Affirming Catholics in Synod briefing November 2026 Group of Sessions

This briefing paper has been prepared by members of the board of Affirming Catholicism UK and of ACiS (Affirming Catholics in Synod), for the information and advice of ACiS supporters and friends.

Affirming Catholicism (AffCath) is a charitable organisation, whose aims and objectives are educational, seeking to promote an inclusive Catholic vision of Anglicanism within the Church of England and wider Anglican Communion.

General note

Congratulations to everyone elected or re-elected to the General Synod, and a particular welcome to those coming for the first time. We have an interesting five years ahead of us.

Affirming Catholics in Synod brings together members from all three Houses who support the aims and values of Affirming Catholicism: *"a movement of inspiration and hope in the Anglican Communion, seeking to bring together and strengthen lay and ordained people who recognise the positive, inclusive and joyful currents in the Catholic tradition of Christianity."* We work in partnership with organisations that share our mission, and closely with other progressive Anglican bodies through Inclusive Church. Among the things we value are:

- Commitment to the social and ethical transformation of the world.
- A living catholic tradition to carry the gifts of the past into the future.
- Models of love, friendship and community for all seeking to follow the gospel, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation.
- Diversity and freedom of conscience within the community of faith.

Before each group of sessions the Board prepares a short briefing like this one, and we meet together at the start of each Synod, beginning with a celebration of the Eucharist when in London. This briefing is not an exhaustive guide to the agenda. It highlights items of particular interest or concern, or where a distinctive affirming Catholic perspective might helpfully be brought to debate. Where they issue a briefing on matters of common concern, we commend the advice of our friends in **Together for the Church of England**. **If you might be interested in helping with the work of ACiS please let either Hannah Cleugh or Charlie Baczyk-Bell know.**

This is a short and unusual group of sessions: barely a day of business, no legislation, and much of it ceremonial or informational. It is nonetheless the moment at which the culture of a new Synod begins to form: who speaks, how we treat one another, and who is elected to the bodies that will shape the next five years. Much of the real business of November happens in the elections that follow it.

Members old and new will be alert to the fact that during the past quinquennium of General Synod many debates, however innocuous or innocently conceived, became prey to the divisions over LLF. This may indeed happen during this quinquennium - we encourage everyone to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. There is no need to play into the incessant politicisation of every issue, but nor is it a virtue to pretend away the political dynamics. We commit ourselves in prayer to a better, more honest and more holy dynamic in this new Synod.

Before the sessions

Synod meets at Church House, Westminster, from 3pm on Tuesday 17 November until no later than 3.15pm on Wednesday 18 November. There is no legislative business, which is unusual for a legislative body, and the Business Committee expects several legislative items in February 2027.

- **Monday 16 November, from 10:00am:** tours of Church House and Market Stalls by various parts of the National Church Institutions and **from 2pm:** induction programme in the Assembly Hall. It is intended for new members but open to all, and returning members are a welcome presence for those finding their feet.

  ACiS gathering and Eucharist: St Matthew Westminster, 7:30pm on Monday 16th, followed by a trip to somewhere for some food afterwards. All welcome
- **Tuesday 17 November, 10.45am:** The Eucharist at Westminster Abbey, followed by the inauguration of the twelfth General Synod by His Majesty the King. It is the first inauguration of his reign and the first of Archbishop Sarah Mullally's tenure.
- **Zoom for Synod:** basic Zoom access is available for those unable to attend in person through illness or other reasons. Let Synod Support know in advance.

Questions closed at midday on 3 November. Amendments need the support of two other members and go to amendments@churchofengland.org. The deadline is 5.30pm on Monday 16 November for Tuesday's business, and 10am on Tuesday 17 November for the Blackburn motion on church buildings.

The business at a glance

When	Item	Paper	Form
Tue from 3pm	Opening worship, introductions and welcomes		
Tue	Presidential Address, Archbishop of Canterbury		Address
Tue	Report by the Business Committee	GS 2469	Take note debate
Tue, ends by 5.45pm	Safeguarding Update	GS 2470	Presentation and questions
Tue from 5.45pm	Questions		Written answers and supplementaries
Wed from 9am	Loyal Address to HM The King		Motion
Wed morning	Maintaining Church Buildings (Blackburn DSM)	GS 2471A, GS 2471B	Debate, amendable
Wed morning	Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing	GS 2466	Take note debate
Wed 12.50pm	Holy Communion, Church House Chapel		
Wed 2pm	Funding our Church's Mission	GS 2472	Presentation and questions
Wed by 3.15pm	Prorogation		
Wed from 3.45pm	House of Laity (Assembly Hall); House of Bishops (Harvey Goodwin Suite)		Separate meetings

Tuesday afternoon

Presidential Address

Archbishop Sarah will address the new Synod for the first time. There is no debate, but the address will set the tone for the quinquennium, and members will listen for what she says about unity, safeguarding and the unresolved questions of inclusion.

