



DIOCESE IN EUROPE GENERAL SYNOD REPORT February 2026



Church House, Westminster

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Introduction

This report summarises the key discussions and decisions from the February 2026 group of sessions of the General Synod. It brings together contributions from members of the Diocese in Europe, reflecting both the breadth of business conducted and the depth of engagement across a number of significant areas in the life of the Church.

Highlights of the sessions included the Presidential Address by Archbishop Sarah, setting a tone of hope, shared ministry and unity; substantial debate on mental health and the need for better training and support; and

important legislative progress on the Clergy Conduct Measure and safeguarding structures. Synod also considered matters of liturgy, including the proposed Festival of God the Creator and the commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya, as well as practical aspects of church life such as environmental sustainability in church flowers.

Alongside these, there were significant discussions on working-class ministry and inclusion, and a major update on the Living in Love and Faith process, marking the conclusion of one phase and the beginning of another. The report concludes with a tribute to Clive Billenness, remembering his significant contribution to the work of Synod, particularly in safeguarding, at the anniversary of his death.

Robin Hall

President's Address

There was warm and enthusiastic support, with a standing ovation, for Archbishop Sarah as she addressed Synod for the first time in that role. In turbulent times, she spoke first of the need to 'focus on Christ, who calms the waters and stills the wind.' She highlighted the prayer and support that she had received not just from the UK but across the Anglican Communion, which brought her hope. She sees herself as bringing 'calm, consistency and compassion'. Archbishop Sarah said, 'I do not carry the responsibilities alone.'

We serve God's Church together, lay and ordained, offering our richly varied gifts and diversity; treating one another with love, dignity and respect; setting our face to Christ. We should be one in our love of God and of one another.' The golden thread which has run through her ministry, including her nursing career, is 'washing feet'.

She mentioned the need to 'live out our calling to share the love of Christ with those around us', citing multiple examples of where she saw this happening across the parishes and chaplaincies. Passing through a reference to Thomas Merton's poem on the field with 'the pearl of great price', she returned again to the message of 'hope' through the ministry that speaks of the Kingdom, and her own hope 'because the ministry I offer is shared.'

Mary Talbot

Mental Health and the Church

For the first time since 2008, Synod discussed a motion related to mental health. Since that date, there has been a much better medical understanding of different types and issues, but also, sadly, an increase in incidence.

The principal focus of the debate, led by the Diocesan Lay Chair, Dr Jamie Harrison, was on the urgent need to train and equip clergy to be able to respond to the mental needs of those to whom they minister in an informed, prayerful and compassionate way. He referred to the close relationship between spiritual and mental wellbeing.

The motion, which was passed incorporating three amendments, asked dioceses to include specific content in their post-ordination (curacy) training and continuing ministerial education on how to support those facing mental health challenges. It asked the National Society to develop further materials for use in Church schools and children's groups, which was extended to include material for those children and young people who live with or are carers for others with mental health challenges.

The motion stressed the importance of ensuring that appropriate counselling and therapy is available to clergy themselves facing mental health challenges, which was further

strengthened to call upon the dioceses to bring their arrangements up to the standards of best practice, referring to the report from St Luke's for Clergy Wellbeing. The motion also asked for care to be taken when drafting liturgical materials.

A number of the speakers were clergy who have experienced mental health issues, who mentioned the continuing stigma and the difficulty of talking openly in a church setting. Others spoke of the challenges that they have faced in knowing how best to offer support. One speaker mentioned the usefulness of the Mental Health First Aid course.

There were many moving speeches.

Mary Talbot

Sustainable Church Flowers

There was considerable media interest in this Diocesan Synod motion well before General Synod met. It came from the Diocese of Worcester, having made its way from a parish to a Deanery Synod and then to Diocesan Synod. It is a good example of how a Parochial Church Council can raise concerns which make their way through the synodical system. The motion in question was to seek to promote the use of local, seasonal flowers and foliage and to discourage the use of floral foam – "Oasis" being the brand name. Bishop Martin Gorrick, the Bishop of Dudley, made his speech, which included a video on the whole idea.

