

Report from General Synod February 2022

It was a very full and varied agenda, and the Synod was in full theatrical flow with of points of order flying about and strings of amendments. Overall there was a sense of a new Synod finding its feet, but also of some wary positioning as the Synod pushed back against “National Church”.

Hybrid meetings

The February group of sessions began with a debate on extending the standing orders to enable remote participation. This was the first fully hybrid General Synod, with members at Church House in person and on zoom, and an online voting system for those not present in person. This was well-received and enabled around 50 members to participate who were not able to be present in person. Due to the nature of the Standing Orders this was a temporary extension, but several members urged the synod to consider making this a permanent change to make General Synod more accessible, a proposal which may be brought to the Synod in the future.

Racial Justice

The Racial Justice report was introduced by the new chair of the Archbishops’ Racial Justice Commission, Lord Boateng. His speech was powerful and humbling as he impressed upon the Synod the need not just for good intentions but resources, intentionality and commitment to make real change happen. There is no doubt that he will continue to hold the Church of England to account.

You can listen to his speech on YouTube [here](#) starting at 2:12:30.

Following the meeting of the Synod, the House of Laity and the Convocations of Canterbury and York met to implement one of the recommendations in the Racial Justice report, to co-opt UKME members of Synod to increase racial diversity.

Safeguarding

We had a presentation from the chair of the Independent Safeguarding Board and a report from the National Safeguarding Team to set out the work being done at a national level, which is clearly significant. This was one of the items that received significant pushback, including an extensive amendment challenging the report. This included concerns about how bullying was handled in safeguarding measures, and a call for further independent investigation. The amendment was not passed.

Climate-friendly Faculty changes

There was encouraging progress towards the ambitious goal of reaching Net Zero by 2030, largely around how churches replace their boilers and lighting, and are insulated. As a result of the changes, every church will be required to consider a more environmentally friendly measures if changing lighting boilers, having work done on rooves etc, and it will be much easier to gain permissions for works that reduce our churches’ carbon emissions. These proposals again met with resistance and a string of amendments, not because of the intention to reduce carbon but because they were seen to increase the administrative burden and reduce freedom of choice when replacing boilers etc.

Challenging Slavery and Human Trafficking

The first of two excellent motions to come from Diocesan Synods, originating from Durham and updated by Southwark (it had been “parked” for a long time). We are all encouraged to raise awareness of modern slavery, to engage in training to enable us to identify and support victims and survivors, and to pray regularly for those affected. You can find resources around modern slavery from [the Clewer Initiative](#).

Clergy Remuneration Review

The first review in 20 years suggested that more than a third of clergy were just getting by or struggling to manage on their stipends – in a week when we were being told about increasing energy costs and cost of living increases, the debate focussed on clergy poverty including fuel poverty. The report suggested it was better to find ways to target support to the 38% who needed it rather than increasing the remuneration package across the board.

Setting God's people free

We heard about the successes of this initiative, 5 years in, and how in many parts of the church people have grown more confident in their discipleship and sharing their faith with others.

Diversity, difference and disagreement

Synod participated in some group work using some resources that are designed to help us engage with difference – the [Pastoral Principles course](#) (from the LLF resources) and [Difference](#) which comes from Reconciliation Leaders Network, part of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Ministry.

Governance review

The Governance Review Group has been working on extremely complex task of streamlining the National Church Institutions (NCIs) to simplify the functions of National Church, make lines of responsibility clearer, and be more transparent. Due to the complexity of the process, the Synod were asked to approve a process of engagement with the key stakeholders rather than voting on any specific proposals in the report; with a view to detailed proposals coming to Synod in the future for debate. Again, there was a great deal of pushback and frustration from the floor of synod that there wasn't an opportunity to engage more actively with the process at this stage, with some amendments proposed. These were seen by the Governance Review Group to be hinderances to progress, and unnecessary as the issues in question would come back to synod in the future. The only amendment to be passed changed the wording so that the report was not "welcomed", rather the group was "thanked" for preparing it – which rather encapsulated the mood of the Synod.

Persecuted Church

The second Diocesan Synod motion, this time from Lichfield, again updated by Southwark, focussed on the persecuted church. Notably we are all asked to pray and to consider contacting our MPs ahead of the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief Conference in July with more information and resources available from [End the Persecution](#).

Appointing the next Archbishop of Canterbury

The main business of the Synod concluded with a debate on a consultation process about who should be on the CNC that appoints the Archbishop of Canterbury. Canterbury Diocesan Synod had suggested their number of reps should be reduced as the Archbishop does not act as their Diocesan. Added to this was a suggestion that there ought to be more than 1 representative of the Anglican Communion. This opened up the question of the knotty relationship between the Anglican Communion and British colonial history, and also seemed to be seen by some as (yet another?) power grab away from the ordinary members of the Church of England towards centralised structures. You can take part in the consultation [here](#) until 31st March.