

Lynn Nichol, General Synod Report February 2026

The General Synod met for 5 days from 9th – 13th February. I hope this report gives you an insight into the breadth of items debated and decisions over the 5 days. Amongst the issues that attracted national press coverage, there were also some key areas of relevant to the workings of local churches, eg parochial fees, safeguarding, national register of lay ministers, changes to standing orders relevant to PCCs and of course the Diocese of Worcester's motion on sustainable church flowers.

I take notes during the debates and given the complexity and length of debates I can only give you a summary and snapshot of all that was discussed (and can't guarantee 100% accuracy). If you would like further information, the papers for each item listed below are available on the Church of England website at [Full Papers General Synod Feb 2026](#).

Most votes are by show of hands, when there was a counted vote of by Houses, I have showed the results as numbers in House of Bishops/Clergy/Laity in the order of in favour/against/abstained, where there was a counted vote of the whole Synod I have showed this as in favour/against.

Monday 9th February: before the Synod started there were separate meetings of the House of Laity and Convocations of the House of Clergy. I can't report on the House of Clergy discussions so will leave that to members of 'the other house'.

House of Laity Meeting

The House of Laity approved amendments to Standing Orders for the election of the Chair and Vice Chair of the House of Laity and House of Laity reps to Archbishop's Council in preparation for the election of a new Synod in Autumn 2026. We discussed a proposal from the House of Bishops to allow acting bishops during a vacancy in a diocese to vote in the General Synod and House of Bishops rather than attend and speak but not vote. The House of Laity voted in favour by a small majority 86/80.

The Synod opened in worship. Before we started, the Archbishop of York (ABY) wanted to place on record our welcome to our new Archbishop of Canterbury (ABC). The ABC was given a standing ovation.

Changes to Standing Order

Synod agreed unanimously to amend standing orders permanently so that members could attend by Zoom. Synod also agreed unanimously to increase the number of youth representatives from 3-5.

Introductions and Welcomes - The ABC welcomed new members.

Report by the Business Committee the Chair reflected on the difficulties of setting the agenda and the feedback from previous Synods and provided a rationale for the items included. Synod debated the agenda, including disappointment that the Low-Income Funding Allocation was in contingency business not on the main agenda, the need for more time for questions and prioritize hearing from the Anglican Communion.

Questions there were 258 questions sent in by members of Synod including two questions by Worcester Lay Rep, Robin Lunn about retired clergy housing and time periods for church funerals. Members can ask a supplementary question in the Chamber. Written answers are provided and can be seen at [Questions and Answers](#).

Tuesday 10th February –Presidential Address I had the privilege of chairing this session, so it was difficult to make extensive notes and provide a summary so here is the link to the full text of her address [Archbishop of Canterbury Presidential Address](#).

Clergy Conduct Measure – The Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee had returned the proposed Clergy Conduct Measure as not expedient. It was concerned that hearings under the measure were proposed to be in private rather than public. The initial legislation suggested hearings in private to encourage witnesses to come forward and hearings could then be ordered to be in public. The Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee decision was an unusual situation that had not occurred for some years. The Synod in favour to accept the amendment that by default hearing would be held in public House of Bishops 21/0/0 Clergy 142/0/0 Laity 149/0/0.

Living in Love and Faith Presentation, the first of two sessions on LLF. The ABY and colleagues from the LLF Programme Board gave a presentation on the Living in Love and Faith process from 2017 – 2026, including the start of the process, the decision in February 2023 to commend the use of prayers of love and faith in regular services, discussions in ongoing working groups as well as a report from the Faith and Order Commission (see papers 1406 and 1407 at [LLF Papers](#)) exploring unity and difference in the House of Bishops and wider Church on LLF and the Doctrine of Marriage. In Summer 2025, The Bishops of Oxford and Sheffield began a ‘thought experiment’ working together from their different positions on a letter/statement to the Church for discussion by the House of Bishops with the aim of clarifying areas they could agree on and areas where views were not aligned. 4 further papers were produced exploring the theological context and legal advice (GS1429, 1430, 1432, 1431 [LLF papers 2](#). The House of Bishops met 3 times to discuss their letter. It was clear to them that standalone service would require formal legislative processes as would allowing clergy to enter same-sex civil marriages. The ABY in his conclusion observed that we have learnt that we need to be more open about our disagreements, and he hoped that we would move forward after the debate on Thursday. A period of questions followed covering a range of issues and answered by the ABY and Bishops of Sheffield and Oxford. It was acknowledged that the process had not delivered a ‘radical Christian inclusion’ that many had hoped for, hence the sober tone to the presentation.

Church Representation Rules - The Synod approved that where proposals for a parochial church council are dealt with by correspondence, the proposals are approved if at least one-third of the members of the council approve and no member objects. Further details at [CRR Rules](#)

Wednesday 11th February

The Synod opened with a Eucharist presided at by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Mental Health and The Church. Again, I was chairing so I have limited notes. 32 people spoke in the debate, many sharing personal and emotional stories. The Synod requested that diocese review their IME and CME to ensure ministers are appropriately trained, stressed the importance of availability of counselling services and therapy for clergy, and asked the National Society to develop material on mental health for use in Church schools and groups.

