learn more about the initiatives discussed or has questions about the proceedings, I would be delighted to share further details.

Faithfully,

Andrew Daye  
Lay Rep