

GENERAL SYNOD

Introduction

This paper provides Synod with background to the items relating to the Armed Forces that will be considered during these sessions, including the briefing from Brigadier Jaish Mahan and the legislative changes to the licensing of Armed Forces Chaplains. It also gives some broader context for work underway on church engagement in issues of war and peace at a time of increased global conflict.

The current situation

1. The recently published Global Peace Index¹ for 2025 reports that the level of global peacefulness continues to decline and that 'many of the leading factors that precede major conflicts are higher than they have been since the end of WW2'. It notes that in 2024:
 - 17 countries recorded more than 1000 conflict deaths
 - The successful resolution of conflict was lower than at any point for the last 50 years
 - 78 countries were involved in conflict beyond their borders
 - Expenditure on peacebuilding and peacekeeping was 0.52 per cent of total military spending in 2024, compared to 0.83 per cent ten years ago.
2. The level and range of threats faced by the UK has increased in recent years. In July 2024, in light of these threats, the then Chief of the General Staff described this as a 'pre-war generation' and called on the UK to 'take preparatory steps to enable placing our societies on a war footing.' While the Conservative government at the time rejected his view, the recently published Strategic Defence Review² used a similar phrase in describing clearly the need for the nation to move to 'warfighting readiness'.
3. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in particular has brought large scale nation-to-nation war to Europe for the first time in 75 years. The UK as a whole, including many churches, has been deeply supportive of the Ukrainian people and their Armed Forces during this terrible war. In February 2024 General Synod overwhelmingly passed a motion calling for a just peace for Ukraine, and for continued support for Ukraine until this outcome is reached.
4. During this group of sessions General Synod will hear from Brigadier Jaish Mahan, Deputy Commander Reserves, 1st (UK) Division. Brig Jaish is a practising Christian who has served in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan. He will brief Synod on the global context and the challenges faced by the UK, as well as sharing his experience as a Christian serving in the military.

¹ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Global-Peace-Index-2025-web.pdf>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The_Strategic_Defence_Review_2025_-_Making_Britain_Safer_-_secure_at_home_strong_abroad.pdf

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5. There are nearly 200 Church of England chaplains serving in the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force as both regulars and reservists. Chaplains have provided spiritual, moral and pastoral care to military personnel and their families for more than 150 years and remain a highly valued part of the Armed Forces, often witnessing to Jesus Christ in complex and difficult contexts.
6. Amongst the many ways the UK has supported Ukraine is by training Ukrainian priests and ministers as the nation's first Armed Forces chaplains. They now serve a crucial role in the midst of terrible suffering.
7. The legislative changes being introduced to Synod during these sessions will allow Armed Forces Chaplains, when operating in their roles, to minister under an Archbishops' licence without also having to hold diocesan PTO. The requirement to have PTO was introduced 18 months ago as a result of new legal advice about the status of the Archbishop's licence. It has added a serious administrative burden and made it more difficult for Chaplains to deploy within the UK at the pace required by their roles. The changes being put to Synod will resolve the legal problem and allow Chaplains to minister and deploy without this burden. The requirement to have PTO will remain in place for Chaplains wanting to minister in local parishes or other settings beyond their uniformed chaplaincy role.

Supporting Armed Forces personnel

8. There are approximately 2.3 million Armed Forces personnel, veterans and military children in the UK. While there are parts of the country that have a particular association with the military, serving personnel, military families and veterans are present in every community.
9. In July 2014 General Synod voted overwhelmingly to ask the Archbishops' Council to sign the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant was signed in February 2015 by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Many dioceses have also signed the Covenant and there is support available to any that wish to do so.
10. At a time of heightened pressure on the Armed Forces, churches are invited to commit to prioritising prayer and practical support for Armed Forces personnel and their families. Churches and church schools have a particular role to play in supporting the 124,000 children of military families, who are likely to have to move school more often than others and to have parents away on deployment, sometimes for long periods with limited contact. The organisation *Little Troopers*³ provide practical and easy-to-run groups for military children in Primary Schools and welcome support from churches.
11. As an example of church support for Armed Forces personnel, a project in Salisbury Diocese to develop an Armed Forces Friendly Church Network is well underway. As host to a third of the British Army, the diocesan network has enabled parishes to

³ <https://www.littletroopers.net/>

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prioritise hospitality to Armed Forces personnel and their families. We hope to see similar work in other dioceses, especially those with a large military footprint.

Being church in a time of conflict

12. Scripture does not have a single voice on war, conflict and peace and Christians today, including Anglicans, have different views on pacifism, just war and the ethics of conflict. All agree however that war is terrible and that Christians are called to pray and work for peace and justice.
13. In recent weeks four bishops joined 60 military, political and faith leaders in signing a letter from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Conflict prevention and Peacebuilding calling on the Prime Minister to invest in peace-building as well as defence⁴.
14. While working for peace, the church as a whole is invited to consider what it means to be church in a time of heightened conflict. While a conflict directly involving the UK is not an immediate risk, given the very serious impact such a conflict would have on every person in the country, we must be prepared. The pandemic showed us the risks of being unprepared for a national crisis, and we must learn the lessons.
15. With that in mind a suite of simple resources for churches has been prepared and will be made available on the Church of England website soon after General Synod. Under the title, *Being church in a time of conflict* these resources, which have been written by clergy and lay people, will include:
 - A brief introduction to Christian thinking and theological resources for being church in a time of conflict
 - Resources for working with schools on issues of peace, war and conflict
 - Prayer and liturgical resources
 - Practical suggestions for making your church hospitable and welcoming to Armed Forces personnel and their families
 - Resources for reflection and prayer spaces in churches
16. A more detailed piece of theological work to resource the church on issues relating to peace, war and conflict is in the early stages of planning.

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⁴ <https://alexballinger.org.uk/work-in-parliament>