

Report on the proceedings of the General Synod held in London 13 -15 November 2024 for the Derby Diocesan Synod

Although the General Synod is always timetabled to meet for a third sitting in November, it rarely does other than for its commencement at the start of each new quinquennium. However, the importance of the Living In Love and Faith (LLF) process, introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) and the consequent volume of business necessitated this.

Instead of a chronological account this briefing will cover the other legislative business of the Synod first and then deal with the LLF separately. This is not an account of the Synod, but a brief summary. The full report of the Synod, all papers, Questions and voting record can be found on the [Church of England website](#).

There are always a number of guests and observers at the Synod among them on this occasion were The Most Revd Kay Goldsworthy AO, Archbishop of Perth and The Most Revd Albert Chama, Archbishop of Central Africa as well as The Rt Revd Anthony Poggo, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. Both the Archbishop of Perth and the Archbishop of Central Africa were called to speak in the LLF debate. The Archbishop of Perth encouraged the Synod to vote for the motion, the Archbishop of Central Africa advised caution.

The Synod always commences with a Presidential Address, on this occasion given by both archbishops and His Grace, The Archbishop of Jerusalem, the Most Rev. Dr Hosam Naoum who spoke to the Synod in a pre-recorded link. The workings of Synod can often seem inward looking and legalistic, Archbishop Hosam spoke of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the Holy Land. It was good for our attention to be drawn so acutely to the suffering of all his people. The Archbishop of Canterbury called for an immediate ceasefire and invited the Synod to stand as one and in solidarity with the suffering people of Israel Palestine to observe two minutes of silent prayer together.

The Archbishop of York then focussed on Living in Love and Faith, there was resounding applause thanking the Bishop of London for her leadership on this as she now steps down and hands over to the Bishops of Leicester and Newcastle. The Archbishop indicated his tacit support of the amendment being brought by the Bishop of Oxford (see below) in the debate to come and recognised the strength of feeling on both sides of the argument and need for compromise.

The first debates of Synod are set by the Standing Orders and are always the same. Starting with a debate on the Business of the Synod itself, which on this occasion was understandably charged given the matters under consideration. This was followed by the presentation of two petitions, critical of the Archbishop of Canterbury. These are not petitions in the sense of people signing something, but petition made by an individual member of the Synod in the sense of making a request. This is an archaic procedure under Standing Order 43 (SO43) and was not well received by others.

Considerable time was allocated to Questions over the course of the Synod. 228 questions were tabled 93 specifically relating to LLF. Questions are a source of considerable and increasing frustration as on one hand questions often seem designed to catch the answerer out, whilst at the same time answers can seem evasive or deflecting. Some feel this to be especially true around LLF. However, they do offer an important opportunity to raise matters in areas of our church life which would otherwise go un-noticed. The Question paper is available on the link at the start of this briefing.

Mr Clive Mather was appointed as Chair of the Church of England Pensions Board.

Legislative Business:

ABUSE (REDRESS) MEASURE (GS 2325) First Reading.

The redress scheme is being developed in response to a recommendation by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in 2020 and has been promised initial funding of £150 million by the Church Commissioners. A number of speeches related to the burden of responsibility that could fall on the parish in which abuse had occurred. The draft Measure says that “contributions” from “one or more accountable bodies” could be requested, which would include the PCC of a church at which an offender worked. This could result in PCCs needing to take out insurance cover re: historic abuse.

An explanatory note published with the draft Measure states that accountable bodies “cannot seek to avoid an obligation to contribute ... by arguing that another person is vicariously liable at common law”.

A separate briefing note by the CofE’s national director of safeguarding, Alex Kubeyinje, outlined the principles that the proposed Measure seeks to enshrine: that it be survivor-centred, consistent, and put forward a “whole-church approach that enables all parts of the Church to show contrition for our collective past failings”.

A call for a slight delay before sending the draft Measure to the review committee was urged by many. The Archbishop of York, however, defended the process, saying that a more “iterative” approach meant that survivors and others would be able to contribute throughout the process. Bishop Mounstephen said that a delay would be unhelpful, and that rejecting the Measure at this early stage would send a “catastrophic” message to survivors. Members accordingly voted overwhelmingly for it to progress to the next stage.

PAYMENTS TO THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST ORDER 2023 (GS 2326)

The Synod was required to approve payments by the Church Commissioners to the CCT to match fund government funding for our at risk buildings. This was a positive debate, with the question asked given the rise in contribution at only .5% how the CCT was to deal with the volume of churches now at risk. A suggestion as made to add a small additional amount of funding (£150k pa) which would enable work to help churches remain viable and open. The motion passed.

AMENDMENTS TO THE STANDING ORDERS

The Synod reviews its Standing Orders (the rules on how the Synod operates). Like painting the Forth Road Bridge, this is a constant process and one the Synod takes seriously, for how we discuss has a very real effect on what we discuss and decisions made. Various amendments brought by the Standing Orders Committee updating SO43 were accepted.

