

Summary from General Synod, Feb 2018

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General Synod met in London on 8th to 10th February. Here, as usual, is a very brief and selective summary of some of the proceedings.

- We voted almost unanimously to take note of Prof Oliver O'Donovan's review of the operation of the Crown Nominations Commission (which undertakes the discernment process for the selection of diocesan bishops). His recommendations included boosting the number of theological experts in the House of Bishops, and reducing "excessive secrecy". There remains an Oxford Diocesan Synod motion requesting consideration of alternative means of appointment, following the prolonged process leading to the appointment of Bishop Steven.
- In the light of food poverty problems and food wastage, a motion was passed urging all, including government, the food supply chain and church members, to use food resources wisely and minimise waste.
- Synod welcomed a report "Mission and Ministry in Covenant" addressing moves towards unity between the Church of England and the Methodist church. Further work will be carried out by the two churches, which will lead to recommendations on next steps. There remain significant practical, doctrinal and ethical obstacles.
- Safeguarding was addressed in a presentation on national developments and preparation for the independent inquiry into institutional sexual abuse (IICSA). In the light of the (very different) cases of Bishop George Bell and Bishop Peter Ball, and ongoing concerns of victims, this is a very important matter for all of us, at parish level as well as nationally. To see something of the seriousness, I recommend all to read "*We asked for Bread but you gave us Stones*": words of victims of abuse - <http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/uploads/Stones%20not%20Bread.compressed.pdf>. Church safeguarding resources at national level have increased 5-fold. There are good training materials available – many of you will have received a diocesan communication on this recently. We must all take this seriously – our PCC safeguarding policies, reports, and responses to Archdeacons' articles of enquiry must be more than tick-box exercises. Pray for Bishop Peter Hancock (Bath and Wells), the lead bishop for safeguarding.
- We had a presentation on digital evangelism. The Digital Communications Team has 4 focus areas: evangelism, discipleship, the common good and transforming the national websites (a much improved Church of England website has been launched recently). There are lots of resources (and training available) on the website.
- A resolution affirming the dignity of people with Down's syndrome was passed unanimously. This is seen as an important message to government and professional bodies. There was an unfortunate (in my view) reluctance to strengthen the motion to include affirming the dignity of people with Downs Syndrome, before as well as after birth.

All papers are available on the Church of England website. You can even watch recordings of the sessions!