

GENERAL SYNOD 23RD/24TH APRIL 2021: REPORT TO STROUD DEANERY SYNOD

INTRODUCTION

A meeting of General Synod was held on the 23rd and 24th April 2021 by way of the Zoom platform. This is a brief summary of the key discussion topics but please feel free to contact me if you would like further information on any item.

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HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

Tributes were paid to the Duke of Edinburgh from the Archbishop of Canterbury and others speaking warmly of his Christian commitment and his life of service.

Presidential Address

In the week of the Panorama programme about racism in the C of E and the publication of the Archbishops' Taskforce report "From Lament to Action", the Archbishop of York's Presidential Address focussed on the issue of racism and in particular racism in the Church. The address was powerful and pointed and contained the commitment on behalf of the Church to address an issue which firmly identified racism as a sin. You can find the address at [Archbishop of York's Presidential Address to General Synod | The Archbishop of York](#)

The Taskforce Report highlights how many previous reports on this topic have been presented to the church but not acted on, hence the title. The bulk of their report therefore consists of a detailed action plan addressed to all aspects of church life.

Legislative Business

The Synod is the church's law-making body, in addition to other functions and this session was dominated by legislative business, keeping a number of key issues moving. The items addressed on Friday and Saturday were as follows:

- (1) **The Safeguarding (Code of Practice) Measure** This responds to a criticism made in the the IICSA¹ Report that requiring responsible people to have "due regard" to guidance about how to respond to allegations of abuse was not sufficient. This measure therefore requires the House of Bishops to provide a Code of Practice that will apply to clergy and lay people and set out clear requirements of their actions.

¹ Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

- (2) **The Legislative Reform (Church Pensions) Order** proposed changes to the constitution of the Church of England Pensions Board to bring it more into line with current best practice in terms of number on the board and length of terms of office. It also requires the Board to present its annual report to General Synod.
- (3) **The Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Rules 2021** again addressed an issue arising from IICSA, but also recognised internally in the church, about the inefficiency and onerous nature of the current rules as implemented. There is a wider piece of work going on to fully revise the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM), but in the mean time, this amendment introduced helpful streamlining of the process and also clarifies the difference between complaints handling and the more serious misconduct issues that should be dealt with under the CDM.

International Religious Freedom

Synod considered a paper on the threats to religious freedom in different parts of the world. This was in order to position the Church as an advocate of religious freedom in all parts of the world and for all faiths to encourage working with the Government in highlighting issues in different parts of the world for different communities. The call for the Church to be a powerful and persistent advocate for religious freedom was, as expected, widely supported. A summary of the paper can be found at [Bishop tells General Synod to speak out against persecution of religious believers and atheists | The Church of England](#)

Safeguarding

The Bishop of Huddersfield, Lead Bishop on safeguarding, presented a full updating report showing good signs of real progress on implementing the wide-ranging recommendations from the IICSA.

Margaret Sheather/Martin Kingston