

# Report from General Synod representatives on July 2022 sessions

## Introduction

The General Synod met in York across five days in early July. It was a packed programme with the usual mix of outward and inward facing issues and the whole of the Sunday afternoon was given over to workshops on two of the major current themes: Vision and Strategy and Living in Love and Faith

Elections also took place during the Synod for the three lay and three clergy central representatives on the Crown Nominations Commission – the body that makes nominations for the appointment of bishops. They hold office for five years.

There are many topics in what follows that need our prayers but, in reporting to the Diocesan Synod in July, we offered four particular issues to focus on:

- For peace and prosperity in the Congo, whose Archbishop spoke at Synod and sought all our prayers for his huge and troubled country
- For Ukraine, on which there was a debate, including a call on the government to work towards a negotiated peace
- About the impact on children and young people's lives and development of the easy, and often initially unsought, access to pornography. A motion calling for age-verification on such websites led to a full and moving debate
- The next steps in the Living in Love and Faith process, as the College of Bishops prepares for a series of residential meetings through the autumn to consider the report on the extensive engagement phase and considers what proposals to bring forward.

The rest of this report is not a comprehensive account but outlines some of the main topics addressed. Anyone wishing to pursue particular points in more detail can find all the papers here <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/general-synod-july-2022> .

## The Church and the World

There were several good debates on current issues in the wider world.

A motion on the **War in Ukraine** lamented the invasion and its impact, urged prayer for an end to the war, called on dioceses to work on long term refuge for all refugees and called on the government to work to secure peace, though there were different opinions in the debate about whether the motion should refer to a "just" rather than simply a "negotiated" peace. It was passed with the original "negotiated" wording.

Speeches on a Private Members' Motion on **Assisted suicide**, which appreciated the work of health professionals in palliative and end of life care, called on the government to resource this care to ensure the highest possible standards and, in that context, affirmed the current legislation, covered a wide range of views and moving accounts of personal experiences.

Similarly, the motion from Guildford Diocesan Synod on **Age Verification for Pornography Websites**, led to a debate that was very informative about the impact of pornography on children and young people and troubling examples from members' work or experience.

The motion on **Affirming and Including Disabled People in the Whole Life of the Church** bridged the church's own life and behaviour and that of the wider world. Presented by several disabled members of Synod it presented a sobering picture of the difficulties faced

by disabled people in full participation in the life of the church and the ways, including in liturgy, that it is still falls far short of inclusivity. It was offered as a springboard for action on several broad themes that can lead to further proposals addressing the detail. A topic for thought by all of us.

## **The Life of the Church**

The motion and supporting paper on the **Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by 2030** started to put some detail on this goal, covering all the main different groupings in the C of E: Churches; Schools; Cathedrals; Dioceses; National Church Institutions etc. It was presented as a pragmatic, step-by-step approach but also recognised that the plan would have to flex and adapt as the picture emerges. The Routemap was endorsed and the motion allocated actions to Diocesan Synods to agree a feasible programme of action and to the Environment staff team to report back regularly to Synod on progress.

There was a presentation on **Safeguarding and Independence** from the Chairs of the two independent elements of the church's safeguarding structure: Meg Munn the Chair of the National Safeguarding Panel, which has been in place since 2018, and Maggie Atkinson, Chair of the Independent Safeguarding Board which has been more recently established and is still developing its role and remit, though an initial publication from it is due soon. There was also what is now a regular update from the lead Bishop on more general work and progress.

There was an initial report from the group working on **Resourcing Ministerial Formation** which set out principles for reform and led to lively discussion and a broad welcome. The report and motion on **Implementation of the Clergy Conduct Measure** was also welcomed as it works on ensuring a better balanced approach to issues of conduct.

There were also several legislative matters raised for first consideration and all referred for further revision and development. We can report on those when they have their more substantive discussion.

## **Financial and Organisational**

Synod received the following major reports:

- The Annual Report of the Archbishops' Council
- Review of Strategic Development Funding and Lowest Income Communities Funding
- Spending Plans of the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council
- Archbishops' Council Budget 2023 and Proposals for Apportionment

Notable points from these included

- that the Spending Plans report set out not only the intended distributions for 2023-25 but also the indicative figures for the subsequent six years, so giving a longer term view than has usually been the case
- That there is some adaptation proposed to the way that the Strategic Development Fund is allocated, giving a more local and varied emphasis to potential projects.

*Margaret Sheather  
Lay Chair*