

General Synod Report 8-10 February 2022

General Synod met in Church House, London for three days in February, and voted first to allow about 50 members to participate fully through Zoom. This worked remarkably well, and may become a permanent feature of General Synod. The new Synod is getting to grips with the unfamiliar complexities of Synodical debate, amendments, points of order and following motions, which sometimes seem to hinder debate.

Tuesday 8 February

Presidential Address:

The Archbishop of Canterbury reflected on the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”. We have lost an underpinning commitment to society, and the pandemic has exposed our obsession with individual rights as an illusion of individualism, for our every action impacts someone else. Even God exists in relationship. Life is found in relationship and truth, and a society that forgets about or ceases to desire God loses its way. Instead it has to find cohesion in the fear and hatred of an enemy, rather than a vision of the common good.

As a church we have convinced ourselves of our own weakness and poverty, forgetting the abundant God to whom we belong. The Archbishop commended the Difference and Pastoral Principles course as means of learning how to disagree well and walk together.

Racial Justice: a report on racial justice in the church ([GS2243](#)) was debated. Lord Boateng has been appointed as the Chair of the new Archbishop’s Commission on Racial Justice and he gave a powerful and humble address in which he pledged to implement the recommendations of the report “from Lament to Action” published last year, and ‘to hold Synod’s feet to the fire’ in order to heal the ‘gaping wound in the body of Christ’ which is racism, and get things done in the next 3 years, for there have been too many reports which have not been actioned.

Many speakers shared stories of experiencing racism, and how diversity can enrich and strengthen the church, and Justin spoke of how he had become convinced that we can no longer say of good candidates for an appointment, “Not here, not now”. He also controversially questioned why it is so hard to remove a racist monument from Jesus College Cambridge.

The approved language to describe people of colour, or different ethnicities is changing from UKME (UK minority ethnicity) to GMH (global majority heritage).

In meetings held by the Houses of clergy and laity at the end of the Session, it was agreed to use existing rules of co-option to increase the numbers of UKME people on General Synod.

- Two recommendations- the appointment of full time officers in every diocese, and the call for racial awareness programmes for all leaders and volunteers of youth work as part of safeguarding training are not supported by the Archbishop’s Council.

Questions: Synod members have the right to hold the national church institutions to account by submitting up to 2 questions, which all receive a written reply. Supplementary questions are then asked in the Questions session, and answered by appropriate speakers. 150 questions were submitted, and in two sessions half were answered. The quality and tone of the sessions were notably better than last year, and they reveal the concerns of parishes and dioceses which may not always feature on Synod’s formal agenda. There is much anxiety about the viability of parish finance and ministry, clergy well-being and discipline, as well as recent points of contention, such as SDF funding, safeguarding cases, and the method of appointing the secretary to the Crown Nomination Commission. In response to questions about the use of individual communion cups (Q73. The Bishop of Lichfield made it clear that the House of Bishops has ‘no particular plan to find out how some churches are experimenting’. He commended the Grove booklet W250 on the issue, and said that “The HOB has discussed and decided not to follow a synodical route to make the use of individual cups indubitably legal.’

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Safeguarding Report (GS 2244): Synod was given an introduction to the complex work-streams being followed by the *National Safeguarding Team* (with 40 staff). Safeguarding is now established as a real priority and is being fully funded. The focus is gradually shifting from dealing with past abuse to the prevention of future abuse through Safe Recruitment, raising awareness of Domestic Abuse and forthcoming work on Spiritual Abuse. New guidance from the House of Bishops will be published in July 2022, and a theology of safeguarding is being developed. A first report was received from the newly formed *Independent Safeguarding Board*, and questions were answered.

The only legislative business tackled was the **Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules 2022**, which generated some headlines. The changes are intended to help us to fulfil the pledge to reach zero-carbon by 2030, by making the process easier for changes that reduce our carbon footprint, and making it harder to sustain more carbon intensive patterns. Thus a faculty will be needed to replace an oil tank or oil or gas boiler. One amendment will make it easier to install satellite Wi-Fi in churches where there is no broadband access, and so enable the streaming of services. Amendments to give Archdeacons the discretion to authorise the emergency replacement of oil tanks and boilers (ie List B) were (sadly in my view) narrowly defeated.