External Auditors the Synod approved the appointment of external auditors.

Safeguarding The Synod listened to a presentation by Dame Christine Ryan, the Chair of the Safeguarding Programme Board. She spoke about ‘can the church build a safeguarding structure that is trusted’. Since taking on the role in October, she had observed, why the C of E was vulnerable and what solutions can be provided. She suggested that ‘this is a church ready to change’ but has been ‘too slow to act’, ‘the window for incremental change has closed’. The reality is often better than the perception but there are inconsistencies. She was confident with full commitment that the new structure can deliver at pace. The new charity will be led by a

Board with majority of members independent of the Church of England. The Synod voted in favour 345/1/3.

Liturgical Business Synod noted a report from the Revisions Committee on developing two new festivals ‘festival of God the Creator’ and ‘Commemoration of the 21 Martyrs of Libya’. This will return to Synod when further work has been carried out.

Legislative Business Code of Practice – Mission and Pastoral Measure - Code of Practice – this was approved.

Thursday 12th February

Dates of Synod – Synod approved the dates of Synod meetings for 2027 including changes not to meet at half term so that parents (and grandparents) find it easier to attend.

Changes of Standing Orders – The Synod passed a range of changes to standing orders aimed at simplifying processes, including the appointments process and by-elections for central members of Crown Nomination Commission processes.

Sustainable Church Flowers - The Worcester Diocesan Motion!

The Bishop of Dudley opened the debate also showing casing the work of the Sustainable Church Flowers Movement through a film. (It was also noticeable that the Bishop Martin had sustainable flowers in his buttonhole). There was a blocking tactic used with a procedural motion to move to next business asking that we should not be giving Synod time to this debate. This was heavily defeated, with Synod confirming that they wished to hear the voice of the local parish. After a concerted effort by a long row of Worcester Reps standing to speak, Robin was called. The motion provoked some lively debate, the vast majority in support and what emerged was a ground swell of support for our motion recognising that this was an important ministry and witness, and part of our worship. One speaker articulating that flower arrangers ‘were the very backbone of our churches and this motion was an act of repentance and renewal for the Church. The motion was carried by a vast majority. The paper for the debate is at [Worcester DSM Sustainable Church Flowers](#).

Poverty and the Church: 40 years after Faith in the City Report– the debate and motion confirmed the Church’s commitment to ending poverty and asking questions of ‘ourselves, our political, society and business leaders about the unjust structures and decisions which cause and exacerbate poverty. The motion was passed with a very large majority.

Living in Love and Faith This debate was scheduled for 5 hours, with an original motion and 8 amendments. The ABY opened up the debate indicating that this wasn’t where he hoped the LLF process would have progressed to and he recognised the pain and disappointment felt by people on all sides. Knowing how we divided we are, the House of Bishops haven’t been able to find a way through those tensions. He noted that we do now know what questions need to be asked legally, theologically and synodically to move forward. Many personal stories were told, some angry, many emotional and it was a challenging and, in some places, a highly charged debate.

I have set out the motion and amendments below so you can see the progress of the debate and the votes that were taken by Houses. With a vote by Houses it has to pass in all houses to be carried.

‘That this Synod: a) recognise and lament the distress and pain many have suffered during the LLF process, especially LGBTQI+ people;
b) affirm that the LLF Programme and all work initiated by the February 2023 LLF Motion and subsequent LLF Motions will conclude by July 2026;

c) thank the LLF Working Groups for their committed and costly work, which will now draw to a close with the conclusion of this synodical process;

d) commend the House of Bishops in establishing the Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group and Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Pastoral Consultative Group for continuing work.'

The Revd Charlie Baczyk-Bell (Southwark) to move as an amendment:

58 'Leave out paragraph (a) and insert

"() recognise and lament the distress and pain many LGBTQIA+ people continue to suffer because the Church of England remains unwilling to affirm their faithful, committed and legally-recognised relationships"

Amendment lost counted vote by Houses **bishops 6/22/9 clergy 80/90/5 laity 88/94/7**

The Revd Dr Christopher Landau (Lichfield) to move as an amendment:

59 'After paragraph (a) insert:

"() acknowledge that the LLF process has revealed theological diversity among LGBTQIA+ people, and that the church and its chaplaincies should be sensitive to this diversity;"

Amendment lost bishops 0/30/7 clergy 75/99/2 laity 82/98/6

Dr Ros Clarke (Lichfield) to move as an amendment:

60 'After paragraph (a) insert:

"() call on the House of Bishops to apologise for their failure to pay due attention to the legal advice which has not changed since February 2023, causing them to make promises which could not be kept, raise hopes which have been disappointed, and betray trust which has yet to be restored."

