

Report of the July 2025 Sessions of the General Synod from Robin Lunn, Lay Member.

The Session of the General Synod, which has just concluded, was a more constructive, convivial and purposeful group of sessions than the 5 day trench warfare of February in London. I would heartily endorse the comments of the Archbishop of York at the close when he praised the amount of work which had been done and the spirit it had been done in.

This Synod discussed,

Redress Scheme for the victims of abuse.

The rules surrounding such a scheme. Both were passed in their final agreed form.

Redistribution of Funds. Diocesan Synod Motion.

National Church Governance Order. Final Approval.

Financial Reform.

Improvements to the Clergy Pension Scheme.

Armed Forces Chaplains (Licensing) Measure.

Governance Review of the House of Bishops.

Thy Kingdom Come- "Reviewing the call to Prayer and Evangelism".

Archbishops Council Annual Report.

Church Representation Rules.

Removing "Issues in Human Sexuality" from the Vocations Process.

Response to Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life Bill)

As stated in all my Synod reports, any views expressed are purely my own and do not in any way reflect an official view of the Diocese of Worcester.

I think it is appropriate to commence with the work done on the last morning concerning the removal of the House of Bishops teaching document, "Issues in Human Sexuality" from the vocations process. This document introduced on the 5th December 1991 was only ever intended to be a short term measure and not to have attached to it the significance it gathered in later years. The wording and inferences are very out of date and offensive and it was clear that during the debate on the Private Members motion to abolish it, that there was a rare uniformity on a matter linked to Human Sexuality.

Paul Waddell from Southwark moving the motion, described it correctly as being separate from LLF (Living in Love and Faith) and stating that it needs to be put out to pasture. "When you remove something malignant, you should do so by causing the least pain to the body". He also stated in that was the phrase of the session, that "No Canons were harmed in the making of this motion"! This had nothing to do with the doctrine of marriage, but everything to do with getting rid of an embarrassing and outdated document.

Matthew Edwards described the document as being a real block on vocations.

Lucy Davis from St. Albans declared that she had kept trying to give her copy away to new ordinands but sadly they kept returning it...

Professor Helen King opined that the document had not aged well, but that to respect all views they did not just want to remove it but put something in its place. This was to be the existing Clergy guidelines which are in the process anyway of being reviewed. She finished by calling for an end to the unintended reign of Issues!

Jenny Bridgman from Chester moved an amendment which allowed the Bishop of Chester Head of the Ministry Division and many others to support the motion to put the existing Clergy Guidelines in the place of Issues and not create a vacuum. This would be an interim arrangement using an already agreed document and guidelines.

At this point, Dr Ian Paul normally one of the most fervent voices for traditional teaching and values made a gracious intervention and urged that Synod go straight to the vote. There were a couple of other contributions from the Bishop of Chester and the Southern Prolocutor Dr Luke Miller who

explained how the teaching guidelines were being updated. He commented that things could be achieved, and this was an example if “People played nicely”.

The amendment was carried unanimously and only one member Debbie Buggs declared that she could not support the amended motion which was carried overwhelmingly. Issues are no more!

The last debate of the Synod was on the government’s Assisted Dying legislation which is currently in the House of Lords. The Bishop of London Sarah Mullaly who use to be the Chief Nurse is fast emerging as the main figure in public life opposed to the legislation. She explained that her career as a nurse tells her that this is unsafe. Successive governments have failed to reduce inequalities in health care and there is a widespread misunderstanding of palliative care. The government should be funding palliative care. This legislation will mean that our view of a valuable life will change. She went onto highlight death dealing practices.

Nick Land from York continued that view by talking about a Belgian Undertaker who was also involved in helping people to die (rather a conflict of interest) . The whole thing was very traumatic for families and the protections as currently set out are inadequate.

Rev Charlie Bell, urged that the experience in the House of Laity should be fully utilized. We also need to look at how we minister to the nation after/if the measure passes into law.

Dr Simon Eyre highlighted that the anomaly that we would not accept 2/3rds of our cardiac services being funded by charitable giving, so why should we do the same for palliative care.

Prudence Dailey told the moving story of her 92 year old mother who had recently asked her whether “she had lived too long”. She replied that perhaps she had, but it was important to make every day as good as it can be. Many people would feel that they were a burden for their families, which would be an issue.

Pigush Jani said that Kim Leadbitter had brought the bill forward for two main reasons, A. Autonomy of the human spirit and B. Not being a burden on your family. He also quoted how in Oregon where Assisted Dying is legalized, that over 50% of people utilize it for other purposes rather than health. Worrying.

Abigail Ogier. It is not up to me to decide what to do with my body it is up to God, but we need to recognize that many people take a different view.

Jane Patterson who has worked all her life in the NHS highlighted the improved focus on palliative care.

