

Report on the proceedings of the General Synod held in London 23-27 February 2024 for the Derby Diocesan Synod

For the first time, the General Synod met in London over a long weekend in February. The weekend sessions were being trialled as it was hoped that weekend sessions may enable more working people to serve on General Synod.

This is not an account of the Synod, but a summary with the business grouped into procedural areas rather than covered chronologically. The full report of the Synod, all papers, Questions and voting record can be found [here](#).

In the Presidential Address, the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of the necessity of the Church being 'even more the Church' in the face of war and suffering. He urged people to resist seeing others as enemies in times of fear and uncertainty and said that trust across divides builds resilience and an ability to see the best in others. He emphasised that the Church must be able to handle its issues effectively within the Church in order to effectively minister. He reminded Synod of our refuge in God, God's constant presence among us and God's call to be a faithful people. At the end of the Presidential Address, Tom Joy, the Chief Investment Officer for the Church Commissioners, who was leaving to take up a new post overseas, was presented with the Canterbury Cross for services to the Church of England. The Church Commissioners assets grew from £4 billion to £10 billion during his tenure.

Considerable time was again allocated to Questions taken in two separate sessions. 225 questions were tabled. Questions continue to be a source of frustration for both questioners and responders, as supplementary questions often seem designed to catch out responders and responses to questions often seem elusive and dismissive. Questions can be a real opportunity for participation by a wide range of members to raise issues and seek clarification, but it is an area of the Synod's business that can feel particularly and regrettably adversarial.

Legislative Business:

- **Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024 (GS 2334)**

The Act of Synod was affirmed and proclaimed which makes changes to composition of Vacancy in See committees, makes provision for remote meetings and casual vacancies and election of members to a Crown Nominations Commission.

- **Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Rules 2024 (GS 2350)**

The Rules were deemed approved, with no member having given notice for the item to be debated or proposed any amendments.

- **Parochial Fees Order 2024 (GS 2342)**

This sets the fees payable to DBFs and PCCs from 1st January 2025. (provision for fees for crematorium funerals and graveside funerals where there is no service in church was changed in accordance with the diocesan synod motion below).

- **Chancel Repair (Church Commissioners Liability) Measure 2024 (GS 2343)**
The Synod gave first consideration to a measure to detach chancel repair liability from land owned by the Church Commissioners and for it to become a free-standing statutory duty. This would allow the Commissioners to sell land free of this liability and its associated complications. The interests of PCCs would remain protected, as the Commissioners would retain a statutory duty to repair an associated chancel. The measure will now be referred to a revision committee.
- **Reappointment of Members of Archbishops' Council (GS 2347)**
The reappointments of Rev Charlotte Cook and Mr Joseph Diwaker were approved.
- **Church Funds Investment Measure (GS 2344)**
Synod agreed to refer the Measure to a revision committee. The Measure will have the effect of funds covered by the Church Funds Investment Measure 1958 being transferred to a Charity Authorised Investment Fund, which will mean the funds are then regulated by the Charity Commission and Financial Conduct Authority.

Diocesan Synod Motions:

- **Parochial Fees (GS 2331A and 2331B)**
The Diocese of London brought a motion to amend the Draft Parochial Fees Order agreed by Synod in February 2019 which transferred from PCCs to diocesan boards of finance the fees for burials and cremations where there is no service in church. The motion, which sought to return the fees in those instances to PCCs, was carried. Julian Hollywell spoke in the debate, referencing the Derby Diocesan Board of Finance decision in 2020 to elect to return those fees to parishes and the relatively small impact that had had on DBF income compared to the more substantial impact it had on parish funds and acknowledged the associated administrative costs of graveside and crematoria services to parishes. Bishop Libby spoke to say that the Diocese wanted to honour the ministry of all those who have bereavement ministry- stipendiary and self-supported ordained and licensed lay ministers.
- **Code of Conduct for PCCs (GS 2335A and GS 2335B)**
The Diocese of Chelmsford brought a motion requesting that Archbishops' Council carry out a review to consider the possibility of drawing up a Code of Conduct for PCC members and lay volunteers. The original motion had been brought from two churchwardens in a deanery who found that there was no means to remove a PCC member who had repeatedly displayed poor behaviour. There was an acknowledgement in speeches of poor behaviour within PCCs and a need to have a means to address it. Concerns were raised about there needing to be a recognition of neuro-divergence and different ways of communicating which may be open to misinterpretation. The motion was carried, albeit there was a significant vote against in the House of Laity: 105 for and 52 against with 8 abstentions).
- **Future of Work (GS 2320A and GS 2320B)**
The Diocese of Oxford brought a motion which called to mind the impacts of the pandemic, new technology and new forms of working. The motion sought to affirm the dignity and value of purposeful work. An amendment to the motion was passed to include 'paid or unpaid' to qualify that both are purposeful work. The Archbishop of Canterbury's amendment to endorse the Rome Call for promoting an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence also passed. An amendment seeking to encourage all Church institutions to

