Amersham Deanery Synod
Report on July 2025 General Synod group of sessions

General Synod met in York from 11 to 15 July 2025. Money matters loomed large on the agenda, but there were other important areas of business summarised briefly below.

Church finances

A key focus of this group of sessions was finance. The following items were discussed:

- The Church's ***'triennium' spending plans*** for 2026-28, which included an increase in Church Commissioners' funding from £1.2bn to £1.6bn over the three years, and proposals for a significant (10%+) uplift in clergy stipends from April 2026. The ***2026 budget of the Archbishops' Council*** was also debated;
- A private members' motion urging the Archbishops' Council to improve ***clergy pension provision and retirement housing*** was unanimously approved; and
- Final approval was given to an ***Abuse (Redress) Measure*** and associated rules which established in law a £150m redress scheme for survivors of Church-related abuse.

There was also a debate on a radical ***'redistribution' proposal*** from the Diocese of Hereford to oblige the Church Commissioners to disburse 1% of their assets each year (c £100m) to support struggling dioceses and in particular to subsidise stipendiary clergy. This gave rise to a lively debate which highlighted the increasing tension and lack of trust between hard-pressed dioceses, many of which are facing large structural deficits and demoralised and overworked parish clergy, and the national Church, with its emphasis on targeted 'strategic' funding of growth projects through something called the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). It was pointed out that the Church Commissioners would have to ring-fence at least £3.5bn of their £11bn of assets to support such an annual inflation-linked disbursement in perpetuity, which risked simply 'subsidising decline', and which would have the effect of severely curtailing spending on other priorities. In the end the motion was neutered by an amendment which kicked discussions about 'support for local stipendiary ministry' into the long grass of the next 'triennium' spending review (2029-31).

Living in Love and Faith

The LLF project did not figure very large in this group of sessions, as the House of Bishops is still trying to agree, ahead of the next Synod meeting in February 2026, a package of proposals on 'bespoke' (standalone) services of blessing for same-sex couples in church and clergy and ordinands entering into same-sex marriages, and some form of 'pastoral reassurance' for those who are unhappy with the proposed changes. The Archbishop of York did however admit in his opening presidential address that 'we seem no nearer a settlement that can hold us together'. At a fringe meeting it was confirmed that the national LLF team are considering contingency plans in the event that that there is no agreement in February. A particular problem is what form of 'pastoral reassurance' would be acceptable to bishops: an initial proposal for 'delegated episcopal ministry' for traditionalists has not found favour with many bishops, who see it as undermining episcopacy.

On the final morning there was a debate on a motion calling on the House of Bishops to remove a requirement for ordination candidates to conform their lives to a 1991 teaching document, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, which affirms a traditional doctrine of marriage and

sexual ethics. Progressives have argued that the document is outdated in its terminology and deters LGBTQ+ candidates from putting themselves forward for ordination. Traditionalists contend that while *Issues* does indeed need to be replaced, there must be new guidance to replace it, consistent with the Church's teaching on marriage.

In a rare show of co-operation between the two sides, which I fear is unlikely to be repeated when the subject of LLF returns to Synod in February, a 'friendly' compromise was agreed by which Synod voted overwhelmingly to drop *Issues* while replacing it with an 'interim' requirement that ordination candidates live consistently within the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy. These guidelines refer to a later (1999) House of Bishops teaching document which still affirms that 'sexual intercourse…properly belongs within marriage exclusively.' Marriage is assumed to be as defined in the Canons (Canon B30 – 'marriage is in its nature a union…of one man with one woman'). In a clarifying statement issued on 23 July, the House of Bishops confirmed the immediate replacement of *Issues*, but also reiterated that 'the change does not alter the Church's doctrine or canonical requirements' in relation to discerning new candidates for ordination.

Other business

Final approval was given to a ***National Church Governance Measure*** which restructures national church institutions so that most functions are centralised into a new trustee-led charity, Church of England National Services (CENS). Other items included a discussion about the governance and culture of ***the House of Bishops***, a debate about ***church growth and revitalisation***, and a discussion of the ***'Thy Kingdom Come'*** prayer and evangelism initiative. Synod also approved plans to amend the ***Common Worship liturgical calendar***, introducing a new Festival of God the Creator (first Sunday after 1 September) and a new Commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya. In an unusual display of legislative speed, the ***Armed Forces Chaplains (Licensing) Measure*** was agreed in just five days. This facilitates the movement of chaplains around the country by providing for their licensing by the Archbishop of Canterbury, rather than diocesan bishops. The debate was an opportunity for Synod to affirm the valuable role that chaplains play in HM Armed Forces. Finally, Synod agreed on ***revised election rules*** for the next quinquennium (2026-31), with voting due in autumn 2026.

Turning to national and global issues, there was a moving address from ***the Archbishop of Jerusalem*** in which he compared the 'horrifying' system of food distribution in Gaza to the 'The Hunger Games' TV series. Many in Synod were however disappointed that the Business Committee did not make time for a 2021 diocesan motion from Carlisle, supported by several other dioceses, calling on the Church's investment bodies to review their policies in relation to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. Synod also reaffirmed its opposition to the ***Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill*** and called on government to improve funding for palliative care services.

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

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