

Diocesan Synod 14 March 2026

I'm finding it quite difficult to believe that I'm standing here this morning as Acting Bishop of Guildford. As I read the papers of the last Diocesan Synod, hosted by St Andrew's, Goldsworth Park on Saturday 8 November, vivid memories flood back of that occasion. Bishop Andrew was his usual ebullient self as he focused his presidential address on the Anglican Communion and the increasing strain on relationships within it (he did of course make a considerable contribution towards trying to reach out across these increasing divisions – most notably through his strong friendship with Archbishop Henry Ndukuba – Primate of Nigeria – who's written to me and is hoping to fly over from Abuja to the funeral). After the meeting, having done my usual trick of forgetting where I'd parked the car, Andrew and I ended up catching up in the Autumn sun, leant against the bonnet of his car. A member of Synod passed and said, 'so this is where real business happens is it?'. Nothing could have been further from the truth – but it was a picture of a very special partnership between a diocesan and suffragan bishop.

I was aware just before Christmas that Andrew was experiencing a discomfort in his stomach. This gradually got worse until he took himself to A&E in the New Year and underwent some tests. It was on the afternoon of 12 January that a phone call changed everything. The source of pain had been identified as a substantial tumour in his pancreas and further lesions in his liver. He went from that conversation straight into Bishop's Council. Kirsten Rosslyn-Smith opened our meeting with words from Eugene Peterson *"Every day I put hope on the line. I don't know one thing about the future. I don't know what the next hour will hold. There may be sickness, accident, personal or world catastrophe. Before this day is over, I may have to deal with death, pain, loss, rejection... Still, despite my ignorance and surrounded by tinny optimists and cowardly pessimists, I say that God will accomplish his will, and I cheerfully persist in living in the hope that nothing will separate me from Christ's love."*

Andrew sensed that those words were for him. And from then on, he both prepared for his death and modelled to us what 'cheerfully persisting towards a good death' looks like. He was adamant that he wanted God to be glorified through it, and the message of hope, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to be proclaimed as powerfully as possible. I know that his example and inspiration has touched many people - not just in this diocese - but throughout this country and across the world. As I said in my announcement of his death on 3 March 'For me, personally, he has taught me so much about how we should live and, in these past months, about how we should die'.

And yet for all the hope which Andrew held before us, and for which I rejoice, there have been and still are lots of tears. Both of Andrew's remarkable pastoral letters to us as a diocese spoke of his tears – the second one referencing his tear ducts being sent into overdrive. On the two last occasions I met him, I almost managed to hold back my own tears – until on the first occasion when he asked me to officiate at his funeral, and the second occasion when he handed his diocese over to me – quickly followed by a box of tissues! Since his death, 11 days ago, I've found myself welling up on a regular basis as well as being alongside so many others who have shed tears as they've spoken of the ways in which he baptised them, confirmed them, taught them, cared for them, blessed them.

And this has made me reflect a little on tears in Scripture. And in particular two references.

I've come back several times in the past week to this moving Gospel story in John chapter 11 – which tells of the death of Lazarus. It's the story that contains the shortest sentence in Scripture: Jesus wept. What do these words teach us about Jesus' relationship with those who mourn death? Jesus' tears, of course, are not for Lazarus. He has already said that this death is for God's glory. In just a few moments, Jesus will be united with his deceased friend as he performs the most amazing miracle which will astonish everyone. Rather, Jesus weeps because his friends Mary and Martha weep. Though he knows the end of the story, he doesn't remain emotionally detached from those whose hearts have been shattered. His is moved to tears by their grief.