implement the living wage for employees was also carried. Amendments calling for specific advice on the impact of work on women and to make more explicit the Christian impulse behind the motion were also carried. The amended motion passed affirming the dignity and value of purposeful work paid or unpaid, endorsing the Rome Call for an ethical approach to AI, endorsing and commending the five principles used for evaluating fair work in the gig economy, encouraging all Church institutions to pay employees the living wage, and calling on the Faith and Order Commission and the Mission and Public Affairs Committee to advise on 'what is essential to purposeful, dignified and fair work in the context of the fourth industrial revolution now in progress including specific advice on how these changes impact the work of women and to look at Biblical wisdom on work, employment and economy in its widest sense; and to consider a range of practical solutions from recent economic thinking in harmony with the Christian tradition's emphasis on grace, justice and mercy, such as questions around pay ratios within organisations, Basic Citizens' Income, poverty and wealth lines, to strengthen our Christian voice in the public square as a Church.'

Private Members' Motions:

- **Bullying by Lay Officers (GS 2339A and 2339B)**

The Archdeacon of Blackburn brought a motion that sought to address the imbalance that currently exists in that clergy can be subject to penalties or removal from office for bullying behaviour but there is no similar provision for lay officers who bully clergy or other lay people. The motion was passed and requested that Archbishops' Council bring forward legislative proposals which would enable lay officers who have been found to have engaged in bullying to be disqualified from holding office.

- **Clergy Pensions (GS 2330A and 2330B)**

Synod passed a motion brought by Rev Dr Ian Paul of Southwell & Nottingham diocese as amended by Mr Carl Hughes, Chair of the Archbishops' Council Finance Committee, to explore ways in which clergy stipends and pensions might be improved. The impetus for the motion was a 2011 change to cut the pension as a proportion of the national minimum stipend and the length of service had increased; this had been considered necessary at the time, because of financial pressures, but the changes had resulted in significant financial detriment to active and retired clergy. There were numerous speeches detailing hardships clergy have experienced. The amended motion passed unanimously.

- **Removal of Divorce Impediment to Ordination (GS 2349A and 2349B)**

Rev Canon Mark Bennet brought a motion seeking to reform the Church's current legal requirement for a Archbishop's C4 faculty to be obtained by a candidate for ordination who has been divorced and remarried or whose spouse was previously married. Alicia Dring, who recently became the C4 faculty adviser in the Diocese, spoke of her experience working with ordinands and the inconsistencies in the Church's enquiries into past marriages amidst the complexities of a modern society in which a high proportion of ordination candidates are remarried after divorce. The Archbishop of York said that he and the Archbishop of Canterbury welcomed an amendment which asked Archbishops Council to introduce the necessary legislation to revise the Canon so that a bishop could remove the impediment to ordination with guidelines issued by the Archbishops to ensure consistency across dioceses. The amended motion was carried.

Other Business:

- **Safeguarding Independence (GS 2336)**

A presentation was given to Synod including a recorded video from Professor Alexis Jay who had only that week published her report *The Future of Church Safeguarding*, which recommended the creation of two new charities funded by the Church of England but operationally and legally independent- one to deliver safeguarding and one to have scrutiny over safeguarding. The Wilkinson report, which had been published in November 2023, reported on the establishment and subsequent collapse of the Church's Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB). The Bishop of Stepney, Lead Bishop for Safeguarding, thanked Professors Jay and Wilkinson for their reports and said that the Church had 'not yet gained the trust and respect' of survivors. The Archbishop of Canterbury said that a system needed to be set up without conflicts of interest and which would enable an environment where all are safe in the future. Amendments to the motion, which called for an immediate move to implement Professor Jay's recommendations for independent safeguarding, were rejected by Synod. The motion that was carried thanked Professors Wilkinson and Jay for their work and agreed to a process to respond to their recommendations, endorse apologies to survivors impacted by the matters described in the Wilkinson report and apologised to the members of the former ISB.

