

Amersham Deanery Synod

Report on February 2025 General Synod group of sessions

General Synod met in London from 10 to 14 February. The Living in Love and Faith (LLF) project has dominated Synod since I was elected in 2021, but on this occasion just one hour was allocated to LLF, as the House of Bishops has delayed bringing firm proposals, probably until next year, to allow for more theological work. But the deep divisions caused by LLF, between ‘progressives’ and ‘traditionalists’, loomed large over all the proceedings, with many votes on non-LLF issues, including safeguarding (the key focus of this group of sessions) and the appointment of diocesan bishops, being largely split along party lines.

Safeguarding

In many ways, and unsurprisingly given the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, this was the ‘safeguarding Synod’. There was a debate on the [Makin Report](#) into the abuses of the late John Smyth, which resulted in a unanimously-approved motion in which Synod declared its repentance of ‘failures of safeguarding’ in the Church. This was followed by a debate on safeguarding independence, following the recommendations in last year’s report, [The Future of Church Safeguarding](#), authored by Professor Alexis Jay. A ‘response group’ of bishops and others has been set up to consider the report, and although this could not reach a conclusion on a way forward, the lead bishop (Stepney) expressed a clear preference for the most radical option, ‘Model 4’, the establishment of two independent bodies: one responsible for delivering all Church safeguarding activities (currently managed by 85 organisations in the national Church, dioceses and cathedrals), and the other responsible for providing scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding. Synod balked at this option, despite strong arguments in favour from some survivors and victims of abuse, with many Synod members believing that it was over-complex and unprecedented, and risked creating more safeguarding problems. A less radical option, ‘Model 3’, which transferred just the scrutiny function and part of the National Safeguarding Team into new independent bodies, was also rejected as an end goal. Instead, Synod voted for a compromise proposed by the Bishop of Blackburn, ‘Model 3.5’, which supported Model 3 as a short-term solution but which called for *‘further work as to the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model 4.’* Press headlines next day suggesting that Synod had [ignored ‘expert advice’](#) were wide of the mark; many safeguarding experts, including over 100 diocesan and cathedral safeguarding professionals, had expressed their concern about the viability of Model 4.

Appointment of diocesan bishops

Two lengthy debates, each with numerous amendments tabled, had a bearing on how diocesan bishops are appointed. This followed the recent failure to appoint diocesans in Carlisle and Ely. The first involved proposals from the House of Bishops to change Synod’s standing orders for the **Crown Nominations Commission** which makes diocesan appointments, so as to make it less likely that the CNC would fail to agree on a preferred candidate. Crucially, the bishops wanted to exclude abstentions from the vote count, water down to 60% the 2/3rds majority required, remove the secret ballot, and give the person chairing the CNC (usually the relevant Archbishop) a casting vote. Though supported by many progressives who felt that CNCs were biased against progressive or women candidates, the proposals were seen by many as a ‘power grab’ by the House of Bishops, especially after press reports of how the Liverpool CNC had been conducted in 2022, and were defeated in a vote ‘by houses’, with Laity (but not Clergy or Bishops) voting against.

The bishops had a second, more successful, bite of the cherry on the final day when they put forward proposals to change how diocesan ***Vacancy in See Committees (ViSCs)*** are appointed, with the goal of achieving ‘a better representation of the diocese as a whole’. This had a bearing on the CNC process as ViSCs elect the diocesan representatives on CNCs. The bishops’ proposals to prevent more than two people from the same ‘worshipping community’ (ie electoral roll) being elected to the ViSC (and therefore the CNC), and requiring at least two women (one lay and one clergy) to be put forward to the CNC, were approved. It was pointed out that the former proposal may discriminate against larger parishes/churches, where most young people worship (despite the desire to improve the participation of young people – see below), and also those parishes where there are existing *ex officio* ViSC members, eg clergy or lay members of General Synod.

Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

Just one hour was allocated to a presentation by the Bishop of Leicester and questions. This was because, as explained in paper [GS 2386](#), the bishops were still doing the theological work (mostly through the Faith and Order Commission, FAOC) needed to underpin the various parts of the LLF ‘package’, including the commendation of ‘bespoke’ (previously ‘standalone’) services of blessing for same-sex couples, the relaxation of rules which prevent clergy and ordinands contracting same-sex marriages, and the development of ‘pastoral reassurance’ for those opposed to the Prayers of Love and Faith through what has become styled as ‘delegated episcopal ministry’ (a form of shared episcopacy across regions). Progressives expressed their frustration at the glacial progress since the vote in support of PLF was passed two years ago, and will have been dismayed when the Bishop of Leicester said he could not even guarantee that proposals would be ready for the February 2026 group of sessions. Before then there will need to be further theological work and consultations with diocesan synods – the Oxford diocesan synod will have discussed this at its meeting on 14 June. Theological and doctrinal challenges include [FAOC’s scepticism](#), in the context of the Church’s continued commitment to the doctrine of marriage (Canon B30), that ‘a clear distinction between holy matrimony and civil marriage can withstand scrutiny.’

Other business

The rest of the Synod was taken up in part with some very detailed legislative business, including approval of a new ***Clergy Conduct Measure*** to replace the discredited Clergy Discipline Measure, introducing a new ‘triage’ system for complaints about conduct, distinguishing between grievances, allegations of misconduct and serious misconduct. In the most serious cases clergy will once again be liable to ‘de-frocking’ (or, in the technical language, being ‘deposed from Holy Orders’). A new ***National Church Governance Measure***, restructuring the national church organisational structure, passed its revision stage. And first consideration was given to a revised ***Mission and Pastoral Measure*** which governs how changes are made to pastoral ministry and church buildings. Debates were also held on ***racial justice***, ***diocesan finances*** (where initial proposals for substantial increases in clergy stipends were floated), ***sports and wellbeing ministry***, ***working class ministry*** and how to involve more ***young people*** in the work of General Synod.

Synod members are welcome to contact me directly with any questions about the above.

Jeremy Moodey
February 2025

jeremy@stmaryschesham.org