

A report to Deaneries from General Synod July 2024

Published: [Tuesday July 16, 2024](#)

The General Synod members for the Diocese of Gloucester (also Dana Delap not pictured).

Margaret Sheather, one of the Diocese of Gloucester's representatives at General Synod, shares her reflections from last week's gathering. She notes that as ever, her summary can only give you a brief flavour of the work of the last five days.

"I'm going to start where Synod did with the Presential Address by the Archbishop of York. He shaped his thoughts around stories, thinking about books we read and re-read, and how they shape us individually. This took him to the supreme narrative of the Bible and how the Living God still wants to write this story on our hearts, so that we, in turn, are able to write the next chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Having referred to the lives of Archbishop William Temple and of a great urban priest of the early 20th century, Basil Jellicoe, he concluded that in our witness and service to the nation we need their vision and action to rise above our divisions, and live together as a sign of peace in our divided world.

I'm going to go next to the final item on our agenda – hearing and responding to the voices of children and young people. Students from two schools attended to give a presentation about the position of children and young people in the Church and, through a short film, present their views of their participation. While the motion that followed was about generally welcoming the voices of children and young people, and recognising the work being done across the Church to achieve the mission of becoming younger and more diverse, the good debate also picked up the need to re-establish a way for the voices to be heard regularly at General Synod.

The Safeguarding Independence update presented the outcome of thorough research that has been done since February by the Response Group to the Wilkinson and Jay reports. These reports inform the analysis work for four possible future models that Synod was asked to approve. The models range from status quo (really offered only as a baseline), through two variations on independent scrutiny/oversight with operations remaining in the Church, to the full Jay position of two new bodies, one taking up operations and one for scrutiny. We were also introduced to the independent co-chair of the Response Group, Lesley-Ann Ryder.

Synod members generally spoke positively about the quality and pace of the work done. The only pressure for change to the process was a proposal to move ahead straight away with the Independent Scrutiny element. This was not supported, so the Response Group will continue its work as proposed and report back fully in February.

Living in Love and Faith was addressed through a presentation session where members of the groups that have been working on aspects of the developments spoke about their experiences. There was also a formal debate on the emerging proposals. These are only in outline and Synod was being asked to agree to continued development of these ideas, not to approve them for implementation now. The proposals are:

- To remove the restrictions in the current pastoral guidance on using the PLF for a three year period of discernment – this means that the prayers would be able to be used in standalone services as well as in the context of existing services.
- To introduce a model of specific and defined delegation of Episcopal ministry so that those on both sides of the debate can request care from a bishop whose ministry they are in conscience able to receive.
- More work through the Faith and Order Commission on the nature of doctrine to enable further discussions on the issue of clergy being in civil same sex marriages.

This continues to be the topic where divisions of view are still most apparent. The broad direction of travel proposed was approved in the final vote, but only by narrow margins in the Houses of Clergy and Laity. It would be good if we could get a greater sense in our debates of the views of the generality of the Church – congregations that aren't particularly focused on this issue probably have a wide range of views comfortably absorbed within them, or have arrived at local accommodations. There will be a further report in February, intended to bring back more definite proposals.

Synod is fundamentally a legislative body and we covered a lot of Legislation in these sessions, some reaching their final approval and some at earlier stages in the process. Just three to mention specifically here and there were good debates on all of them, with questions as well as support:

- National Church Governance Measure – first consideration. This formalises the proposals to simplify the central structures of the Church.
- Clergy Conduct Measure – at its second stage. This is a generally welcomed measure to replace the Clergy Discipline Measure and aims to ensure a clearer and more proportionate approach to various matters of Clergy Conduct.
- Abuse (Redress) Measure – also at its second stage. This is an important measure that has involved victims and survivors extensively in its preparation and will contract with an independent body (a firm of solicitors) to administer the redress, financial or otherwise.

The large number of Diocesan Synod Motions and Private Members Motions addressed at this Synod illustrate that there is a route through to Synod from parishes and individuals.

We tackled social issues: the Human Dignity of Disabled Children and Foodbanks and Inadequacies in Social Security. Katrina made an excellent speech in the latter item, highlighting the evidence of rural poverty in apparently prosperous areas that had come from research in North Cotswold Deanery.

We also addressed more internal topics:

- A motion to reinforce and extend the entitlement of clergy to uninterrupted rest periods in their week, which brought out strong support for both clergy and laity well-being.
- A day of prayer and action for the persecuted Church
- And a motion asking for a more independent review of the Mike Pilavachi case. This was heavily amended but provided a good opportunity for key points to be raised.

Archbishop's Council Budget and apportionment Carl Hughes, Chair of the Archbishops' Council Financial Committee, presented the budget for 2025 and the proposals for Apportionment which is the amount we, as a diocese, are asked to contribute to central services – rather like parish share for a diocese. The budget was challenged robustly and it was noted that the Church Commissioners and others had increased contributions to keep the increases in apportionment as low as possible. Dioceses are asked to contribute just over half (50.2%) of budgeted expenditure.

The main areas of note were:

- the decline in the forecast numbers for ordinands in training, to 885 for 2024/5 down from this year's figure of 940 and substantially below the peak of 1373 in 2020/1;
- an increase of 11.9% on the operating budget, much of which relates to ministry training and development;
- a resumption of contributions towards clergy pensions – you will recall that we have benefitted this year from a break in that contribution;
- an additional grant for CHARM housing.

Carl Hughes also described the impact of the wider financial landscape:

- when considered net of inflation, every Diocese has experienced a decline, in real terms;
- the number of regular givers has declined and although the actual amount given has increased slightly, this has not kept pace with inflation;
- attendance was falling before the pandemic. Although it is now increasing, it has not yet reached the number predicted in decline pre-pandemic.

In short, declining financial sustainability is becoming a common trend across all dioceses and has worsened since covid.

Looking at assets, we are one of the wealthiest dioceses, blessed with historic assets that have allowed us to weather some of the recent pressures. There was much in the presentation and subsequent conversation about mutuality, partnership, generosity and sacrifice, and diocesan collaboration.

In summary, Carl's view is that the main crisis we face as a Church is missional and we need to focus our efforts on that. Alongside, we need to work towards a time when today's mission and ministry are funded by today's giving."

Do look online for papers and for the live stream on the diocesan Weekly Bulletin for more detail on any issue.

The General Synod members for the Diocese of Gloucester are currently Jennifer Fellows, Robert McNeill-Wilson, Canon Margaret Sheather, Canon Karen Czapiewski, the Revd Canon Dana Delap and the Revd Canon Katrina Scott.

Canon Margaret Sheather
16.7.2024