

July 2026 General Synod Report by Robin Lunn Lay Member. Worcester Diocese.

Please find enclosed my last report for this Quinquennial of the General Synod which began in November 2021.

At this session of Synod we debated and discussed the following subjects,

“All Kinds of Minds”: Affirming Neurodiversity in the life of the Church”.
Same Sex Relationships Compatibility with Christian Discipleship. PMM
Amendments to the Clergy Conduct Rules
House of Clergy and House of Laity Election rules.
Vacancy in See Committee rules.
Renewing Trust. “Addressing the Challenges of Trustworthiness in the COE”
Safeguarding Update.
Route map to Net Zero for the Church.
Kairos Palestine.
Archbishops Council and Budget Report.
Support for Looked After Children. PMM (Private members Motion)
Protecting Nature on Church Commissioners Land.

As always, the comments and any views expressed are entirely my own and not those of the Diocese of Worcester. I have tried to concentrate on the key debates and apologies for missing matters of interest to you.

The Synod had an “End of Term” feel to it, but there were still important pieces of legislation concluded and decisions taken. In his opening address, the Archbishop of York reminded everyone of the 2021 pledge to, “Put Jesus at the Centre of Everything” and listed all the things which had been achieved particularly on Clergy Discipline, Safeguarding and the LLF prayers. He also drew attention to those things where work still needed to be done.

Robert Hammond the Chair of the Business Committee spoke in the report of a Synod session designed to tidy up loose ends ready for the new Synod in November along with several Private Members Motions. The first of these was about Neurodiversity. The mover of the motion Fiona McMillan explained what this meant in the context of the debate.

Stuart Craddock spoke about attempting to appear “normal” while Rev Howlett Shipley in recommending appropriate training courses declared, “we are all normal for us, we all think we are normal, but what is normal?”

Rev Robert Thompson quoted various biblical figures who do not conform to the stereotyping of what people should be like and called on everyone to recognize people’s gifts in the eyes of God.

Vicky Brett from Peterborough opined that, “The world needs all types of brain”. Important to be aware of that some people speak more directly than others due to their conditions.

Mary Durlacher declared that, “We should make the invisible visible”.

A recurring theme was that there was no such thing as “normal” but one speaker warned that bad behavior could often be excused as neuro diverse.

The motion was overwhelmingly carried and served as a useful education piece of work for many.

At the Question Time spread over 2 sessions, I asked two questions about the number of Churches closing to worship in the last year where they had data and how this compared to new churches and places of worship being opened. I was pleased with the answers that I received from Sir Robert Buckland the 3rd Church Estates Commissioner who went into more detail than I had expected.

During 2025, 26 Churches had closed which was far outweighed by the number of new Worshiping Communities inline with the objectives in our diocese. The central Church do not gather this data centrally, but what they had received from the 42 dioceses indicated that 1025 new Worshiping Communities had been set up with 448 closing in 2025.

Question Time remains an important part of Synod, and I have always tried to ask questions which are relevant to our wider mission as well as the internal workings of the Church in this diocese.

After a motion on Digital Communications was not voted on due to most of the work already having been done, we were informed as to why the Church Governance measure had been withdrawn temporarily from consideration by the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Houses of Parliament. The Committee were clearly waiting for our final decision on Safeguarding structures and provision before making a decision on anything else

On late Saturday afternoon, we did group work on “Promoting Unity in our Nation” and the role the Church could play.

Despite the busy schedule and debates, we did find time on Saturday evening to watch the World Cup Quarter Final between England and Norway in the James College dining room. A thoroughly tense, nervous but ultimately successful evening was enjoyed by many in a very friendly environment!

After the uplifting joy of the Sunday morning service in York Minster, and an address by the Ecumenical visitor, the rest of Sunday afternoon was taken up with debates on “Hope for all Creation” and an update on how the Church was progressing in its plan to reach Net Zero by 2030. In this debate, the Bishop of Lancaster declared that, “God is the ultimate Scientist” and pointed out that an Eclipse is never late so that climate developments follow a very predictable path. Mike Royal used the example of Ghana as a lived experience for him. The country had major floods last year made worse by single use plastics blocking up the drains. As a result, there was mass action to unblock the drains and reduce use of this type of plastic to avoid repeating.

The Bishop of Norwich declared, that “Selfishness, Apathy and Greed” were the 3 major challenging issues on Climate Change. We know what is required, it is a question of doing it. The Bishop of Manchester spoke about the UK signing the Oceans Treaty.