Report by the Business Committee (GS 2469): take note debate

This is the only opportunity to comment on the agenda as a whole, and it rewards a short, well-aimed speech. Points members might raise:

- **The waiting list.** Nine Diocesan Synod Motions are listed on the agenda but not scheduled. Two concern LLF (Lincoln; Newcastle, *Progressing Living in Love and Faith*), alongside Coventry on the

failure to appoint diocesan bishops, three on national funding and redistribution (Norwich, Hereford, Lichfield), and others on safer recruitment, non-disclosure agreements and DBF governance.

- **Conduct.** Paragraph 19 reports complaints about a member's behaviour at the July sessions, on which the Committee deferred a decision until the election results were known. Members may reasonably ask how complaints straddling two Synods will be resolved, without commenting on the substance.
- **The Elections Review Group.** The Committee will invite expressions of interest in early 2027. This is worth ACiS members volunteering for.
- **February 2027.** The envelope is 22 to 26 February. The forecast includes the **Clergy Conduct Code of Practice** (for approval), the Mission and Ministry in Covenant report, Safeguarding Structures, the 68th Standing Orders Committee report, and the appointment of a member of the Archbishops' Council (the new permanent Chair, per GS Misc 1469).
- **Safeguarding in the Church Code of Practice.** This may be laid after the November Synod. It will be deemed approved unless 25 members ask for a debate within three weeks, in which case a special online session will be held on **Saturday 12 December**. Members should read it promptly when it appears.

Safeguarding Update (GS 2470): presentation and questions

The Rt Revd Robert Springett, Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, will present. The paper, from the National Director of Safeguarding, reports that 97% of the National Safeguarding Team have completed trauma-informed training, that the Interim Support Scheme closed on 1 October after supporting 270 victims and survivors over six years, and that a new Survivor Support Fund opened the same day. Publication of the independent practice review into the case of David Tudor has been delayed again, to early 2027.

The paper is largely silent on the bigger question: the move to the more independent structures Synod voted for in February 2025 and February 2026. It acknowledges "uncertainty" about future structures, and GS Misc 1469 records that the Archbishops' Council met twice in early October on safeguarding structures, "including the Executive Chair's decision to step back". Members will want to know what that means for the timetable and for independence.

Our tradition speaks of confession, penance and amendment of life, and these apply to institutions as much as to individuals. The affirming Catholic instinct here is to keep victims and survivors at the centre, to resist the temptation to treat safeguarding as a matter of process, and to avoid using it as a proxy for any other dispute. Useful questions might include:

- Who now leads the Safeguarding Structures programme, and what is the revised timetable for the new national safeguarding charity?
- How does funding for the Survivor Support Fund compare with the Interim Support Scheme it replaces?
- What has caused the further delay to the David Tudor review, and how are those affected being kept informed?
- How will the new victims and survivors reference group be independent of the bodies it advises?

GS Misc 1471, on the Redress Scheme, should be read alongside this item.

Questions

The deadline has passed. Written answers are published in advance on the Synod App and website, and the session begins no later than 5.45pm. Supplementary questions must be genuine questions arising from the answer, and brevity is a courtesy to the chair and to colleagues. For new members: formulations such as *"will*

the bishop confirm" or *"will the bishop tell Synod"* are procedurally safer than *"does the bishop agree"*, which invites a ruling that the question seeks an opinion and therefore is out of order.

<u>Wednesday morning</u>

Loyal Address

Moved by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the occasion of the inauguration. This is customary and not expected to be contentious.

Maintaining Church Buildings (GS 2471A and GS 2471B): Diocesan Synod Motion from Blackburn

The motion, moved by the Revd Dr Tom Woolford, asks Synod to acknowledge that many PCCs are struggling with buildings in poor repair, to recognise that parishes in areas of high deprivation find these costs especially hard and that the grant system can set neighbouring parishes in competition, and to ask the National Church Institutions to develop a national strategy for the preservation, maintenance and development of buildings that serve their communities through the week. It began in the Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery, where nine of 17 churches are in the most deprived 12% of parishes and four each face urgent repairs of over £100,000.

We warmly support the motion. An incarnational and sacramental faith takes place seriously: our churches are holy ground, signs of God's presence in every community, and often the last public building left open in the poorest. The scale of the problem is set out plainly in the Secretary General's note (GS 2471B):

- about 16,000 church buildings, of which about 12,500 are listed, and over 900 on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register;
- a conservation deficit of roughly £1 billion, against Buildings for Mission funding of under £10 million for 2026–28;
- the end of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which means works to listed churches now cost about 20% more in VAT;
- the DCMS Places of Worship Renewal Fund, worth £92 million over four years, described as "hugely oversubscribed" and "not nearly sufficient".

