

GENERAL SYNOD JULY 2024

Report to Lincoln Diocesan Synod

The General Synod met in York between 5th and 9th July.

Synod opened on the Friday with a Presidential Address from the Archbishop of York. One of our ecumenical guests was the Lutheran Archbishop of Finland, who, with a group of his confirmands, addressed the Synod.

After the traditional debate on the Agenda, there was a preliminary report on *Trust and Trustworthiness within the Church of England*. This was to be quoted many times by opposing points of view in the debates which followed. The report indicated that major areas of a lack of trust include racism, abuse, accountability, the tendency towards cover-ups and tribalism. It was adjourned due to lack of time and will come back in February 2025.

On Saturday morning various items of Legislative Business were approved in relation to Safeguarding and Clergy Risk Assessments, Church Fund Investment, Chancel Repair Liability and the standing orders of the Crown Nominations Commission. The

Archbishops' Council Budget of £64.1 million was approved, consisting of

- £17m for ministry training
- £38m for national Church responsibilities (the AC's 'unrestricted fund')
- £1.5m for grants
- £505k for mission agency pension contributions
- £6.5m for clergy retirement housing grants

Of this £64m, £32.2m will come from the dioceses and £27m from the Church Commissioners.

The *Clergy Conduct Measure* (which will replace the *Clergy Discipline Measure*) continued its progress and is committed for final drafting. Its principal difference from the CDM is that complaints will be triaged upon reception, rather than a one-route process used for everything from forgetfulness to serial adultery! A diocesan Synod motion to recommend that clergy take 36 rather than 24 hours rest per week was passed. There was then a presentation from those involved in what has become known as the 'Leicester Love-In' - the residential workshop of the *Living in Love and Faith*. The testimonies of the participants was respectful and moving; the comments and questions which followed were not always thus.

On Sunday the Synod attended the Eucharist in the Minster and your representatives enjoyed Sunday lunch together with our bishop. In the afternoon there was a diocesan Synod motion on the dignity of disabled children, which called for better support of and compassion for families receiving the news that their unborn child was disabled. Next the draft *National Church Governance Measure* was considered. This seeks to reduce the National Church Institutions from seven to four, to transfer the rest to a new *Church of England National Services* and to set up a GS scrutiny committee to review its actions and decisions. The draft passed its first consideration and is now committed to a Revision Committee. A Private Members' Motion calling for an independent inquiry into the allegations of abuse within the *Soul Survivor* network was amended to lose its teeth, but passed.

In the evening a presentation was made on the Archbishops' Council Annual Report and a following motion regretted the lack of any mention of the relaunch of the National Burial Grounds Survey. The concern here is that there has been partnership with the Mormon Church in this, whose principal interest seems to be the posthumous baptism of dead people, and more recently that sensitive pastoral information about vulnerable children, particularly their whereabouts, might be available from registers to potential abusers. This was carried.

On Monday Synod received an update on the progress of the revision of Safeguarding practice within the CofE. The new *Safeguarding Code of Practice: Learning and Development Framework* will be published in August and operative from January next year. There followed a diocesan Synod motion on *Foodbanks and*

Inequalities in Society which highlighted the increasing dependence on foodbanks and the difficulties many people, particularly the disabled, endure in accessing social care. This was overwhelmingly carried.

The remainder of the day was given over to *Living in Love and Faith*. There was fervent, though generally well-mannered and moderate, debate on whether the Church of England should continue on the trajectory begun over stand-alone services for couples of the same sex. Opinions expressed ranged from 'not far enough: no gay people will have anything to do with the Church' to 'too far, too fast: people like me won't be able to remain.' Eventually Synod voted

- to continue the overall direction of travel
- to allow stand-alone services of blessing for same-sex couples, where desired and acceptable to the incumbent for a trial period
- the ability to register for Pastoral Reassurance [passing Resolutions] and to ask the House of Bishops to publish a Code for this
- that the Pastoral Guidance and Code on Pastoral Reassurance should replace *Issues in Human Sexuality*
- that the Faith & Order Commission should do urgent work on the nature of doctrine, particularly as it applies to marriage
- that the trial period should be at least three years

The vote was by Houses, and very close in the H of Clergy and H of Laity.

Synod declined to approve the new fees for legal officers and asked for new proposals, which will be brought in February 2025.

On Tuesday the Redress Scheme for abuse survivors completed its revision stage and there was a moving debate on the lives of Christians persecuted for their faith. Synod voted unanimously for an ecumenical day of prayer and action for the persecuted Church throughout the world. A debate on hearing and responding to the voices of the young - part of our commitment to becoming younger and more diverse - resulted in accepting a motion to include at least one substantive item of business at each Group of Sessions.

Synod was prorogued around lunchtime on Tuesday.

The Archdeacon of Lincoln
The Venerable Gavin Kirk
July 2024