

Diocese of Salisbury
Report from members of General Synod
6 - 10 July 2018

INTRODUCTION

General Synod met in York from Friday 6 to Tuesday 10 July. It felt a long and intense group of sessions There was lots of legislation and the first major reforms to parish governance as part of the Simplification agenda including a new set of Church Representation Rules as well as import Reports and debates on the Environment, Safeguarding and Cathedrals. There was not a single Private Member's Motion which is the way that individual members get items on the agenda. The agenda was altered to enable Synod so see some of the World Cup match between England and Sweden on Saturday afternoon.

If you want to read the Synod papers, they are available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod/agendas-papers/july-2018-group-sessions>.

FRIDAY

Addresses from Representatives of the Anglican Communion

One of the three invited speakers had to return home urgently mid-journey, a reminder that many Anglicans are suffering from repressive political systems and are hugely disadvantaged. For many, getting sufficient food for their families and themselves is the main concern. The Bishop of Peshawar, Pakistan, spoke of the ever-present pressure for people to deny their Christian faith by the Islamic state. Pakistan was formed in 1947. Of the 60 million people, 15 million were Christians; now of the population of 200 million, only 3 million are Christian. The Archbishop for the Province of Central Africa (Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe) spoke of the food and health problems as well as great hope for the pending elections in Zimbabwe. He asked for our prayers and continued support as the church supports the people.

Report from Business Committee

Canon Sue Booy, the chair of the Business Committee explained how the agenda had been constructed. Although two PMMs on human sexuality are waiting to be debated, it had been decided to postpone these debates to a later synod although one afternoon was to be spent in seminars relating to the Teaching Document. The Chair reminded us that 2019 would mark the centenary of the founding of Church Assembly - and informed us that there would be no Synod in November. Questions were asked on various aspects of the agenda including why there was no place on the agenda for comment on the recent GAFCON conference.

Legislation

Friday afternoon was the first time in this Group of Sessions for dealing with legislation. The Draft Ecumenical Relations Measure and Draft Amending Canon 38 and Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure were approved. The former contains technical changes to enable closer working with other churches and ecumenical partnerships. First consideration was given to Draft Amending Canon 40 dealing with accountability, regulation and guidance for religious orders and covers Safeguarding, finance and vows.

Questions

The main hall at the university of York is where Synod gathers. In previous years it has been very hot venue. So in the middle of a heat wave in July we expected it to be a difficult few days but it was great to discover that they had introduced air conditioning designed to lower the temperature. Questions is usually one of the most informative and lively sessions but it seemed that the leadership wanted to take the heat out of that, too. Although there were a massive number of questions (83) across a broad range of topics, from evangelism to Pension in church to CNC to GAFCON to safeguarding to the new website for the church of England, at the end we were not that much better informed.

SATURDAY

Presidential Address

The Presidential Address was given on Saturday morning by the Archbishop of York, on 'God Nudging Us To Hope'. He took as his starting point the sermon preached by Bishop Michael Curry at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Why had people found it so unusual and engaging and what did that say about the institutional Church of England? He reminded Synod of the Partners in Mission audit conducted 37 years ago and the report '*To A Rebellious House*' that had emerged from it. Today it seems just as uncertain and challenging. His two key reflections were that 'God believes in us more than we believe in him' and that 'there is objective hope even when there is subjective despair'. Drawing on the words of the prophets he reflected on what hope might look like in practice for different groups within our society, and the ways in which the Church might fruitfully challenge the world's assumptions.

Safeguarding

A fringe event with victims and survivors had been held the evening and some of them were in the public gallery. Jo Kind from MACSAS (Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors) and Dr Sheila Fish, a consultant psychologist working with MACSAS, made a presentation to Synod. Jo as a young adult was abused by a member of the clergy, the first time Synod had been addressed by, rather than on behalf of, a survivor of abuse. Her presentation was powerful and moving. She urged Synod to 'borrow some of our courage' to do the right thing and included a plea for independent oversight of the work of the national safeguarding team. She received a standing ovation.

