

Report on General Synod February 2025 Group of Sessions

The full details of Synod, including the voting record, can be found here [General Synod February 2025 | The Church of England](#)

This report is intended as a brief, personal, report highlighting some of the main issues discussed in this group of sessions.

Each day we start and end with worship. There are 483 members of Synod and it is wonderful to be part of this congregation, although attendance is not always high. Worship sets the tone for the debate, as we are meant to consider things prayerfully.

All groups of sessions start with a Presidential Address, this time by the Archbishop of York as he is the only Archbishop. Before his address there was a motion put before Synod which would have meant that he should not speak, this was lost by 239 votes to 73. The Archbishop of York paid tribute to Geoffrey Tattersall KC who contributed so much and whose chairmanship of Synod during the Living in Love and Faith debates was inspirational.

As with Diocesan Synod, we have the opportunity to ask questions before the start of the group of sessions and get formal responses. We then have the opportunity to ask limited supplementary questions. For this Synod there were 156 questions and we had time for supplementary questions on the first 94.

The rest of Monday afternoon was devoted to discussing the **Makin Report**. The tone was contentions but victim focused and reinforced the need to do much better. There was a concern that the views of only a small number of the 130 victims known about were sought and also that no apparent disciplinary action had been taken against those people named in the report, the perceived need for accountability was strong.

The amended motion, below, was passed by 384 in favour and 0 against: -

That this Synod, repenting of the failures of safeguarding in the Church of England detailed in the Makin report:

- (a) ask those in leadership roles across the Church of England to redouble work to implement best safeguarding practice in line with national policies and guidance, and note the further and forthcoming reforms set out in GS 2376; and
- (b) at the specific request of victims and survivors of John Smyth QC, recognise that the institutional failure to enact adequate disciplinary process means that this and other cases cannot simply be labelled 'historic' as they have continuing effects on the lives of those victims and survivors who suffer the consequences of the prolonged cover-up by the Church of England.

Tuesday brought the discussion regarding **Racial Justice** and the motion commending the good work done and the desire to continue this at a cost of £20m over the next 3 years was approved by 311 to 1.

The discussion on the **Future of Church Safeguarding** was lengthy but worthwhile. Synod were essentially given the option of introducing model 3, which gave independence to the national oversight body (who would be responsible for standards in Dioceses) but that the Diocesan safeguarding teams would remain employed by the Diocese, or option 4 where the oversight

arrangements would be the same but that all Diocesan safeguarding teams would be employed by an independent body. The Bishop of Stepney moved the motion which suggested that her preference was model 4 but that she was also content to accept model 3.

The safeguarding Response Group could not agree if model 3 or 4 was better. There was an open letter from over 100 of the Diocesan safeguarding teams suggesting model 3 was preferable and more easily delivered. The Charity Commissioners also wrote to all Synod members reminding those who are Charity Trustees, virtually everyone, that we have a personal responsibility to ensure effective safeguarding.

The detailed debate covered the original motion and 7 amendments.

The last amendment in this debate was to add a clause: -

“and lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to victims and survivors and the harm they have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church.”

Eventually the motion to accept model 4 but to initiate model 3 now, as a route towards model 4, was accepted by 392 votes to 9. It was interesting that the BBC news coverage of this debate and the outcome did not reflect the views expressed in Synod by the Bishop of Stepney.

The **Diocesan Finances Review Update** was presented. Some of the triennium spending plans for 2026 to 2028 were outlined.

2024 is expected to show that 35 of the 42 Dioceses are in deficit. This is driven by falling attendance and the subsequent fall in Parish Share (our Common Fund). This contrasts with the Church Commissioners' £10.6 billion fund which continues to grow in real terms.

The review plan includes increasing Lowest Income Communities Funding (LInC) from £20m pa to £30m pa with checks to ensure that this funding is being spent on low income communities, which, from the comments made, it frequently is not.

The plan also incorporates an increase in clergy stipends to catch up with inflation since 2011 and standardise stipends levels and policies across all dioceses (maternity, paternity, sabbaticals etc). Increasing the National Minimum Stipend will also uprate starting pensions and the removal of the one-year NMS time-lag on starting pensions, and a review of pension benefits and contributions will be considered.

