

The Channel Islands Measure

Archdeacon Alan reported back to Diocesan Synod on the details of Draft Channel Islands Measure that was expedited through the General Synod.

The Archdeacon of Sarum told members gathered at Corfe Mullen that expediting the Measure in just one group of sessions was “a first in my 15 years as a member of the Synod.”

He then took Synod through the various debates and their outcomes:

“Presenting his report on the future relationship of the Church of England and the Channel Islands, the former Bishop of London, Lord Chartres, who lives in Salisbury Diocese, spoke of the deep, historical, and structured relationship between the Channel Islands and the C of E, and of the distinctive legal and cultural traditions of the Islands.

“Referring to the reasons The Islands had requested to move from the oversight of the Bishop of Winchester, Lord Chartres said, progress had already been made with most issues, and there was a “readiness” to learn lessons, including respecting the role of the Diocesan Bishop and recognising the pastoral context within the deaneries and their legislative autonomy.

“So, on Tuesday – the Channel Islands Measure had First Consideration. Moving his motion for the first time, the Bishop to the Armed Forces and Bishop at Lambeth, the Rt Revd Tim Thornton, former Bishop of Sherborne, who chaired the steering committee, said the measure was brief and focussed. It asked that 2 island deaneries be attached to the diocese of Salisbury.

“Legislation on women bishops, safeguarding, and clergy discipline, which had not yet been approved by the Channel Islands would be considered by the deaneries. He commended the measure: “This is the best and fastest way forward.”

“Bishop Nicholas spoke first, and was grateful that Bishop Tim Dakin, the Bishop of Winchester, had sat with him throughout the debate:

““This is not a case of choosing your own Bishop”, he said.

““It is about how you belong to the C of E, the body of Christ. We have begun to rebuild that relationship.”

“He had visited the Islands. There were good informal relationships, and these suggested the attachment to the Diocese would be a mutual flourishing.

“A couple of speakers spoke against the Measure, suggesting that reconciliation needed to be undertaken before the proposals could be considered. Speaking on behalf of Winchester Diocese, the Archdeacon of Bournemouth urged the Synod to support the measure. Many Synod members would have lived with broken relationships of various forms, he said. Reconciliation was the work of Christ. “There is prayer, there is conversation, but there are also important structural steps, that reposition people and places so that encounters that were difficult in the past, may be re-encountered.”

“A member from the Islands, a former judge in Jersey, thanked past bishops in the diocese of Winchester for their support, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the former Bishop of Dover for helping the Islands through the transitions. “We are looking forward with confidence to a new relationship in fellowship with the C of E,” he said. “But, to understand Jersey, you must understand that we are not part of the UK, we have our own institutions, secular laws, and canon law.”

“The motion was carried by a simple majority and proceeded to the revision stage. Evening came, and morning came - the first day.

"Wednesday – the Revision Stage debate. Bishop Thornton simply moved the motion a second time.

"Another lay member from the Channel Islands said that there was an urgency to pass this, so it could go through parliaments in Westminster and on the Channel Islands. The motion was carried by a simple majority.

"Evening came, and morning came - the second day.

"On Thursday, Bishop Thornton introduced the final approval debate for the Channel Islands measure. He urged members to remember in their prayers the people and parishes of the Islands. "We are all indeed sinners," he said, "from here I can see quite a few miserable sinners in front of me... We go on the journey of reconciliation, this is not about forgetting or ignoring that." The Synod had done something new in passing the legislation so quickly, which should give confidence for the future.

"The Bishop of Winchester, the Rt Revd Tim Dakin, declaring himself a "miserable sinner", welcomed the new Measure, saying "I wish the Channel Islands to flourish with all my heart." He had been praying weekly for the Islands and the mission of their churches. But it had not been an easy process, holding together need for truth, change and good relationships in the midst of a complex safeguarding case going back to 2008.

"The Dean of Guernsey, the Very Revd Tim Barker, said that he hoped that the Synod would give final approval. The shift to Salisbury diocese had been unanimously welcomed by the Islands' deanery synods.

"Bishop Nicholas, who had the first word, also had the last word. He spoke again of Bishop Dakin's "graciousness" throughout the process, which he said had been "exemplary". Changes to the Clergy Discipline Measure, and safeguarding, meant that relationships between bishops and clergy were more important than ever. Reconciliation was still being addressed, even though the Islands were being moved to a new diocese.

"To conclude, let me say this Measure will not mean the Archdeacon of Dorset will now be also the Archdeacon to the Channel Islands – they have no need of Archdeacons on Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney or Sark. The Deans will join our college of priests, and I welcome their collegiality and we will work together to ensure both Diocese and Islands mutually flourish in all things missional and ministerial."

Finally, Archdeacon Alan told Synod that the Measure now passes through the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, the Parliaments of Jersey and Guernsey, and then to the Privy Council for final approval and enactment later this year.