

General Synod Report July 2025

The Archbishop of York opened Synod with an address on the theme of deep water and the need now more than ever for spiritual and theological leadership. A Christ-centred church with people living Jesus-shaped lives so as to challenge issues such as assisted dying. We must not be a divided church but one of prayer which is simpler, humble and bolder.

We then received an address by Brigadier Jaish Mahan, Deputy Commander of one of two combat divisions in the UK which currently has units in Nato as part of the high readiness division. Brigadier Jaish spoke of the changing world we live in and the need for investment in defence. As a Christian he takes solace from the words of the Psalm 139, 'Where can I find comfort?' He asked that we pray for the soldiers and mentioned how receiving letters from strangers, such as ourselves, meant so much for the men and women of our armed services.

Further sessions on Saturday and Sunday debated the unique situation where Armed Forces chaplains, unlike others in roles of chaplaincy, may be required to move across dioceses at very short notice. This has highlighted the need to modify the rules for Armed Forces chaplains regarding permission to officiate. All three stages of the legislation to do this were passed during this Synod and now required final approval by parliament before becoming law.

Given the ongoing deficits in most Dioceses, finance was a major item in this Synod. Following a major review involving wide consultation, the national church spending plans for the next 3 years (26-28) were presented. This provides £1.6 billion of funding for 2026 – 2028 and a further £4.7 billion over the next nine years:

- This includes a ministry training fund and better funding of clergy in training.
- A 10.7% increase in clergy stipend and an increase in pension and the pension pot for clergy on retirements.
- Additional funds to reach parishes in areas of high deprivation

However, funds are still limited so not all requests could be granted. Paper GS 2402 provides in depth figures on the distribution of funds, for those who would like more detailed information. An amendment calling for much more of the Diocesan Investment Programme to be allocated directly to Dioceses was defeated, heavily in the house of Bishops, but received more support, but not a majority, in the other two Houses.

A Diocesan Synod motion from Gloucester and 9 other Dioceses called for a more radical approach with more of the funds being handed over to Diocesan control. A lively debate followed with many suggesting that central control was not the best way to distribute funds and that giving the funds to local people would be more effective. However, who holds the funds is not the point, but who knows how best to get the maximum for that funding, whether this is the parishes or the central church body? This was a significant debate which revealed the complexity of funding the parishes, but in a way that was sustainable in perpetuity. The Synod finally passed a watered-down motion which effectively kicked the issue into the long grass, although the Archbishop of York said that there was a need to reset the balance between local and national. Our Diocese now needs to decide whether to withdraw our own Diocesan Synod motion which covers similar ground, or it may be withdrawn for us.

Synod was privileged to hear from four Anglican Guests:

Archbishop Chan from Hong Kong and Macau spoke of the similarities between his province and that of our two provinces at general synod. He also preached in York Minster on Sunday on the parable of the Good Samaritan challenging us not to be bystanders to those in need. Archbishop Chan took a card, with our greetings and blessing, with him to give Rev Leslie Siu a recent General Synod rep from our diocese and now an associate minister at St Andrews Kowloon.

Canon Chuck Robinson from the Episcopal church reflected on the similarities of our synodical church governance here in the UK and the structures of the church in the United States. Canon Chuck stressed the need to hold the vulnerable close and to show the love of God in all that we do in His name.

The Bishop of Tunsburg in Norway Otto Jan Myrseth commended synod to speak truth to power and to keep indoor voices when speaking on difficult topics, so that Christ may be among us as we seek the way forward.

The Archbishop of Jerusalem, Hosam Naoum said hospitals continue to be bombed in Gaza, with medical supplies in short supply and a 'horrificing' system of food distribution, comparable to the dystopian series The Hunger Games, with three sites open one hour a day for two million people. Calling for a restoration of humanitarian supplies including food and medicine, under UN supervision, Archbishop Hosam said there should be no targeting of civilians, especially emergency workers and medical staff. He called for the release of all hostages and captives and a

permanent ceasefire for the end of the war and rebuilding of Gaza – ‘not ethnic cleansing that is presently being discussed by the Israeli and US Government.’ The church is committed to peace building and reconciliation – a message that he has repeated ‘time and time again’ – but these are ‘alien terms’ that people across both sides of the divide refuse to talk about or even listen to, he said.

