

Report on the General Synod July 2017 Sessions at York.

Introduction and welcomes. It is customary to invite several Anglican and Ecumenical guests to General Synod, of whom one is invited to address the Synod on behalf of all. The greeting this time was given by the Rt Revd Dr Matti Repo, Bishop of Tampere in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, who was welcomed and thanked by the Archbishop of York in, presumably, Finnish! Another guest of note was the Bishop of Edinburgh, the Rt Revd Dr John Armes, whose presence was felt by some to be controversial because of the Scottish Episcopal Church's recent decision to approve same sex marriage. A letter in the Church Times suggested that a small number of synod members might stay away because of this but all were present, and a prolonged round of applause indicated that the majority were pleased to welcome Bishop John.

Business Committee. Sue Booy's the chair of the BC took time to shape the pattern of this Synod using the London agenda as a blue print. No more food at Fringe meetings! The main business of the day (Friday) was a debate on *After the General Election, a still small voice of calm*. She then told us about the Agenda for the next few days. It was recognised that there would be several presentations, maybe too many! The cost of synod was also raised and it was asked if it gave value for money. A theme of this synod would be engagement. We were told that Saturday evening would be the time for fringe meetings. There were three big debates at this synod: the first being 'Still Small Voice' looking at recent national events; Conversion Therapy and the Welcoming Transgender people. Finally, we were told that there would be no GS meeting in November 2017.

After the General Election, a still small voice of calm. The Archbishop of York spoke of the common good of all; of the need for a fresh commitment to the European churches; to pull together at a time when the government is pulling us apart from the European Union; that we must seek to reflect relationship not selfish ambition. We were encouraged to use the language of 'social insurance' rather than welfare benefits, because such language develops a sense of wellbeing, of a just and sustainable society. The Archbishop told the Synod that we do not currently pay enough in taxes to fund all that we see as priorities and he got a clear endorsement from members that they would pay more tax if it were targeted into health, education and social care. An amendment to this effect was only lost because it is not possible in law for taxpayers to assign their taxes to specific areas. There were several other amendments, some of which played out issues elsewhere on the agenda! The Archbishop referred to these amendments as baubles on a Christmas tree, which had the effect of ensuring they were all of which were lost! After a lively debate, Synod gave an overwhelming endorsement to the motion.

Amending Canon No 36. Amending Canon 36 seeks to relax the canon laws regarding vesture worn by priests during services. The amending canon, which was given final approval, allows priests to consult with the PCC in the case of normal services, parents or the candidate in the case of baptisms, the couple in the case of weddings and the loved ones in the case of funerals, as to what vesture is desired and deemed appropriate. It is important to emphasise that this is intended to be a permissive canon, allowing for flexibility and responsiveness to situations, and does not outlaw traditional vesture. Having been approved by Synod, this will now go to the Queen for Royal Approval.

Approval of appointment to the Archbishop's Council. Mary Chapman was reappointed to Archbishops' Council, on which she has served for a number of years, with overwhelming support from Synod.

Questions. Answers had already been listed on the Order Paper under SO 112-116 to the various bodies such as House of Bishops. The subjects ranged from Tim Farron's resignation, Safeguarding, Church Schools, Church Buildings, Clergy Wellbeing, and Sexuality, which would dominate much of this Synod's focus. Although several supplementary questions were subsequently put each representative of the bodies skilfully answered or deferred the question as it would be covered under subsequent Synod business.

Presentation from the House of Bishops on the Proposals for the Pastoral Advisory Group on Human Sexuality and the development of the Teaching Document. The Archbishop of Canterbury led the presentation outlining the culture and context which led to the Synod not accepting the House of

Bishops report in February. The updates focussed on the Pastoral Advisory Group which is led by the Bishop of Newcastle and the Episcopal Teaching Document led by the Bishop of Coventry. He emphasised the radical new Christian inclusion, founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the CofE has received it. This will be a large Document - probably coming to Synod in 2020. We had a time of questions and answers. Predictably these sought clarification on how inclusive the working groups might be, how doctrine could be affected by the work, and what pastoral action might result. Canon Jane Charman asked if Synod will learn from the recent experience of the Scottish Episcopal Church. The Archbishop answered that we will learn from all Anglican provinces who have taken decisions with regards to human sexuality.