- **Land and Nature (GS 2319)**

The Bishop of Norwich, the Lead Bishop for the Environment, brought a motion to encourage greater biodiversity and sustainable land use. Sue Cavill spoke in the debate encouraging parishes and dioceses to engage in practical ways to care for God's creation but urging a higher-level strategic role by the Church Commissioners. The motion was carried and requested that each diocese create an action plan to achieve the 'land' section of Eco Diocese silver level by 2026, requested chairs and secretaries of DBFs to incorporate nature- positive objectives in their asset management policies, called on parishes, cathedrals and others to create land management plans with reference to Caring for God's Acre, work towards Eco Church and record biodiversity of their green spaces including taking part in Churches Count on Nature, called on diocesan boards of education to work with the Department for Education sustainability strategy and requested the Church Commissioners to report back to Synod within three year on their progress towards enhancing and supporting biodiversity across their land, engagement and collaboration with tenants about sustainable farming and their leadership amongst landowners.

- **Synod Code of Conduct (GS 2337)**

Having already agreed to explore a Code of Conduct for PCCs, Synod turned to examine itself and responses to a survey of members and asked the Business Committee to revise the Members' Code of Conduct and present proposals at a future group of sessions.

- **Racial Justice: Furthering the Implementation of *From Lament to Action***

The Bishop of Dover proposed the motion, which called for further work to be done to embed racial justice in the life and practice of the Church and requested Archbishops' Council to ensure that effective structures existed to monitor actions and outcomes on racial justice, in light of the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice being due to complete its three-year term in November 2024. The Bishop of Leicester appealed to the chair to prolong the debate so that every ethnic minority member who wished to speak could do so. Speakers drew attention to good work that was being done to tackle racism

within the Church but that there was more work to be done. The motion was passed with 364 votes in favour, zero against and two abstentions.

- **Amendments to Standing Orders (GS 2340)**

Various changes to the General Synod's Standing Orders, as brought by the Standing Orders Committee, were passed.

- **Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households (GS 2321)**

The Synod agreed to commend the report *Love Matters* and its recommendations for dioceses, deaneries and parishes, encourage practical responses in line with the vision to be a younger, more diverse, mixed economy and missionary discipleship church and urged the government to implement the recommendations to it made by the report. A proposed amendment, which sought to reaffirm the value of marriage as providing the most stable and permanent environment for bringing up children, was lost in a counted vote by houses; there was a 8-8 tie in the House of Bishops and the vote was lost in both the Houses of Clergy and Laity. Several speakers drew attention to the fact that single households were included and valued in the report. The unamended motion was carried.

- **Church Commissioners Response to Links to Transatlantic Chattel Slavery (GS 2341)**

There was a presentation to Synod from the Church Commissioners and the group that had been looking into the Church's historic links with the transatlantic slave trade.

- **Estates Evangelism (GS 2345)**

The Bishop of Blackburn, on behalf of the National Estates Evangelism Task Group, brought a motion in which the Synod agreed unanimously to dedicate itself afresh to the Church's commitment to estates ministry and evangelism and call on the whole church to address the structural and financial injustices that prevent flourishing and sustainable worshipping communities on every estate.

- **Living in Love and Faith (GS 2346)**

The Bishop of Leicester Martyn Snow, the Lead Bishop for LLF, presented a paper to Synod in which he offered an indicative ten commitments that might form a way forward for the Church and encouraged a focus on reconciliation and bridge building. The tone of the debate, which included consideration of several amendments, was more positive than Synod's previous LLF debates in February and November 2023. After several hours of debate on the amendments and main motion, there was a call to move to next business which was agreed by a counted vote of the whole Synod 322 votes for, 69 against and 20 abstentions. The move to next business means that the motion cannot be brought in the same form during the life of this Synod. Bishop Martyn said that he was hoping that more bishops would co-lead the next stages of the process to implement Synod's decisions and explore 'what degree of communion is possible.'

- **War in Ukraine and Challenge to International Order (GS 2348)**

Synod agreed this motion as amended to recognise the suffering caused by the war, affirm churches work towards peace and reconciliation, call on parties to the conflict to ensure religious freedom, call on UK political parties to set out their vision for desirable international order and their support for Ukraine.

*Kat Alldread
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