

Lynn Nichol - Report for Greater Dudley Deanery Chapter General Synod February 2025

The General Synod met for 5 days from Monday 10th February – Friday 14th February 2025 at Church House Westminster for what has been described by many as the most challenging meeting of the current sessions. The agenda focused on safeguarding, including the Makin Report and the future and independence of safeguarding. I hope the following report gives you an insight into the main business discussed, decisions made and links to further information. The report is presented in the order of business for the 5 days. Voting figures are given in the order of in favour/against/abstentions.

Monday 10th Feb

1. **Welcome and introductions** – the Archbishop of York paid tribute to Geoffrey Tattersall KC who sadly died a few weeks ago and had been a much loved and respected Chair of General Synod.
2. **Presidential address** Sam Margrave proposed that the presidential address be suspended as he considered that the Archbishop of York's position was no longer tenable. This was rejected by a counted vote of the whole Synod – In favour 73/Against 239/abstentions 43. The presidential address by the Archbishop of York including a time of penitence and silence.
3. **A report from the Business Committee** was provided including information on the challenges of scheduling such a significant amount of business and indication that there may be an additional session in November.
4. **Questions** – the Synod considered written answers to 155 questions and asked a range of supplementary questions including **from Diocese Reps**, supplementary to Q 46 from Lynn Nichol, a question about the provision of gluten free bread and non-alcoholic wine – 'has the liturgical commission consider the long term pastoral impact on those who come to faith and then find because of living with celiac disease a lifelong autoimmune condition they are excluded from sharing in both bread and wine throughout their lives rather than for example when they are in hospital'. Q 74 Robin Lunn, 'Clive Mather stated that existing tenants of Pension Board housing were eligible to move to new houses on the scheme when their health and mobility needs change. How many existing tenants have been rehoused in the last 3 years? With a supplementary of: How long will it take to re house existing residents in need or will in effect new people always be at the front of the queue?

Full details of questions are at: [link to questions](#).

5. In a sombre atmosphere in the chamber the Synod debated and amended **the Makin Review** into the Church of England's handling of allegations of serious abuse by the late John Smyth and voted on the motion:

"repenting of the failures of safeguarding in the Church of England detailed in the Makin report, 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 [Paper - Makin Review](#) and 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."

Before the vote there was a period of silence. The Synod voted in favour: 384/0/2

Tuesday 11th February,

6 and 7 Racial Justice - Lord Paul Boateng, opened the session on affirming the racial justice agenda urging the Synod to act and take responsibility for racial justice including financing it. The motion was passed 311/1/6 and included a recommendation that current financial resources remain, an effective governance framework is developed including appointing a lead bishop and funding for the next triennium and staffing at nation and diocesan level. It also recommended that **Dioceses share good practices and give priority to the collection and measuring of relevant data; and that deaneries and parishes are encouraged to participate in the racial justice programmes.**

8. The Future of Church Safeguarding Presentation – Lesley-Anne Ryder deputy chair of the Safeguarding Response Committee gave a presentation. She observed that ‘you are complicated’ pointing out a range of issues that the ‘outside world’ doesn’t understand or can navigate. She urged us not to hide behind the structure of church, with 1000s of individual groups and charities. She identified how the proposed ‘model 4’ for independent would ensure consistency and give the opportunity to raise standards across the church (my summary).

9. The Future of Church Safeguarding – Debate

The Synod debated which of the two proposed models (Model 3 and 4) of safeguarding to adopt from 11.45 am – 16.30 pm. The details of model 3 and 4 are in GS2378 available at [Paper outlining proposed way forward for safeguarding](#). The Lead Bishop for Safeguarding recommended the adoption of Model 4 which would have brought together staff from the 85 different charities into one organisation with the aims of bringing consistency, timeliness and equality of resourcing so that everyone could have a timely and consistent response and build public confidence in us. The debate included contributions from many members of Synod including, Marsha de Cordova MP – Second Church Estates Commissioner who suggested that the Church needs to demonstrate that it is committed to change, to restore and rebuild confidence in the churches ability to keep people safe. From the **Diocese of Worcester**, Kashmir Garton Worcester Lay Rep and former interim chair of national safeguarding panel spoke in the debate outlining the advantages of model 3 and Robin Lunn, Worcester Lay Rep, presented findings from several deanery synods indicating support for model 4. The Bishop of Birkenhead, deputy lead for safeguarding commented that we are resistant to independent voices, we think we are special, we need to listen to ‘God’s wisdom in the world’. We sound arrogant. Is it our inherent arrogance that prevents us from hearing criticism. We have broken trust with our survivors and our nation, which is not the same as building trust in the first place.