Mission & Public Affairs Council, Presence & Engagement (P&E) Programme. This was established by General Synod in 2005 to support & resource parishes where more than 10% of their population self-identified in the 2001 census as being of a different religion to Christianity; not that they need more support than other parishes, but rather that of a different type. Initially a network of diocesan advisors was inaugurated and now it is entering a new phase of responding to the Renewal & Reform programme as well as the geo-political context. Most dioceses have appointed lay & ordained DIFAs (Diocesan interfaith advisors) as a point of contact. Additionally, at Leicester, Birmingham, West Yorkshire, & London there are autonomous Presence & Engagement centres to provide good practice in Christian relations & religious literacy.

Their vision for the next quinquennium has four aims:

1. 'A Christian Presence in Every Community' - not easy in today's environment.
2. 'Building Bridges' (through the *Near Neighbours* programme).
3. 'Sharing Christian Faith',
4. 'Equipping People for Ministry' (including an increased number of clergy and lay people passionate for ministry in a multi-faith context).

The programme echoes the report *Setting God's People Free* in saying that where life takes place in a multi-religious setting 'lack of confidence in connecting faith to everyday life ... is magnified'. Presence & Engagement remains crucial as recent violent events continue to underscore the urgent need for religions to find ways to live together.

Synod was asked 'to commend the P&E programme, ... recognise cultivation of relationships with other faith communities, ... and re-affirm the *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* report' whilst calling 'on the P&E task group to continue supporting parishes in bearing faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ with sensitivity among people of other faiths'. An amendment to insert words 'Uniqueness of Christ in Multi-Faith Britain' in reference to the theological work done in the *Gospel of Salvation* report was narrowly defeated because there is no need to repeat words referred to in a previous report. A second amendment was passed to add '... encourage churches and Christian people throughout the nation to reach out to neighbours and colleagues of other faiths to offer solidarity in times of tension, condemning the attempts of extremists to divide us, and challenging all hatred'.

Legislative business.

Draft Legislative Reform Measure and Draft Statute Law (Repeals) Measure - These two pieces of legislation were dealt with by one Steering Group and in a single report. The Legislative Reform Measure, one of the outcomes of *the Simplification strand of Renewal and Reform agenda* will allow the Archbishops' Council to shortcut the full legislative process to remove or reduce financial or administrative burdens. More safeguards have been incorporated in response to comments from Synod and the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament. On that basis, Synod gave final approval to the draft Measure. The second, the Draft Statute Law (Repeals) Measure repealed lots of bits and pieces of legislation 'of no practical utility'. *Some were ancient, such as the Simony Act 1588 and Queen Anne's Bounty Act 1714, and others were as recent as 2011.* It was also approved.

Pensions - The Bishop of Rochester did a fine job covering the necessary legislative business to tidy up the Pensions Measure which would further protect widows, widowers and dependants of clergy by consolidating what had previously been a separate pension fund into the main clergy pension fund.

National Support for Local Churches. The four-month old Chair of the Mission and a Public Affairs Committee, Mark Sheard, introduced the debate on a motion on work under the Going for Growth

strand of the Renewal and Reform agenda. The debate followed an afternoon when members attended self-selected groups on one of six topics:

1. Crossing the Generations (which was only about work with children and youth);
2. Digital Evangelism;
3. Inclusion and Outreach;
4. Life Events, which one speaker commented in the debate he knew as pastoral offices;
5. National Events as opportunities for community witness; and
6. Thy Kingdom Come a period of prayer, beacon events etc. between Ascension and Pentecost *at which the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke.*

Links

Introductory Paper:	https://www.churchofengland.org/media/4000450/gs-2069-national-support-for-the-local-church.pdf
Crossing the Generations:	https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3775547/rooted-in-the-church-summary-report-nov-2016.pdf
Digital Evangelism:	https://www.churchofengland.org/renewal-reform/evangelism-witness/digital-evangelism.aspx
Inclusion and Outreach:	https://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/home-and-community-affairs/minority-ethnic-anglican-concerns.aspx
Life Events:	https://www.churchofengland.org/weddings-baptisms-funerals.aspx ; https://churchsupporthub.org
Thy Kingdom Come:	https://www.thykingdomcome.global

Synod welcomed the resources being made available, noted the progress on Life Events and requested regular reports from the Archbishops' Council. We also agreed to encourage dioceses and parishes to engage with these areas through prayer and practical action.