Liturgical Business to create a “Festival of Creation in Christ” for the first Sunday in September received final approval by 250 votes to 1. This will provide a focal point at the beginning of September for preaching on creation and the protection of God’s planet.

In the discussion about Net Zero and 2030, various speakers looked back to the February 2020 debate when General Synod voted for 2030 rather than 2045. The Bishop of Norwich (unlike myself) voted against 2030 but has come to realize that 2030 has galvanized the whole Church and we have made far more progress than we would otherwise have done. He quoted some of the extra benefits such as,

A. Warmer Spaces. B. Cost Savings for Churches. C. Reduced Costs.

Our Carbon omissions have reduced by the end of 2024 from £415,000 tonnes to 365,000 with that reduction likely to gather pace when we see new data. One perhaps unknown point is that while Churches are responsible for 32% of carbon omissions, the largest share at 43% is Church Schools.

Sir Robert Buckland the 3rd Church Estates Commissioner said that credit for the progress belongs to Clergy, Church Wardens and volunteers. This has never been about edicts from the Centre. It is about supporting Churches to act. He reminded Synod that the Church Commissioners were funding £40 million of measures in the 2026-2028 to help in the progression to Net Zero. He wanted to ensure that Church Buildings were more welcoming, warmer and more flexible to serve the community and mission. He thought that “Ambitious goals focus minds”.

The Head of Finance Carl Hughes, spoke of measuring outcomes and getting value for money.

Rev Campion-Spall highlighted an example in her parish which reflected that the Church was aware of the big picture and committed to the future.

Catherine Rhodes gave a list of reasons why we should carry on and also answered a point raised by a couple of speakers re the amount of Solar energy now being generated in China.

The overall motion was overwhelmingly approved.

We then had the two most challenging debates of the session of which the first was on the Kairos Palestine debate. This was an emotive issue for many as highlighted by an attempt to move onto next business at the start which was comfortably defeated.

The mover of the motion Canon Stewart Fyfe stated that the Kairos document came from the Palestinian Church and that our silence on the matter would not be being neutral but would lead to pain by that Church. He was caught up in the October 7th 2023 atrocities and also highlighted the violence from the Israeli settlers in the West Bank. He urged that we give the Palestinian Church hope.

In a very moving speech, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave an account of her recent visit to the Holy Land. She stated that we are called to a new solidarity with the Palestinian people. We as a church deplore both Anti Semitism and Anti Muslim views, and she closed by declaring, **“I am a Pastor, not a Politician!”**

The Bishop of Gloucester declared that it was important to call out violence on both sides and that time was running out for Palestinian Christians.

Several speakers disagreed with the motion and supported the position of the Israeli government.

Jeremy Moody made a very appropriate point that anyone accusing the motion of being Anti Semitic had clearly not read it properly. He was very critical of the Settlor Community.

The Bishop of Southwark spoke about the “Balance of Power” and having visited Israel many times was keen to save it from itself.

Several amendments were accepted to improve the original text thus enabling more people to being able to support it.

The debate paused at 21.45 and resumed the following morning which was no bad thing, as the tenure of the debate improved. The Archbishop of York reminded us of the standing ovation given to Bishop Hasan a year ago and said that we are now being asked to do something much more difficult than standing and cheering. We are being asked to get involved. It is also important to protect the character of Jerusalem.

Valerie Hallard who had done much work to bring the motion together and who has considerable experience of the areas discussed stated that the situation for Palestinians was becoming “More and more desperate” The West Bank is home to 4 million people and there are 90 checkpoints and many more unofficial ones which create issues for people moving around in a way we would find incredibly difficult in our daily lives.

The Ecumenical visitor Stephen Maxwell highlighted how difficult life was being made for Christians in the area. He said that the British government was actively protecting Jewish people in the UK, so pressure should be put on the Israeli government to do the same for Christians.

Christina Burgess called for a two state solution and praised the UK government for its recognition of the Palestinian state.

The Bishop of Manchester called out the violence of the settlor community. He also reminded people of the Synagogue attacks in Manchester and declared, “My Heart would break if I have to address my City for a third time”.

The Bishop of Blackburn was against the motion as he said that the “nice” distinctions which we were using made no allowance for the fact that the two communities did not do nuance. The debate had achieved its aim of publicizing the Palestinian cause but we should not vote on it as there will be winners and losers.

