

## Written report on General Synod February 2020

The last session of General Synod was the penultimate before elections take place later this year... *reminder for your APCM deanery synod reps are the electing constituency.* It was Synod at its best, it's very worst, its most effective and its least effective. Congratulations to Sian, Rhodri and Alicia who replaced Rachel Bell, Hannah Grivell and Simon Taylor and did so most successfully. I thought it was a good Synod for although the hallowed halls of Westminster can seem a long way indeed from Derby and Chesterfield and Ashbourne we focused on matters that spoke into our nation's life and made a practical difference to the life of our church.

So what was best? Well the draft **Cathedrals Measure** may not be exciting, but it was an example of what a good legislative process looks like. A complex series of recommendations came before Synod last year, since then the Revision Committee brought proposals back for this Synod. The work done in committee between sittings, meant good proposals were brought forward and the legal framework passed will help our cathedrals to flourish and serve us in the years ahead. The **Safeguarding debate** too showed the progress being made against the five specific recommendations made so far by IICSA, and Synod presented a unanimously supported amendment that commits us to a deeper engagement with survivors of abuse, and to backing up words with action.

What was perhaps less successful? Well we Derby lay and clergy were of one mind that the relatively short update on the **Living in Love and Faith** process didn't work well. The questions from the most extreme ends of either spectrum dominating. As it was an interim report, material was not available for scrutiny, but it inevitably meant that there was fear among Synod members as to what will ultimately be produced and to what end. The House of Bishops will see the next draft in March, the aim of which is to enable process that will lead to each person flourishing, alongside those with whom we disagree deeply, as one body. I encourage members of this synod to remain open to the Living in Love and Faith process as it becomes part of diocesan life over the next twelve months and particularly as no material is yet available do not use social media to undermine it before you've even read it. Pray for the LLF drafting group, pray for our bishops and pray for those of us on Synod who will come together with the material before us at York in July. I cannot help but think it would have been better not to have given time to as yet unpublished material.

It was an example of how General Synod is less successful when, with good intent, the methodology of doing careful and inclusive work before then presenting matters in fullness to Synod does not take place.

Likewise the **Environment debate** was not effective and highlighted how Synod can get to perhaps the right decision, but in the wrong way. The debate was looking at the timescale for the Church to eliminate its carbon footprint. A vital amendment from the chair of the Finance Committee of Archbishops' Council was passed that will ensure structures are in place to make a hypothetical target achievable, a target that a further amendment moved from 2045 to 2030. The process felt unsatisfactory, decided after less than ten minutes debate, by a majority of just 15, with a low turnout. (Many, following the harrowing Safeguarding debate were recovering in the tearoom.) Given the level of climate crisis the case

was made that 2030 is the right year, but the process felt flawed and did not enable a resounding prophetic call from the Synod to the nation.

But Synod was at its most effective in two divergent debates... the first a short debate asking the Business Committee to introduce an amendment to the draft **Church Representation Rules** legislation at York in July to remove the legislation bringing in fixed terms for deanery synod membership. It was well presented, well researched and didn't overstep a line trying to make the U-turn happen too quickly. It means after the revision committee has done its bit, such legislation will pass smoothly through Synod in July.

Synod was at its most impressive and most effective in the **Windrush debate**. Not least as whilst Synod was sitting, the news reported that Windrush deportations were taking place. The debate spoke of a story that remains untold, Archbishop Justin spoke movingly, and honestly about the continued institutional racism within our church.

Finally a word about **Question Time**. It is where those who wield genuine power are held to factual account and it can be remarkably informative. Yet the aim of some questioners is to inflict maximum damage on those with whom they disagree. In the words of the Bishop of Manchester - we need mechanisms of accountability, but synod must hold itself accountable for the way in which it exercises accountability.