The Bishop of Blackburn spoke about the recent passing away of his father and the dignity of death. The vote in favour of the motion and against the Assisted Dying Bill could not really have been clearer. For 258 and against 7 with 7 abstentions.

Redistribution of Funds Debate.

Saturday was finance day as there were debates on the redistribution of funds to dioceses, about Church funds and the Clergy Pension schemes. As a person who works as an Independent Financial Planner, it was like being at work! However, it also empowered me to notice when representatives of the Church Commissioners were using “interesting” tactics to get their own way.

The Bishop of Hereford moving the motion explained that tis was about redirecting the yields not the capital of the 1997 changes in pension provision. He put the case of an existential threat to the Dioceses leading to less incumbents. People feel that too heavy a burden is falling on individual Churches. He welcomed the rises in Stipends and Pensions. The whole thrust is about how the income is distributed. Who knows best Dioceses and parishes or the central Church? We want to get away from all of the “Hoop Jumping” of applying for central grants. We are not incompetent at diocese level! Do we still have faith in the parish system? YES!

Stewart Fyfe from Carlisle declared that we have underfunded our rural parishes. Funding decisions have had a major impact.

As an example of the “interesting facts” I mentioned earlier the 1st Church Estates Commissioner Alan Smith declared that in order to fund a yield of 1% going to dioceses per annum (approximately 1%) there would have to be changes to how investments were made which would remove monies from other areas. He quoted a figure of £3.5 billion having to be invested in a different way. I challenged

this as inaccurate due to the motion and amendment speaking about a **fixed percentage and not a fixed amount**. If it is a fixed percentage, you should not have to make any investment changes while accepting that the figure might vary if investment returns were lower in some years than others. The Bishop of Sheffield (who is a Church Commissioner) moved an amendment calling for a review to report back next year. We don't just have a problem, we have a crisis. The budgetary crisis has led to a cutting of the number of parish priests.

The Bishop of Blackburn welcomed the recently announced Triennial funding and would vote against the motion as "you cannot spend your way out of a missional crisis, you cannot only grow yourself out".

Father Marcus Walker one of the leaders of "Save the Parish" asked the question of how the Church best thrives. Where does the power lie? The whole debate was really about the power of the Centre against that of the parishes and dioceses. It was one of devolution.

The Bishop of Chelmsford Dr Francis Ghali supported the Bath of Wells amendment which could only be put if the Sheffield one fell. The lack of funds was putting great pressure on our clergy morale which is very low. Stress levels amongst her clergy were very high. "The Holy Spirit cannot be expected to work in 9-year time frames".

The Sheffield amendment reducing the impact of the motion was carried, although I voted against it as I felt that the 1% yield should be devolved to dioceses.

The Archbishop of York made clear before we voted on the final amended motion that nothing was ruled out in a review. He went on to say that there needed to be greater accountability between national and local and the local and the national.

The amended motion was carried by 361 to 7 with 14 abstentions.

On the final debate on the new National Church Governance measure, the Bishop of Leeds in his final speech to Synod before retirement after 25 years on Synod said that most people did not know how he Church ran and the new measure would hopefully correct this and bring a change of culture. He congratulated the Synod for getting to the right place in the end.

Andrew Orange from Winchester said that the measure gives respectability to how monies are spent and for that reason he was unable to support it.

Ian Johnson from Portsmouth a long time critic of the central Church and its finance functions said that the challenges were too great and the oversight not good enough. "Assets over mission".

Stephen Hoffmeyer said that it was about good governance

Roy Faulkner declared that he did not like the motivation behind the bill. It protects staff and not he Parishes.

Charlotte Cook by contrast was very excited by the measure and declared that our "work is prayer".

Archbishop of York did not understand the objections as Synod had gone through all of the stages and were not rubber stamping anything.

Martin Sewell the tireless campaigner for safeguarding announced that he was stepping down from Synod provided the Redress Bill was passed (It was) as there was nothing more that he wanted to do. This was carried overwhelmingly in all 3 houses.

On the following measure on finance and Clergy Pensions, the Bishop of London spoke about the package and the return of the 2/3rds accrual rate on the Clergy's Defined Benefits pension scheme. I spoke in this debate on the issue of pensions and the Clergy Pension scheme. Stating that it is rather difficult in 5 minutes to explain the benefits of both Defined Benefits and Defined Contribution pension schemes, I welcomed the improvements to the Clergy scheme but called on future changes to look at a Defined Contribution option to act as a "top up" as this gave more flexibility to clergy and was a way of the Church knowing its fixed costs. I explained that I in no way wanted to undermine the Clergy Scheme. In finished by saying that I wanted a **"Defined Benefits Church but with aspects of Defined Contribution"**. In response, the Bishop of London declared that "those that know more about pensions than me, will hear what Robin has said and consider accordingly!"