And if Jesus is moved to tears by the grief of Mary and Martha, I'm sure of two things. First, he gives us permission to grieve too. And I'm intensely aware at this time that grief is so often cumulative. As I've mourned +Andrew's death this week, it's also touched the grief that I still carry for my dear friend Paul Bryer (Martin's predecessor as Archdeacon of Dorking). His funeral was the first service I officiated at as a brand-new bishop. And of my own mother too. She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer five years ago this month and, like Andrew, died within six weeks. Grief is cumulative but it's also complex. In Andrew's death, we lose not just a brother in Christ and friend but a diocesan bishop. That's not just about the person but the office. Andrew used to say that the diocese is 'a patch of land in most of Surrey, part of Hampshire and a tiny bit of London and Sussex'. I agree – but I'd add that it's the patch of land that comes under the oversight of the Bishop of Guildford who has a special responsibility under God to guard and teach the faith, be our chief pastor, and our focus of unity. Without a bishop, a diocese isn't a diocese, a cathedral isn't a cathedral, and a vicar isn't a vicar. But we give thanks for a God who, in Jesus, is compassionate, merciful, tender and knows and has experienced grief and shares that grief with his friends. Here, this morning, in this Eucharist, he meets and ministers to us in our grief as we gather to support each other in that grief.

But whilst it's a great comfort that Jesus hates death and grieves with us, we don't just need sympathy. We need Jesus to do something about death. When Jesus commands the stone to be rolled away, Martha protests: 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead for four days'. Jesus shouts into the tomb: 'Lazarus, come out!'. The dead man walks out - still wrapped in burial clothes. Jesus' instruction to unwrap him and let him go, unbinds him from death and gives us a glimpse of the glory that will get brighter as we move into the most sacred part of John's Gospel. This wonderful story gives us hope for two reasons. First, as Irenaeus wrote in the second century, Jesus' raising of Lazarus prefigures our bodily resurrection. As Paul tells the Thessalonians, just as Jesus raises a shout at Lazarus' tomb he'll descend from heaven with a shout, calling all the dead to burst from their graves. Second, whether someone has recently died (such as the widow's son at Nain or the daughter of Jairus) or has been in the grave for four days, four decades, four thousand years, no length of time is an obstacle to his power. Here, this morning, in this Eucharist, he reminds us of that as he gives us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in eternal life.

And this brings me to the second reference to tears that I've been reflecting upon - from the Book of Revelation. Towards the end of the book, and indeed towards the end of the Bible itself, it's like we have this great crescendo (beautifully set to music by Edward Bainton – our Cathedral Choir sings it sublimely) 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'.

My prayer for us as a diocese in the weeks ahead is that we grieve and model grief well. Grief is a consequence of love. We loved Bishop Andrew, and his loss is painful. But I pray that as we shed tears of grief, they might give way to tears of gratitude too: gratitude for one whose life enriched ours in so many ways - but even more so - gratitude for the hope which means, in the words of Paul's first letter to the Church of the Thessalonians, 'that we do not grieve as those who have no hope - for we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus all who have fallen asleep in him'. To Him be the glory, this day and always.

+Paul Dorking
14 March 2026

Tribute to the Rt Revd Andrew Watson
Tenth Bishop of Guildford
2015 - 2026

'Who do you think you are?' was the theme of Bishop Andrew's last confirmation sermon at St Peter's Church, Ash on 11 January 2026. He ended that sermon by saying 'a day will come – quite certainly – when Andrew Watson becomes the *late* Andrew Watson'. He continued, 'what on earth will be the point of my degrees and qualifications then, let alone my dubious hereditary links with King Alfred and the Emperor Charlemagne? I find who I am in Jesus Christ'. Little did he know when he spoke those words that, within seven weeks, his earthly life would end. And yet they sum up the life of this disciple and bishop. That strong identity, which shone through his short illness, was an inspiration to so many within the Diocese of Guildford and further afield whose lives were touched and transformed by it.

Andrew was born on 16 July 1961. He was educated at Winchester College where his father was the Master of Music. He reflected that his vocation could have gone in any one of three directions: music, the church or law. He inherited his father's musical genes and played the bassoon in the National Youth Orchestra. Alongside music, his Christian commitment grew as 'the truth gradually dawned' on him. He also had an interest in law – which he went on to read at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Following graduation, during time as a caretaker and youth worker in Islington, he discerned that God was calling him to ordained ministry and returned to Cambridge to train at Ridley Hall. It was during this time, in a Rowan Williams lecture on Origen, that he met Beverly, whom he married in 1986.