Conversion Therapy. Conversion Therapy (CT) can be defined as the umbrella term for a type of talking therapy or activity which attempts to change sexual orientation or reduce attraction to other of the same sex". As with all debates on Human Sexuality diverse perspectives were apparent from our same Anglican tradition: the separate understandings of scripture; different upbringings and cultural backgrounds; varied education and varied lives and experiences meant people hold widely differing views. However, it quickly became apparent that Synod was almost unanimous in its condemnation of CT as bespoke learned bodies, led by the NHS, independently and jointly signed declarations condemning it as not effective and at times causing degrees of harm. The debate gravitated towards which of the complex amendments was/were going to be taken. It was an intense debate conducted with compassion and restraint. Many spoke, at time with passion and deep emotion, as they related their personal journeys. It was accepted that homosexuality and transgender orientation were not forms of mental sickness. The final version of the motion was accepted and supported the 2015 statement condemning CT and its potential to harm and, asking the government to formally ban the use of such therapies in relation to sexual orientation.

Welcoming Transgender People. This Diocesan Synod Motion from Blackburn Diocese, calling on the House of Bishops to consider whether some nationally commended liturgical materials might be prepared to mark a person's gender transition, had attracted a lot of attention, including from the media. A note from Revd Christopher Newlands, the proposer of the motion, can be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3996992/gs-2071a-welcoming-transgender-people.pdf> and an accompanying explanatory note from the Secretary General here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3997005/gs-2071b-welcoming-transgender-people-a-note-from-the-secretary-general.pdf>. Some moving and disturbing personal testimonies were heard. An amendment to the motion calling for further theological explorations before making any liturgical changes was deemed to be a 'long grass' intervention and was defeated. A vote by houses was

requested, the results being bishops: 30 for, 2 against, 2 recorded abstentions; clergy: 127 for, 28 against, 16 recorded abstentions; laity: 127 for, 48 against, 8 recorded abstentions.

Interim Report on the Review of the Crown Nominations Commission. This was a presentation updating the Synod about this important review. The CNC is the body who is joined by Diocesan representatives in appointing Diocesan Bishops. There has been some controversy recently about appointments to certain Dioceses. There are six permanent members elected by the Synod - three laity and three clergy, these are joined by certain ex-officio members, including the two Archbishops. Six diocesan members also form the CNC panel. The presentation admitted that sometimes a panel is presented with a candidate whose name has been determined locally, as the right person, at any cost, or someone who is not acceptable. Difficulty ensues! CNC members need to be exceptional and representational of the whole church. Questions were asked including: how do you explain recent delays for Oxford Diocese; the "shameful" process leading to a preferred candidate forced to withdraw after the announcement; how do you measure success in Episcopal appointments; how can we bring the voice of young people and Black Asian and Minority Ethnic voices into this process etc.

Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing. The report was moved by Simon Butler. He reminded Synod that this work would focus on the Well-Being of Clergy (Approx. 20,000). We were reminded that clergy face the many expectations from across the church. This paper gave us an invitation to begin this work of developing a Covenant of Well-Being. This is not a modern concept. This is a start but not an end. Responses will be gathered from clergy, bishops and especially the house of Laity. The hope is that it will lead to an Act of Synod. The Synod then asked a range of questions. Our own Thomas Woodhouse spoke about his experience of the military covenant, as he shared his story and reminded us of the love of Jesus. There were also many other helpful contributions. The motion was passed overwhelmingly.