Members might press three points. First, a national strategy must remain a partnership with parishes and dioceses, and must not become a vehicle for closure by stealth or for concentrating investment in a few favoured places; deprivation should sit at its heart. Second, Synod should hear back on the strategy, which needs to be purposeful and with a timetable for implementation, rather than receive it as settled. Third, the Church should keep pressing Government on VAT relief for listed places of worship. Any amendment to this effect must be lodged by **10am on Tuesday 17 November**. There will no doubt be amendments by our evangelical brothers and sisters to widen the definition of 'Church" to include the people of God as well as buildings. This would take the focus away from the heart of the motion and, although may seem acceptable may dilute the original motion.

Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing (GS 2466): take note debate

Moved by the Bishop of Hereford. This is the five-year report on the Covenant passed in 2020, held over from July. There is real progress to welcome: every diocese now has a clergy wellbeing lead, at least 26 offer pastoral supervision, stipends and pensions have improved, and the report recommends non-managerial supervision or reflective practice for all clergy by the end of the triennium. The Living Ministry findings are sobering, however: 40% of clergy feel isolated, 45% of incumbents are uncertain about retirement provision, first incumbency is a time of acute strain, and self-supporting ministers describe feeling "second-class".

The report is silent in two places that matter to many ACiS members:

- **LGBTQIA+ clergy and their households**, including clergy in same-sex partnerships and marriages and those unable to marry because of the consequences for their ministry, are not mentioned. The report's own recommendation 9, to "align with inclusion and justice work", gives members a natural way to ask that this be named explicitly.
- **Discipline.** The experience of complaints and discipline under the CDM, and the transition to the Clergy Conduct Measure, is among the most significant causes of clergy distress, but it is not addressed. This links directly to the Clergy Conduct Code of Practice expected in February.

Members might also ask why the 36-hour weekly rest proposed by an earlier Synod motion has become guidance for bishops, and whether a two-year pause in research risks losing sight of the very trends the report identifies. The report's focused study of disabled and neurodivergent clergy picks up themes from July's *All Kinds of Minds* debate, and is worth connecting to it. Theologically, the bishop is *pastor pastorum*, and the care of clergy is part of the Church's sacramental life rather than an HR function. The report deserves to be taken note of warmly, with the gaps named.

Wednesday afternoon

Funding our Church's Mission (GS 2472): presentation and questions

This presentation from the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners lays the ground for the funding decisions of this quinquennium. Its headline claim is that the Church is "exceptionally well resourced in comparison with many other provinces". The detail tells a more uneven story:

- **Parishes.** Mean PCC income is £96,500, but the median is £45,600. The poorest tenth of parishes average £5,800 a year, the richest tenth £454,700. Parish share has fallen from 34% of PCC income in 2020 to 27% in 2024.
- **Dioceses.** Diocesan boards ran an aggregate deficit of £48 million in 2024, and 38 dioceses forecast a deficit for 2026.
- **Clergy.** There are 6,753 stipendiary clergy on the national payroll, about 1,000 fewer than a decade ago. 29% are aged 60 or over and a further 17% are 55 to 59.
- **Vocations.** Starters in training rose from 324 to 444 in 2025/26, the first increase in five years, and a further rise is expected this autumn.
- **National money.** Commissioners' distributions for 2026–28 total £1.6 billion. The sums for 2029–31 will be set in the first half of 2028.

The affirming Catholic interest is the parish: a priest and a people in every community, and the poorest communities above all. St Paul's appeal for "a fair balance between your present abundance and their need" (2 Corinthians 8:13–14) is the right frame for a church whose resources are so unevenly spread. The National Funding for Diocesan Ministry (NFDM) review (GS Misc 1472) is now examining how endowment income reaches dioceses: Lowest Income Communities Funding (£133.5 million for 2026–28), the Diocesan Investment Programme (£236 million), and transition funding. Synod has asked for a full debate early in this quinquennium, based on robust modelling. Useful questions include:

- What does the 2029–31 planning assume about the number of stipendiary clergy, and about where they will serve?
- How will the NFDM review weigh deprivation against growth, and will Synod see the options before decisions are taken in 2028?
- How is the Diocesan Investment Programme being evaluated, and does it reach parishes in the poorest places?

- With vocations rising, are training institutions across the breadth of the Church's traditions resourced to receive them?

The NFDM co-chairs, the Bishops of Bath and Wells and Manchester, invite evidence at talkingchurchfunding@churchofengland.org.

House meetings

After prorogation, the House of Laity meets from 3.45pm in the Assembly Hall and the House of Bishops in the Harvey Goodwin Suite. Details go directly to members of each House.

GS Misc papers worth reading

These are not debated, but contain material that may surface in questions or speeches.

