

REPORT FOR DEANERY SYNOD ON THE FEBRUARY SESSIONS OF GENERAL SYNOD

General Synod met at Church House in Westminster between 10 – 14 February 2025. This was an important meeting. The headlines are as follows:

1. Safeguarding

- 1.1. GS considered and debated the Makin Review of the horrific abuses of John Smyth and heard testimony from some survivors as a prelude to considering proposals for the future of safeguarding in the C of E in the wake of the Jay and Wilkinson Reports. A motion was carried calling on those in leadership roles to redouble efforts to implement best safeguarding policies and accepting, at the request of victims and survivors, that cases cannot simply be labelled “historic” when they have continuing effects on those affected.
- 1.2. GS had two proposals before it for the future of safeguarding, known as Model 3 and Model 4. Model 3 was for the creation of an independent Scrutiny Body. Model 4 was for an independent Scrutiny Body **and** a separate independent body which would employ all safeguarding staff nationally.
- 1.3. The Bishop of Blackburn moved an amendment to set up the Scrutiny Body (Model 3) immediately and to work towards Model 4 by further investigating the legal and practical difficulties which would need to be overcome. GS voted for the Bishop of Blackburn’s amendment.
- 1.4. GS also passed new codes of practice on:

1.4.1.Managing Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations.

1.4.2.Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations.

2. Racial Justice

2.1. GS received a presentation by the Right Hon. Lord Boateng, chair of the Archbishops' Council for Racial Justice reporting on the completion of the 3 year term to monitor the recommendations in *From Lament to Action*.

2.2. Broadly, it was felt that progress had been made but that there was still a way to go. Lord Boateng made some strong comments on perceived inertia in the established structures of the Church.

2.3. GS approved a motion calling for Dioceses to share good practices; to give priority to the collection and measurement of data, and that deaneries and parishes should be encouraged to participate in the racial justice programmes. The Racial Justice Unit was also tasked with undertaking the necessary evaluations in order to enable GS to review further progress by 2027.

3. Diocesan Finances

3.1. A presentation was made to GS on proposals to be considered by the Triennium Funding Working Group for spending plans for 2026-2028.

3.2. Noting that Dioceses have suffered a level of acute financial pressures post pandemic the proposals included a recommendation for additional support to Dioceses in the order of £200M over a 9 year period, tapering down over time.

- 3.3. It was also proposed that a more robust and transparent framework for Synodical consideration of national budgets / spending plans should be introduced.
- 3.4. The outcome of this work will be brought back to GS at the July group of sessions.

4. Sports & Wellbeing Ministry (SWM)

- 4.1. A report was received on the work of the National Sport & Wellbeing Project over its first 3 years.
- 4.2. Emphasis was placed on how sport and wellbeing can enable us to be “a church for the whole nation”, providing the opportunity to connect with over 60% of England’s population, the vast majority of whom are not regular churchgoers.
- 4.3. Reference was made to the findings of Balcar & Parker (2024) that SWM is a clear and obvious solution to helping dioceses achieve their strategic aims to make the church younger and more diverse and to enable the growth of a “mixed ecology”.
- 4.4. GS recognised the missional potential here.

5. Clergy Risk Assessment Regulations 2025

New Regulations replacing the 2016 Regs. for risk assessments of clergy were passed into effect.

6. Guest Addresses

Addresses, both of which received standing ovations, were given by:

- 6.1. The Most Revd. Urmias Vilma, Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia who addressed concerns about how the church should approach preparations for war in the light of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict but emphasised that, as Christians, our eschatological hope is of light overcoming the darkness; and
- 6.2. The Most Revd. Anne Germond, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada who, in the light of the safeguarding debates, spoke of her church's continuing lamentations for Canada's residential schools in which indigenous children were abused physically, sexually and culturally.
- 6.3. Both speakers touched on declining attendances in their churches. Urmias Vilma sought to emphasise that decreasing numbers of churchgoers did not necessarily mean increasing numbers of atheists as people sought other forms of spirituality. Anne Germond said that whilst some Canadian dioceses were well resourced others were extremely poor: in one the Diocesan Bishop is the only stipendiary clergy. In some areas, while attendance is low, closing churches would mean people would need to travel 6-8 hours to receive communion.

7. Working Class Ministry

- 7.1. It was noted that most ministers are not from working class backgrounds and GS approved a motion seeking to encourage the ministry of people from such backgrounds by instituting a national programme for working class vocations. In moving the motion, the proposer called for a different approach, pointing out that, "*If you always do what you've always done, you'll always have what you've already got*".

- 7.2. One speaker from Manchester from a working class background spoke of the “*cringe*” that the working class always feel in a middle class environment and that education is not sufficient of itself to banish structural inequalities. Another spoke of “Ronnie” an ex prisoner with tattoos who wished to pursue ordination but who was concerned and anxious that his face would not fit.
- 7.3. A speaker from Liverpool endorsed the cringe factor but noted that she felt she had been from the last “mobile” generation who had been able succeed despite being brought up on a council estate: but that the same opportunities were not available now.
- 7.4. The Archbishop of York revealed that he had not been brought up in a church environment; that he had achieved only 3 GCEs at his secondary modern school; and that he had only managed to get A levels and a place at university by joining a girls’ school in the 6th Form.