Bishop Peter Hancock, the Bishop of Bath and Wells and lead bishop for safeguarding, then moved the motion which included endorsing the priorities for action outlined in the GS 2092 and implementing the actions. The debate uncovered a difference of opinion between those who thought that the Church should take responsibility by remaining in charge of its own safeguarding arrangements and those who felt that the arrangements should be under wholly independent oversight. Two amendments were proposed and proved uncontroversial, one emphasising the importance of delivering safeguarding well at parish level and one proposing the provision of mediation between the National Church and those currently in dispute with it.

Seminars and workshops

Saturday afternoon was given over to seminars and workshops. There were four seminars on the Teaching Document on Human Sexuality which is now called *Living in Love and Faith*. Other seminar topics were the Pastoral Advisory Group, Children and Young People, Environmental Matters and the Evangelism Task Force. Some of the seminars were excellent, well-researched and delivered and provided new perspectives; others were disappointing and seemed to be built on questionable assumptions and 'creative' reading.

SUNDAY

Sunday morning is the General Synod service in York Minster. Almost invariably, the Archbishop of Canterbury presides and the Archbishop of York preaches.

Climate Change and Investment

This item commenced with a presentation showing how the National Investing Bodies (NIB) have been effective in many areas including gaining support from many other major shareholders Annual Meetings. Much of the debate centered on timing and weight of action. Synod widely acknowledged the need for urgency. In short, Synod approved a motion welcoming the 2015 Paris Agreement to hold 'the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels' and urging NIBs to engage robustly with companies rated poorly by the Transition Pathway Initiative (TPI) which the NIBs had established and which had been adopted worldwide, as well as to scale-up investment in renewable energy. An amendment was passed urging the NIBs to ensure that they have disinvested from fossil fuel companies that they have assessed, drawing on TPI data, as not prepared to align with the goal of the Paris Agreement.

Environment Programmes

Hard on the heels of the previous debate on ethical investment, there was a sense that many of the issues touched upon in this item had already been debated. A motion with several clauses was proposed by Enid Barron on behalf of the London Diocesan Synod. It was felt that the church should first and foremost be seen as a champion for those most vulnerable to climate change, especially as many dioceses had links to overseas provinces where this was the number one issue. The next part of the motion included proposals for dioceses to quantify their carbon footprint to enable the church itself to address the issue of climate change during which our Bishop Nick spoke. There will be a further debate in February 2019 once the financial and human resources needed to for the work to be done had been assessed by the Archbishops' Council.

Ethics of Nuclear War

The Bishop of Chelmsford opened this debate. These speeches fell into 3 main topics.

- Ex-military personnel, who felt that as nuclear weapons had been a great deterrent in the cold war period and helped to maintain the 'cold' peace, they should be retained to combat a resurgent Russia. Some felt that the debate was unbalanced and that very few people in this first category were called.
- Military chaplains who led tributes to service personnel who were away from their families for months on end, to keep our nuclear capabilities on alert
- Most of the speakers wished to say that owning nuclear weapons was wrong and an expensive luxury. Some felt our government ought to form a coalition across the world to ban them.

The motion was passed with a significant majority. It was noted, in passing, that Church House, Westminster hosts military arms fairs (including the Land War Fair) and it was felt that these should be condemned. It was pointed out that Church House Corporation was a separate entity and had its own lettings policies.

MONDAY

Report of the Archbishops' Council and Budget

The Annual Report of the Archbishops Council reviewed all the work that has been undertaken under the umbrella of Renewal and Reform, an ambitious body of work that seeks to provide a narrative of hope to the Church of England in the 21st century.

We then moved on to debate the budget for 2019. Success in raising the number of vocations to ordained ministry by around 20% had generated challenges in terms of funding training and curacies. The Commissioners are committed to the release of intergenerational equity in the short term but this is not a solution to challenges facing the Church. As always, many Synod members appreciated Canon Spence's vigorous and enthusiastic style and the 2019 budget was unanimously approved.