Amendment lost 0/36/2 60/105/7 68/107/7

The Revd Canon Stuart Craddock (Lincoln) to move as an amendment:

61 'Leave out paragraph b.'

Amendment lost 0/36/2 74/94/8 78/101/6

Mrs Vicky Brett (Peterborough) to move as an amendment:

62 'After paragraph (b) insert:

"() affirm that restrictions on the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith in 'standalone' services should be removed at the earliest opportunity and that clergy should be enabled to use or refrain from using the said Prayers at such services according to conscience;"

Amendment Lost 2/32/4 76/95/6 83/102/2

Miss Debbie Buggs (London) to move as an amendment:

63 'Leave out paragraph (d)'

Amendment Lost 0/ 30/ 5 66/107/6 75/105/6

The Revd Lis Goddard (London) to move as an amendment:
64 'At the end of paragraph (d) insert “, and that the current LLF working groups, in conjunction with the Programme Board, be asked to prepare a review and reflection on LLF, focussed on the work of the LLF working groups. This work should begin immediately and provide the foundation for the work of the proposed new working groups, with the aim of learning from the mistakes of the past and of undertaking honest reflection on the lessons that can be taken forward, so as to avoid having to apologise to members of Synod and our wider communities once again.”'

Amendment Lost 2/28/6 88/87/6. 93/87/4 (this passed in the Houses of Clergy and Laity)

Professor Helen King (Oxford) to move as an amendment:
65 'At the end, insert:

“() Request the Archbishops ensure that a majority of the Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group are in favour of change towards standalone services of blessing and full inclusion of clergy in same-sex civil marriages; that the Group issues a report in advance of every sitting of General Synod; and that recommendations are delivered with urgency.”'

Amendment lost

Finally, after 4 hours Synod had rejected all proposed amendments and returned to debate the main motion unamended (in green above). At this point there was a **motion for closure**
The vote was 173/208 so the debate continued.

The ABC spoke near the end of the date thanking synod for the way we had engaged in the debate. She was grateful that we were still here, with us. She believed that there was a structured way forward and urged us to believe in hope, trusting in God in these next steps.

The final vote at 6.50 34/0/2 109/62/10109/70/9Carried in all 3 houses.

So, what does that mean? It means that the formal programme of Living in Love and Faith will conclude in the next few months but the work of finding a way to take the agenda forward will continue through a series of working groups that will report to Synod during the next quinquennium.

Friday 13th February

The day started with an address by the Archbishop of Brazil and Bishop of Amazonia Marinez Rosa Dos Santos Bassotto. She spoke of the churches work advocating for change in society and COP 30. The COP did not make significant progress in her view but did involve over 70,000 people the most for any COP and a space for dialogue was facilitated by the Anglican Church. She urged churches to be a prophetic voice in advocating for the stewardship of God's creation.

Parochial Fees Order Legislative Business

This draft fee order for parochial fees for 2027-2031 attracted 48 amendments, indicating some disquiet with the initial suggestions, particularly the level of burial fees for the next 5 years. At the outset of the debate the Bishop of Blackburn proposed that the debate be adjourned until July to give greater time to consider the breadth of views. After 4 speeches on this Synod agreed to carry on with the debate. The focus of most of the debate was against the proposed one off £1000 increase for burial fees as it would be detrimental to bereavement ministry, pastoral care and the Church of England's reputation. The debate included amendments proposed by Robin Lunn and supported by Lynn Nichol and Kashmir Garton to increase fees by £200 each year

rather than increase by one off £1000 increase. This was not supported by Synod probably because it would commit the C of E to a £1000 increase and other amendments later in the order paper proposed a lower increase. We went on with the debate. The Synod passed a series of amendments resulting in not to increase the burial fees and the same for cremated remains for the next 5 years. A personal view, but probably an example of Synod at its best working through the issues step by step and coming to a common mind.

Passed 262 in favour 3 against.

Working Class Vocation and Ministry Next Steps the Bishop of Barking, Lynn Cullen introduced the debate including her own experience as an ordinand from a working-class background in Salford. She was given a standing ovation. The Bishop of Chester updated Synod on the ongoing work which he indicated was important for mission and justice, followed by a series of insightful and moving speeches about members own experience. The ABC welcomed the work and urged us to continue to listen to those with lower incomes about the barriers they face developing their ministry, eg those who work shifts are often excluded from patterns of training. **The motion was passed unanimously.**

Draft National Lay Minister Regs – Synod approved the construction of a publicly available national register of lay ministers - deaconesses, readers, licenced lay workers. This brings lay ministry in line with the existing national register of clergy and enables anyone to check that both clergy and lay ministers have a license or permission to officiate. Synod passed unanimously.

Prorogation – Synod was prorogued until July.

If you have got to page 6 of this report – thank you! When I sit in Synod, I often think how does what we are debating relate to the people of the Diocese of Worcester and what do they need to know, so I hope it has been a useful, if rather a long read. Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for your prayers for those on the General Synod.

Best wishes

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Worcester Diocese Lay Member General Synod