

General Synod Report July 2025 Session - for Greater Dudley Deanery

The General Synod met between Friday 11th July – Tuesday 15th July at the University of York. I hope the following report gives you an insight into the business discussed over the 5 days and decisions made. Voting is mostly by show of hands however where there were counted votes either of the whole Synod or by houses, I have provided the voting figures as for/against/abstentions.

NB - my notes are taken during the debate, and I've tried to summarise 5 days of debate in a few pages so you can have access to the issues and decisions made and where it might impact on parishes in the Diocese of Worcester. I strive to make them as precise as possible and still give you the main flavour of the issues, however in the context of some debates that go over several hours I can't guarantee 100% accuracy or cover every point. If you would like further information all the papers for General Synod on the Church of England Website <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod/groups-sessions/general-synod-july-2025> and recordings of all the debates are available at the Church of England Youtube site, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLeck8GovYoaYzIgyOEIKZg>.

Friday 11th July 2025

1. Introductions and Welcomes

The Archbishop of York (ABY) welcomed members of Synod to York including new members and guest and the new Pro-Procurator of the Convocation of Canterbury.

2. Presidential Address by the ABY focusing on the deep waters of faith.

3. Report by the Business Committee – Synod commented on the agenda for the session.

4. A presentation was given by Brigadier Jaish Mahon, a senior member of the armed forces.

5. Spending Plans Presentation – Alan Smith (Church Commissioners) outlined the spending plans for 2026-2028 highlighting the growing ability to fund mission. Key areas for funding are safeguarding, clergy wellbeing, including encouraging consistent HR practice across all Diocese and increased stipends and pensions, as well as financing ordinands. The changes to pensions are possible because of the strong development of the clergy pension scheme and there will not be an increased contribution rate. He commented on investment in mission and ministry in parishes, particularly in low-income parishes through Lowest Incomes Communities Funding (LinC) with 73% of LinC is allocated to the 25% most deprived areas. Further details of the plans can be found later in this report at item 12.

6. There was an address from a guest from the Anglican Communion.

7. Questions – over 200 questions had been submitted across a wide range of issues and given written answers, including Living and Prayers of Love and Faith, Safeguarding, and Racial Justice Funding Full details can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/questions-notice-paper-july-2025.pdf>.

Saturday 12th July 2025

8. Redistribution of Funds (Hereford Diocesan Synod Motion (DSM))

The Bishop of Hereford outlined the reason for the DSM including the state of diocesan finances (now 60M in deficit) meaning low clergy wellbeing, fewer vocations, longer vacancies, demoralising congregations and affecting the mission of the Church. He suggested that local decision makers are far better placed to oversee the allocation of resources.

Other speakers presented a range of views including urging people to remember the success of strategically funded projects on meeting our priorities on becoming a younger and more diverse church. Alternatively, the need to fund 'bed rock' ministry in parishes and counter the narrative that the Church has created where the newly ordained no longer see their future in parish ministry but in centrally funded projects.

Alan Smith, Church Commissioners, and the Bishop of Sheffield also a Church Commissioner outlined the impact passing this motion would have on any discretionary funding in other areas, eg cathedrals, clergy retirement housing. The Bishop of Blackburn and the Archdeacon of Liverpool urged caution and commented that this was not a direct choice between local or central funding, discussing the new Triennium Funding and how this had already provided extra funding to re-energise parishes.

The Bishop of Sheffield proposed an amendment that would require the General Synod early in the next triennium to debate the approach to distributing funding, including support for local stipendiary ministry to ensure we avoid unintended consequences of adopting this motion from Hereford. The amendment was carried by a counted vote by houses - Bishops 22/9/2 Clergy 89/75/8 Laity 87/83/9.

In the final vote the amended motion was carried by a very large majority in a counted vote of the whole Synod – 361/7. The papers for the debate are also available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/gs-2396a-redistribution-of-funds-dsm-july-2025.pdf>

9. **National Church Governance Measure** – this work has been undertaken over the past 4 years to simplify the working of the national church institutions (NCIs) and increase transparency and openness including reducing the number of NCIs from 7 to the following 4:
- Church of England National Services, replacing the Archbishop’s Council. CENS will focus on the delivery of the Church’s strategic objectives and will **not** be chaired by either of the archbishops.
 - The National Society – focusing on education
 - The Pensions Board – regulating clergy pension and retirement provision.
 - The Church Commissioners – focusing on delivering strong investment return.

