

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT – JULY 2024

Every summer the General Synod meets over a five-day weekend at York University, sharing the campus with the geese and the rabbits, the residents. It has a more relaxed feel than the meetings in London, with communal meals and space for conversations (and watching the occasional penalty shoot-out).

Over the last few months and years there has been a growing realisation that **trust** between the various parts of the Church has been ebbing away, so it was good to focus on that issue, with the help of a specialist academic, and a comprehensive report. No easy answers but plenty of food for thought and self-examination.

At the present time the **Prayers of Love and Faith** are never far from members' thoughts, and significant time was spent seeking ways forward which will enable those with different interpretations of scripture to live together even though divisions are deep and opinions are passionately held. There can be no doubt about the amount of work being done on the issue with presentations, working groups and papers, and perhaps there is a gradual improvement in the tone of the debate. Time will tell.

Safeguarding, in various guises, also demanded much time and concentration from members. The Synod is acutely conscious of the damage done to individuals and the Church over the years because safeguarding was inadequate or failed completely, and so care is taken when speaking on the subject not to cause any unintentional distress or harm to victims and survivors.

- a) The thorny question of what independent oversight of national Church safeguarding governance and local operations means moved forward (a little). There was apparent acceptance that national governance and operations in the diocese and parishes required different solutions.
- b) The national safeguarding training programme was affirmed but not without some voices wondering about the amount of time and effort required of parish volunteers in training.
- c) And finally, a debate on the issues raised by the events surrounding Soul Survivor and Mike Pilavachi. A report into those particular events had been commissioned from an eminent KC, but there was a call for a more wide-ranging enquiry into the cultures and systems in which such events can happen – that call was rejected.

Members are not allowed to forget that the Synod is primarily **a legislative body** so there was plenty of time spent scrutinising various Measures in progress through their necessary stages. Subjects included chancel repair liability, clergy conduct (replacing the Clergy Discipline Measure), national church governance and the Standing Orders which govern how the Synod works.

At the other end of the spectrum of business were debates on matters demanding compassion and pastoral care. Perhaps this is Synod at its best where members have a chance to tell their stories. As well as a good debate on **how much rest clergy should be entitled to** (easy to forget that Jesus guarded his rest), the Synod spent time considering the rights of **disabled children** both before and after birth, and the continued (and growing) need for **foodbanks**. Entirely appropriate motions were carried without demur – this was the Church speaking into the public space and reminding those in power of Christian values and priorities.

And finally, on the last morning, **young people** were the focus of attention with contributions from the pupils of local schools, as the Synod reminded itself of the need for the Church to become “younger and more diverse”. Should young people be the last item on the agenda? No, but their time in the members' seats will come.

David Kemp (Reculver Deanery)