

# Report on July 2025 General Synod Group of Sessions

Synod met at York University from Friday 11th July to Tuesday 15th July 2025. The sessions in York are more informal than those in London, with the opportunity for Synod members to talk over meals and at the bar in the evening, and attend fringe sessions.

This was a very full group of sessions with several important pieces of legislation coming to the Synod, and this was without any substantive discussion of the controversial LLF/PLF proposals. Money matters loomed large on the agenda.

## Finances

- The Church's '**triennium**' **spending** plans for 2026-28 were discussed. This included an increase in Church Commissioners' funding from £1.2bn to £1.6bn over the three years, and proposals for a significant (10%+) uplift in clergy stipends from April 2026. The 2026 budget of the Archbishops' Council was also debated.
- A private members' motion urging the Archbishops' Council to improve **clergy pension provision** and retirement housing was unanimously approved.
- Final approval was given to the **Abuse (Redress) Measure** and associated rules which established in law a £150m redress scheme for survivors of Church-related abuse. This legislation is now with the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament for scrutiny before final approval in the House of Commons.
- There was a debate on a **radical 'redistribution'** proposal from the Diocese of Hereford to oblige the Church Commissioners to disburse 1% of their assets each year (c£100m) to support struggling dioceses and in particular to subsidise stipendiary clergy. This gave rise to a lively debate which highlighted the increasing tension and lack of trust between hard-pressed dioceses, many of which are facing large structural deficits and demoralised and overworked parish clergy, and the national Church, with its emphasis on targeted 'strategic' funding of growth projects through the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). It was pointed out that the Church Commissioners would have to ring-fence at least £3.5bn of their £11bn of assets to support such an annual inflation-linked disbursement in perpetuity, which risked simply 'subsidising decline', and which would have the effect of severely curtailing spending on other priorities. In the end the motion was neutered by an amendment which kicked discussions about 'support for local stipendiary ministry' into the long grass of the next 'triennium' spending review (2029-31).

## Governance

Final approval was given to a **National Church Governance Measure** which restructures national church institutions so that most functions are centralised into a new trustee-led charity, Church of England National Services (CENS). This will abolish the Archbishops' Council and change the structure of committees and the National Church Institutions (NCIs) to ensure better accountability and governance. Ros Clarke, from our diocese, had a Private Member's Motion on the **governance and culture of the House of Bishops**. Although it was discussed, it did not go to a vote. The Bishop of Stepney gave a moving speech, highlighting the issue of sexual harassment within the house, and it is to be hoped that a review commissioned by the House of Bishops addresses this and other concerns.

## Living in Love and Faith

The LLF project did not figure very large in this group of sessions, as the House of Bishops is still trying to agree, ahead of the next Synod meeting in February 2026, a package of proposals on 'bespoke' (standalone) services of blessing for same-sex couples in church and clergy and the licensing of clergy in same-sex civil marriages, and some form of 'pastoral reassurance' for those who are unhappy with the proposed changes. The Archbishop of York did however state in his opening presidential address that 'we seem no nearer a settlement that can hold us together'. At a fringe meeting it was confirmed that the national LLF team are

considering contingency plans in the event that there is no agreement in February. A particular problem is what form of 'pastoral reassurance' would be acceptable to bishops: an initial proposal for 'delegated episcopal ministry' for traditionalists has not found favour with many bishops, who see it as undermining episcopacy.

On the final morning there was a debate on a Private Member's Motion calling on the House of Bishops to remove a requirement for ordination candidates to conform their lives to a 1991 teaching document, **Issues in Human Sexuality**, which affirms a traditional doctrine of marriage and sexual ethics. The original proposer of the motion argued that the document was outdated in its terminology and deterred LGBTQ+ candidates from putting themselves forward for ordination. Others contended that while Issues did indeed need to be replaced, there needed to be new guidance to replace it, consistent with the Church's teaching on marriage.

In an encouraging show of co-operation, a 'friendly' compromise was agreed by which Synod voted overwhelmingly to drop Issues while replacing it with an 'interim' requirement that ordination candidates live consistently within the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy. These guidelines refer to a later (1999) House of Bishops teaching document which still affirms that 'sexual intercourse...properly belongs within marriage exclusively.' Marriage is assumed to be as defined in the Canons (Canon B30 – 'marriage is in its nature a union...of one man with one woman'). In a clarifying statement issued on 23rd July, the House of Bishops confirmed the immediate replacement of Issues, but also reiterated that 'the change does not alter the Church's doctrine or canonical requirements' in relation to discerning new candidates for ordination.

## Other business

- A debate about church growth and revitalisation, and a discussion of the 'Thy Kingdom Come' prayer and evangelism initiative.
- Synod also approved plans to amend the Common Worship liturgical calendar, introducing a new Festival of God the Creator (first Sunday after 1 September) and a new Commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya. This liturgical business was introduced by our own Bishop Michael in his role as Chair of the Liturgical Commission.
- The Armed Forces Chaplains (Licensing) Measure was agreed within the five days of Synod, in a feat of very speedy legislating. This facilitates the movement of chaplains around the country by providing for their licensing by the Archbishop of Canterbury, rather than diocesan bishops. The debate was an opportunity for Synod to affirm the valuable role that chaplains play in HM Armed Forces.
- Synod agreed on revised election rules for the next quinquennium (2026-31), with voting due in autumn 2026.
- There was a moving address from the Archbishop of Jerusalem about the situation in Gaza.
- Synod also overwhelmingly reaffirmed its opposition to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill and called on the government to improve funding for palliative care services.

All the papers from Synod are available, if you'd like to know more:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod/groups-sessions/general-synod-july-2025>

Videos of the sessions can also be viewed, and you can find some of our Diocesan representatives speaking in several debates:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpbUZrqhrlmWE-LHnW1-dik](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpbUZrqhrlmWE-LHnW1-dik)

As ever, do contact me if there's anything more you'd like to know about General Synod and please pray for your General Synod reps - the weight of our decision making hangs heavy on us, and we need the Lord's guidance and grace in all our reading, speaking, contributing and voting. Our next meeting is in February 2026.

Amanda Robbie, General Synod Laity

July 2025