

Report from the February 2026 General Synod by Robin Lunn. Lay Member for Diocese of Worcester.

The General Synod in London was the first to be presided over by a female Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullaly and for those of us who battled for many years to get Women in the Episcopacy through, it was a very satisfying moment.

The subjects discussed at this session of Synod after the Business committee report were,

Clergy Conduct Measure.

Reimagining Care.

Mental Health and the Church.

Church Safeguarding Structure.

Liturgical Business. (Festival of God the Creator)

Future Seat Allocation.

Poverty and the Church. 40 years after Faith in the City.

Sustainable Church Flowers. (Worcester Diocesan Synod Motion)

Living in Love and Faith.

Parochial Fees Order. (Particularly debate on burial fees)

Working Class Vocation and Ministry Next Steps.

National Ministry Register Regulations.

As always in my report, it is important to stress that any opinions expressed here are my own and are not those of the Diocese of Worcester.

I will begin with the Worcester Diocese motion on Sustainable Flowers. This had originated from a PCC Meeting and gone through the Deanery and our Diocesan Synod and was a clear example of a motion coming from the grass roots. To have not debated it would have been a clear rebuke to Parishes and contrary to our processes and democracy. At the start of the week, opposition was raised to this being debated as some members in the Business Committee debate raised concerns that this was being debated and not debating the situation in Gaza. Whatever the merits of that argument, the Business Committee set the agenda and it was not our responsibility what is debated.

Bishop Martin who did plenty of work on this and invited the King's Florist who arranged all of the flowers at the Coronation to the debate, began by introducing the debate "Love to picture the flowers in the fields". He made very clear that despite some of the more lurid press reports, we were not trying to be prescriptive or tell Churches what they can or cannot do. Motion does not ban anything, it encourages better practice. A very well-structured film presentation which you can now find on the Diocesan website went along with the presentation.

Judith Osborne making a debut speech stated that the motion offers practical guidance on the root map to net zero.

At that point a Synod Member tried to move next business so that it would not be debated, but after a skillful defense from Bishop Martin the Synod thought that this was not appropriate and the attempt was heavily defeated.

Going back to the debate the Bishop of Norwich (the former Bishop of Dudley) stated that flowers are symbols of love and Christian Symbolism.

I spoke in the debate, first stressing the importance of why this needed to be debated and that it was to help protect our environment and reduce the Church's carbon footprint. Most importantly it was something we can do ourselves rather than rely on the activities of others.. One of the points I made was that it was not wrong to consider using flowers out of season and highlighted how the Flower trade in the Channel Islands had been undermined by all the flowers flown in from further afield. I

also made reference as did Bishop Martin to the use of plastic foam (Oasis being an example of this) which was banned 6 years ago by the RHC for Chelsea flower show. The hope is that each little flower that opens will be a local flower.

One clever speaker linked sustainable flowers with Gaza just about staying within the rules of the debate. Another Jonathan Menzies made a very helpful speech saying that until he had heard the debate, he was going to vote against, but we had persuaded him to change his mind. His view was in union with many others and after Bishop Martin gave a well-crafted summing up, Synod voted overwhelmingly in favor of the motion.

The other matter which I was particularly involved in, was the subject of the Parochial fees order but in particular a proposal to increase the costs of the burial of a body and cremated ashes by **£1000**. I strongly objected to this and wrote out to Deanery Synod members in my own Deanery of Evesham and Pershore to seek people's opinions. Virtually every parish responded with most strongly against such an increase. The underlying view was, "that we are better than this". To ensure that this was debated, I moved an amendment which put forward a much smaller increase of £200. Another member put forward £500, but it was Rev Jonathan Macy from Southwark who won the day by proposing no increase. This was clearly the popular view.

In my own speech, I explained the consultation which had been undergone and read out anonymously some of the views which had been expressed. I set out several reasons why it was not appropriate to make such a large increase and that we speak about a "Cost of living crisis, but that this becomes a "Cost of Dying crisis". **The end result after voting was that there will be no increase to burial of a body or cremated remains in a Church of England graveyard** in the 2027 list of fees. I thank all those who provided feedback.

Apart from these matters directly impacting on our diocese the major debate was the Living in Love and Faith debate which took place with 8 amendments over 5 hours on Thursday afternoon. The Archbishop of York began by saying that we were not where we wanted to be with the whole process, but the alternative to apologizing from the House of Bishops was not apologizing. We remain in disagreement about how LGBTQI people can be welcomed with a position where the prayers can and blessings can be used as part of a service, but that it is not legal to hold stand alone services. The whole point of moving forward was that we find a way of living together and not apart. The House of Bishops were determined to oppose all 8 amendments and the motion ended up being passed in its original form.

