

Report for Deaneries on General Synod February 2024

Introduction

The Synod met in London from 23rd -27th February to deal with a very full agenda covering a wide range of items.

Prominent items

Included in this section are several items that have received a lot of public attention

Safeguarding independence

Synod had received two key reports which were the basis for this item:

- The Wilkinson Report on the establishment, work and eventual disbanding (in controversial circumstances) of the Independent Safeguarding Board. It raised a number of concerns both about processes and about the conduct of relationships.¹ It had been published in December 2023.
- The Jay report on the Future of Church Safeguarding.² This made recommendations about future independent structures both for the operational aspects of safeguarding in the Church of England and the scrutiny/oversight function. It was only published two days before the Synod met.

The motion before Synod was to agree to establish a Response Group to consider the findings of both reports and propose a way forward. The issue most fiercely debated was whether this was a sufficiently urgent and definitive approach, with considerable pressure to accept the Jay Report recommendation immediately and move to action. The motion was agreed in the end, with the senior people involved recognising the need for progress to be made at a good pace and noting the points made about wider involvement and consultation.

Living in Love and Faith

No new decisions were made at this Synod, as the report presented on this topic disappointed most Synod members, whatever their views on the issue itself. It wasn't felt to be sufficiently focussed on delivering the decisions already made by the Synod: the proposed Pastoral Guidance, Pastoral Assurance and the approach to be taken to approval of the stand alone services for same sex couples. After one session of debate where these concerns were aired the item was ended without a vote being taken, but with the expectation that the original programme of work would be pursued and progress reported in July.

Presentation on Church Commissioners' Response to Links to Slavery

This was a presentation with questions rather than a formal debate. It updated Synod on the work already done by the Church Commissioners, and introduced the work of the Oversight Group that has been appointed to ensure the commitments made by the

¹ The report can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/isb-review-report-30-november-2023.pdf>

² The report can be found at <https://futureofchurchsafeguarding.org.uk/report/>

Commissioners are effectively acted on. These actions should promote healing, repair and justice.

The group is chaired by +Rosemarie Mallett, and many people will have heard her recent interviews in the media resulting from the most eye-catching of the group's recommendations: that the £100m committed by the Commissioners over nine years should be expanded, through partnerships with others, to £1bn. The group's work is much wider than this and it will be key to achieving the Church's hopes for the impact of its response.

Wider Society Concerns

There were lively debates on a number of wider concerns all of which presented challenges of one sort or another to us all. All the motions were passed, some with amendments to extend or improve them.

Land and Nature, introduced by the Bishop of Norwich, urged a variety of further actions on the Church at every level in response to the ecological crisis, particularly in the way that the Church's wide variety of land is cared for.

Racial Justice: Furthering Implementation of from Lament to Action – A powerful speech from the Bishop of Dover, Rose Hudson-Wilkin, introduced a motion looking at what has already been achieved, but also looking forward to work that needs to continue beyond the life time of the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice.

Future of Work – the Bishop of Oxford's motion referred to the significant upheavals in the world of work now and in future years and proposed that the Faith and Order Commission should work with the Mission and Public Affairs Committee to advise the Church on what is "essential to purposeful, dignified and fair work" in these times.

Love Matters - Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households – the report of this Commission was originally published about nine months ago, but pressures on Synod agendas had prevented it being discussed until this session. The Bishop of Durham commended the report and also other materials that have now been developed to support the implementation of its proposals. Information can be found at www.churchofengland.org/families-and-households

Estates Evangelism – the Bishop of Blackburn's motion, marking the fifth anniversary of the Synod's original commitment to the goal of achieving a loving, serving and worshipping Christian community on every significant social housing estate, commended what has been achieved and urged all dioceses to include this work in their strategic mission and ministry plans.

War in Ukraine and Challenge to International Order – it was a particular challenge to imagine how we could helpfully address this disturbing topic. The motion focussed on the work of churches in supporting conflict parties and mediators; promoting freedom of religion or belief in line with international human rights law and called on political parties to set out their vision for a desirable international order.

Internal issues

There was something of a theme about conduct with an item about the General Synod Code of Conduct; a Diocesan Synod motions about a Code of Conduct for PCCs; and a Private Member's Motion about Bullying by Lay Officers. All were referred for further work.

Legislation

A number of items of legislation were addressed, at various stages of their processes

- Vacancy in See Committee Regulations – Proclamation
- Parochial Fees Order – Approval
- Amending Canon 43 – Enactment (*Miscellaneous Provisions*)
- Chancel Repair Measure – First consideration
- Church Funds Investment – First consideration

Diocesan Synod motions

A motion on whether certain Parochial Fees should remain with the parish or be paid to the diocese revealed both a variety of views and a variety of diocesan practice.

Private Members' Motion from Revd Dr Ian Paul on Clergy Pensions

Given the performance of the church's investments, there was dissatisfaction with the level of clergy pensions. The original motion was effectively replaced completely by amendments, the intention being to correct as far as possible the shortfalls from the past and to protect the payments in the future. There was much detailed discussion including a call for a one-off generational resettlement to rebalance diocesan stipends funds in order to prevent additional costs for dioceses or parishes. Archbishops' Council, which sets the pension level, will review them in the light of this debate and make proposals to Synod. Proposals included pensions being reset to pre-2011 level as soon as possible and the Church Commissioners should taking responsibility for the post-1997 pensions fully.

The motion as amended was carried unanimously

General Synod Representatives

Revd Dana Delap	dana@delap.org.uk
Revd Katrina Scott	kragscott@hotmail.com
Karen Czapiewski	karen.czapiewski@btinternet.com
Jennifer Fellows	jenniferfellows41@gmail.com
Robert McNeill-Wilson	rmw@unisonprojects.co.uk
Margaret Sheather	m.sheather@btinternet.com