

## Summary from General Synod, Feb 2019

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General Synod met in London from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> February. The agenda had an encouraging focus on evangelism in several debates. Archbishop Justin in his presidential address emphasised that we are not a club with a membership drive, but disciples following Jesus' Great Commission to *go and make disciples* (Matt 28:19). Below is a brief and selective summary of the four days (All papers are available on the Church of England website):

- Synod heard from two Bishops in the wider Anglican Church who spoke of mission and ministry in dioceses in India and Kenya, often suffering extreme persecution.
- There is always a time for questions; this time there were over 30 on the House of Bishops' guidance on gender transition services – a reflection of the considerable concern this has caused. Other subjects included safeguarding, ordinand training, and the Church's response to various world issues. There was not sufficient time to cover all 120 questions, though that isn't unusual.
- An important piece of legislative business was to approve revised Church Representation Rules, which should now become law in 2020. Amongst other things these rules define membership and operation of PCCs and synods. The revision includes many welcome changes, but there was much concern about a rule to limit lay members serving on deanery synods to two consecutive terms. As this was final approval there was no opportunity to make amendments; the measure was approved but the Business Committee undertook to look at mechanisms for reviewing this particular rule before it takes effect.
- A proposal to establish a national Homelessness Task Force was passed overwhelmingly, with moving speeches about the terrible consequences of the rise of homelessness in this country.
- There was a briefer than scheduled presentation from the Pastoral Advisory Group and the Living in Love and Faith coordinating committee. One of the key outcomes at this stage is *Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together*, which calls on Christians and churches to examine their attitudes and prejudices around sexuality, but does not propose any changes to doctrine, liturgy or practice.
- We passed a motion to equip churches to reduce their carbon footprint, and encourage dioceses and parishes to be more environmentally aware.
- We had a wide-ranging debate on the importance of evangelism, voting to make it a priority for the whole Church of England in the coming year and beyond. Additional debates supported evangelism on estates (which are often poorly served by the church), ministry in traveller communities, ministry to children, and youth evangelism. A sad statistic here is that 66% of churches have fewer than five under 16s attending and only 0.2% have over 100.
- An important motion from the Mission and Public Affairs Council called on the government to seek to curb pernicious gambling advertising, particularly advertising online and in sport. A statistic that struck home is that more children gamble online illegally than drink or smoke.
- We finished with a motion from the Archbishops asking the Church to pray for our politicians and call upon them to work together for the common good.
- There have been calls in recent sessions for more reflection on scripture. It was therefore a positive addition to the agenda that, as well as the usual worship, we spent an hour in bible study together in 1Pet 1.