

From 11 to 15 July 2025 the General Synod gathered at the University of York for its summer group of sessions. Chaired by the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell—who is the sole primate while the See of Canterbury is vacant—we were 483 voting members (26 bishops, 199 clergy, 258 laity) and the agenda mixed routine housekeeping with questions that go to the heart of the Church's credibility: safeguarding, money, governance, war, assisted dying and sexuality.

We were privileged to welcome His Grace, Archbishop Hosam, the Archbishop of Jerusalem who addressed the Synod. Here is his address, please take the time to listen to his words at a time of such appalling conflict and suffering in Israel Palestine.

<https://youtu.be/lidEE7BFndo?si=Qo3wE3ni8Fmg80Ye>

---

## Safeguarding and Redress

The most decisive act of the week came on Monday 14th July, when Synod gave final approval to the Abuse (Redress) Measure and its companion Rules. The legislation creates a legally binding scheme, initially funded with £150 million from the Church Commissioners, that will offer banded financial awards, therapeutic support and a formal apology to anyone abused by church officers. Final Approval requires a counted vote by houses: Bishops 26-0, Clergy 129-1, Laity 140-0—and was greeted with relieved applause from survivors watching in the public gallery.

---

## National governance reform and trust.

On Saturday 12th July Synod completed three years of internal review by finally approving the National Church Governance Measure. The Measure folds the Archbishops' Council into a new charity, the Church of England National Services (CENS), obliges that body to publish an open funding framework, and establishes a permanent Synodical Scrutiny Committee to monitor national decisions. After a string of technical amendments—including new whistle-blowing protections—the Measure passed by large margins (Bishops 27-0, Clergy 116-0, Laity 133-10). Synod failed to vote on a private members motion seeking a review of the House of Bishops by voting to move to next business. A miscellaneous paper indicated that the review looking at Trust in the Church of England had been cancelled as it was seen as the wrong way to proceed.

---

## Money, mission, stipends and pensions

Finance dominated the Saturday afternoon sitting. Synod welcomed a record £1.6 billion spending plan for 2026-28, aimed at parish ministry in low-income areas, safeguarding costs and clergy welfare; it also signalled an indicative 13 % uplift to future clergy pensions. A diocesan motion that sought an immediate transfer of 1 % of the Church Commissioners' endowment (≈ £110 million) straight to diocesan stipend funds was defeated; instead members backed a milder call for earlier Synod input into future distribution frameworks.

A separate private member's motion pressed for the full restoration of the pre-2011 pension accrual rate of two-thirds of stipend and for compensation to clergy already affected by erosion. After hearing evidence from the Pensions Board, Synod referred the costing exercise to the Board, requiring a progress report at the February 2026 session.

Following the Synod the Bishop of Hereford, who holds the responsibility for Clergy Well-being in the House of Bishops made the following statement in his weekly video message to his Diocese, but which is pertinent to us all:

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=kok-1CZR3fk&si=DvCW1aCoiBGACF\\_Y](https://youtube.com/watch?v=kok-1CZR3fk&si=DvCW1aCoiBGACF_Y)

---

## Defence and Military Chaplaincy

Heightened geopolitical tension was reflected in a briefing by Brigadier Jaish Mahan, who warned of cyber- and drone-enabled conflict and the very real threat of European conflict. He urged churches to support armed-forces personnel. Synod then took every legislative stage of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy (Licensing) Measure, which will replace the current diocesan patch-work with a single national licence for the 190 service chaplains—easing deployment overseas and across commands.

---

## Assisted dying

In his presidential address Archbishop Stephen told members the Church must “turn back” popular support for assisted suicide because it assumes “authority over death that belongs to God alone.” The speech framed a motion brought by the Bishop of London on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill recently passed by the House of Commons and now before the House of Lords; The motion sought to reaffirm the church's opposition to assisted dying and demand urgent funding for palliative care. Contributions from palliative-care clinicians, disability-rights advocates and ethicists revealed a strong consensus that any legalisation would endanger the vulnerable.

The motion passed by an huge margin (289 -7 against, (7 abstentions)) in a counted vote of the whole Synod.

*(In spirit of openness I voted against the motion - if called to speak I would have indicated my view that the motion conflated two issues: (a) the catastrophic under funding of palliative care and (b) the ethical question of an assisted dying bill. It is possible to agree with the urgent need for funding and to support an assisted dying bill.)*

---

## **Issues in Human Sexuality and Living in Love and Faith**

The long-running disagreements over same-sex relationships hovered in the background, but did not dominate proceedings. However a debate on the teaching document *Issues in Human Sexuality* showed a remarkable degree of cohesion in a respectful debate. Following an amendment giving clarification that the *Guidelines for the Conduct of the Clergy* would give offer nationally consistent approach particularly for ordinands the synod voted overwhelmingly to discard *Issues*.

An information paper (GS 2386 available on the General Synod section of the Church of England website for those who wish more detail) reported slow progress on a code of practice for standalone “Prayers of Love and Faith” and on pastoral reassurance for clergy who cannot in conscience participate, but confirmed that no LLF vote would be sought before 2026—a delay that disappointed activists on all sides.

---

## **Other business**

- Election-related amendments to the Church Representation Rules advanced, clearing the way for the 2026 Synod elections.
  - A progress report showed a 32 % cut in operational carbon emissions since 2019 on the Church’s path to net-zero 2030.
  - First consideration was given to adding “God the Creator” and the “Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya” to the liturgical calendar.
  - Synod marked the 40th anniversary of Faith in the City with a debate that was unfortunately timed out on poverty and agreed to revisit mental-health inclusion in parish life at a future session.
-

## **Clergy Conduct Measure and Wellbeing - Standing Committee.**

The Standing Committee of the House of Clergy met and received updates on clergy well-being and the Clergy Conduct Measure, CCM. Clergy morale and well-being were a running theme through the Synod. A meeting of the full House of Clergy will be called before February as part of the process of long overdue updating the Guidelines on Conduct of the Clergy. Long delay is expected on the introduction of the CCM (replacing CDM) due to parliamentary scrutiny. Once the CCM has received its final reading it will still not be ready as the guidelines on use, rules for enacting the Measure and national training materials will still all need to be produced... so its a case of watch this space!

---

## **Atmosphere and trajectory**

Survivors' applause after the redress vote contrasted with visible fatigue during the long finance and governance sessions. Passionate and articulate debates on conflict, pensions, Issues in Human Sexuality and assisted dying were all permeated at times with the issue of trust, particularly trust in the House of Bishops. Even so, there were fewer procedural ambushes than in 2024 and a shared determination in the Synod to rebuild trust. The Governance Measure begins to answer long-standing demands for transparency, while adoption of the Redress Scheme represents the Church's most concrete act of contrition to date.

The next group of sessions, 15–19 February 2026 in London, is expected to test that resolve: Synod will scrutinise the first year of Redress implementation, receive the promised pension-costings, and—if the timetable holds—attempt a conclusive vote on the LLF package. How it navigates that agenda will go far in determining the moral authority the Church can offer our nation facing economic difficulties, ethical dilemmas at life's boundaries and an uncertain international order.

---

As always, just a reminder that as members of General Synod we take it in turns to provide a report, each of us speaking from our own perspective. If you have any questions do get in touch with any of us.

Canon Julian Hollywell.