As this was a long and important debate I’ve noted the development of the major items in the debate with voting figures. The original motion proposed by the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding stated:

‘That this Synod:

- (a) thank all those involved in Church safeguarding, particularly the victims and survivors who give so generously of their wisdom and experience, often at great personal cost, and parish safeguarding officers who make sure that safeguarding is a priority in every level and all those who support them in dioceses;
- (b) affirm its commitment to greater independence in safeguarding in the Church of England;

(c) thank the Response Group for its work for greater independence in safeguarding in the Church of England, endorse model 4 as the direction of travel, and request the lead bishop to engage with the relevant bodies with a view to implementation.’

Mr Martin Sewell (Rochester) moved as an amendment: 36 ‘In paragraph (b) leave out “greater” and insert “total”.’ This was opposed by the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding as she wished the Synod to debate both model 4 and 3. Vote by Houses - Bishops 6/26/4 Clergy 34/128/6 Laity 46/126/12 Amendment lost.

Robert Hammond then proposed an amendment - ‘In paragraph (c), leave out “model 4” and insert “model 3.” giving Synod the opportunity to discuss model 3 as well as model 4. After the debate the amendment was lost meaning the original motion stood unamended and model 3 was not the preferred option at this stage.

The Bishop of Blackburn then proposed an amendment

‘In paragraph (c) leave out the words after ‘Church of England’ and insert: “and, noting the significant reservations around model 4 in paragraph 62 of GS 2378 and the legal advice from VVV dated 31st January 2025, **endorse model 3 as the way forward in the short term and call for further work as to the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model 4.**” He proposed this amendment as in his view, there was challenge to the data and research methods that underpin the Jay Report, legal advice questioning whether trustees can fulfil their duties with model 4 and many safeguarding professionals were advising that model 3 was a more appropriate approach.

In a counted vote by Houses the amendment was carried in each House. Bishops 23/14/0 Clergy 114/65/2, Laity 106/86/3. leaving a situation where Synod agreed to model 3 in the short term but seeks further information to implement model 4. The final vote on the amended motion was carried 392/9/6.

Wednesday 12th February

12. The Synod debated a private members motion about a **strategy for encouraging vocations from people from working class backgrounds** and voted overwhelmingly for ‘That this Synod welcome the work that has already been done to encourage the ministry of people from working class backgrounds, and request the Ministry Development Board to go further in developing a national strategy for the encouragement, development and support of vocations, lay and ordained, of people from working class backgrounds and report back to Synod to debate that strategy within 12 months.’ Further details are available at [Strategy for working class ministry](#)

13. The Synod debated the missional potential for churches of sport and well-being, and included calling **upon all dioceses, in partnership with church schools and Christian organisations already active in this field, to develop a coherent and resourced mission strategy for sport and wellbeing ministry.** The motion was passed by a large majority

14. **Clergy Conduct Measure.** This debate was the final approval for the new Clergy Conduct Measure. The existing Clergy Disciplinary Measure (2003) was considered not to be fit for purpose, inflexible and failed to distinguish between different categories of complaints, including grievances. It establishes a new system for the investigation, determination and dealing with three level of complaints: grievances, allegations of misconduct or serious misconduct. It also gives protection to clergy from vexatious complaints. This work has been going on for several years and lay members from Worcester have been involved in this committee work and development of the legislation, so we are very pleased to see the completion of the work. Kashmir Garton served on the steering committee and Lynn Nichol served on the revisions committee in 2023 and 2024. The

motion was carried by a counted vote by Houses – Bishops 25/0/0 Clergy 128/0/1 Laity 145/0/2. Details of the measure are available at [Clergy Conduct Measure](#).

15 Legal Officers Annual Fees. July 2024 Synod provided feedback on the original proposal and much further work had been carried out. The item was carried.

16 Safeguarding Code of Practice. Synod approved unanimously.

16A As the Synod was running early the Synod then debated the Canterbury Diocesan Synod Motion asking for confirmation numbers to be added to Stats for Mission. This was unanimously approved after an encouraging debate and conversation about the value of confirmation and the need to enable greater reflection by parishes and dioceses on trends in mission and ministry, including sharing stories of coming to faith and confirmation on for example newsletters and blogs.

17. The Synod turned its attention to **‘Growing younger and more diverse - hearing and responding to the voices of young adults’** Kenson Li when presenting the motion noted that there are only 5 members of Synod under 30 and only 1 under 25. The average age is 58, compared to 51 in the House of Parliament. The Synod voted unanimously for the motion. Further information is available at [Paper growing-younger-and-more-diverse-hearing-and-responding-to-the-voices-of-young-adults](#)

18. Living in Love and Faith – presentation and questions

The Bishop of Leicester, Lead Bishop for LLF gave a presentation starting with a question ‘Can we imagine a future together? One church with all our differences, or are we resigned to go our separate ways, mirroring wider society where each one chooses their own truth. He discussed the ongoing work proposing a way forward – with shared episcopacy and congregations and clergy remaining in communion even if they disagree. This would offer bespoke prayers for those in same sex relationships and devolved episcopal ministry for those who are unable to work with that situation. Alongside this work is being undertaken considering clergy and same sex civil marriage. He apologised that the timescale has slipped but important theological work was needed to address the questions that LLF/PLF brings. A timetable is being developed for the consideration of clergy who want to enter same sex civil marriage but it has yet to be published.

