

5. General Synod Report – July 2022

General Synod was, happily, back in York for the first time since 2019. I was, frustratingly, stuck in Bristol due to Covid! But the wonders of Zoom meant I was still able to represent you on-line from the splendid self-isolation of my home.

Presidential Address

Archbishop Stephen Cottrell of York started our proceedings with more of “*a state of the soul rather than state of the nation*” presidential address challenging us all: “*Know your need of God!*”

Business Report

This is usually the first attempt to judge the mood of the Synod. It was mild-mannered this time - as the rest of the Synod proved to be.

Questions

Any Synod member can submit a written question, and then ask a follow-up one in response to the written answer provided. There were 180+ questions asked and a couple of sessions working through the replies – we got up to 136.

Route map to Net Zero Carbon

This presentation and following debate outlined plans to action the ambitious target of achieving net carbon zero status by 2030. Our own Martin Gainsborough recalled the negative response to his amendment demanding this goal when it was first passed in February 2020. The debate demonstrated the prophetic status of the call he made.

War in Ukraine

This debate was most moving when we heard of the self-sacrificial actions of General Synod members in housing refugees from Ukraine – and what they’d learnt from the experience. Martin Gainsborough made “*an important speech*” (according to Bishop Nick Baines of Leeds) about the right use and understanding of language.

Appointing the next Archbishop of Canterbury

At various stages of the Synod, discussions continued about the right levels of diocesan, national and international representation on the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) that will appoint Justin Welby’s successor (no retirement thought to be imminent!).

Review of Strategic Development Funding

It was encouraging to hear a report by Sir Robert Chote (former Director of HM Treasury’s Office of Budget Responsibility) reviewing the huge amounts of money the central church has been using to invest in growth at a local level – including three grants to the Diocese of Bristol. It was great to hear our own Abby Scott making her maiden speech sharing good news from the Well Church in Swindon [www.thewellswindon.org].

Spending plans of Church Commissioners & Archbishops’ Council

These were described by the Archbishop of York as “*Putting our money where our missional mouth is.*” The debate that followed highlighted concerns about diminishing numbers of parish priests and diocesan financial challenges.

Safeguarding and Independence

The chair of the National Safeguarding Panel and members of the new Independent Safeguarding Board briefed synod on early days of their work together. Bishop Jonathan Gibbs of Rochester provided an update on behalf of the National Safeguarding Team.

Boring but important legislation

We tackled legislation/ measures affecting clergy pensions, ecclesiastical legal fees, remote meetings, PCC and electoral roll membership – amongst many other things.

Living in Love & Faith Group Work

There was a brief update on the LLF process from Bishop Sarah Mullaly of London and then time for Synod members to interact in small groups.

Assisted Suicide

There was a hugely moving debate on assisted suicide after which Synod overwhelmingly passed a motion which affirmed the efforts of health professionals in providing palliative and end of life care, alongside asking the government to both increase investment in such care and not change existing law and safeguards.

CNC Elections

Synod elected “pairs” of representatives to serve as their representatives on the body that interviews candidates for vacant diocesan sees (and the see of Dover).

Archbishops' Council Report & Budget

Listening to John Spence, Chair of Archbishop's Council Finance Committee is, believe it or not, always a delight in his enthusiasm for all the Church of England's finances enable it to do.

Affirming and Including Disabled People in the Whole Life of the Church

“We should not fear dependency!” was the clarion call from the proposer of this debate (Canon Timothy Goode of Southwark). As another speaker expressed: *“It's not just loos, ramps and loops.”*

Resourcing Ministerial Training

Our own Sean Doherty of Trinity College, Bristol, spoke of the need for good life-giving theology and the need for proper review of current changes – two amendments in his name were accepted and passed. The importance of resourcing training for lay ministry was stressed by a number of speakers.

Age Verification for Porn Websites

A Guildford Diocesan Motion enabled another moving debate – this time calling on HM Government to introduce legislation to prevent under 18s from accessing pornography websites.

Clergy Discipline Measure

There were two debates on this – one that proposed changes to the existing system, another that reported back on a more wide-ranging review. Sean Doherty spoke in one of them.

Loyal Address to HM Queen This was enthusiastically made on the occasion of her Platinum Jubilee.

Thank You

For your prayers – and the opportunity to serve as one of our Diocesan representatives.

Ed Shaw