Schools Admissions Code. This was a private member's motion. It asked Synod to bring to the attention of the Secretary of State for Education, the difficulties that clergy – and other people moving into 'tied' accommodation – can encounter with a school's admission code. As schools, increasingly, have constrained Planned Admission Numbers, there have been distressing incidents of vicars being refused places for their children in their local school. (This debate followed the one on Clergy Well-Being and so was particularly pertinent) Several members of Synod spoke as children of clergy and shared the traumatic events accompanying a parental move to a new parish. Those members who have served on Admission Panels also made helpful comments. The motion was passed and hopefully, in future, those children whose parents must live in tied housing, will appear on the Admission Code of each school and Academy Trust.

Cost of Applying for Citizenship. Citizenship is about a sense of identity and belonging to a state, and is either given by right of birth, or acquired through a lengthy process by which immigrants can align themselves with the host nation. This motion from the Diocese of Birmingham sought to address a perceived injustice is the cost of the application, in addition to other financial demands. The costs are £1282 for each adult and £973 for each child. If a single mistake is made on the 70-page application, the fee is forfeited and a new payment is required for a subsequent application. This demand leads to a vulnerability to unscrupulous money lenders. Some parishes in Birmingham assist immigrant parishioners through this process. Citizenship is about loyalty not about wealth. Speeches focussed on legal rights, stories of GS members who have or have not been made citizens and Parliamentary processes to apply pressure to correct this injustice. No one spoke against the motion and following a vote of the whole Synod, was unanimously carried.

Elections Review Group and Elections to the House of Laity. The plan is that in 2020 elections to General Synod will be conducted electronically with the option to continue to opt out and vote by post. While this attracted the most comment, the most time was spent on the next item – who should be electors to the House of Laity. The presentation followed an unusual format where different people, not all the members of the relevant committee or steering group, outlined the pros and then another person would set out the cons: 1) those especially elected by the APCM for the purpose; 2) the lay members of the Deanery Synod (as now); 3) the elected lay members of the PCC (*Debbie McIsaac was asked to present the case for*); 4) all those on the electoral roll and finally 5) the lay members of Diocesan Synod. General Synod then had its own indicative, non-binding referendum by completing a form indicating our order of preference for these options. Don't be surprised if there is no change.

Amending Canon 37. On Monday morning, Synod took the final approval stage of Amending Canon 37, presented by the Bishop of St Albans. This amended Canon B38, Of the burial of the dead, to permit the burial of those who have committed suicide according to the usual funeral liturgy of the Church of England. Prior to this an alternative form of service had been used. A surprising number of speakers shared stories of suicide in their own families and their gratitude for the Church's ministry. It was generally felt that this is a wise and compassionate development and evidence from the work being done around Life Events also showed its importance for mission. As this was a change of doctrine the motion required a two thirds majority in all three houses which was easily achieved.

The Church Commissioners Annual Report. The Commissioners manage a £7.9 Bn investment fund to support 'the work & mission of the C of E today and for future generations, ensuring a Christian presence in every community'. Their target for investment returns of inflation plus 5% has been well exceeded for many years and in the last was a 17.1% return. This splendid performance has, amongst many other contributions, aided Strategic Development Funding to 23 projects in 20 dioceses. This year two leading commissioner members retire. First Estates Commissioner Sir Andreas Whittam Smith has served for 15 years and Dr Richard Chartres as Deputy Chair having joined the Commissioners in 1999. (They are to be replaced by Canon Loretta Minghella OBE and David Walker, Bishop of Manchester, respectively.)

Archbishops' Council Annual Report 2016. Renewal and Reform continues to be to the focus of the Council's work, supporting and encouraging the agenda across the Church of England. From partnership with dioceses and local churches, through projects on prayer and worship, and sponsoring reports such as *Setting God's People Free* and *Promoting a Safer Church*, the Council is involved in a vast area of work. The work enables the bishops to speak in the public square and local churches to find their place in local communities. Education remains a key focus, the place of church buildings in mission is honoured, and support for environmental projects continues. Practical and financial assistance in the form of strategic development funding grows, with an ever-growing number of successful bids being made and all undergirded by good communications.

