

General Synod Report February 2026 Sessions

What happened at General Synod this week?

General Synod met in London from Mon 9 to Friday 13 February. The Synod met by separate Houses (of Clergy and Laity) before general business, to consider various matters, including possible revision to the Guidelines for the Conduct of Clergy, which have new importance after the vote to replace “issues in Human sexuality (1991) with them in the ordination criteria.

The new Archbishop of Canterbury gave her **first presidential address**, and struck a humble tone: “I believe that I have been called to love and serve the Diocese of Canterbury, the Church of England, and the Anglican Communion, not through developing new programmes and initiatives, but by being a shepherd, who works collaboratively and in partnership, enabling others to flourish....As a shepherd, I will strive to be calm, consistent and compassionate to all in this role.”

She outlined a simple desire to help the Church of England in every parish church and chaplaincy see the Kingdom of God, to which it points, as a pearl of great price, and an ambition to “help the Church love itself more ... believing that its best days are still to come”. She stressed the importance of accountability and transparency, especially in regard to Safeguarding (which was the final straw in her predecessor’s fall). The address was warmly received.

There was significant **legislative business**.

The Clergy Conduct Measure (intended to replace the Clergy Discipline Measure) had been sent back by the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament as ‘not expedient’, because of the the default presumption that tribunals should always be held in private. Synod agreed to change this, so that hearings would usually be in public, but the presiding judge can still order a private tribunal, to protect vulnerable witnesses etc.

Synod received a report on the progress towards creating better **Church Safeguarding Structures**, since the debate last February when it was agreed to establish a truly independent national Safeguarding body, which would set policy and provide supervision to the operational safeguarding teams based in dioceses and cathedrals.

New codes of practice for **Bishops’ Mission Initiatives** were approved.

A National Register of licensed Lay Ministers was approved. This will make it easier to keep track of Lay Readers moving from Diocese to Diocese, in line with good safeguarding.

A paper encouraging **more vocations from people with a working class background** was approved.

The **Parochial Fees Order** for 2027-32 was hotly contested. Synod agreed that the proposal to increase the fees for burial and interment of ashes by £1000 was wrong, and would damage our pastoral ministry, and the proposal will be revised. Our wedding fees are still prohibitive.

Liturgy: Synod completed the next stage in revising liturgy for a Festival of God the Creator (to be offered in September) and a Commemoration of the Twenty-One martyrs of Libya. Changes in liturgy *should* always follow this slow and careful process according to Canon B2...

Synod often seems to spend a lot of time revising its **own, complicated rules:** the number of seats for each diocese in the next Quinquennium was approved - Exeter Diocese will have five clergy and five lay representatives (one more than in 2012), and the dates of meetings were arranged. Very complicated rules about the Crown Nomination Commission, which appoints diocesan Bishops, had the simple aim of averting the disruption of the Commission’s work by the Synod elections.

A number of helpful debates were held on **public matters**.

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On Tuesday Synod debated the recommendations of the Archbishops' Commission on **Reimagining Social Care**", encouraging churches to support the social services, and asking the Government to consider the report as it considers a National Care Service.

On Wednesday Synod debated the **Mental Health Crisis**, and agreed that Dioceses should provide better training for schools and clergy (in mental health first aid), and offer appropriate counselling and therapy to clergy with their own mental health challenges.

On Thursday Synod completed the debate on **Poverty and the Church (40 years after Faith)** in the City).

These are not strictly debates - no-one is objecting to the church serving people facing poverty, nor are we seriously trying to set the national political agenda, but rather celebrate the good work being done in many parishes, and note that the parishes facing the greatest challenges are usually the most poorly resourced.

A Diocesan Synod motion encouraging **more sustainable Flowers in church** drew some advance hostility- why were we debating flowers rather than financial Crisis or the politics of Palestine and Gaza?- but the debate proved to be surprising sensible and even inspiring!

Two sessions were dedicated to answering a record number (258) of Questions submitted by members: almost half were about LLF and the decision of the House of Bishops in October to conclude the process.

What happened about Same-Sex Blessings?

The Bishops gave a Presentation to Synod on Tuesday, on the history of the *Living in Love & Faith* process, and the problems encountered with the *Prayers of Love & Faith*. Synod then spent FIVE hours on Thursday afternoon debating a motion from the House of Bishops (carefully chaired by Ven Douglas Dettmer of this parish)

There are clear divisions within the House of Bishops, but after receiving legal advice and reports on the changing of doctrine and liturgy from the "Faith & Order Commission" (FAOC) they had agreed to bring a motion to General Synod with four points.

