



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL  
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<b>Report Title</b>	General Synod Report – February 2025
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This February 2025 session of General Synod was approached with a lot of uncertainty because of the safeguarding issues that had filled the news in the approach to the Synod Sessions. It was the first General Synod after the resignation of Archbishop Justin Welby in the wake of the news about David Smyth which was later followed by news about David Fletcher and soon followed by the resignation of the Bishop of Liverpool, The Rt Revd John Perumbalath, over safeguarding concerns. Amidst these were some calls for the resignation of the Archbishop of York, Rt Revd Stephen Cotterell, who is acting as the Archbishop of Canterbury. They raised objections to him giving the presidential address whilst the issues surrounding the calls for his resignation were outstanding.

### **Presidential Address**

On the first day of Synod, Sam Margrave addressed the chamber and asked that Synod moves to next business rather than have the Presidential Address by the Archbishop of York acting as Archbishop of Canterbury. Bishop of Dover, Rose Hudson- Wilkin, who was chairing encouraged the chamber to have a brief moment of silence and reflection before voting. The motion to move to next business was lost, and the Archbishop gave the Presidential Address. It commenced with a time of lamentation and reflective prayer. The themes of his speech were on justice and the need for repentance.

**Worship** included the Eucharist and then ecumenical addresses from the Most Revd Urmas Viilma, Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia, and Anglican Communion Guest Most Revd Anne Germond, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

### **Questions**

Questions include themes such as building faculties, Universities and TEI, religious education, the church's reputation, standing orders of the synod, inconsistencies in

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the LLF process, the Green investment declaration, church investments, investing in apprenticeships, the church apps.

### **Safeguarding and the Future of Safeguarding:**

The Makin report was introduced by the Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, Rt Revd Joanne Grenfell. The records of some survivors were read out and General Synod repented of the safeguarding failures highlighted in the various reports such as Makin, Scolding, IICSA and the INEQE independent safeguarding audit report. The importance of trauma-informed safeguarding was recognised. Everyone agreed that there should be more scrutiny of the safeguarding process, but the issue was how this can be achieved. The debate generally flipped between those supporting Model 3 as a more practical approach to those supporting a more radical Model 4 to rebuild trust with Parliament and the Public. Model 3 was more generally more supported by Diocesan Safeguarding Officers as expressed in their letter to various General Synod members prior to the February Sessions.

The Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, Rt Revd Joanne Grenfell presented two alternative models for consideration:

**Model 3** – All Diocesan and Cathedral safeguarding officers to remain in their current employment arrangements and the national safeguarding team employed by the Archbishops Council transfer to a new independent body. Create a new independent safeguarding scrutiny and the new body provide professional supervision over the diocesan and cathedral safeguarding staff. It will hold the 85 separate diocesan/cathedral/national officers and departments to account.

**Model 4** - Create an independent scrutiny safeguarding body and create a single independent operational safeguarding body to replace the 85 separate operational safeguarding departments. This will involve the TUPE transfer of all safeguarding staff in the 85 operational safeguarding departments.

Two other options were put on the table during the debate - one, wanting "total independence" sought to go further than Model 4 - it was defeated.

The other, Model 3.5 was put forward by the Bishop of Blackburn, Rt Revd Phillip North. **Model 3.5** sought to introduce independent scrutiny, while investigating the possibility of operational safeguarding but not committing Synod to its implementation until the "staggering complexity of Model 4" had been overcome.

Bishop Joanne Grenfell rejected this amendment, saying "...it would be very much harder to bolt the additional parts of Model 4 onto Model 3, than to develop Model 4 from the outset carefully and with all necessary consideration and diligence... it would add uncertainty, and ... take longer.

General Synod however, wanted greater clarity about how Model 4 would work in practice and backed Model 3.5. The final vote on the motion which included Model 3.5 was passed in all the three houses of General Synod (Bishops, Clergy and Laity). As an expression of lament and repentance, a specific apology to victims and survivors was also included in the agreed motion.

### **Racial Justice**

Lord Boateng gave a presentation of the final report of the Archbishops' Commission on Racial Justice and urged Synod to take action on the Report. The Bishop of Dover reminded Synod that taking action includes recognition for the excellent work of the Commission for Racial Justice, recognising the positive outcomes that have derived from Lament to Action, putting the reports into action with a £20 million commitment to establish a racial justice board and lead bishop and adequate staffing, sharing of good practice between Diocese. This item passed with a large majority.

### **Crown Nominations Committee Report**

The Crown Nominations Committee report was discussed in advance of the CNC standing orders debate for this group of sessions. Key themes around confidentiality, the importance of the secret ballot and the need to be led by the Holy Spirit in appointments were discussed. It was decided to retain the secret ballot.