The paper presented to Synod focused on sustainability in church floristry, eliminating harmful materials and suggesting practical tips for churches. The negativity (of which there was some) around the debate centred not on the contents of the motion but on the fact that such advice could have been circulated rather than precious Synod time being used for a debate.

However, a mainly positive debate ensued, with many speakers speaking in favour. It was pointed out that the briefing notes seemed out of date in places because three-quarters of flower foam used today is biodegradable. Nevertheless, it was an informative and useful contribution to the Church of England's programme of caring for creation. Synod took note of the report.

Fr Richard Seabrook

Festival of God the Creator and Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya

Synod considered this liturgical business, which had been introduced in July last year, with the consideration of liturgical material to be added to the calendar. At this first revision stage, Synod had a line-by-line breakdown of the proposals of a revision report from the Liturgical Commission for the Feast of God the Creator (also to be known as the Feast of the Creation in Christ), to be celebrated on the First Sunday in September. This gave Synod the opportunity to comment on the texts of the Invitation to Confession, Kyrie Confession, Collect, Lectionary provision, Gospel Acclamation, Introduction to the Peace, Prayer at the Preparation of the Table, Eucharistic Prayer Preface, Post Communion Prayer and Blessing, together with the antiphons to be used for the Gospel Canticles in the Daily Office.

The debate around the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya arose from the killing of twenty-one Christian men, mainly migrant labourers, on or around 15 February 2015 by Islamic extremists. It is proposed that this be added to the Common Worship calendar, and Synod was asked to comment on a potential biography. There were many moving speeches about this particular item, in particular from His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos from the Coptic Orthodox Church – it was the Coptic Orthodox Church

that recognised immediately these men as Christian martyrs. Synod took note of the report.

Fr Richard Seabrook

Clergy Conduct Measure

The Clergy Conduct Measure (“CCM”) was passed almost unanimously by all three Houses of the General Synod (Bishops, Clergy, Laity) in February 2025. Much work and consultation on the CCM had been done in this five-year term of the Synod, which is a replacement for the much-criticised Clergy Discipline Measure (often referred to as “CDM”).

The main changes are (quoting the Church Times): “streamlining bureaucracy, abolition of the 12-month limit for serious misconduct, integration of safeguarding professionals into the process, better protections against vexatious complaints, and more information-sharing between dioceses and provinces. Deposition from Holy Orders had been reintroduced for the most serious offences.”

Because the Church of England is the established Church *in* England, its Measures must be approved by Parliament before becoming effective. It was thus duly considered by the Ecclesiastical Committee, a joint thirty-member committee of the Commons and Lords. If the Ecclesiastical Committee recommends legislation, the two Houses then usually simply vote on the motion *yea* or *nay*, and it is sent to the Sovereign for final approval.

The Ecclesiastical Committee had some reservations about one aspect of the processes in the CCM, namely the assumption that the court or tribunal would sit in private unless otherwise decided to be in public. It felt strongly that the Church needed to be more transparent, and that proceedings under the CCM should normally be public, unless there were good

reasons for a closed tribunal. As the Ecclesiastical Committee would not recommend the legislation unless the change were made, the CCM came back to the General Synod this year. It was reintroduced as a matter for debate, amended in line with the Committee's requests, and passed again. All being well, it will now make its way through Parliament.

The Revd Bruce Bryant-Scott

Safeguarding Next Steps

General Synod received a report from Dame Christine Ryan, Chair of the Safeguarding Structures Programme Board, on progress towards reform of the upper reaches of safeguarding leadership. Following decisions taken by Synod in 2025, it envisions setting up a new charity, which may be called the Independent Safeguarding Authority ("ISA"). Separate from the National Church Institutions, as well as dioceses and cathedrals, this would play a watchdog role with respect to all in their operations. The governing board would be a majority of non-church members, and its director responsible to an external regulatory body. The National Safeguarding Team would become employees of the ISA.

A motion to support this work was passed almost unanimously.

Diocesan and cathedral safeguarding teams would remain embedded within their jurisdictions, but having a high degree of independence. Thus, at the local level, much would remain the same. What should change, especially in dioceses and cathedrals that may not have as strong a safeguarding staff as we do in the Diocese in Europe, is the quality of response to complainants. The ISA will give guidance on training, procedures, and resources to these local bodies.