Archbishops' Council Budget & Proposals for Apportionment for 2018. In short, Synod agreed to raise the gross budget by 5.8% to £39.9m, 80% of which is to come from diocesan apportionment (an increase of 3%). To help mitigate the increase, it is planned to withdraw £850,000 from its Church & Community Fund. Also, the Corporation of Church House, Westminster has granted a fourth year of rent relief (worth a 3% increase, in apportionment). The budget increase is mainly due to the welcome larger number of new ordinands (14.2% forecast) but also includes extra investment in the Renewal & Reform programme.

The broad-brush figures for expected 2018 expenditure are, £15.2m Ministry Training, £17.6m National Church Responsibilities, £1.2m Grants & Provisions, £0.8m Mission Agency clergy pension contributions, £4.8m CHARM scheme (Church's Housing Assistance for the Retired Ministry), including the agreed increase of 5% per year.

Future forecasts indicate 7 & 7.5% budget rises in 2019 & 2020 respectively, assuming a 10% increase on present levels of new ordinands. If this happens the Council recognises that these figures are unsustainable for dioceses and they will need to have conversations, with the Commissioners for example, to release sufficient funding to aid shortfalls.

However, following the budget presentation concern was expressed that rather than wait until rises in ordination numbers prompt a budget shortfall, conversations must be begun sooner rather than later. Another point was the question of what is the theology for the direction we are taking? There was also support for the question of where was there support for lay training?

Finally, Synod approved the Table of Apportionment amongst the dioceses.

Farewells. The Rt. Revd. Mike Hill. Bishop of Bristol. Born in Bradford, Described as sharp and imaginative. He discovered Jesus Christ as an 18-year-old. He went to the Scargill community for a year to see what the Spirit would bring forth and ended up going into the priesthood.

In 1989, he was appointed Rural Dean of Amersham, he liked the area so much he became the Bishop of Buckingham and then for the last 15 years he was Bishop of Bristol. He has been described as someone who speaks and uplifts us and inspires trust in many. A man of many interests who had been very good at 'growing churches'. The Archbishop of Canterbury said he had been a great help to him as the link to the Church in Uganda.

As a member of the House of Lords he has provided pastoral care to many in both houses where he will be greatly missed.

The Rt. Revd. Nigel Stock. Bishop at Lambeth and Bishop to the Armed forces, and Bishop to the Falkland Islands. Previously Bishop of Stockport, then Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. He served his Curacy in Stockton later becoming the Bishop of Stockport. The Archbishop of Canterbury related several humorous stories about him, one where the Archbishop, Nigel and his wife were trying their hand at flight simulators. Following the completion, the Archbishop asked about their performance, the reply came – I could not possibly pass comment but the lady shows great promise! He is said to be a machine nut but is unable to cope with the coffee machine at Lambeth palace.

He too will be greatly missed.

Deemed Business:

Audit Committee Annual Report. *This report was taken as deemed business because of the late inclusion of the General Election ... debate on the Synod agenda. In any case, the Auditors BDO had identified no significant issues in the 2016 financial statements. During the year, the Committee sought assurance that risks to vulnerable adults, and children, were being addressed and questioned IT infrastructure risks. The internal audit plan continues to review in turn various aspects of the Archbishops' Council's operations and the Committee called for further work to assess value-for-money of the ChECS (Shared Common Services).*

Standing Orders Committee Report. *The Business Committee determined that the report both, need not be debated and its amendments proposed would be deemed to be approved. The main item sets out provisions for setting up a 'Scrutiny Committee of the Synod', particularly for reviewing Legislative Reform Measure Orders. The membership criteria, charring, representations (within 35 days), attendance and speaking at meetings (Synod members by right, others by invitation of the Committee) are all covered.*

The rest of the draft Orders largely tidies up existing legislation dealing with Synod business and includes interrupting speeches, and the right of an acting bishop during a vacancy in see to attend General Synod meetings.

Legal Officers (Legal Fees) Order 2017. *The regular annual review of the fees paid to Diocesan Registrars and Diocesan Chancellors as retainers for legal services to the Bishop and the parishes of the Diocese, was deemed business.*