Challenging Slavery and Human Trafficking: A motion from Durham Diocesan Synod was included in Synod business to coincide with the Nationality & Borders Bill progressing through parliament. The value of such debates (no-one could oppose the motion!) lies in raising awareness in church and society of modern slavery: there are estimated to be 136,000 in the UK in effective slavery through coercion, debt bondage, and 1/4 of them are UK nationals. The Clewer Initiative provides very helpful resources to enable ordinary Christians to identify victims of cheap goods and labour.

Clergy Remuneration (GS 2247) the Bishop of Hereford introduced a review of clergy remuneration, based on a national survey. The value of the package (stipend, housing benefits and pension contribution) is estimated to be £50,000, and 62% of those surveyed found the stipend adequate, but 38% are struggling financially, or find the stipend inadequate. Those with families, or disabilities were most likely to struggle. The debate highlighted the the loss of value in the clergy pension since government changes in 2008, the impact of Increasing fuel costs for heating and travel, and the need for better financial education. Clergy who find the stipend adequate may be depending on the income of spouses. Some clergy are the best paid and housed people in their parishes, others are among the worst. There are no funds for an overall increase in stipend, but the report recommends maintaining the National Minimum stipend and pension against the Consumer Price Index. A Hardship fund for clergy is being considered by Archbishops' Council.

Setting God's People Free (GS 2248): this initiative began in 2017 and was intended to produce a culture shift from doing worship to being church 24/7, witnesses for Christ on the frontline at home and in the workplace. Some dioceses had engaged with parts of it enthusiastically, others not.

LICC have produced some excellent resources that are easy to use, such as 'This Time Tomorrow', Sheffield are encouraging 'Lights for Christ' as an exploration of baptismal promises, and Oxford Diocese encourage *Personal Discipleship Plans*. The project is now being subsumed into the new strategy, A church of Missionary Disciples, and the resources for Everyday Faith and Everyday Church are worth exploring. Simon Friend sounded a salutary note about the difficulty of bringing newcomers into the alien environment of our churches

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Thursday

Diversity, Disagreement and Difference: resources for effecting culture change:

Synod members were introduced to the *Difference* course, which commends the reconciling habits of being curious, being present and reimagining, and the *Pastoral Principles* course. We did a short bible study on John 4. The paper GS **Misc 1308** encourages Synod members to engage with the course material in Diocesan groups, and I hope that we will be able to do so as a group in Exeter. Talking briefly with one or two others seated in the chamber does not constitute effective group work.

Governance Review Group (GS2249)

The Bishop of Leeds introduced a debate on the Governance Review Group paper GS 2239, which he had first presented in November. The main proposal is to centralise many of the national church institutions into one more efficient body, **Church of England National Services (CENS)** but leave the Pensions Board and National Society (for education) independent.

The authors of the paper were thanked, but the paper did not receive a warm welcome, and the various amendments demonstrated that Synod accepts the need for change, but is deeply concerned by the dangers of centralising power and removing democratic accountability from Synod. The work will continue under the new chairmanship of the Bishop of Guilford.

Appointments - Spiers & Dame Caroline Spelman was re-appointed as Chair of the Dioceses Commission. In view of the paper 'Bishops & their Ministry' (leaked by the Church Times) and the ideas about merging dioceses into regions they may face a heavy workload

Persecuted Church in the World. Lichfield Diocesan Synod proposed a motion calling on the Church of England to pray for persecuted Christians and to support link dioceses facing persecution. Persecution of religious believers worldwide is increasing and especially of Christians. Many powerful stories were shared, (click [here](#) for the stories of A, B & H from just one church in Liverpool) and churches were encouraged to use the **Everyday Faith-Hidden Church** resource for the 'Thy Kingdom Come' prayer focus from Ascension 2022. The motion (strengthened by an amendment) was passed unanimously.

See of Canterbury: Membership of the Crown Nominations Committee. Synod took note of a report (GS2253) proposing changes to the way that the Archbishop of Canterbury is appointed, to include representatives from the wider Anglican Communion, in recognition of the global role of the Archbishop. A Consultation is open until 31 March 2022.

Synod concluded with farewells to the Bishops of Winchester and Liverpool, and will meet in York in July.

Rev Graham Hamilton
Sat 26 February 2022