- i. to recognise and lament the distress and pain suffered during the LLF process, especially by LGBTI+people
- ii. to affirm the end of the LLF programme which began in February 2023
- iii. to thank the LLF working groups for their work
- iv. to commend the House of Bishops' proposal to establish a Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group and Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Pastoral Consultative Group.

Both 'sides' of Synod tried to amend most of these clauses, but the Bishops defeated them, and What does this motion mean? Para ii) seems to mark the end of LLF, but para iv) launches a new process. Some of the headlines were very misleading:

The Guardian reported "Church of England halts work on LGBTQ+ equality"

The Telegraph reported 'Church of England abandons gay blessing plans'

The BBC claimed 'Church of England has abandoned proposals for same-sex blessing ceremonies'

"Together" (the main progressive pressure group) claimed that the motion passed with a nearly two-thirds majority, which is simply not true. <https://togethercofe.org.uk/update-on-living-and-love-and-faith/>

GS2426 makes clear that the House of Bishops will set up a Working Group to advise the Bishops in their clear intention to allow bespoke (Standalone) services of blessing, using the full and slow Canon B2 process, for which they will need a two-thirds majority in each House of General Synod,

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and make the formal legislative changes to allow clergy to enter same-sex marriages, which also depends on Synodical support.

Perhaps the most revealing speech in the debate came from the Bishop of Chelmsford, a leading revisionist. In effect she said to the Revisionists, “Don’t blame us for the stalemate. We can’t move without offering some sort of alternative episcopal oversight, which would undermine “our ecclesiology or Anglican identity” (ie power)

The Alliance campaign - the Ephesian Fund- has not succeeded in gaining alternative structures, but it has stymied the bishops, which is why we are the only ones actually criticised in GS 2426. In short, nothing has changed since the Bishops commended the Prayers of Love & Faith in December 2023, to the fury and frustration of the Progressive group, and nothing more will change unless the new General Synod to be elected in the autumn votes for it.

Even this stand-off is a surprising victory, given the determination of the majority of the House of Bishops and the rest of Synod to move in a progressive direction since 2023.

What should we now be doing?

First we need to think carefully. Is it worth contending for the Church of England?

Our answer may depend on the Diocese or parish in which we serve. The struggle to uphold the orthodox teaching is exhausting, especially if we feel like a despised minority in our PCC, Parish, Deanery or Diocese. There will be places with clear orthodox leadership which can stand firm. In other places, it may seem easier to find a better boat to fish from, but we also need a historical and national perspective. The faithful Church of God has always been under pressure from the world and from heretical voices within, and Jesus is still Lord of his church. If it is possible for some to remain orthodox with good conscience in the national church, then then it makes it easier for other churches to remain faithful and resist pressure from society.

Second, we should pray for God to sustain us, and even to turn our church and nation back to God. It may seem like an impossible dream- but God specialises in the impossible.

Third, whether or not we think we have a long-term future in our particular parish or diocese, we should now contend for the historic faith through the Synodical process.

The next eight months are critical. Between **March and May**, we must encourage orthodox candidates to stand for election at Annual Parochial Church Meetings, and aim to fill every seat on Deanery Synod - even if they are not able or willing to attend Deanery Synod meetings.

We then need to recruit five lay and five clergy candidates to stand in the October elections for General Synod. If we can win 3 seats in the house of Laity, we will have made a vital contribution to the national struggle. We will need the extra two candidates to step in and fill casual vacancies: it is worth noting that only two of the four laity originally elected to General Synod in 2021 will have completed the five years.

By the first meeting of the new General Synod in November it should be clear whether there is sufficient support to fulfil the House of Bishops’ ambition. If the newly elected Synod can block them and make them face another five years of frustration, perhaps they will be prepared to consider a settlement and relinquish some of the power which is so precious to them.

You can read some well-informed reflections on the significance of the General Synod debate here:

Ian Paul: <https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/the-discussion-at-the-end-of-the-llf-process/>

Tim Wyatt: <https://tswyatt.substack.com/p/calming-the-waters>

Martin Davie: <https://mbarrattdavie.wordpress.com/>

Susie Leafe: <https://www.anglicanfutures.org/post/prayers-of-blessing-still-commended-in-the-church-of-england>

The progressive viewpoint can be found at <https://togethercofe.org.uk/update-on-living-and-love-and-faith/>