

## Amersham Deanery Synod – September 2022

### Report on July 2022 General Synod group of sessions

The 11<sup>th</sup> General Synod, elected last year for the 2021-26 quinquennium, met for its first residential group of sessions at the University of York on 8-12 July 2022. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the first time Synod had met for its annual summer gathering at York since 2019. There was a bewildering array of fringe events, with topics covered including the rural church, theological education, gender and sexuality, Israel/Palestine and the environment.

#### Friday 8 July

The Archbishop of York opened the Synod with his **presidential address**. Referring to his 'Vision & Strategy' initiative, launched last year, for a 'simpler, humbler, bolder' church, he said this was simply 'a call to centre our lives in Christ.' He also acknowledged that there would be some tough decisions ahead on how to resource ministry.

The first substantive debate was on the Church's **Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by 2030**. General Synod endorsed a report setting out detailed plans for how the Church envisages achieving a net zero carbon target by 2030. The debate highlighted concerns about how the Church will pay for the Routemap, given the significant expense of insulating churches and vicarages, installing heat pumps etc. A figure of £190m over nine years emerged in a later discussion, but this seems hardly enough. At one point the debate was disrupted by activists from a group called Christian Climate Action calling on the Church to divest from fossil fuels.

There then followed a discussion, initiated by the Bishop of Leeds, about the **War in Ukraine**. The Bishop's original motion, praying that 'the war in Ukraine be ended', was amended with the addition of the word 'justly', Synod wanting to ensure that any settlement recognised Ukraine's territorial integrity.

The day ended with **Questions**. As noted in the national press, the Bishop in Europe, in response to one question, declined to give an official CofE definition of a woman, pointing out that 'until fairly recently definitions of this kind were thought to be self-evident.'

#### Saturday 9 July

Synod debated the mechanism for **appointing the next Archbishop of Canterbury**, with proposals to reduce the influence in the relevant Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) of the Diocese of Canterbury and increase the vote of Anglican Communion representatives, given the Archbishop's pivotal and growing role as an 'Instrument' of the wider Communion. After various amendments the diocesan vote was reduced from 6 to 3 (out of a total of 17 CNC members) while the Anglican Communion vote was increased from 1 to 5, with a balance of men and women and at least half of the Communion's five being of Global Majority Heritage. Archbishop Justin has since indicated that he wishes to continue in office – health permitting – until he reaches the age of 70 in 2026. To be honest, Justin did not look particularly well at York; it is not clear that he has fully recovered from the pneumonia and COVID-19 he contracted in May. We should remember him in our prayers.

Later on Saturday we discussed how funds for **Strategic Development** and **Lowest Income Communities** were being disbursed, as well as the spending plans for the **Church**

**Commissioners** and **Archbishops Council**. A figure of £3.6bn has been allocated to the 'frontline work' of the CofE over the period 2023-31. We also had an update on **Safeguarding** and the new **Independent Safeguarding Panel** following the recommendations of the Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). We later agreed a new power in the Canons for dioceses to have a safeguarding officer (DSO) with the power to act independently from his or her diocese. There was also some time for small technical pieces of legislation, including approval of increased fees for diocesan registrars and ecclesiastical judges, and extending the period in which the Church Commissioners can resort to capital to meet certain pre-1998 pension obligations.

### **Sunday 10 July**

In the morning there was a magnificent Eucharist for Synod members at York Minister. In the afternoon we worked in small groups on the Archbishop of York's **Vision & Strategy** and also had group work on the **Living in Love and Faith** (LLF) initiative. On the latter the church-wide consultation has now ended and the College of Bishops will meet three times over this coming autumn 'to discern and articulate a clear sense of direction for the Church' in relation to the questions raised by LLF. Proposals will come to the next General Synod in February 2023. Later on Sunday we had a debate on a Private Members' Motion opposing **Assisted Suicide**. This, together with a call for improved palliative care, was passed by a significant majority. On Sunday evening, in the context of Evening Prayer (Compline), we elected twelve new central members (acting as six pairs) to the **Crown Nominations Commission**, which makes recommendations on diocesan episcopal appointments.

### **Monday 11 July**

This was a busy day with substantive debates and legislation. We received a report from and approved a budget for the **Archbishops' Council**. We debated a report on **Affirming and Including Disabled People in the Whole Life of the Church** and unanimously approved a motion to revisit the barriers which prevent full participation by disabled people and to strengthen the network of diocesan disability advisers. We discussed **Resourcing Ministerial Formation** and approved in principle a new mechanism for supporting ordination training at theological colleges around the country. Legislation to allow **wealthier dioceses to support poorer dioceses** with fund transfers (an area where the Diocese of Oxford has led the way) was also passed. A motion from Guildford Diocese on **Age Verification for Pornography Websites** was massively approved and asked the Government to implement this as soon as possible. Other technical pieces of legislation were also passed. General Synod also asked the Archbishops' Council to review the **Qualifications for PCC membership**, and in particular, in the context of Fresh Expressions, Messy Church etc, the need for a less complicated Electoral Roll form and whether a PCC member needs to be an 'actual communicant'.

### **Tuesday 12 July**

After the 'loyal address' to HM the Queen from Archbishop Justin, General Synod received an update on the proposed new **Clergy Conduct Measure (CCM)**, which will replace the discredited Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM). This envisages a new triage process which will hopefully separate out complaints of serious misconduct from less serious complaints and grievances.

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August 2022