Rev Rob Sutherland welcomed Link funding as we should be the Church of the Poor.

Julie Dziegel said that we were sleepwalking into Centralization by the call of Money”.

Nic Tall regretted that the package leaves Dioceses in the same place and we should back our Churches.

An amendment was brought to ensure that £20 million was included for Racial Justice which Synod had previously supported. This was in the context of a package of many hundreds of millions.

Daniel Matavu said that words were cheap and monies were required not pity and lament.

Charlie Bell said that we had to choose to support this not just wishing it could happen.

While the Clergy supported it 89 to 52, it was defeated in the House of Bishops 7 to 13 and in the House of laity by 75 to 80. I voted in favor not least as monies which had been put aside previously had not all been used for this very purpose.

The overall motion was then carried by 328-0. It was fair to say that some of the contributions on pensions matters were not that knowledgeable or informed.

The debate on the Governance of the House of Bishops was not very edifying due to the intemperate and frankly adversarial wording of the motion. The mover of the motion Dr Ros Clarke from Litchfield was calling for a full reworking of the governance of the Church of England. She spoke about a lack of integrity and wanted independent governance and culture.

Sufficient to say after a 50 minute debate described by Rev Kirk-Springs, “as a total waste of time” a motion was carried by 10 votes to move to next business. The House of Bishops are having a review anyway.

Sunday after the service in York Minster saw presentations on Church Growth and support for the Festival for God the Martyr and the 21 martyrs of Libya.

One of the key points which came out of the Church Growth seminar was the fact that the sell of Bibles has grown by 87% since 2019. A very interesting fact.

Rev Sally Gaze gave examples of growth from around the country. A priest from Leicester said that growth was coming from intentional listening.

Parishes which have received strategic funding have 25% higher attendances, 40% more giving and they pay 14% in Parish Share. This was questioned by some speakers.

On “Thy Kingdom Come”.

Bishop of Blackburn. We have the omni crisis in the Church and the wider world. Need to focus on,

A. Prayer. B. Partnership. C. Evangelism.

Bishop of Truro said that 172 countries were using the material.

Bishop of Leicester said that we should one evening at Synod dedicated to prayer which was enthusiastically welcomed.

Monday was dominated by the final vote on the Redress scheme for the survivors of abuse in the Church which covered the morning session and then the rules governing it which covered most of the afternoon.

Carl Fender in introducing the final measure said that the scheme should be non-adversarial, deliverable, and memorable. He also looked at “the close connection test” did the alleged abuser hold a role within the Church?

The legislation listed who was a Church Officer and Nigel Bacon moved a short amendment to add Lay Readers which was accepted.

Peter Adams reminded that we only function due to our laity.

Bishop of Winchester reminded the Synod that we would never have had to set up a redress board if we had all behaved in an appropriate manner. This is not about money but providing proper and acceptable redress. We need to do this as a fair recompense of our guilt and shame.

Bishop of Gloucester. Today the focus is on the “what”

Rev Paul Ayers was critical of the measure as how do we determine if a person has actively suffered from abuse? What are we going to find out?

Martin Sewell reminded how David Lammig from a previous Synod had done so much to get this up and running.

The lead safeguarding Bishop the Bishop of Stepney said that the whole Church had to face up to our sin and abuse. This has been a careful process and the measure allows us to do the right thing. The collective approach to individual dignity.

Vicki Brett, we must recognize that much of the abuse was done by silence. Redress is part of forgiveness. It is a pastoral imperative.

Bishop of London. The scheme is not an end in itself. We still have work to do.

Dr Simon Eyre. As a doctor he wanted to highlight confidentiality.

David Kemp warned about the threat from a category which we had not covered, "Pillar of the Church". Age gives the illusion of wisdom.

The final vote was held in silence which was,

Bishops For 26 Against 0, Abstain 0.

Clergy For 129. Against 1, Abstain 1.

Laity For 140. Against 0. Abstain 4. The Redress Scheme was carried.

Monday afternoon saw a discussion of the rules governing the scheme and later a long debate about the way in which the General Synod elections will be conducted next year. I spoke on an amendment as to whether addresses should be included on ballot papers. On a much lighter note, many people in the Chamber were following the epic Lords Test Match between England and India to its thrilling conclusion. There was a huge sigh of relief when England eventually won by 22 runs.

On Tuesday morning prior to the debates on Issues in Human Sexuality, the Archbishop of Jerusalem addressed Synod and re-laid just how challenging life was in the Holy Land. He received a standing ovation.

I hope you have found this digest of the recent Synod sessions of interest. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me on 07746-251083 or email rlunn47@gmail.com.

God Bless,

Robin Lunn.