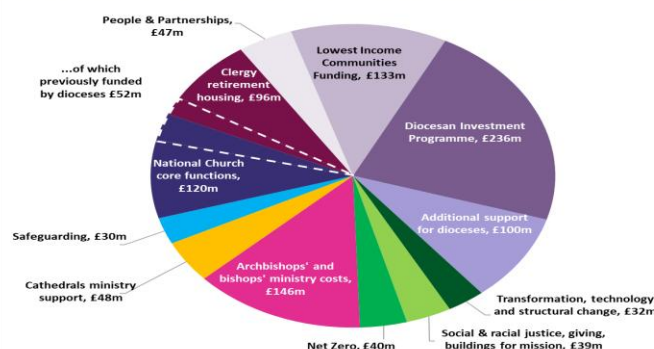
This was passed by counted vote by houses Bishops 27/0/0 Clergy 116/0/0 Laity 133/10/1

10. **Armed Forces Chaplain (Licensing) Measure.** This measure removes the need for licensed Armed Forces Chaplains to gain Permission to Officiate in any diocese they are temporarily based in and going forward can minister in any place in Canterbury or York provinces. This was passed unanimously.

11. **Two new members of the Archbishop’s Council** were appointed.

12. **Spending Plans: Debate** (following a presentation of the plans on Friday). The chart below shows the planned spending for 2026-2028.

Planned spending of £1.1bn for 2026-28 (excluding ‘historic’ matters and contingency)



£1.1bn distributions + £0.5bn ‘Historic’ (incl. Pre98 pensions, Safeguarding Redress and Spire) = £1.6bn for 2026-28

Full details are available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/gs-2402-spending-plans-2026-28.pdf>. The Bishop of London reminded us that these spending plans only cover

1/5th of the Church's expenditure and giving is therefore very important. The motion was passed by a large majority.

12. **Private Members Motion – Clergy Pensions** – in addition to the proposals in the spending plans, this motion asked for an independent review to ensure clergy are treated with dignity and fairness in retirement and historic injustices are rectified. There was a counted vote of the whole synod which passed the motion 328/0/3.
13. **Private Members Motion - Governance Review of the House of Bishops** – after extensive debate the Synod voted to move to next business 154/144 and not debate or vote on the motion.

Sunday 13th July 2025

14. **Liturgical Business** – Synod discussed the introduction of a new Festival of God the Creator and a new commemoration of the 21 Martyrs of Libya. Synod passed and this item will return to Synod after revision.
15. There was an **address by the ecumenical guest**, the Bishop of Tunsberg.
16. **The Armed Forces Chaplain Legislation** debated earlier in the Synod was passed.
17. **Church Growth and Revitalisation** – there was a presentation and discussion including hearing the stories of three young adults (age 18-25) who will be joining Synod, one who had become Church Warden at the age of 21 in his rural parish in Lancashire.
18. **Archbishop's Council Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report** – Synod took note of the report.
19. **Thy Kingdom Come** – renewing the call to prayer and evangelism. There was a presentation on the progress of the project over the last 10 years. This included how it developed from small beginnings. It included hearing from 4 young people sharing how prayer had been present in their lives. They were given a standing ovation. The Synod then heard stories of the impact of Thy Kingdom Come.
20. **Archbishop's Council Annual Report** was noted.

Monday 14th July 2025

21. **Date of Future Synods** – these were passed, and the business committee were asked to consider the needs of parents and those who worked if they wished Synod to become younger and more diverse.
22. **Abuse (Redress) Measure.** This provides the final draft legislation to underpin the commitment made to General Synod to bring forward a national redress scheme for victims and survivors of Church-related abuse.

In the final approval debate, speakers suggested that abuse and therefore the reason this legislation was needed was a shame on the whole Church of England and all of us in the Church of England need to treat survivors with respect, dignity and respect. The abuse measure was described as repentance made visible, and we were urged to collectively repent, perhaps starting by reading Psalm 32.

After a long debate, conducted in a sombre atmosphere the motion was passed by a counted vote by Houses Bishops 26/0/0/ Clergy 129/1/1 Laity 140/0/4.

23 Abuse Redress Rules to underpin the Abuse Redress measure (see item above). This included an amendment proposing funding provided by the interim support scheme must not be deducted from the amount of a redress payment. The Archbishop of York urged us to be generous. This was passed by a large majority - 237/32/12.

The final speakers in these two debates about Abuse Redress commented that after 5 years we have 'at last, set the record straight and we are on a new road' and a second thanked the survivors who have worked with us to put this scheme in place.

The Abuse Redress Rules were approved unanimously.

24. The Archbishop's Council Budget for 2026 was approved

25. Church Representation Rules (Amendment) – this includes a national timetable for elections which all dioceses will need to follow and a national contract with Civica for LUMI to deliver the electronic elements of elections. Passed in all houses. The rules for elections to General Synod for House of Bishops, Clergy and Laity were also passed.

