

## General Synod February 2023 - Report to Stroud Deanery Synod

General Synod met from 6<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> February at Church House, Westminster. Although the main media focus was on the debate on Living in Love and Faith, there was also a full programme of other issues to address. Some key points are noted below, and full Synod papers are available on the C of E website

### Legislation

The following are the most relevant items from a wider range.

It was agreed to continue to be able to **hold Synod meetings in “hybrid” form** and this is now a permanent part of the Standing Orders. Even when most people can attend a meeting it has been good to provide for others unable to attend due to illness or other unexpected commitments to be able to participate.

Very importantly, the first steps to **implement the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)** were taken with the change of title of Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors to Diocesan Safeguarding Officers, and confirmation that they are independent of the bishop.

Recognising the unequal endowments of dioceses across the country, DBFs are now permitted to make **grants from the Diocesan Stipends Fund** to another diocese if they feel that is appropriate. A number of people felt a more fundamental re-assessment of the church’s overall resources was required and it may be that few dioceses feel they are in a position to share their funds in this way.

### Reports and motions

**Resourcing Ministerial Formation** provided an update on the arrangements for ministerial training and its funding. The proposals give training institutions more stability of funding by improving the financial and structural system for the relationship between the institutions, the national church and diocese. The report was not about the content of theological education.

There was a good debate on a motion about the impact of the **increased cost of living** which addressed the responsibilities of individuals, churches and government and recognised the good work already going on in many places.

There was a full updating report on **Safeguarding Activity**, and the new Director of the National Safeguarding Team addressed the Synod.

### Living in Love and Faith

The bishops’ response to this five year process was a major report to Synod along with the draft Prayers of Love and Faith that they propose could be used, if the motion passed, by clergy who wished to bless same sex couples. The report says

*“Bishops recognise the diversity of committed relationships that exist both in the Church and in wider society today. Bishops joyfully affirm, and want to acknowledge in church, stable, committed relationships between two people – including same-sex relationships.”*

You will all be aware of the different opinions about this matter across the church, and the best way of understanding the position is to read the bishops’ report which I will arrange to be circulated to you. After a long and very full debate the motion put forward by the bishops, with the Bishop of London leading the presentation, was passed with only one amendment by 57% of the Synod membership.

You can find the motion below and item (g) is the amendment. Also below are links to four key speeches: the Archbishop of Canterbury’s presidential address, which set the tone at the start of Synod’s session, and three speeches from the debate.

There is now further work to be done on the prayers and pastoral guidance before the Synod meets again in July.

### **Motion as finally passed**

‘That this Synod, recognising the commitment to learning and deep listening to God and to each other of the Living in Love and Faith process, and desiring with God’s help to journey together while acknowledging the different deeply held convictions within the Church:

- (a) lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people and the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church;
- (b) recommit to our shared witness to God’s love for and acceptance of every person by continuing to embed the Pastoral Principles in our life together locally and nationally;
- (c) commend the continued learning together enabled by the Living in Love and Faith process and resources in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage;
- (d) welcome the decision of the House of Bishops to replace Issues in Human Sexuality with new pastoral guidance;
- (e) welcome the response from the College of Bishops and look forward to the House of Bishops further refining, commending and issuing the Prayers of Love and Faith described in GS 2289 and its Annexes;
- (f) invite the House of Bishops to monitor the Church’s use of and response to the Prayers of Love and Faith, once they have been commended and published, and to report back to Synod in five years’ time.
- (g) Endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.

Archbishop of Canterbury presidential address to Synod

<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/general-synod-presidential-address-archbishop-justin-welby>

Archbishop of Canterbury speech in LLF debate

<https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=0f336c2c91&e=7b937991d7>

Archbishop of York speech in LLF debate

<https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=1274453d53&e=7b937991d7>

Bishop of London response to LLF debate

<https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=1a09ec5f7e&e=7b937991d7>

Margaret Sheather 14<sup>th</sup> February 2023