

General Synod Report – February Sessions 2025

This report is designed as feedback to Deaneries. Your representatives are happy to hear how you feel about the issues being debated and decided upon. For full details of debates and decisions made, go to: www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod/groups-sessions-information/general-synod-february-2025 All debates can be seen at: www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/watch-general-synod-live

Topics included:

Welcome of New Members – quite a number of new members (retirements and changes in Dioceses).

Makin Report (GS 2376) Safeguarding Report – urged leaders to ‘redouble work to implement best practice’.

Affirming the Racial Justice Agenda: An Update and Next Steps on ‘From Lament to Action’ (GS2377)

Reviewed progress and Racial Justice Unit to report back to Synod by 2027.

Future of Church Safeguarding (GS2378) – Model 4 rejected and amended motion to endorse Model 3. Members approved a motion (amended on a proposal of the Bishop of Blackburn) that endorses “Model 3” first while doing further work on “Model 4”. The approved motion includes:

- setting up an external scrutiny body, which is likely to be on a statutory basis in order to give it “teeth” and so would require legislation;
- transfer of most functions currently delivered by the National Safeguarding Team – except policy development – to an external employer, eventually and after all development, consultation and legislative processes are completed; and
- further work to determine the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model 4 which would involve the transfer of safeguarding teams in dioceses and cathedrals to the same external employer as the NST.

The original motion from the lead safeguarding bishop, Joanne Grenfell, Bishop of Stepney, endorsed Model 4. Speaking after the debate, she said: “We have missed the opportunity to say unequivocally to victims and survivors today that we hear their concerns about trust and confidence in the Church. I am committed to working with where we have got to today, continuing to do feasibility around model 4 as well as moving swiftly to set up a statutory body for scrutiny, audits and complaints”. The Archbishop of York said that he was “disappointed” that the Church was now going to reorganise safeguarding in two stages, “but I fully commit myself to work towards implementing Synod’s decision and making it happen”.

Report of The Crown Nominations Commission (GS 2379) – Noted and looked to GS2387 for more discussion.

Diocesan Finances Review Update (GS 2380) – Presentation of the review of Diocesan Finances, including increases to Lowest Income Communities funding, increasing stipends, removing apportionment, reorganising ordination training funding, and looking for more ways to remove duplication and complexity. The money flows to and from Dioceses are complex and in many ways obscure. The review group will present the further work to July Synod, as some elements may require Synodical approval.

Safeguarding (Clergy Risk Assessment) Regulations 2025 (GS 2369) – approved

Strategy for Working Class Ministry (GS2382A&B) – Ministry Development Board tasked with developing a strategy to support vocations (lay and ordained) from working class backgrounds and report back within a year.

Sports and Wellbeing Ministry (GS2381) – Presentation.

Clergy Conduct Measure (GS2311B) – approved. If and when it is approved by Parliament, it will replace the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. The new measure introduces a tiered approach to complaints, ensuring that different levels of concern are handled proportionately. For cases of serious misconduct it reintroduces the penalty of deposition from Holy Orders.

Legal Officers (Annual Fees) Order 2025 (GS2384) – Legal fees agreed (postponed from 2024)

Safeguarding Code of Practice: Managing Allegations and Reporting Allegations (GS2372) – Approved

Add Confirmation Numbers to Statistics for Mission (GS2371A&B) – decision made to record nationally the number of confirmations.

‘Growing Younger And More Diverse’ - Hearing And Responding To The Voices Of Young Adults (18-25) (GS 2385) – agreed to form a group of 200 young adults to meet three times a year and elect 3 to 5 young adults to sit on General Synod (allowed to speak but not vote).

Living In Love And Faith: Update On Proposals (GS 2386) – Presentation with questions on the LLF process. Further work is ongoing around the guidelines for clergy in same-sex relationships. Questions have been raised about the way a bespoke PLF service might look, with those opposed to the use of PLF suggesting they might still “look” like a wedding. Synod was reminded that people’s lives are on hold waiting for answers to these questions.

Proposed Changes to The Standing Orders Relating To The Crown Nominations Commission (GS 2387) These were brought to Synod by the House of Bishops as a result of failures to nominate in Ely and Carlisle Dioceses. A couple of these changes were housekeeping/changes that were seen to be needed now the current CNC process is several years old. For example, there are six pairs of members elected from General Synod, but the pairs could not “tag team” with one member having to commit to a CNC process from start to finish. The requirement for interpretation – particularly for Canterbury CNC, which will include members from the wider Anglican Communion – was agreed. Three changes did not pass. Currently, abstentions count as a vote against a candidate. The proposal to change this so that abstentions would be ignored was lost. Also lost was a proposal to reduce the voting threshold from two-thirds to 60%. Finally, the secret ballot was retained.

National Church Governance Measure (GS 2360A) - Revision of the rules surrounding the reorganisation of the National Church Institutions (NCIs). A significant number of amendments were tabled relating to delegated functions, reporting, and scrutiny. Cleared to go for final drafting.

Mission And Pastoral Measure (GS 2394) - Accepted for Revision. Comments in the debate related to the ease, or otherwise, of closing churches; the importance of buildings for mission, and calls for more collaborative and less directive language in the regulations.

Mission And Pastoral Regulations (GS 2395) – the regulations to accompany the Measure (which can be changed by Synod without the need to go to Parliament).

Vacancy In See Committees (Amendment) Regulation 2025 (GS 2396) There was strong disagreement over two of the proposed changes. The changes (i) limit the number of people from one church or worshipping community who can be elected and (ii) require that women be included. The amendments to the amendments were lost, so the proposed changes stand. This means that future VIS Committees will be guaranteed to include the voices of women, and a wider range of churches and worshipping communities should be represented.

There were to have been debates on several other items which were adjourned until the next set of Sessions:

Thy Kingdom Come – Renewing The Call To Prayer & Evangelism (GS 2393) – a presentation in advance of this year’s events was not given

Redistribution of Funds (GS 2396A&B) – was to be a debate on how the Church Commissioners should distribute their money. The requests were for the money to come to Dioceses and be spent on Clergy (better stipends and more clergy in parishes). The delay means that any decisions will be too late for the Triennium Funding Plan (2026-2028), which will be settled before July 2025.

There were other (fringe) meetings held. Questions were answered and media attention focused on:

Gluten-free bread and non-alcoholic wine

Prior to Synod, there was wide media coverage of whether Canon B17 could be amended formally to permit the use of gluten-free bread and non-alcoholic wine in the Eucharist, following one of the 155 Questions of which notice had been given under Standing Orders 112–116. The subsequent confusion led the Church of England to issue a press release entitled, No, we’re not banning ‘gluten-free’ bread or ‘non-alcoholic’ Communion wine. Canon B17 was agreed after the Convocation debates of the 1940s and 1950s.