Member of Synod could then ask questions; the following is an indicative list of questions – (answers in bold).

Is it possible to be clear on timing that proposals will come back to Synod at the latest by Feb 2026 to give certainty when LGBTQ+ people may or may not be able to celebrate their love in church? - **The Bishop of Leicester was committed to this but can’t be certain.**

What resources can be provided for GS members and to Diocesan Synod to enable discussions in Diocese, eg what happens in multi-parish benefices, what if incumbent and PCC disagreed? - **Resource Materials will be provided by the beginning of March and rolling update provided over next 6-9 months. There will also be guidance on the context of multi-parish benefices.**

Will there be more information for Diocesan Synods on how to make sure the discussions are safe in Diocesan Synod?– the **document from LLF resources ‘braver and safer’ will be part of resources.**

Can there be standalone legal advice on the canons and how it applies to LLF? – **agreed to further discussions with legal office.**

What would it take for the House of Bishops to conclude that the only way forward is to launch a B2 process? **B2 is not ruled out**

What should clergy say to good Christians offering themselves for ordination and are already in same sex marriages – should they get divorced? – **there is a working group on this area with new guidance this year.**

What reassurance can you give us about how we relate to our culture without compromising our faith – are you going to compromise the gold standard of the gospel? **We are constantly thinking about culture and the gospel and being attentive about it.**

What reassurance can you give that alternative episcopal oversight will not be a post code lottery? The possible Devolved Episcopal Ministry (only an idea not final proposal) is a national framework and needs to be sufficient for those who need it and needs to be part of the consultation with Dioceses. What comes from diocese consultation will shape the final product.

We have been waiting a long time, most of church feels we should have made quicker progress and some people's lives are on hold – what can we ordinary punters do to help to speed up the process? **Everyone in GS has a key process to play in consultation with Diocese and shape healthy conversation locally. It is about learning to live with disagreements, so we are able to witness to a wider world where there are differences. There is no simple solution to this. We will keep pressing forward and hope we will keep learning and creating safe and brave spaces where others can engage in this learning.**

What can we pray for? – **that these are healthy conversations about where is God is leading us as a church.**

19. Changes to Standing Orders Relating to the Crown Nominations Committee (CNC)

There were a series of changes proposed to refine the work of the CNC that will come into force before the CNC for the Diocese of Worcester in May and June. The debate included contributions from **Diocese of Worcester** Clergy Rep Claire Lording on shared ministry in the parish and in CNC work and +Martin on the problems of growing number of episcopal vacancies and the lack of voting rights for acting bishops in these dioceses. The following changes were approved:

Change 1 - If the member of a pair is unable to attend a meeting of the Commission at which the vacancy is under consideration, the other member of the pair may attend the meeting in that member's place."

Change 2 – if the PM or Archbishop's appointments secretary is not able to attend, a deputy can attend.

Change 3 interpreters can be provided if English is not the first language of a member, eg from the Anglican Communion in the context of the CNC for Canterbury.

Change 4 – if there is no Archbishop of Canterbury or York in post the other Archbishop can appoint a bishop from the province to act as a deputy.

Change 5 If there was a situation whether neither Archbishop was available one of the bishops replacing the archbishops could preside.

20. Governance Measure

There was a take note debate on the Governance Measure. This included a contribution by +Martin about prioritising the cure of souls. It also included the passing of an amendment to require the new CENS body to have regard to take due regard to make additional provision for cure of soul in parishes where such assistance is more required, eg in areas of high deprivation.

Friday 14th February 2025

We started the day with a petition to the business committee to debate at the next Synod issues in Human Sexuality and remove it from the vocations process. This was referred to the Business Committee for further discussion.

Mission and Pastoral Measure

The Synod debated the new measure and passed with a majority. Further details available at [Mission and Pastoral Measure](#).

The Vacancy in See Committee Regulations

Synod debated changes to the ViSC committee Regs and passed that no more than one person from each church community can be on the ViSc and CNC and at least one lay and clergy person on CNC must be female. From the Diocese of Worcester, Lynn Nichol spoke in the debate as current chair of the Worcester Vacancy in See Committee.

Due to the over running of a number of debates during the week the Synod was not able to debate the Hereford Diocesan Motion asking the Church Commissions to consider a redistribution of funds to Diocesan Stipends Funds. This will be on the agenda in July.

Thank you for reading this report and I hope it has provided some insight into the issues discussed by General Synod at what seems like a challenging few months in the life of the Church of England at national level.

It is a great privilege to represent you and the Diocese of Worcester at the General Synod. If you do have any questions or would like further information on anything in the report, please do contact me.

Best wishes

Lynn Nichol, Worcester Diocese Lay Representative.