Despite this, Synod did vote and the motion was comfortably carried in all 3 houses with 253 in favour compared to 47 against and 70 abstentions.

The debate which I appreciate will have caused the most distress and concern to people was Professor Helen King's PMM on Same Sex Relationships Compatibility with Christian Discipleship which was passed in terms of votes but was lost due to the House of Bishops voting 14-11 against with 4 abstentions. This after they had supported an amendment. The main motion was supported by a majority of 14 in the House of Clergy and 18 in the House of Laity. **I voted in support of the motion.**

Prof Muriel Robinson set out that the motion was to establish a point of principle rather than the process driven LLF (Living in Love and Faith). This was not a debate about the bible, or a rerun of LLF or an attempt to redefine marriage. It was about reaffirming those that are LGBTQ+ are welcomed in the Church. She could not accept that God created people that are being excluded.

Adam Kendry an Armed Services Chaplain compared both institutions and their differing approaches. He urged all those who could not accept the motion to abstain rather than create further distress. Ed Shaw said that it created too narrow a definition and could not accept it. Rev Jake Madin on Zoom held up a picture of a duck and said that it was not a rabbit. This motion was a duck with a rabbit hidden in it (You had to be there!)

Jamie Harrison the Chair of the House of Laity moved an amendment not approved by the mover of the motion, to bring some concluding clarity to the LLF process. He also wanted to set out a guide to the new Synod in November. This was not supported by the Clergy and Laity and therefore fell. A key speech against was from the Bishop of Grantham who regretted that he was administering in a more polarized Church. He asked us to be more pastoral and kinder.

A more favorable and helpful amendment from Chris Dalliston which declared, "That this Synod affirm that all baptized, believing and faithful persons regardless of sexual orientation are full members of the body of Christ and delight in the lives and ministries of LGBTQIA+ people in the Church of England, and recognize a legitimate range of theological perspectives".

This was passed comfortably in all 3 houses.

Rev Vaughan Roberts declared that we all needed to face a reality that there was no meeting in the middle on this fundamental issue.

Sam Wilson declared that the motion did actually name what we are talking about.

The Bishop of Birmingham posed an intriguing question as to what "legitimate" means in this context and Synod should be mindful of this before they vote.

Prof Robinson in her summing up declared that, "We cannot discern, if we do not allow discerning voices".

While a real pity that one of the 3 Houses voted the motion down, progress was made and greater understanding engendered during the debate.

After a rather meandering discussion on the report of trust within the Church, Monday closed with the Diocese of Worcester members conducting closing prayers.

The last morning saw unanimous support for a motion on creating a Lead Bishop role about Looked after Children. Billy Jo O'Leary who had been in care herself, said that there were over 100,000 children in care in the UK and 4 would be admitted during the course of this debate. She showed a heat map of areas of the country who had the most looked after children and our diocese scored highly on this.

There were many moving speeches not least from the Bishop of Southall and Nottingham who has been a foster carer with his wife for 14 years. He was concerned about the fall in people fostering due to "Burn out" and lack of care. The Church can broker important partnerships.

Robert Thompson urged us to be prophetic on this issue. It costs £300,000 a year to place a child and highlighted the number of Care Companies now owned not by Local Authorities but by Private Equity firms.

The Bishop of Rochester said that the motion filled a gap and was very missional.

Diana Tremayne declared that, “Our greatest strength is not to have survived but to have been loved” Kashmir Garton from our diocese, spoke of her experience in the probation service. The Church cannot undo the trauma they have gone through but they can help.

The motion passed 282-0.

The final debate saw an amended motion about rewilding be approved. The Bishop of Norwich our lead Bishop on the Climate, declared that he was a Pragmatist and wants the Church Commissioners to be set targets which were sustainable. We need food security. 90% of Church Commission tenants are already involved in biodiversity and we can deliver for a better countryside by following the existing policies rather than an arbitrary target.

This had the support of Cathy Rhodes Environmental lead on the Archbishops Council.

The Bishop of Dudley said that we needed good farmers farming good land, both conventional and organic.

The amendment was carried and the motion then adopted overwhelmingly.

So thus ended the final session of this 5 year term of the General Synod where it has been a pleasure to serve and report back to you after some often very challenging meetings. I trust you have found the accounts of interest and if you have any questions for me, please email rlunn47@gmail.com

God Bless,

Robin.

Robin Lunn. House of Laity Member of the General Synod.