Rev Claire Robson from Newcastle in a debut speech declared that the cost of living in obedience was incalculable and said that she could do it no longer. Several speakers criticized some Bishops for over promising and under delivering.

There was however a reflection that due to the composition of the current Synod, it would not be possible to secure a two thirds majority to get the legislation through.

The Bishop of Birmingham admitted that nobody was happy with the Bishops statement, but it was important that we moved forward.

Rev Rachel Mann remarked that it was an indictment of the process that this was where we had ended up.

Rev Baczyk-Bell expressed real anger at being in the same place and was particularly critical of Bishops who had encouraged in private but had not spoken out in public.

The Rev Ian Paul taking a totally opposite view reminded Synod that LGBTQI people did not all agree with each other and it was paramount to follow the bible's teaching.

Other speakers criticized Churches who allegedly exclude LGBTQI people.

A mover of one amendment Vicki Brent from Peterborough angrily urged the opponents of the prayers of LLF to "stay in your lane".

In contrast the Rev Mike Smith declared that, "this was a battle between Grace and Truth". He stood for the truth as he perceived it in the bible while a large group of members were interested in grace.

This got to the nub of the wider debate.

One amendment wanted to make more use of some of the working groups from LLF rather than just starting again, a view which I subscribed to. However, this was defeated in the House of Bishops having passed in the other two Houses albeit with narrow majorities.

In the final amendment, Professor Helen King urged that future groups be made up of people who wanted to make progress on this matter. One Clergy speaker said that we cannot proceed in the same way as otherwise we would be like a train going on the same track with the same likely result. Canon Judith Maltby recalled the famous words of Una Kroll after the 1978 debate on Women's Ministry, "we came for bread, yet you gave us a stone".

The Archbishop of Canterbury speaking near the end of the debate expressed gratitude for the fact that we were all still in the Church despite the stark differences on this matter. She set out the merits of the wording of the motion and spoke about, "flexing the muscle of hope".

The final vote at the end of the debate, was

Bishops 34 For and 0 against.

Clergy 109 For and 62 against.

Laity 109 For and 70 against.

It remains to be seen in the next Synod commencing in November what the path forward envisaged by the bishops will be.

Wednesday was a very heavy day with extremely necessary debates on Mental Health and Safeguarding structures. Both in their own ways were very harrowing, although progress was made in both areas.

Dr Jamie Harrison the Chair of the House of Laity said that this was the first debate on mental health since 2008 and there were many mental health conditions in society. The challenges for young people are massive. He wanted to help people understand the symptoms and the signs.

Rev Kate Wharton highlighted "Mental Health First Aid training" which is something which should be rolled out to all clergy.

Other speakers, including Rev Will Harwood (Truro) said that training was not being rolled out to enough people.

Many speakers spoke about their own very challenging issues in childhood particularly with parents who suffered from differing forms of mental health issues. Some accounts were harrowing. Others declared that it was certainly not a weakness to admit that a person was struggling. It is possible for Clergy to be unwell, and people needed to be aware of this.

Canon Mark Miller stated that it was important to look at the root causes of stress amongst clergy such as ever more churches to look after and treat the root causes and not just the symptoms.

Rev Alice Kemp said that as a physically disabled person, she did not like the wording of some hymns.

The motion was overwhelmingly carried.

In the Safeguarding debate, the former Ofsted Head Christine Ryan who had been brought in to look at processes and provide some observations declared that in her first observations, that the overall Church was willing to change but "the window for just incremental change had closed". The Church could not be Judge and Jury on its own cases. Safeguarding must be led by someone who is protected from in-house pressures.

The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Joanne Grenfell who is soon to step down as the lead Bishop on safeguarding explained forcibly that we were not just taking a pragmatic approach. The subject was too important for that approach.

Two amendments were defeated as they appeared to slow the process although not intentionally, Alison Coulter the Vice Chair of the House of Laity described a meeting with the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament. They were very clear that they wanted us to solve this issue promptly.

The final motion to make the appropriate progress was carried by 345 votes to 1.

Mention of the Ecclesiastical Committee of the House of Commons leads onto an unusual situation where they had sent back to General Synod the Clergy Discipline legislation which we thought we had given final passage to last July. The committee exercising their rights under the 1919 Enabling

Act did not agree with disciplinary hearings being heard in private unless matters involving children or vulnerable people were involved. An amendment to change thinks proposed by Clive Scowan from London diocese was accepted and back to parliament the bill goes.

If you have any questions about this report, please don't hesitate to contact me on rlunn47@gmail.com or 07746-251083.

God Bless,

Robin.

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