Andrew was made deacon in 1987 at Redditch where he served his title by building a worshipping community on a large council estate. In 1991 he moved to Notting Hill where, in addition to growing the church, he enabled the development of a community café, a prison fellowship in Wormwood Scrubs and a major restoration of St Peter's Church. In 1996 he started his longest chapter of ministry as vicar of St Stephen's, Twickenham. These years saw him send out three planting teams to All Souls, St Margarets; St Saviours, Sunbury; and the Ivybridge Estate, as well as serving as Area Dean. In 2008 he was nominated as Bishop of Aston where he masterminded the diocesan strategy *Transforming Church*, engaged deeply with the wider community and grew the link with Malawi.

In 2014 Andrew was translated from the poorest diocese in the Church of England to the wealthiest. His charge as Bishop of Guildford was to enable a new vision and strategy. He facilitated an extensive process of listening to God, the church and the community. It resulted in a strongly owned vision of *Transforming Church, Transforming Lives* – a framework not a blueprint. He worked hard to create a culture which was ambitious for the Kingdom of God, well-resourced and supported, with mutual accountability. He brought to Guildford his passion for and gifts in deepening discipleship, church planting, celebrating and increasing diversity, and being deeply engaged in local communities. His painful experience of abuse as a young person made him extremely committed to safeguarding.

Andrew played a significant role in the national and global church. Within the Church of England, he chaired the Ordained Vocations Working Group which enabled a significant increase in vocations, and the Steering Group on Church Governance – he was committed to good process. He also served as Chair of Trustees of CPAS. As the grandson of Church Mission Society missionaries in China, he was deeply committed to the global church – especially in places of persecution. He used his voice in the House of Lords to campaign for and strengthen freedom of religious belief. He had strong links with China, India, Pakistan, Sweden and Nigeria – where in latter years he worked hard to maintain a strong friendship in the context of strained relationships across the Anglican Communion.

Andrew was blessed with a gifted mind but wore his learning lightly. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible and read widely. He published four books on discipleship and leadership. As a gifted wordsmith, his well-crafted sermons were firmly rooted in prayer and Scripture, and at once deep and accessible. He integrated his musical gifts into ministry and delighted in any opportunity to sit behind a keyboard. He was born the year in which Guildford Cathedral was consecrated and wrote a setting of the mass to celebrate its 60th anniversary. Andrew was much loved throughout his ministry for his Gospel-focus, prayerfulness, authenticity, gentleness, humility and kindness. Whilst he held clear views on certain issues, he was deeply respectful of those who held a different view.

Over the past week, my inbox, and others, have overflowed with the most moving testimonies.

Sarah Mullally, Archbishop of Canterbury, said 'Andrew was a man of deep Christian faith who lived his life in the service of Christ and others. In the face of death, he demonstrated a calm reassurance of God's saving grace. Over four decades of ministry, Andrew made an enormous contribution to the life of the Church of England – and, through his concern for Anglicans and other Christians around the world, the global church. He was a gentle man and generous with those who held differing theological views. He will be greatly missed, not just by family and friends, but by the whole church'.

Michael More-Molyneux, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey, said 'Bishop Andrew was held in the highest regard and loved throughout the Diocese. My abiding memory will be of his involvement with various multi faith meetings around the county. His presence had a great effect on the meetings, and whenever he commented, all members of all faiths listened intently and respected his clear thinking.'

Hafiz Hashmi, Imam of Shah Jahan Mosque said: 'When he was being considered for the role of Bishop, I was consulted as part of a small committee to reflect on what kind of leadership our area needed. I recall expressing the need for a Bishop who would be present, compassionate, and open to meaningful engagement across faiths. Andrew embodied those qualities with integrity and grace'.

Henry Ndukuba, Archbishop and Primate of Nigeria, says to us all 'We know that this is a difficult time, but we are greatly encouraged by the steadfast faith and the radiant hope in Christ Jesus, Bishop Andrew demonstrated till the end. It was all joy and reason to give praise to God Almighty'.

