

# **Liverpool Diocesan Synod**

## **Report on February 2025 General Synod group of sessions**

### General Synod Report - February 2025

Unexpected retirements of the Archbishop of Canterbury and of the Bishop of Liverpool in January 2025 set a sombre mood for General Synod held in London, 10-14 February 2025.

#### **Safeguarding**

The Church of England exists to proclaim the good news of God's salvation through Christ. Safeguarding - protecting the safety of those we serve - was at the heart of these sessions.

A debate on the Makin Report into abuses by the late John Smyth led to a unanimously-approved motion in which Synod repented of 'failures of safeguarding' in the Church.

A debate on safeguarding independence, considered the recommendations in last year's report *The Future of Church Safeguarding* by Professor Alexis Jay. A 'response group' set up to consider the report did not reach a conclusion on a way forward and offered a choice.

Lead bishop (Joanne Grenfell) expressed a preference for 'model 4', the establishment of two independent bodies: one responsible for delivering all Church safeguarding activities (currently managed by dioceses and cathedrals, totalling 85 organisations), and the other responsible for providing scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding. Despite strong arguments in favour from some survivors and victims of abuse, there were arguments that 'model 4' was untested, and could create more safeguarding problems.

Another option, 'model 3', transferred only the scrutiny function and part of the National Safeguarding Team into new independent bodies. An amendment to the motion created 'model 3.5', in which 'model 3' was brought in immediately and which called for *'further work as to the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement model 4.'* The amended motion for 'model 3.5' was carried. Press headlines the next day suggesting that Synod had ignored 'expert advice' were not accurate because expert advice from over 100 diocesan and cathedral safeguarding professionals expressed concern about the viability of 'model 4'.

#### **Appointment of diocesan bishops**

Two debates concerned how diocesan bishops are appointed. This followed recent failures to appoint new bishops for Carlisle and Ely.

In the first debate, the House of Bishops proposed to change standing orders for the **Crown Nominations Commission (CNC)**, which appoints diocesan bishops, to make it less likely that the CNC would not agree on a candidate. Bishops wanted to exclude abstentions from the vote count, reduce the 2/3rds majority required to 60%, remove the secret ballot, and give the person chairing the CNC (usually the relevant Archbishop) a casting vote. Though supported by those who felt that a failure to appoint is unsatisfactory, the proposals were seen by others as overreach by the House of Bishops, especially after press reports of how the Liverpool CNC had been conducted in 2022. The proposals were defeated.

In the second debate the bishops proposed to change how diocesan ***Vacancy in See Committees (ViSCs)*** are appointed, to achieve 'a better representation of the diocese as a whole'. This affects the CNC process because ViSCs elect representatives from the diocese to CNCs. Proposals to prevent more than two people from the same 'worshipping community' being elected to the ViSC, and requiring at least two women (one lay and one clergy) to be put forward to the CNC, were approved. The first proposal will discriminate against larger parishes/churches, where most young people worship and those parishes which have *ex officio* ViSC members, such as General Synod members.

### **Living in Love and Faith (LLF)**

Only one hour was allocated to a presentation by the lead bishop (Martyn Snow) and questions. As explained in an update on LLF (GS 2386), bishops are still doing the theological work needed to underpin the parts of the LLF 'package', including the commendation of 'bespoke' (previously 'standalone') services of blessing for same-sex couples, the relaxation of rules which prevent clergy and ordinands contracting same-sex marriages, and the development of 'pastoral reassurance' for those opposed to the Prayers of Love and Faith through what is called 'delegated episcopal ministry' (a form of shared episcopacy across regions).

Those seeking change expressed frustration at the slow progress since the vote in favour of PLF two years ago. The lead bishop could not guarantee that proposals would be ready for the February 2026 group of sessions. Before then there will need to be further theological work and consultations with diocesan synods. In 'A Report from the Faith And Order Commission' (GS Misc 1406) there is scepticism that, in the context of the Church's continued commitment to the doctrine of marriage (Canon B30), 'a clear distinction between holy matrimony and civil marriage can withstand scrutiny.'

### **Other business**

Synod approved a new ***Clergy Conduct Measure*** to replace the Clergy Discipline Measure, introducing a new 'triage' system for complaints about conduct, distinguishing between grievances, allegations of misconduct and serious misconduct. In serious misconduct cases, clergy will be liable to 'de-frocking' (being 'deposed from Holy Orders').

A ***National Church Governance Measure***, restructuring the national church institutions, passed the revision stage. First consideration was given to a revised ***Mission and Pastoral Measure*** which governs how changes are made to pastoral ministry and church buildings. Debates were held on ***racial justice***, ***diocesan finances*** (including initial proposals for substantial increases in clergy stipends), ***sports and wellbeing ministry***, ***working class ministry*** and how to involve more ***young people*** in the work of General Synod.

Link to Synod papers: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod>

If you have any questions about the above, please contact me.

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