The Revd Bruce Bryant-Scott

Working Class Ministry

Many years ago I heard the quip that, "The purpose of the Church of England is to put a gentleman in every parish." While a bit of a caricature, and certainly outdated, like most witticisms there is some truth in it. Clergy have been overwhelmingly recruited from the middle classes and the second sons of aristocracy, and historically attended public schools and Oxbridge. While there are now many clergy from the working class, they still face implicit and all too frequent discrimination. The norm still seems to be formation in residential seminaries when many candidates for ordination can only study part-time and at a distance. Many working-class candidates and clergy find that, not having obtained first degrees in Classics or Theology, there is a discounting of their qualifications and experience. The maintenance of their original accent is counted against them, and some are told to have elocution lessons. All of this undermines the Church of England in being a Church for all people.

The Revd Alex Frost from the Diocese of Blackburn (and a proud supporter of Burnley FC) introduced a Private Member's Motion that the Ministry Development Board develop a national strategy for working-class vocations. The Bishop of Barking, the Rt Revd Lynne Cullens, made a presentation describing the repeated discrimination received by a working-class single mother because of her accent, her manner of dress and make-up, and went on to say how this person persisted, eventually being ordained, and after some time, much to her own surprise, became the Suffragan Bishop of Barking. However, her experience was still the exception, and the norm was still too much that of a middle-class priest with a heart for the working class.

During the debate, clergy and laity spoke about the need for greater inclusion of people from

working-class backgrounds, and the need to change formation in both colleges and IME2 (post-ordination training). The motion passed, and we await concrete proposals and action.

The Revd Bruce Bryant-Scott

Living in Love and Faith

The journey so far

Since its inception in 2017, the LLF process sought to navigate the complex landscape of identity, sexuality, and marriage within our Church. Following the Church's historic apology in 2023 for its "rejection, exclusion and hostility" toward LGBTQ+ people, there was a profound hope that progress – specifically regarding "standalone" services for the Prayers of Love and Faith and clergy in same-sex civil marriages – would follow, in line with the "radical new Christian inclusion" that was approved in all three Houses of Synod.

The February 2026 Debate

A five-hour debate centred on the House of Bishops' motion to bring the formal LLF programme to a close. Synod voted to:

- Lament the distress and pain suffered during the process, particularly by LGBTQI+ people;
- Affirm that the formal LLF programme will conclude by July 2026;
- Establish new working groups to oversee future theological and legal work.

The decision to halt LLF without authorizing standalone blessing services for same-sex couples in a civil marriage (these may be held in a regular advertised service) or resolving the status of clergy in same-sex civil marriages feels for many like a loss of momentum.

This latter point is of importance to us in Europe where UK civil partnerships are not legally valid in all jurisdictions within our diocese. Consequently, whereas clergy in same-sex

relationships in England may enter into a civil partnership to secure next-of-kin and pension rights, in some European countries, they must choose between their Permission to Officiate or, for example, the right to visit their partner in hospital. I repeatedly raised this injustice at Synod but sadly it has not been addressed.

What happens next

While a frustrating conclusion for some, the vote in favour of the motion, including its commitment to future theological work, passed comfortably in all three Houses. With elections for a new General Synod in September this year, any next steps will be for our new Archbishop, the House of Bishops and those elected to General Synod for 2026-2031.

Robin Hall

Clive Billenness (1961–2025)

As we participated in this February's Synod, and especially the debate on safeguarding, we did so conscious of the one-year anniversary of the death of our fellow Synod member from Europe, Clive Billenness, as he returned from the February 2025 Group of Sessions.



Clive was a stalwart representative from our diocese and had built a formidable reputation on General Synod, both as a champion for safeguarding but also for his work as a member of the Archbishops' Council Audit Committee.

Clive was committed to transparency, good governance and, most of all, giving a platform to the victims and survivors of Church abuse.

We continue to be grateful for Clive's work during his time on General Synod, and hold his wife Linda in our prayers.

Robin Hall

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The Diocese in Europe team, leading worship at General Synod, July 2025