Amersham Deanery Synod
Report on February 2026 General Synod group of sessions

General Synod met in London from 9 to 13 February 2026. This was the penultimate group of sessions in this quinquennium. Synod will meet again in York in July and then be prorogued and dissolved ahead of elections for a new five-year term in the autumn.

Safeguarding and clergy conduct

After recent controversies, it was not surprising that the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dame Sarah Mullally, in a warmly-received ***presidential address***, spoke at length on safeguarding. Mullally said that she would adopt a 'trauma-informed' approach and that protecting church members from abuse would be a key priority: the Church had 'too often failed to recognise or take seriously the abuse of power in all its forms,' and had also fallen 'tragically short' on accountability. The full text of the Archbishop's speech is here.

Discussion about ***safeguarding*** continued, following Synod's decision to move towards independent oversight in July and demands from the Charity Commission that the Church accelerate its implementation of new structures. Synod endorsed moves towards a new independent national charity, provisionally called the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) and incorporating the current National Safeguarding Team, but not diocesan or cathedral safeguarding teams, although these would look to the ISA for support. A new safeguarding code of practice - ***Safer Recruitment and People Management*** – was passed as 'deemed business.' Synod also gave final approval to the ***Clergy Conduct Measure***, replacing the Clergy Discipline Measure, incorporating a change proposed by Parliament's Ecclesiastical Committee that disciplinary tribunals should normally be held in public.

Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

A five-hour debate and earlier presentation on LLF proved no less emotional and divisive than previous debates on this subject. The House of Bishops had confirmed in January that it was proposing to bring the £1.66m eight-year LLF process to a conclusion in the light of clear legal advice that new 'standalone' or 'bespoke' services using the Prayers of Love and Faith for same-sex couples would require formal authorisation under canon law, while legislation would also be needed to permit clergy to enter into same-sex civil marriage. The bishops therefore proposed a Synod motion lamenting the 'distress and pain' suffered during the LLF process, especially for LGBTQI+ people, affirming that the project would conclude by July 2026 and establishing a new working group to (a) explore the approval process for bespoke services under Canon B2; (b) consider the legislative changes needed to enable clergy to enter same-sex marriage; and (c) continue to explore what pastoral episcopal provision and reassurance would be required, 'proportionate to any further proposed changes.' The working group would report back to the new General Synod by 2028.

This new timetable was deplored by those wanting more rapid change, including moves towards same-sex marriage in church, while traditionalists argued that LLF was simply being rebranded and that deadlock was likely to continue, even in the next Synod, given sharp divisions within the Church. Amendments to the bishops' motion from both progressives and traditionalists were defeated, and the unamended motion was passed in all three Houses. The overall vote was 252 votes for, 132 against, and 21 abstentions. So this deeply contentious and divisive issue will continue to dominate Synod into the next quinquennium.

Other church issues

Church finances loomed large at this Synod, as they always do. There was a debate on a motion from Chester Diocese challenging the way ***Lowest Income Communities (LInC) funding*** is allocated, suggesting that this should be disbursed on the basis of individual parish rather than diocesan need (13 out of 42 dioceses, including Chester and Oxford, receive no LInC support, despite having some very poor parishes). An amended motion was approved, remitting LInC funding reform to a wider review of Church finances. A proposal from the Archbishops' Council to increase ***churchyard burial fees*** by £1,000 was heavily defeated, with many speakers expressing concern that this would impact negatively the Church's pastoral ministry. Synod also approved, without debate, significant improvements to ***clergy pensions*** for those with service after 2011, to take effect from 1 April 2026.

Synod backed calls for improved training of ordinands and clergy to help support people in their communities with ***mental health needs***. ***Working-class lay and ordained vocations*** were also debated, with Synod urging the House of Bishops to address structural and cultural barriers to the flourishing of working-class ministers. Legislation to simplify the licensing of ***military chaplains*** was given final approval. Synod also approved a revised Code of Practice for ***Bishops' Mission Orders***, reflecting governance recommendations emerging from the 2024 Scolding Review into Mike Pilavachi and Soul Survivor. A motion to enhance ***youth representation*** in General Synod, increasing the number of (non-voting) youth members from three to five, was approved. First consideration was given to draft liturgical material marking a new ***Feast of God the Creator*** and the ***Commemoration of the 21 Martyrs of Libya*** which will now go to the House of Bishops. Synod gave a warm welcome to the usual address from an ***Anglican Communion speaker***, in this case from the Primate of Brazil, Bishop Marinez Rosa dos Santos Bassotto.

In a debate which provoked significant national coverage, Synod backed a motion from Worcester Diocese on ***sustainable church flowers***, encouraging churches and cathedrals to adopt more environmentally responsible ways of arranging flowers, including avoiding floral foam and sourcing flowers and foliage locally rather than using imported varieties. Synod also agreed on new ***seat allocations*** for this autumn's election of directly-elected diocesan representatives to the Convocations of Canterbury and York (House of Clergy) and the House of Laity. Oxford's allocation remained unchanged at 19 (ten clergy and nine lay).

Other business

In a wide-ranging debate on ***adult social care***, Synod backed proposals for a 'national care covenant' which would clarify the roles and responsibilities of all involved in adult social care including families, communities and local and national government. Synod also supported a motion marking the 40th anniversary of the *Faith in the City* report which recommitted the Church to ending ***poverty*** 'in all its forms and manifestations'.

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

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