Legislative Business

The legislative business was a long and demanding session which went from 11.00 am until 7.00 pm ousting the expected presentation on the Evangelism Task Force. Final Drafting or Approval of various Measures, Canons and Petitions were approved with little or no comments or amendment as is usual at the final stage. It was noted that this was the first occasion on which the shortened procedure for uncontroversial changes had been used.

Church Representation and Ministers Measure

This had had a very rough ride when it first came to Synod. This time, it had an easier run – in the end. It is an important bit of legislation and the Report of the Revision Committee was over 600 paragraphs long. In summary:

- There is an entirely new set of Church Representation Rules including the elimination of various procedural requirements relating to parish governance, enabling parishes to make their own rules (with the consent of Bishop's Council) and new rules for the making and keeping of the electoral roll, provision for enabling connected parishes to establish joint councils in place of their separate PCCs and updating forms.
- GDPR has been taken into account. The new CRRs have been designed to avoid any need to obtain consent from individuals for processing the personal data for the purposes of the Rules such as in relation to the electoral roll. Personal data can be processed in the ways required by the Rules on the basis that

doing so 'is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation and for the performance of a task carried out in the exercise of official authority.'

- There is now comprehensive provision for communication by email.
- The new rules will permit electronic voting in elections.
- Mission initiatives will be entitled to representation on Diocesan and General Synod.

The electors to the House of Laity of General Synod will continue to be the lay members of Deanery Synods.

This debate was lengthy time with several proposed amendments. Few secured enough support to be debated. Synod also approved new ecumenical relationship provisions, and some very detailed changes to the law about funerals, the Church Commissioners and their funding to the wider church and gave First Consideration to *Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Measure*.

Presentation from the Church Commissioners

The Church Commissioners are responsible for the investments (£8.3bn) of the Church of England recognised as a world leader and beacon of excellence in diversifying its holdings, moving out of unsustainable organisations and remaining within those companies changing their policies and ways of working to be less harmful to the environment. The Commissioners' policy cautious and diverse investment to help insulate the portfolio from any market shocks or slumps. The Commissioners distributed £226.2m last year amounting to approximately 15% of the church's running costs. Market volatility and issues such as BREXIT have meant that it was just below its target of a 5% net return annually but over 5, 10, 15 and 20 years it is ahead.

Long-term sustainability of the National Health Service

The debate was introduced by The Right Reverend James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle and a member of the Lords' Select Committee which produced a Report on the Long-Term Sustainability of the NHS and Adult Social Care published in April 2017. The Committee were generally happy with the government's response to the report but felt that it did not go far enough and concentrated on short term political gain and not on the long-term future of health and social care needs. General Synod passed a motion urging the Government to set up a Royal Commission on the UK's health and social care and urging local churches to lead by example in care to the elderly and vulnerable in our local communities as we have done historically and is now especially needed, given the shortfall in the funding of social care.

Report on the Archbishops' Evangelism Task Force

As the timetabled Agenda had slipped so much, to do justice to this important topic it was decided to defer this Report until February 2019.

TUESDAY

Appointments

Jonathan Spencer's term of Office as Chair of the Pensions Board was extended by six months and John Spence was reappointed as Chair of the Finance Committee of the Archbishops' Council for a further term.

Report of the Cathedrals Working Group

This was debated but not before an apology to the residentiary canons that they had not been consulted. Bishop Viv Faull set the report within its recent historical context and made particular reference to the Howe Report. The working group began with the ecclesiology of what it is to be a cathedral. The Chair of the working group had spoken with every diocesan bishop and cathedral dean for an hour each: 84 hours of one-to-one consultation. The Third Church Estates Commissioner, Eve Poole, has established a consultative group to take the work forward.

The general feel of the debate was positive (including a speech from Debbie McIsaac with its warning to take time) and the report was accepted unanimously, with an amendment that gives extra time to the consultation. This was definitely the desire that ran throughout the debate: make sure there is plenty of time to have proper consultation that leads to the best outcomes.