

Report on General Synod in London 23-27 February 2024

For the first time General Synod met in London over a long weekend. From Friday after lunch until Tuesday afternoon we were in session for over 32 hours altogether.

In the **Presidential Address** the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of the suffering throughout the world, and our calling to be God's church in God's world.

There were 225 **Questions** which all received written answers, but even in two extended sessions there was only time available for supplementary oral questions for questions 1-167 to be answered.

The Bishop of Leicester proposed a motion on **Living in Love and Faith**. He apologised for not bringing firm proposals to implement Synod's decisions, but instead offered ten possible commitments, with the aim of achieving reconciliation. After debating several amendments, General Synod agreed by a large majority not to vote on the motion but to move to next business.

Synod voted to ask the Business Committee to revise the current **General Synod Members' Code of Conduct**. A private member's motion was passed which sought to sanction **bullying by lay officers**, because at the moment there is no means of disqualifying a churchwarden, PCC member or other lay officer who is guilty of bullying from holding office. A Chelmsford Diocesan Synod motion was agreed which asked for a review of the possibility of drawing up a **Code of Conduct for PCC members** and lay volunteers, for a disciplinary process for their removal from the PCC if this is not followed and for the resources required at all levels to bring this about.

There was a presentation on **safeguarding independence**, followed by a vote for a motion as amended which thanked Sarah Wilkinson and Alexis Jay for their reports, asked for a response and implementation of their recommendations, endorsed apologies to survivors, and apologised to all members of the former Independent Safeguarding Board.

Synod agreed to a London Diocesan Synod motion about **Parochial Fees**, that there should be a fee payable to the PCC for funeral services at crematoria and cemeteries to reflect the contribution made by parishes in support of such services. We later agreed to an amendment to the Parochial Fees Order to bring this into effect.

The dignity and value of purposeful work was affirmed in an Oxford Diocesan motion on the **future of work**. Amendments were agreed to include unpaid work, to endorse the Rome Call for promoting an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence, to commend payment of the living wage, to advise on how changes impact the work of women, to look at Biblical wisdom, and to strengthen the Christian voice in the public square.

A debate on **land and nature** concluded with encouragement for greater biodiversity and sustainable land use by the Church Commissioners, the NCIs, dioceses, parishes, cathedrals, TEIs and schools. Dioceses were requested to create an action plan to achieve the 'Land' section of Eco Diocese at Silver level by 2026 at the latest, and to incorporate nature-positive objectives into their asset management policies within the next six months. All were to follow guidance from Caring for God's Acre, to work towards an increasing level of Eco Church, and take part in Churches Count on Nature each year. The Church Commissioners were to report on their progress within three years.

There was a debate on **racial justice: furthering the implementation of 'From Lament to Action'** in which the Bishop of Dover reminded us that the word 'woke' had first been used by black people to mean 'wake up' to social injustice. After an intervention by

the Bishop of Leicester, the debate continued until all members with Global Majority Heritage who wished to speak had done so. We voted unanimously to continue resourcing, collecting data for, and monitoring progress in, the Church's Racial Justice initiatives.

There was a presentation followed by questions on the Church Commissioners' response to links to **transatlantic chattel slavery**. A copy of the Slave Bible of 1807, which excluded all references to freedom for slaves, is in the Lambeth Palace library. The Commissioners' fund of 100 million pounds is to support initiatives in communities affected by enslavement. It is intended to act as a catalyst to attract other investors to make a perpetual fund of 1 billion pounds. Parishes and dioceses were encouraged to research their history and to be honest about people, benefactions and investments that had benefitted from the transatlantic slave trade and plantations.

The **Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households'** report 'Love Matters' was welcomed and commended to the church, with recommendations for the Archbishops' Council and for the Government.

After a debate on **War in Ukraine and challenges to international order** Synod voted overwhelmingly for peace in Ukraine.

During the debate on a private member's motion on **Removal of divorce impediment to ordination** we heard that one in six ordination candidates have to apply to the Archbishops under Canon C4.5 for permission to be ordained because either they or their spouse has been divorced. This process is lengthy and can involve interviewing an ex-spouse, which is particularly problematic if a divorce had been caused by abusive or controlling behaviour. An amendment was carried to allow a diocesan bishop, or acting diocesan bishop, to grant a faculty to remove the impediment under Canon C4.4, with national assessment guidelines issued by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly to ensure consistency across dioceses.

Bishop Philip North proposed a motion on **Estates Evangelism**. General Synod voted unanimously to refresh the Church's commitment to estates ministry and called on the whole Church to address hindrances due to structural and financial injustice.

A private member's motion on **Clergy pensions** and what could be done to restore them to previous levels after a cut in real terms was debated. The amended motion was carried unanimously.

General Synod gave first consideration to the **Draft Chancel Repair (Church Commissioners' liability) Measure** and agreed to refer it for revision in committee.

A draft measure on **Church Funds** is intended to keep all users of these funds, including some PCCs, safe. It provides for the transfer of six now unregulated CBF Church of England funds to a regulated charity authorised investment (CAIF). The Synod voted to send the draft measure to a revision committee.

Legislation was completed on the **Vacancy in See Regulations 2024** (allowing the Channel Islands to be represented on the Vacancy in See Committee for the Diocese of Salisbury), and the **Amending Canon no 43** (miscellaneous amendments to the Canons which do not merit separate, free-standing legislation). Some amendments to **Standing Orders** were agreed.

Sue Slater, General Synod Representative