In the three weeks between his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and his death, Andrew wrote two inspirational pastoral letters to this diocese. In the second of these he reflected, 'I don't fear the prospect of dying and find to my relief that my faith in the 'resurrection of the body and the life everlasting' has only grown stronger over the past few weeks'. He further commented, 'I still consider myself as deeply blessed to have been born into such a loving family, to have met with Christ as a teenager, to have spent nearly forty years of my life so joyfully married to the 'wife of my youth', to have raised four remarkable children (all equally remarkably partnered), and to have been entrusted with a series of fulfilling ministries within my beloved Church of England'.

On a personal note, I consider myself to have been enormously blessed to begin my episcopal ministry with Bishop Andrew. I don't believe that any diocesan bishop could have taught me more about following Jesus or leading his people. I shall miss his constant Gospel-focus, his love, encouragement, gentleness, humility, integrity, kindness, music, preaching and boyish humour. In our final meeting, through our tears, I told him that I felt a little like Elisha not wanting to leave Elijah's side. I asked him to pray that I may be given a double portion of his Spirit. His response was 'No – I'll pray for a quadruple portion!'. If that prayer is granted, you better all watch out!

Well done good and faithful servant. May you rest in peace.

+Paul Dorking
14 March 2026

Interim Arrangements For the Leadership of the Diocese

On 18 February, Bishop Andrew handed over leadership of the diocese to me by deed of delegation by reason of his incapacity. On 3 March, the day that +Andrew died, the diocese became vacant. Following various interviews this week (with the National Head of Safeguarding and Archbishop of Canterbury) I've now become Acting Bishop of Guildford. I'm expecting to fulfil this role for the best part of two years – and then I think there'll be a fight on the Bishops Leadership Team for sabbaticals!

A Vacancy in See (especially of this sort of length) is not a time for treading water. Neither is it a time for new vision and strategy. In the midst of everything else that's been going on in the last month, I have spent some time thinking through what my focus will be in this time. I've shared this with the Bishop's Leadership Team and had their endorsement. There are five.

1. Prayer

We've talked about this regularly, but it needs to be central to our life in the months and years ahead. I'd like us to be more intentional about embedding it into our culture as a diocese and will say a little more about this after Easter.

2. Pastoral Care

As I begin this role, I recognize that our diocese is in bereavement. The role of pastor and shepherd during this time will be crucial. This is not a role that I can fulfil on my own, but I recognize that I can both set a culture and tone of caring for one another across the diocese and pay particular attention to the care of our senior leaders and, beyond them, the leaders in our churches, schools, chaplaincies and at Church House Guildford. I will seek to be as visible as I can be and communicate as well as I can.

3. Priorities

The last significant piece of work that Bishop Andrew did with the Bishop's Leadership Team was during an overnight residential meeting in mid-January. Providentially, I had pushed Andrew a little before the meeting to help us drill down on our priority of priorities. I do constantly think that on national, diocesan and parish level, we are prone to have too many priorities and end up being frenetic and not focused. We came away from that meeting with unanimous agreement around our priority of priorities in the years ahead: (i) discipleship and the revitalisation of parishes; (ii) children and young people. I'm passionate about both those areas and I'm convinced that they're the dominant priorities as I read the church development plans of parishes.

4. Process

Clearly, I will need to take responsibility for good governance and process. We have a superb team at CHG which help us with this and I will work with them, BLT, Bishops Council and other bodies to ensure that we discharge our duties as stewards and trustees well. I'm thrilled with our new appointment of DSO (Vicki) and have assured her of my deep commitment to safeguarding.

5. Provincial

Finally, I will represent us at national level. I am a bishop who finds greatest fulfilment in the diocese (which is one of the reasons that I've managed to dodge any national responsibilities to date). Whilst I will be keeping these to a minimum, I will need to attend House of Bishops meetings.

Finally, I'm grateful to my superb colleagues on BLT and our honorary assistant bishops who have offered to help with confirmations and other aspects of episcopal ministry. That said, I will be on my own as a stipendiary licensed bishop and so I am in the process of delegating a significant amount of the Dorking portfolio – whilst keeping a clear oversight of it all... Happy to take questions....