There were two amendments brought by a member of the Synod. The first amendment sought to ensure any service arising from LLF would be deemed liturgical business and therefore come under Canon B2. This was defeated. The second sought to empower any Anglican Communion Representative to call for any business to be designated as liturgical business. This amendment was timed out and so lapsed.

THE VACANCY IN SEE COMMITTEES (AMENDMENT) REGULATION 2023

Following the transfer of the Channel Islands to the Diocese of Salisbury, this was a simple motion making the two deans of Guernsey and Jersey ex officio members of the Vacancy of See Committee of the Diocese of Salisbury.

LLF INTRODUCTION OF PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH (PLF)

Starting at the end and working backwards here is the Motion that was passed as amended by the Synod:

That this Synod, conscious that the Church is not of one mind on the issues raised by Living in Love and Faith, that we are in a period of uncertainty, and that many in the Church on all sides are being deeply hurt at this time, recognise the progress made by the House of Bishops towards implementing the motion on Living in Love and Faith passed by this Synod in February 2023, as reported in GS 2328, and encourage the House to continue its work of implementation, and ask the House to consider whether some standalone services for same-sex couples could be made available for use, possibly on a trial basis, on the timescale envisaged by the motion passed by the Synod in February 2023.

Carried in all three Houses by a counted vote by houses:

Bishops 23-10 Clergy 100-93 Laity 104-100.

The margins in the final vote was predictably tighter than February's vote on the original proposals.

The Bishop of London confirmed that the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF), which had been voted through in February, would be commended by the House of Bishops in mid-December, but it remains unclear exactly when stand-alone services will be available for use.

An amendment brought by the Bishop of Oxford calling for a trial period for stand-alone services was added to the motion under Canon B5 was carried by just one vote in the House of Laity. This is a significant amendment as it allows for what some perceive as a liturgical change to be permitted without due process. A number of speeches were concerned with this not being pastorally possible to be a trial period as it would be difficult to stop once commencing. The Synod was adjourned briefly with protests from the public gallery, with shouts that the Synod was "serving Satan".

Through this amendment the Synod effectively reverses a decision made by the House of Bishops in October to proceed straight to a full synodical process under Canon B2 without a trial permit. However, authorisation under B2 requires final approval by two-thirds in all three Houses and on current voting patterns, this is unlikely. The Archbishop of York said in his presidential address on Monday that he would back the amendment.

In responding to the full debate the Bishop of London stated that the Bishops had "heard the concerns" expressed about the B2 process, and said that B5(A) would provide "clarity" that the services would be used on an opt-in basis.

The House of Bishops was criticised from both sides of the debate. Those in favour of the introduction of the PLF complained that the proposals were the very least progress possible and there was criticism of bishops for the opaqueness of their decision-making in deciding not to publish their legal advice.

An amendment calling on the bishops to publish the formal advice that they had received about the legality of the new proposals was defeated by a counted vote by houses. Responding to the amendment the Bishop of London said that the legal foundation for the proposals was contained in the paper.

An amendment brought by the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham seeking to halt commending the PLF until the full pastoral guidance was published was defeated by a counted vote by houses. The Bishop of London when responding indicated that unlike 'Issues in Human Sexuality' which the Pastoral Guidance was replacing, the Guidance would not be a stand alone document but an ongoing resource more akin to such guidance used in the secular world.

An amendment brought by the Bishop Guildford seeking to bring the whole process under Canon B2 was defeated by a counted vote of houses.

Two amendments calling for structural differentiation were defeated again through a counted vote by houses: the first called on the bishops not to continue until the Synod had "considered proposals for structural provision" the second, brought by the Bishop of Durham called for "firm

provision that provides a clear way of distinguishing differing views”, this was interpreted by those opposed to the amendment as a call for new structures and resources that would allow separation.

An amendment to the motion changing how the work of the House of Bishops was described from “progress” to “work and consultation undertaken” was also defeated through a counted vote by houses. (If this had been a count of the whole synod it would have been a tie.)

Other less significant, less defined or less immediately relevant amendments seeking to bring about a defined timescale, a national referendum, more transparency and a request for the House of Bishops to determine whether sex outside marriage is a first order credal issue were either lost or failed to gain enough support to be debated.

Overall many of the speeches were inevitably restating arguments already heard in February and far more individuals requested to speak than was possible even in the eleven hours of the debate.

Revd Neil Barber House of Clergy for Derby spoke against the main motion early in the debate before it was amended. He asserted what is proposed is a change in doctrine and that the church’s doctrine on sex and marriage is clear.

Canon Julian Hollywell for Derby who strongly supported the motion raised a number of points of order throughout the debate to ensure the voting on amendments hostile to the main motion were counted by houses for a clear understanding of how Synod was voting.

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