- **GS Misc 1469, Archbishops' Council activities.** The Council is recruiting a permanent Chair: an unpaid role of two to three days a week for five years, subject to Synod approval, expected in February 2027. Applications from women, people of global majority heritage and younger people are particularly invited. We note that many recent appointments to the Archbishops Council have been from the Evangelical tradition and would welcome a re-balancing. The National Church Governance Measure will not progress in 2026.
- **GS Misc 1471, Redress.** The scheme is expected to open later this year, with Kennedys LLP as independent administrator. The first 200 applications will be processed immediately and later ones held in a queue. Applications from families of deceased victims are excluded at launch.
- **GS Misc 1472, National Funding for Diocesan Ministry review.** As above.
- **GS Misc 1468, Pensions and financial wellbeing services**, and **GS Misc 1470, Clergy Retirement Dignity and Fairness Review**, both of which bear on the clergy wellbeing debate.

<u>Looking ahead</u>

The shape of the new Synod

Nearly half of the new Synod's members have never served before. Evidence so far suggests a narrow affirming majority in the House of Clergy, and an unclear picture in the House of Laity, with a significant number of members whose views are not yet known. The House of Bishops is likely to become more conservative through elections and appointments. On that reading, measures needing a two-thirds majority in every House look out of reach, while matters needing simple majorities will turn on who is in the chamber. Of course, members of ACiS may find common ground with a variety of the other groups on synod, especially on matters that relate to catholic order or the sacraments.

We should remember where the last Synod ended. In July, the amended version of Professor Helen King's motion, recognising "a legitimate range of theological perspectives, held in good conscience, across the Church of England", passed in the House of Clergy (93 to 79) and the House of Laity (101 to 83), and fell only in the House of Bishops, by 14 votes to 11 with four abstentions. The ground is not lost, but it will be won in relationships rather than in arithmetic. Many new members have not yet formed settled views of one another. Hospitality, friendship across difference, and patient, honest speech in these first sessions will matter more than any single vote.

Elections within Synod

Over the coming months the new Synod will elect members of the bodies that shape its life, including Chair and Vice Chair if the House of Laity, the two Prolocutors, the Business Committee, the extremely influential Appointments Committee and others, and Synod will hopefully be asked in February to approve the appointment of a permanent Chair of the Archbishops' Council if the process has completed by then. These

elections shape the Church's governance for five years, and the central members of the CNC, up for re-election soon, in particular shape every diocesan appointment; Coventry's waiting motion on the failure to appoint diocesan bishops is a reminder of why. We encourage ACiS members, new and returning, to consider standing, to coordinate, and to vote in every election. We will circulate details as timetables are published.

Business to watch

- **Safeguarding in the Church Code of Practice.** If laid after November, a request from 25 members within three weeks triggers a debate at an online session on Saturday 12 December, but as it deemed approved otherwise only support a debate if there's something you disagree with.
- **Clergy Conduct Code of Practice (February 2027, for approval).** Our July briefing raised concern that the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy might be used within the new Clergy Conduct Measure process, including the novel inclusion of the 2014 House of Bishops' statement on same-sex marriage. This would bear heavily on clergy married to people of the same sex. We will study the draft Code as soon as it is published, and urge members to do the same.
- **Mission and Ministry in Covenant (February 2027).** The report on the proposals with the Methodist Church will matter to everyone who cares about catholic order and the unity of the Church.
- **Living in Love and Faith.** LLF is not on the forecast for February. Two LLF Diocesan Synod Motions (Lincoln and Newcastle) are waiting for time, and the bishops' working and consultative groups continue their work. We will keep members informed.

For new members

- **Download the Synod App.** It carries the papers, Notice Papers, forms, and the Order Papers, which appear about an hour before each session.
- **Read the papers in full.** The Business Committee report (GS 2469) is the best single guide to the sessions.
- **Requesting to speak.** Requests go through the App. Say briefly what you would add: chairs look for a balance of Houses, dioceses and perspectives.
- **Conduct.** The Synod Code of Conduct and complaints procedure apply in the chamber and online. Proceedings are livestreamed on YouTube and occasionally broadcast on BBC Parliament.
- **Worship and care.** Each session begins and ends in worship, and pastoral support is available throughout; see the Worship Notice Paper.

Papers and further reading

- General Synod November 2026: agenda and papers
- GS 2469 Report by the Business Committee
- GS 2470 Safeguarding Update
- GS 2471A and GS 2471B Maintaining Church Buildings
- GS 2466 Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing
- GS 2472 Funding our Church's Mission
- Andrew Goddard, "Surveying the new General Synod", Psephizo
- Anglican Ink, "The King vote as amended" (July 2026 votes)

Contact

If you would like to know more about ACiS, please contact Charlie Baczyk-Bell or Hannah Cleugh.

Affirming Catholicism
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