8. Clergy Conduct Measure

- 8.1. Consideration was given to a new Clergy Conduct Measure. Its main points were:
- 8.1.1. To differentiate between grievances, misconduct and serious misconduct.
 - 8.1.2. To abolish any limitation periods for serious misconduct.
 - 8.1.3. To provide for deposition from Holy Orders for very serious misconduct.
 - 8.1.4. To provide for restraint orders against vexatious complainants.
 - 8.1.5. To provide that the new Measure is not to be used for purely theological differences.

- 8.2. Following debate the Measure was passed to the Legislative Committee for further consideration.

9. Vacancy in See Committees Regulations 2025

Following the failure of two Vacancy in See Committees (Ely and Carlisle) to achieve any sufficient consensus to enable the appointment of a Diocesan Bishop to take place, new Regulations for the membership and conduct of such committees were approved by GS.

10. Growing Younger & More Diverse

- 10.1. A paper was received on hearing and responding to the voices of young adults and a debate took place on the continuing work to enable the voice of young adults (18-25) to feed into the work of the national church.
- 10.2. In support of listening more to young voices Bonhoeffer was cited: *“Christians are always speaking when they should be listening and, therefore, speaking beside the point”*.
- 10.3. It was urged that the *“prophetically uncomfortable”* voice of the young must be heard.
- 10.4. GS voted for 3 young representatives from this age group to be invited to the July sessions and for standing orders to be amended to allow more than 3 in the future.

11. Living in Love & Faith

- 11.1. Work on this controversial area continues. An update was received by GS. A final view is not expected before November 2025 or January 2026.
- 11.2. The view was expressed that the currently allowable prayers for same sex couples during a standard service do not contradict the longstanding views of the Church on marriage but that the stand alone services being considered could potentially do so. Significant theological issues are therefore raised which need further consideration.
- 11.3. Also under continuing consideration is the proposal for Delegated Episcopal Ministry for those whose consciences will not allow them to accept any significant variation from the church's traditional views on holy matrimony.

12. *National Church Governance Measure*

- 12.1. The National Church Governance Measure provides a new statutory framework for the governance of certain national functions of the Church of England and will replace the National Institutions Measure 1998 when in force.
- 12.2. The key changes introduced by the draft legislation are:
 - 12.2.1. the reduction of the National Church Institutions from 7 to 4;

12.2.2. the creation of the new Church of England National Services (CENS) and the transfer to CENS of most of the non investment functions of the Church Commissioners;

12.2.3. the establishment of a permanent Synodical Scrutiny Committee to scrutinize national decisions taken by the National Church Institutions.

12.3. The procedures for approving legislation by the GS are complex. This bill has been through the Revision Committee stage and came back to GS for the Revision stage. A long list of potential amendments was considered by GS at this stage.

12.4. Possibly the most significant amendment was that proposed by Rev. Marcus Walker and accepted by GS that CENS, when using any sums paid to it by the Church Commissioners should have particular regard to making additional provision for the cure of souls where most required. In other words, particular consideration should be given to the support of ordained parish ministry in areas struggling to afford this from their own resources.

13. General Synod Election Rules

GS approved various rule changes for the election of candidates to the GS which will be relevant for the inauguration of the 12th GS on 17 November 2026.

14. Thy Kingdom Come

14.1. GS took note of a report on the journey of Thy Kingdom Come over the past decade.

- 14.2. Over that period Thy Kingdom Come has grown into a global ecumenical movement uniting millions of Christians of differing denominations across the world to pray for friends and families to come to faith between Ascension and Pentecost annually.
- 14.3. The report renewed the call to prayer in evangelism and mission within the C of E and beyond.

15. Mission & Pastoral Measure & Regulations

- 15.1. GS gave initial consideration to this draft Measure and accompanying Regulations.
- 15.2. Each Diocese has a Mission & Pastoral Committee (MPC) established under s2 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. In this Diocese this function is fulfilled by the Bishops' Diocesan Council. This will continue to be the case.
- 15.3. The draft Measure and Regs. set out detailed provisions for the general functions of MPC's and how to discharge the duties placed upon them.
- 15.4. The draft Measure and Regs. will now go to the Revision Committee stage.

16. Diocesan Synod Motion: Redistribution of Funds

- 16.1. Perhaps the most controversial and far reaching motion which had emerged from the Hereford Diocesan Synod was not reached through lack of time and had to be adjourned. It is expected, but not guaranteed, that it will come back before Synod at the July Sessions.

- 16.2. In essence the Motion, if eventually passed after debate, will call upon the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners to effect a redistribution of c £2.6 billion in financial resources directly to Diocesan Stipend Funds to be used to support parish ministry in the ways discerned locally to be most effective in enabling growth and sustaining the C of E's commitment to be a Christian presence in every community.
- 16.3. GS reps, were quite heavily lobbied in advance to vote in favour of this Motion but, as stated above, the Motion was not reached for debate.

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12 March 2025