

REPORT ON THE GENERAL SYNOD HELD IN FEBRUARY 2025

Overview

Given recent events and associated publicity we approached this group of sessions in some trepidation. One early outburst was swiftly overcome and overall business was conducted with dignity which will have helped restore credibility in our Church. Whether we made the best decisions will become clearer as events unfold. We spent a lot of time attending to a mass of amendments to legislation at the expense of more important and pressing issues such as diocesan finances. As ever the various debates were expertly chaired including some very long sessions led by our own Izzy McDonald-Booth.

Safeguarding

See Bishop Helen-Ann's Open Letter to the Diocese of Newcastle.

Safeguarding Code of Practice (Managing Allegations) was approved for use at diocesan level and above. There is no change to the procedures at parish level.

Presidential Address

The Archbishop of York gave the Presidential following a motion that tried to prevent him speaking. He began by inviting colleagues to lead us in a Litany of Penitence and a time of silence, focussing on our failings towards victims and survivors of abuse. Reflecting on the Beatitudes, he spoke of the help we need from outside, particularly in safeguarding; of the need for us to be honest about our failings; of the need for greater accountability; of the call to reconciliation, difficult as that might be. He went on to speak of his love for the Church of England and for all the acts of service and proclamation that take place every day and in every community.

Ecumenical and Anglican Visitors

Excellent speeches from The Evangelical Lutheran Archbishop of Estonia The Most Reverend Urmas Viilna and the Acting Primate of Canada The Most Reverend Anne Germond. Urmas Viilna welcomed us "to the future" – in Estonia only 26% of the population identify as Christian and Russia is on their doorstep. Anne Germond spoke of repentance in humility in the light of the Canadian church experience with their First Nations. She spoke of the value of the Anglican Communion in responding to the sufferings of others, citing the Middle East, South Sudan and Ukraine. She raised a vision of hope in difficult times. She also preached a beautiful homily at the Eucharist.

Finance

There was insufficient time to give proper consideration to a motion brought by the Bishop of Bath and Wells about the redistribution of funds. This will be eagerly awaited at our July group of sessions; the financial situation is becoming very serious in most of our dioceses. We did however receive an update on the Diocesan Finances Review commissioned by Archbishops' Council last year aimed at easing the stress on dioceses, simplifying the flow of

funds and working towards longer term financial health. We were informed that all dioceses had been consulted and were actively involved. We wish to check this with our finance team to ensure this is the case, ahead of further sharing of outcomes at General Synod in July. We were informed that it would be necessary to ‘cut our cloth’ in accordance with financial reality. On a point of detail, legal officers’ fees were approved.

National Church Governance Measure

The National Church Governance Measure GS2360A – was about the rules surrounding the reorganisation of the National Church Institutions (NCIs). A significant number of amendments were tabled relating to delegated functions, reporting, and scrutiny. This debate was lengthy due to the quantity of these amendments. Mostly these related to ensuring fair representation on all boards and committees and looking at being fully compliant with the Charity Commission. The measure will now go for final drafting and return to Synod for approval.

Crown Nominations Commission

GS2387 reported proposed changes to the standing orders relating to the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC). These were brought to Synod by the House of Bishops as a result of failures to nominate in Ely and Carlisle Dioceses. A couple of these changes were housekeeping/ changes that were seen to be needed now the current CNC process is several years old. For example, there are six pairs of members elected from General Synod, but the pairs could not “tag team” with one member having to commit to a CNC process from start to finish. The requirement for interpretation – particularly for Canterbury CNC, which will include members from the wider Anglican Communion – was agreed. Three changes did not pass. Currently, abstentions count as a vote against a candidate. The proposal to change this so that abstentions would be ignored was lost. Also lost was a proposal to reduce the voting threshold from two-thirds to 60%. Finally, the secret ballot was retained.

Vacancy in See Committee Regulations

These regulations were approved following helpful consultation despite a plethora of amendments that took up a lot of time but changed very little.

Living in Love and Faith

We were given a presentation with questions on Living in Love and Faith. Further work is ongoing around the guidelines for clergy in same sex relationship, with more theological work needing to be done. Questions have been raised around how a standalone PLF service might look, whilst synod was reminded that people’s lives are on hold waiting for answers around LLF and PLF.

Working Class Ministry

On Wednesday morning, a private members motion was debated. This was brought by Fr. Alex Frost, a vicar in Burnley and asked Synod to support a strategy for encouraging the

ministry (lay and ordained) of people from working class backgrounds. There were a number of speeches and synod voted unanimously to support this.

Racial Justice Agenda

Lord Boateng led a powerful debate drawing attention to the significant culture change we all need to embrace. A significant challenge, perhaps not confined to racial issues, is “what more can you do to make people not like you feel more comfortable in our church?” Synod agreed to the recommendations of the Archbishops’ Commission for Racial Justice, including the appointment of a racial-justice board, panel, and a lead bishop.

Clergy Conduct Measure

The new Clergy Conduct Measure (CCM) received final approval to replace the much-criticised Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM). It includes a more streamlined process, abolition of the 12-month time limit for serious misconduct, the integration of safeguarding professionals into the process, better protections against vexatious complaints, and more information-sharing between dioceses and provinces. Deposition from Holy Orders had been reintroduced for the most serious offences. Clergy from Royal Peculiars were added to the system. Further details of how CCM will work in practice will be decided at July GS, including a definition of the distinction between misconduct and serious misconduct. All passed with no-one opposing.

Clergy Risk Assessment Regulations

The synod passed the Safeguarding (Clergy Risk Assessment) Regulations 2025, part of the ongoing response to IICSA recommendations. In particular these regulations move responsibility for Risk Assessment from the Bishop to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO), as well as providing for external risk assessment if the DSO has a conflict of interest.

Inclusion of Young People

A motion requesting that “at least three and up to five young adults” represent, at Synod, a group of up to 200 young adults from across the dioceses to succeed the Church of England Youth Council, which was disbanded in 2019, was passed, with an amendment to ensure that “links are made with the opportunities provided for the voices of active disciples who are under 18 to be heard in a way that feeds into Synod”.

Statistics for Mission

It was agreed to add Confirmation numbers to the annual collection of Statistics for Mission.