The need for a **Strategy for Working Class Ministry**, a private member's motion, was discussed and approved.

The benefits of **Sports and Wellbeing Ministry** were presented by Bishop Libby and discussed. An amendment calling for the expansion of this initiative was passed.

The long awaited **Clergy Conduct Measure** was brought to Synod for final approval. This replaces the discredited CDM and there were several speeches with personal testimony of the dire and undeserved consequences of the CDM. Following 5 technical amendments this motion was carried unanimously.

A Diocesan Synod Motion was brought to **Add Confirmation Numbers to Statistics for Mission**. This was carried, going forward the number of people confirmed in each parish will be

included in the annual mission stats, and demonstrates how Diocesan Synods can have a voice at General Synod.

A motion calling for **Growing Younger and More Diverse** was debated and passed.

A presentation on **Living in Love and Faith** was given and questions taken.

There was an extensive debate regarding the **Proposed Changes to the Standing Orders Relating to the Crown Nominations Commission**. Whilst some amendments were technical many attempted to ensure that candidates to be Bishops were only appointed when two thirds of the election committee agreed on the appointment and to avoid giving Archbishops overriding power. In total there were 11 proposed alterations and amendments to these, several of these votes were by Houses and close, with different Houses voting different ways. It was a good exercise in democracy and demonstrated the checks and balances that Synod can give.

Having had such an intense and detailed debate the next business was the revision stage of the **National Church Governance Measure**. Unfortunately, the chamber was only half full and this important piece of legislative business was not debated as well as the previous item. This was not helped by having 43 amendments to consider, which was extremely daunting. This legislation will now be reviewed in committee in detail in respect of its final drafting.

However, amendment item 525 of the National Church Governance Measure, which requires CENS have “particular regard to the requirements of section 67 of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act 1840 relating to the making of additional provision for the cure of souls in parishes where such assistance is most required” was carried, with several Bishops voting for this amendment. The explanatory note explained that this amendment would require CENS, when using any amount paid by the Church Commissioners, to have particular regard to making additional provision for the cure of souls where most required.

The first consideration for the **Mission and Pastoral Measure and Regulations** were discussed and approved. There is the opportunity to submit notice of amendments by 18th March. It is interesting to note that item 30 in GS 2394X/2395X would change the “suspension” of presentation to a “pause” and that this pause would be for a maximum of 2 tranches of 3 years, with one further year being possible with the Church Commissioners’ approval.

The **Vacancy in See Committee (Amendment) Regulation 2025** was discussed along with the 8 amendments. Most of the amendments sort to ensure that too much power did not lie with a single parish or worshipping community and that females are better represented than they currently are. These amendments were quite controversial and the voting record interesting. The amended regulation came into force immediately.

Due to the overrun of time in the above items the Diocesan motion **Redistribution of Funds** was adjourned until the July Synod.

This motion calls for £2.6 billion of funding, currently held by the Church Commissions, to be transferred to Dioceses for Stipends. This £2.6 billion is the calculated over payment of Dioceses when they bailed the Church Commissioners out in 1997. There is no expectation that this sum will be paid over to Dioceses but the distributable income from this £2.6 billion is approx. £100m pa and this could be paid to Dioceses safely to support Ministry; the charitable purpose of this money is the cure of souls.

So far 9 Dioceses have supported this motion with another 15 heading in that direction. It is a shame that a proposal with approximately 60% of Dioceses in favour ran out of time and is carried forward to July. We have a Deanery motion passed to request discuss at our Diocesan Synod at some time. Given the wide support it is disappointing that the Business Committee didn't plan the timing of this debate more carefully.

As well as the Synod discussions there are lots of fringe events during lunchtime and in the evening. I attended a statistics fringe meeting which indicated that the initial stats for 2024 show a growth of just under 2%, other interesting information is available via www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services . Another fringe meeting, which was held in the House of Lords, was about the unfulfilled needs of rural ministry and in government. A third fringe I attended was regarding the Redistribution of Funds motion which expanded on the methodology of the proposal.

I appreciate that this is a very personal view of General Synod.

As I pointed out at the start there is a full version of events on the Church of England website.

Please let me know if you have any queries or comments.

Peter Kelsey
Laity – Diocese of Derby