### **Appointment of Diocesan Bishops**

There were lengthy debates about how diocesan bishops are appointed. This followed the recent failure to appoint to the Sees of Carlisle and Ely. The first involved proposals from the House of Bishops to change Synod's standing orders for the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) which makes diocesan appointments, so as to make it less likely that the CNC would fail to agree on a preferred candidate. Crucially, the bishops wanted to exclude abstentions from the vote count, water down to 60% the 2/3rds majority required, remove the secret ballot, and give the person chairing the CNC (usually the relevant Archbishop) a casting vote. The proposals were seen by some as a 'power grab' by the House of Bishops, and were defeated in votes by houses, with particularly strong opposition from the House of Laity.

### **Vacancy in See Regulations 2025**

Emphasis was on making sure the Vacancy in See Committee (ViSc) is representative of the Diocese and ensuring inclusion of women. The restriction of the chair being a layperson was removed. Elected CNCs from ViSC now need at least one female clergy and one female laity to be members and no more than one person from a single worshipping community will be permitted. The new regulations passed. This has a bearing on the CNC process as ViSCs elect the diocesan representatives on CNCs. It was however pointed out during the debate that these new regulations will discriminate against larger parishes/churches, where most young people worship (despite the desire to improve the participation of young people – see below), and also those parishes where there are existing ex officio ViSC members, e.g. members of General Synod.

### **Financial Update**

The Chair of the Finance Committee gave a financial update to the Diocesan Finance Review. Simplicity and transparency have been at the heart of their work. Struggling diocese will be supported with an additional £200 million over nine years. £30m increase in funding per year in perpetuity and £20 million one-off grants for structural changes/pilots.

### **Strategy for Working Class Ministry**

A Private Member's motion was introduced by Revd Alex Frost (Blackburn) to

encourage people of working-class backgrounds into Ministry. Various speakers highlighted how working-class people can live out their God given vocations and overcoming prejudice, and the synod voted unanimously to explore how we can better serve those from working class backgrounds called into a variety of ministries. This motion was passed.

The Ministry Development Board is to work on a National Strategy to support this and report back to Synod within 12 months.

### **Sports and Wellbeing Ministry**

We had a presentation on Sports and Wellbeing ministry, highlighting the benefits of the ministry including the Church's aim to make the church younger and more diverse as well as a mixed ecology. This is to be encouraged.

### **Clergy Conduct Measure Legislation**

Synod considered the legislation on the updated Clergy Conduct Measure. There were a few amendments including the regulation of clergy holding office in royal peculiars, the removal of clergy of office in serious cases and relationship with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. The final measure was passed.

### **Recording Confirmations**

Canterbury Diocese introduced a Motion on Recording data on confirmations at the Parish level. It was recognised that candidates for confirmation should also be clear on the commitment to Christ prior to confirmation. This was universally regarded as a good decision that will strengthen the church and give a more accurate picture of the life in churches. This motion was passed.

### **Growing Younger and More Diverse**

Growing younger and more diverse was acknowledged as essential for General Synod. The financial implication of this motion is about £86,500 per annum. It was pointed out that there is a lack of age diversity on General Synod. It was agreed to include voices of young adults from ages 18-35. They will attend General synod to represent a wider group of about 200 drawn from across all dioceses. This motion was passed by a great majority.

### **Living in Love and Faith Update**

There was a presentation on the progress of the LLF process. It was emphasised the importance of doing deep theological work. Some raised concerns about the lack of speed of the process and others raised legal and logistical issues about moving forward.

### **Crown Nomination Committee Standing Orders**

CNC debate concerns the standing orders. The SO were amended to allow pairs to 'tag team' between sessions and allow the two Secretaries to deputise. The next amendment was to repeal the secret ballot within the committee. This was defeated. The use of interpreters for people with limited English language was approved.

### **National Church Governance Measure**

This relates to the launch and implementation of the new charity, Church of England

National services (CENS). Contributions included its improved simplicity and transparency and improved clarity of the national church. Amendments included the restriction of Commissioners funds, increasing transparency and to ensure a focus on the poorest parishes is at the heart of our spending. The latter passed. There was also an amendment to replace the Archbishops from CENS by Bishops elected from the House of Bishops.

### **Mission and Pastoral Measure**

There was support for the Measure in principle, but concerns were raised around the closure of churches, consultation about church buildings and unintended consequences.

### **Miscellaneous Items**

The Dean of Arches moved the legislative item on Safeguarding Regulations (Clergy Risk Assessment) to implement changes highlighted by the IICSA review.

Legal Officers Annual Fees Order 2025: A 10% increase was agreed. This will result in additional costs of £458000, £26700 to be borne by Diocesan Board of Finance and £191000 to be borne by Church Commissioners.

**Redistribution of funds:** The debate on this Hereford Diocese motion e was adjourned.

**Lastly were farewells and prorogations.**

**The next General Synod will be held in July 2025 in the Province of York**