Tuesday 15th July 2025

26. Address by the Bishop of Jerusalem who was greeted with a standing ovation. He expressed his gratefulness for every message, support and prayer that his Diocese has received over the past months. The Diocese covers 5 countries with 28 congregations and other institutions including hospitals. The hospital in Gaza has been attacked 6 times including a bombing on Palm Sunday. Some of their staff have been detained and one surgeon killed on his way home from the hospital. Medical supplies and food are in short supply. There are increasing attacks on Christian clergy in Jerusalem. His clergy and people are reflecting on what makes a Church in a time of war, deeply committed to the Lord's message of peace and love, the ministry of presence and resilience. The Church is to be a source of hope to the people. In hopeless situation. it ministers to. Where a Church is wounded and constrained in brutal and damaging times, we need the help of the whole Church (my summary). He ended with 'may God bless our partnership and may God bless the Church of England'.

27. Legislative Business – Church Representation Rules (Amendment) – this made changes to the rules including support for new members through the provision of centrally developed standardized training material by the General Synod Business Committee that can be passed on to new PCC members by the PCC Secretary/Incumbent/Church wardens. This was seen as a helpful move to give greater support to new and existing PCC members and would add to rather than replace locally held training. The rules will now go forward to the two houses of Parliament.

28. Armed Forces Chaplains (Licensing) Measure the measure was approved and will now go forward to the two houses of Parliament.

29. Private Members Motion Vocations Process and Issues in Human Sexuality - We debated the motion: That this Synod request that the House of Bishops remove any requirements in relation to Issues in Human Sexuality from the Vocations (Shared Discernment) Process. It was proposed by the Revd Mae Christie (Southwark). Her paper for the debate stated "*Issues in Human Sexuality*" was published 34 years ago as one of a succession of statements on human sexuality and has since taken on a role in the discernment process for both ordained and authorised lay vocations that it was never intended to have. General Synod currently includes members whose discernment took place before this statement was produced, and so have never had to agree to it, as well as members who were not even born when it was published'.

Early in the life of Synod the Bishop of London as the then lead bishop for LLF/PLF that Human Issues would be rescinded when the pastoral guidance was in place and this was expected in July 2023. Given the delay in the Pastoral Guidance for LLF/PLF the proposal was that as an interim measure to replace Issues in Human Sexuality with living consistently with the Professional Guidelines for the Clergy.

The debate was a moment of unity in what over the past few years has been a divided Synod in LLF/PLF debates. Speakers from all sides of the LLF/PLF debate spoke in favour of this motion and its amendment proposing to adopt the Professional Guidelines for Clergy as an interim measure while we wait for the pastoral guidance. The motion was passed by a very large majority and Issues of Human Sexuality will be replaced in the interim by the Professional Guidelines for the Clergy during the discernment process.

30. Response to terminally ill adults (end of life) Bill This motion asked that the Government work to improve funding and access to palliative care services **instead of** enacting a law that puts the most vulnerable at risk'. During this debate many members shared personal and emotional stories as well as expressing their view on the Bill currently going through Parliament. Most

speakers spoke in favour of the motion. The motion was passed by a counted vote of Synod 238/7.

31. Prorogation The Synod said farewell to the Bishops of Bristol, Leeds (retirement) and the Bishop of Islington (becoming Bishop of Melbourne) and was prorogued at 1.30.

As usual your Worcester Reps have been active during Synod in the Chamber and engaged with a range of fringe meetings. Robin Lunn spoke in the Spending Plans debate about future pension provision and submitted a question about retired clergy housing. Fraser Oates spoke in the Church Growth and Revitalisation debate and The Bishop of Dudley spoke in Abuse Redress Rules debate. Lynn Nichol, as a new member of the Panel of Chairs for General Synod, chaired two sessions of the Synod: an address by a member of the Armed Forces and a presentation and questions on Church Growth and Revitalisation.

The General Synod agenda is long and packed with legislative matters and other debates and issues and runs all day from 9 am – 7 pm in the evening with one break at lunch time. There are fringe meetings early in the morning, lunch time and again in the evening. These cover a whole range of issues, for example the Quiet Revival, The Churches response to Palestine, Racial Justice, Guidelines on the Professional Conduct of the Clergy, Conversations with the Church Commissioners and Net Zero. One tradition of the fringe at the York Synod session is the Open Synod Quiz held on Saturday evening, it aims to bring people together from different perspectives on Synod and is always an opportunity to relax after a day of intense debate and discussion of often complex and sometimes difficult issues. Just to report the Worcester Diocese Team were joint first at the end of quiz, unfortunately losing out on a tie break question to Leeds Diocese but it was our best performance so far in this Triennium!

I hope this report has provided some insight into the life of General Synod, issues debated and decisions made. It is a great privilege and honour for me represent the lay people of Worcester Diocese on General Synod. If you have any questions about any items in this report or future meetings, please do get in touch by emailing me at lynnnichol4@gmail.com.

Best wishes

Lynn Nichol, 15th July 2025