The final stages of the National Church Governance Measure, which reorganises the work of the central bodies of the church were approved. These changes seek to bring a much-needed clarity and accountability by replacing the Archbishops’ Council and existing National Church Institutions with the Church of England National Services and new institutional structures. More details are available in GS2360B.

A private member’s motion welcomed the improvements in clergy pensions and called for further enhancements for recently retired clergy. Various issues were raised such as the fact that living expenses during clergy training are often self-funded, and those three years are not taken into account when calculating the pension. The aim of this measure was to create a sustainable and dignified retirement for all clergy. It was recognised that this will be a complex measure to apply, with each member of the clergy who has already retired having an individual assessment.

Sunday afternoon began with consideration for a new Festival of God the Creator and a new Commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya. Synod approved this first stage of incorporation into the Common Worship liturgical calendar.

A presentation on Church growth and revitalisation enabled General Synod to hear of stories that highlighted growth in parishes and communities. Church attendance numbers are still recovering after Covid and are now over ½M on Sunday and over ¾M across the whole week. Bishop Joanne and Sally Gaze were members of a panel that spoke about enabling leadership programmes and a sense of working with what you have in your hands has created new spaces for those outside the church. Young people spoke and shared their faith stories including that their generation has a longing for spirituality and are actively seeking faith.

Thy Kingdom Come is ten years old. Ninety percent of the countries of the world now join in for eleven days of prayer. This Project started with General Synod encouragement and has reached out to denominations across the world. It has brought people to faith as well as enabled others to deepen their faith. The aim now is to ensure funding for this to continue and for it to be more inclusive, with more resources to reach those outside the church. A reassuring message was given to those with churches with low numbers, that small matters to God. And pray as you can, not as you can’t.

The Abuse Redress measure and the accompanying Rules received its final approval. This measure has been written with the focus on survivors and acknowledges the corporate shame and repentance for all historical abuse which had not been addressed. There were many relatively minor changes including to the detailed list of the definition of a church officer and these were all accepted. Trauma informed work will continue to acknowledge the way in which scars from abuse both rewires the brain and wounds the body. Dignity, respect and compassion are to be the pillars for future work on this measure, as this aspect that has been built into this final draft.

The Rules for electing members of General Synod were revised prior to the 2026 elections. The main change was a move to a common timetable of dates across all Dioceses to avoid confusion. The elections will again predominantly take place electronically, with an additional introductory letter going out to all electors, so it is important that Deaneries and Dioceses hold up-to-date Email addresses. As before, provision will be made for those unable to use electronic communication.

Minor changes were made to the Church Representation Rules including the removal of the 3rd declaration on the Electoral Roll application form. This was because it is considered that someone making that declaration would already be covered by the 2nd declaration, and having the 3rd just adds confusion.

The use of the 1997 document “Issues in Human Sexuality” in the discernment process for potential ordinands has caused much unhappiness in recent years. Replacement with new Pastoral Guidelines was promised in 2023 but has not happened yet. A proposal to withdraw it and replace it with an interim requirement to live consistently with the “Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy” during the period of discernment and training was passed overwhelmingly. It was made clear that this does not alter the Church’s view of marriage.

A late addition was a motion from the Bishop of London “reaffirming that every person is of immeasurable and irreducible value,” and calling on the Government to improve palliative care. The debate included many heart-felt stories of terminal care and arguments on both sides. The motion was finally carried by a large majority.

Your Representatives on General Synod:

The people representing the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich on General Synod are:

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FROM HOUSE OF CLERGY: Revd Canon Andrew Dotchin revdotchin@gmail.com, Ven Canon Sally Gaze, archdeacon.sally@cofesuffolk.org, Rev Ali Miller teamvicarlvnb@btinternet.com

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FROM HOUSE OF LAITY: Mr Tony Allwood tony_allwood@btopenworld.com Mrs Jeanette Appleton Jeanetteappleton@hotmail.com Mr Andrew Gray.

People on synod from our diocese in the capacity of representing other constituencies include:

Very Revd Joe Hawes (Cathedral Deans) Dean@stedscathedral.org

Ven James Ridge (Chaplain-General of Prisons),

Mr Mark Sheard (Archbishops' Council), Revd Canon Charlotte Cook (Archbishops' Council)

You may wish to contact your elected representatives to express views or share information about matters being debated at synod or to ask for questions to be raised. The email addresses given above are our preferred way to be contacted on Synod matters.

Jeanette Appleton/Tony Allwood 21.7.25