

## **Report of General Synod 5-9 July 2024 for Derby Diocese**

General Synod met in York on 5-9 July.

### **Living in Love and Faith**

Once again, there was an item on Living in Love and Faith. We received a briefing from the three working groups who had been considering next steps, and then spent Monday afternoon debating the latest motion.

The motion asked us to support a timetable which will remove restrictions on the use of prayers of love and faith in standalone services alongside the introduction of an arrangement to register for Pastoral Reassurance. There will be further development of pastoral guidance and a code of practice for pastoral provision, alongside the development of a doctrine paper, leading to the anticipated final PLF guidance being approved next July.

The pastoral reassurance will be provided through a House of Bishops' Statement and Code of Practice which provides for the delegation of some specific and defined episcopal ministry, and which is overseen by an Independent Review Panel. The Faith and Order Commission will carry out the theological work around the nature of doctrine, particularly the doctrine of marriage and question of clergy in same-sex civil marriages.

Bishop Martyn Snow, the lead bishop for this work, told us that stand alone prayers of love and faith would not begin until the code of practice is in place.

The arrangements for pastoral reassurance will be regularly monitored over a period of at least three years before being formally reviewed by General Synod.

Taken together, the Pastoral Guidance, the Bishops' Statement and the Code of Practice for pastoral provision will replace *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

Bishop Martyn acknowledged that the proposals would not please everyone, and said that maybe we would all have to settle for second best and accept that there are different degrees of communion. The report from the working groups showed us in practice how people with different viewpoints had come together and through working together had become friends, in spite of their differences.

The motion was passed by all three Houses. In the Houses of Clergy and of Laity the vote was close.

### **Safeguarding**

The Synod welcomed a motion asking for further work on the options for a future model for safeguarding at the national level to be brought to the February 2025 Synod. There was some disquiet that it is now a year since the Independent Safeguarding Board was disbanded and nothing has yet been decided, but agreement that the different models needed further consideration and consultation.

There was also recognition of the excellent work carried out in safeguarding at parish and diocesan level.

A separate item discussed the fallout from the issues to do with the allegations of abuse against Mike Pilavachi, the leader of Soul Survivor. Synod agreed that the review of abuse within the Soul Survivor network currently undertaken by independent King's Counsel Fiona Scolding should be considered in any recommendations relating to the future of Church safeguarding, along with a number of other actions involving listening to and supporting survivors of abuse in this context.

### **Rest Periods for Office Holders**

Synod agreed to amend regulations for ecclesiastical officers so that an office holder (ie a member of the clergy) is entitled to not less than 36 hours of rest in any period of seven days, to include an uninterrupted rest period of not less than 24 hours. We had an interesting debate about the nature of Sabbath and it is noteworthy that nearly all those who spoke in favour of the motion were lay members rather than clergy.

### **Archbishops' Council budget**

Synod considered the budget for the Archbishops' Council for 2025 and the apportionment and agreed expenditure as follows:

- £17, 391, 847 for Training for Ministry
- £38, 242, 532 for National Church Responsibilities
- £1, 560, 642 for Grants
- £504, 924 for Mission Agency Pension Contributions
- £6, 444, 313 for Clergy Retirement Housing Grants

### **Archbishops' Council Annual Report and Annual Report of the Church Commissioners**

These reports were followed by questions, and a further motion was passed about the National Burial Grounds Survey. The Survey seeks to film all parish registers and the motion identified safeguarding and other issues. The motion, which was carried, requested Archbishops' Council to consult with the College of Archdeacons to address these issues, and request that parishes are not asked to sign up until this consultation has taken place.

### **The wider world**

We debated a motion on the **Human Dignity of Disabled Children**, affirming the value of every person as unique and precious and made in the image of God. Among other things the motion called upon the government to ensure that mothers whose

unborn child may be disabled are given comprehensive and unbiased information about the condition and support is available to them, and called upon us in parishes to consider how to support families with disabled children.

A motion on **Food Banks and Inadequacies in Social Security** led to an impassioned and emotional debate, when we heard heartbreaking stories of deprivation. It came at the right time to enable the Bishops in the House of Lords to go back to our new government and *'urgently engage with HM Government to press it to review the adequacy of current social security provision'*.

Synod also supported a motion calling for an **Annual Ecumenical Day of Prayer and Action for the Persecuted Church**, hearing personal stories of persecution of Christians in countries around the world.

There was also a useful discussion about how better to hear and respond to **the voice of young people**.

## **Legislation**

Now that we are half way through this five year Synod, various pieces of legislation are at various stages.

We passed the next stage of the Clergy Conduct Measure, which is replacing the Clergy Discipline Measure. It will now go forward for Final Drafting and Final Approval.

We accepted the report on the Abuse Redress Measure revision committee. Following representations to the revision committee (including one from Peter Kelsey and one from me) the requirement for PCCs and others to pay towards any financial redress to abuse survivors has been removed and replaced with request.

We passed legislation about Chancel Repair (Church Commissioners' Liability), and the Church Funds Investment Measure.

We looked at the first draft of a measure to reorganise the central Church institutions – this is all about governance and where power sits.

We looked at suggestions for raising legal fees to registrars and judges and in the case of registrars asked for these to be looked at again.

## **Reflection**

At this Synod we also debated a paper looking at the nature of trust, as there has been some questioning of trust within Synod, particularly, for example, some distrust of the bishops. The paper looks at what factors might lead to lack of trust in the church and in wider society and suggests some ways to foster trust. The debate was dominated by the issues that are causing divisions, most notably the Prayers of Love and Faith. The debate was adjourned when it ran out of time and will be considered for further debate in February 2025. I noticed that in general at this Synod the

debates were less combative and it seems to me that as we all get to know each other we are finding ways to deepen our relationships even with those with whom we disagree, and therefore hopefully to foster greater trust.

A number of the motions that came before us started in Deanery Synods – including the clergy working time motion. Deaneries may like to consider whether there is anything that they would like to move for consideration at General Synod.

It was good to see Sarah Tupling, a representative of Deaf Anglicans Together who is also from Derby diocese, contribute to a number of debates, including the debate on disability.

On a personal note, there were no specific items about the environment this time, but I helped organise a fringe meeting about Climate Justice where we heard how racial justice and climate justice are intertwined, learning about the difficulties caused by flood and drought in many of the poorer countries of the world, and how in this country many people from BME communities live in environments with problems such as poor air quality.

You can find out more detail of the business of this Synod, including all the papers, on the [Church of England website](#).

Sue Cavill, House of Laity

July 2024