

General Synod briefing for Stroud Deanery Synod - February 2018

Part 1 - General Information

1. General Background

The General Synod is the national assembly of the Church of England. It considers and approves legislation affecting the whole of the Church of England, formulates new forms of worship, debates matters of national and international importance, and approves the annual budget for the work of the Church at national level. It has a website which can be found at www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod.

2. Membership

The membership of General Synod has three houses:

- The **House of Bishops** consists of all diocesan bishops and elected representatives of the suffragan bishops
- The **House of Clergy** consists of elected representatives of the clergy in all dioceses and representatives of cathedral deans
- The **House of Laity** consists of representatives of the laity in all dioceses, elected by members of Deanery Synods.

Religious communities and Institutes of Theological Education are also represented and their members may be either clergy or laity.

Gloucester Diocese has three clergy and four lay representatives as well as Bishop Rachel.

3. What Synod does

Synod business tends to fall into four main categories.

3.1. Standing items

- For example, the debate on the Business Committee Report, which sets out the key points about the business for the session and how it was decided on
- Questions, which provide opportunities for members to raise questions on any topic, whether or not they are on the main agenda for the session
- Presidential address – given by the Archbishop of Canterbury when Synod meets in London and the Archbishop of York when it meets in York.

3.2. Legislative business

The legislative function of the General Synod is an important one. Church legislation forms part of the law of the land, and has a far-reaching impact on the Church's mission and activities at diocesan and parish level. It can seem dry at times as it needs to be very detailed. Most of the hard work goes on in

committees but it is still important for Synod members to participate in the discussions at each point when the proposed legislation comes to it for agreement.

3.3. *The Church and the World*

This is a variety of business which debates current issues and takes account of the way in which the Church relates to our public context; a important outward-looking part of the agenda.

3.4. *Ordering the life of the Church*

Business which concerns the way we order our own life together.

Inevitably, some of the subjects which come under these areas may overlap and any of them might be concerned in different ways with the core mission of the Church.

Diocesan Synod Motions and Private Member Motions

Much of the business originates with the Archbishops' Council or one of its themed committees, but any diocese or member of Synod can seek to bring forward an issue through a motion for debate. Such a motion might be in any of the four categories outlined above. Diocesan motions sometimes start at a Deanery Synod.

4. Debates or Presentations

Synod business might be a debate on a specific motion on a topic or it can be a presentation with an opportunity for questions to be asked afterwards.

Presentations are an opportunity for Synod to hear from external visitors, experts and representatives from other churches in a more informal way than is possible in a debate. They can also allow Synod to be given a broader picture regarding the context to a debate or issue under discussion. In many cases, presentations are followed by debates, whether on a 'Take Note' or a more substantive motion.

5. Worship

Worship is threaded through all sessions of Synod, and is co-ordinated by the Chaplain to Synod. The day starts and ends with worship in the main assembly hall, there are other services in the chapel, and there is a communion service for the whole Synod at some point in each session.

There is also a "continuing praying presence" throughout the session which is usually provide by the Community of St Anselm – the community based at Lambeth Palace formed from young people from across the world spending a year in prayer and service. You can find out more about this at www.stanselm.org.uk

6. Interest groups and fringe meetings

There are a number of interest groups that gather members of Synod around particular themes, and fringe meetings also take place on specific topics that might be under discussion or being developed for a future discussion.

Part 2 - Examples of recent Synod activity

This section gives an outline of some of the business Synod has dealt with in its sessions in February 2018 and, looking further back, a more summarised list of some of the topics from the July 2017 sessions.

Legislation

- Final enactment of a Canon that amends existing provision relating to clergy dress when conducting services
- Final enactment of a Canon which amends existing provision relating to the use of the burial service in special cases – *this began as a Private Member's Motion from Mike Parsons when he was a Gloucester Diocese clergy representative and relates, for example, to the funeral of someone who has committed suicide*
- Revision of a Measure about ecumenical provision - *one of many items Synod has been working through arising from the Simplification Task Group*
- A motion for the approval of a Petition from the Bishop of Leeds to the Privy Council to change the name of a Suffragan See - *noted here just for interest as an example of how the church organises itself.*

The Church in the World

- Diocesan Synod Motion on Food Waste
- Motion on 'Valuing People with Down's syndrome' – *arising from the availability of a new, less invasive test during pregnancy*
- Debate on a Motion on Companion Links and the Anglican Communion – *an opportunity to think about the mutual value of links such as our diocesan links with five partner dioceses and links at parish level*
- Presentation on Digital Evangelism – *updating on extensive work well underway to ensure the C of E makes the best possible use of digital resources; recent examples Deanery Synod members may have come across are "Thy Kingdom Come", "#God with us" Christmas campaign and "#Live Lent: Let your light shine"*

Ordering the Life of the Church

- Debate on "Discerning in Obedience" the Review of the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) – *this is the body that nominates bishops and archbishops and this review was from a theological perspective; a really interesting paper and debate which agreed to "take note" of the review's recommendations to the Archbishops on ways of improving the CNC's processes.*
- Safeguarding Presentation - *looking back over the key events of recent years, some of them very public; considering the changes made to improve the church's response to both current and historical allegations of abuse; looking ahead to the*

work of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and its likely impact. Bishop Rachel participated in the presentation, including talking about the arrangements we now have in place in the diocese

- Debate on a Motion on the Anglican-Methodist Covenant – *an important debate about further work on proposals to bring the two denominations into closer links. It was agreed to continue with the work.*
- Three Archbishops from across the Anglican Communion attended as observers and addressed Synod briefly:
 - Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of Cape Town
 - Archbishop Humphrey Peters of Pakistan
 - Archbishop Winston Halapua of Aotorea, New Zealand and Polynesia

Each gave important insights into the life of the wider Anglican Communion and the particular pressures facing each of their provinces. Perhaps the most moving was Archbishop Humphrey so the summary from the Church Times of his contribution is attached below.

July 2017

- Debate on a motion from the Archbishops “After the General Election, a still small voice of calm”.
- Church Commissioners’ Annual Report
- Presentation from the House of Bishops on the Proposals for the Pastoral Advisory Group on Human Sexuality and the development of the Teaching Document
- Workshops on forms of national support for Local Churches
- Private Members’ Motion on Conversion Therapy
- Report from the House of Clergy on a Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing
- Diocesan Synod Motion on the Cost of Applying for Citizenship
- Archbishops’ Council’s Annual Report and Budget

Archbishop Humphrey's contribution

He spoke about the challenge of being the “tiny body of Christ” in his country. He described how actions in the west such as caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad had ramifications for Christians in Pakistan: “We become the victims of it. They burn our churches, they do suicide bombing” yet “God in his wisdom is keeping the body of Christ there.”

People in Pakistan, Muslims and other non-Christians, were “internally bruised. They need a healing touch. The world of Islam needs someone to wipe away their tears, someone to hug them...Quietly they come to us and say ‘What is happening in the world?’” About eight months before Malala Yousafazi was shot, she and her father had spent time with him and asked for prayer.

Canon Margaret Sheather

February 2018