

## **Big issues, Governance, Good decisions – a report from February’s General Synod**

General Synod met in Westminster on 9-13 February. The new Archbishop of Canterbury made her first presidential address. She spoke of the challenges we faced and emphasised that we should ‘flex the muscle of hope’.

For me Synod can be summed up under a number of headings – big issues, governance and good decisions.

### **Big issues**

Living in Love and Faith was high on the agenda, with a presentation on Tuesday afternoon, followed by a debate on Thursday afternoon. The emotional debate was followed by a vote on the motion that the Synod recognise and lament the pain many have suffered during the LLF process, affirm the end of the LLF process by July 2026, thank the LLF Working Groups and commend the establishment of a new Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group and a Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Pastoral Consultative Group for continuing work.

The motion was carried but many people expressed their deep hurt, and I believe that there was a sense of frustration even among those who voted for the motion, and on both ‘sides’ of the debate, that we had spent so much time on this issue and did not seem to have made much progress.

A debate on mental health led to acceptance of a motion calling for more training for clergy and church school leaders in dealing with mental health; recognition of people facing mental health challenges in the way liturgy is developed; and all dioceses to ensure their clergy’s mental health is well-supported. Derby lay representative Kat Alldread made an effective and courageous speech during this debate.

The Synod also endorsed the report of the Archbishops’ Commission for Reimagining Care. We debated Poverty and the Church 40 years after Faith in the City. On a connected theme, LInC Funding, the Synod agreed ‘That this Synod, recognising that areas of deprivation exist across all dioceses, call upon the Church Commissioners and Archbishops’ Council to review the formula and processes used to distribute Lowest Income Communities Funding (LInC), as part of the wider review of the Church’s funding framework for ministry.’

A debate on Working Class Vocation and Ministry Next Steps led to a vote welcoming consultation with working-class ministers, asking for that consultation to continue and asking the bishops to address structural and cultural barriers to the flourishing of working-class ministers.

### **Governance**

Safeguarding governance was on the agenda – and of course this is also a big issue. A safeguarding code of practice was circulated and there was a presentation from Dame Christine Ryan, the new Executive Chair of the Safeguarding Structures Programme, about the next steps on implementation of new safeguarding structures and Synod welcomed the update and endorsed the direction of travel. Dame Christine was clear about the need for rigorous governance.

A revised Code of Practice for Mission Initiatives was passed by Synod. This has been developed in the wake of the Scolding Review of Soul Survivor and Mike Pilavachi's conduct.

Synod agreed to the creation of a public register of nationally recognised lay ministers. We also agreed to a minor amendment to Church Representation Rules that one-third of a PCC must confirm approval when business is circulated by correspondence.

Parliament's Ecclesiastical Committee had challenged an aspect of the Clergy Conduct Measure – such a challenge is unusual - and Synod agreed an amendment the Committee asked for, reversing the presumption of private hearings so that tribunals and courts will normally sit in public.

### **Good decisions**

The Diocesan Synod motion on Sustainable Church Flowers had already attracted media attention before Synod. This motion, which originated in a parish in Worcester Diocese, was a perfect example of how an issue can rise through Deanery Synod, to Diocesan Synod, and thence to General Synod. The good-humoured debate touched on 'oasis' and alternatives to it, the pros and cons of buying flowers from abroad (pros – employment and livelihoods, cons – airmiles) and what realistically was possible if only local flowers were used. With an emphasis that the suggestions for sustainable flowers were not a diktat, but a recommendation, the motion was passed.

Also on the theme of God's world, Synod passed a motion approving revisions to liturgy for the new Festival of God the Creator and Commemoration of the Twenty-one Martyrs of Libya. The speeches in this debate alternated between discussion of the way we speak of God the Creator and moving tributes to the 21 martyrs.

Right at the end of Synod, we spent a whole morning debating suggested increases of £1,000 to fees for funerals. Many clergy spoke to say how disastrous they felt this would be in missional terms and Synod voted the increases down completely.

This is a personal reflection. A record of all the business done, including the few items I have not mentioned, and voting records, can be found on the Church of England [website](#).

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