

General Synod Reports – February, July & September 2020

The February 2020 Meeting of the General Synod in London.

The Synod convened at 2.30pm on Monday 10th February. The Archbishop first welcomed those who were newly elected to synod and synod's overseas guests, then we joined in the opening worship. After the Business Committee had explained how it had created the [Agenda](#) for the next four days; the Archbishop gave his Presidential Address. All items at general synod are recorded so [click here](#) for ++Justin's speech. Or go to the documents section on the [Synod App](#). Most documents for debate are [here](#). All blue texts link to the documents.

[The Channel Islands](#)

The first item of business was the measure to transfer the Deaneries of the Channel Isles from the Diocese of Winchester to the Diocese of Salisbury. This required three debates on three consecutive days to get the task done. Now the Islands can legislate to accept the concept of women as bishops and adopt Safeguarding laws to parallel what we have in England. The temporary arrangements could not allow legislation to proceed.

[The Covenant for Clergy Care](#)

Synod then voted to make the advisory Covenant for Clergy care an 'Act of Synod'. Making this an act of synod means it must come to every Diocesan Synod for consideration. This is not a legally binding document but one which sets out a pattern of care which should exist between the incumbent and the congregation. It will need to be on every PCCs agenda.

[Questions](#)

The final piece of business for Monday was the opportunity for every member of synod to ask a question of the establishment. This year a new record 121 questions. The replies are set out in a booklet (58 pages) and then the questioner can ask verbally a supplementary question.

Tuesday Morning Legislation

Archbishop Justin celebrated Holy Communion and preached. This was followed by Legislative Business. Two items will affect us in Devon. The [Cathedrals Measure](#) which sets out the new pattern of governance of cathedrals and [Deanery Synod Term Limits](#) which will set aside the limit on length of service on a Deanery Synod. Both items now go to Legislative Committee before coming to the July Synod for Final Approval.

[Living in Love and Faith](#)

After lunch there was a presentation on the progress of 'Living in Love and Faith' and the Pastoral Advisory Group showed a short diorama of how we discuss the contested issues in

love. After the recent statement from the House of Bishops which was considered unloving by many Christians, this presentation did not please a large section of the synod. However, the Bishop of Coventry, the lead Bishop, did say that the process would not drag on much longer and the materials and book would be available before we meet in July in York. There would then be a year for the Dioceses to discuss the various publications; before it comes back again to General Synod.

[Private Members' Motions: Windrush Commitment and Legacy](#)

After some more legislative business including the next stage of the Channel Islands Measure we moved to the Private Members' Motion; 'Windrush Commitment and Legacy'. A good timely debate as it took place

only hours after the take-off of a Home Office-organised flight to Jamaica, carrying 17 people. Several synod speakers referred to this. Many BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people) speakers took part and Archbishop Welby said: "Personally, I am sorry and ashamed. I'm ashamed of our history, and I'm ashamed of our failure. I'm ashamed of our lack of witness to Christ. I'm ashamed at my lack of urgent voice to the Church. . . It is shaming as well as shocking." ([Church times report](#))

[Fringe Meetings](#)

Click above to see the 15 fringe meetings which were available. At 7:45 on Wednesday Morning four Exeter synod members and a few others met with Dr Eeva Johns to look at some of the questions raised by Living in Love and Faith and to experience some questions which will come down after the July synod to the Diocesan synods and then down to the PCCs. Other meetings included a presentation about the Archbishop's Lent book focusing on the Climate Emergency.

Worship and Bible study

Wednesday started with worship and bible study in the main chamber led by The Revd Dr Isabelle Hamley, ++Justin's chaplain, on 1 Peter 3. She made this difficult passage from 1 Peter, in context, say something very different from the literal meaning we were faced with. The Synod Guests then gave comments based on their lived experiences.

[Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse \(IICSA\)](#)

The first motion for Wednesday Morning was to accept the Safeguarding committee's response to recommendations by Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). Survivors of Sexual Abuse were in the public gallery to witness the debate. This motion made it clear that safeguarding is a responsibility of everyone in the Church of England. All need to be involved. We need to change and put survivors first. Concrete real immediately action is required. We need to feel uncomfortable until all survivors are comfortable. The Church must provide survivor centred care. Canon John Spence confirmed that finance for

redress will be unlimited. Where there has been historical inadequate redress, cases may be reopened. The new lead Bishop for safeguarding is Jonathan Gibbs, Bishop of Huddersfield

[Climate Emergency and Carbon Reduction Target](#)

The motion was to bring forward the date for the Church to be carbon neutral from 2050 to 2045. But synod thought it was not good enough and supported an amendment to the date. This means the Church is committed to being 'Carbon Neutral' ('Net Zero' emissions) by 2030! This amendment was narrowly carried by 144 voted to 129 with 10 abstentions. This will be costly financially and in other ways. Speakers said we must use the money left to us by previous generations to bring about change for the sake of the next generation. You cannot manage what you cannot measure! The Church of England is launching an '[Energy Rating System](#)' similar to those used for household appliances to help monitor the carbon footprint of its almost 40,000 buildings. So, every church will need to calculate its 'Carbon Footprint'. Then put in place a plan to achieve 'Net Zero' by 2030.

[End to Paupers' Funerals](#) and [Children and Youth Ministry](#)

On Wednesday afternoon synod passed an amended motion on pauper's funerals and then moved on to discuss ways of stopping the severe decline in the number of young people in most Anglican Churches. According to the single church returns 38% of churches have no 0-16's. However, the statistics show that under 16's are not distributed evenly across our Church. In the 2018 Statistics for Mission, 903 returns reported having 25 or more 0-16's which equates to 41,540 under 16s. This means that 44% of all of 0-16's are to be found in 6.4% of churches and parishes. Decline among under 16's is much faster than decline among all other generations. The number of under 16's reported in Average Child Sunday attendance has decreased by 20% over the last five years compared to a 12% decline in average adult Sunday attendance. This is serious news and requires serious action. Please click this link [Children and Youth Ministry](#).

Legislative Business

New election rules took up some time, running on into Thursday morning, as multiple amendments were made by Clive Scowen and David Lamming (Both Lawyers spouting Latin) to the rules. A record for the speed of less than a minute an amendment. We now have a set of new rules for the electronic voting which are fit for purpose and which will be used for the elections to the new Synod later this year. Also Thursday morning gave final approval to the Channel Islands Measure.

[Through His Poverty](#) and [Legal Aid Reform](#)

Then there were two Private Members' The one about Jesus, 'Through His Poverty', brought us back from legal issues to the foundation of our faith. It was good to end synod with a debate which spoke of Jesus

Prorogation and Farewells

Then, while I ate lunch, I listened to the farewells. In particular to John Sentamu, Archbishop of York and Caroline Spellman the second estates commissioner. Both have been impressive in their service of Christ and the Church. General Synod is about people seeking to follow Christ we need to listen carefully to them.

Jack Shelley. February 2020. jack@shobrookepark.com

Virtual meeting of General Synod - Saturday 11th July 2020

Some 400 members of General Synod Zoomed in on the 11th July 2020 for the one day informal gathering of the Synod. As a member of the Business Committee I can confirm it became clear in April that it would not be possible for the usual July meeting of Synod to take place. Dr Jacqui Philips, Clerk to the Synod and the staff of the synod office worked hard to make an informal meeting happen in order to offer members the opportunity to hear from the National Church about how it was dealing with the Pandemic across the Dioceses.

Considerable preparation was needed to sort out the logistics of chairing, broadcasting, carrying out the necessary risk assessments and ensuring safety measures were in place. The meeting was hosted in Church House Westminster (which was officially closed). Being an informal meeting meant no legislation could be passed and so a necessarily small agenda was agreed, covering worship together, a Presidential address from the Archbishop of York, a Presentation, followed by questions on the Church's response to Covid-19 and two sessions of Questions.

All things considered it went off rather well. There were a few technical hiccups and sadly the proposed break out groups for Bible Study fell victim to technological glitches. The chairing of two long Question Time sessions was a tour de force by The Dean of Southwark, the Very Revd Andrew Nunn who kept things moving and called the right people from amidst the sea of raised blue hands! Written answers to the 131 submitted questions had been circulated three days earlier and questioners were encouraged to send in their supplementary questions which were tabled. This resulted in rather less spontaneity than usual but it was still possible for untabled supplementaries to be put. Instead of the red

light to cut the speaker off when time was up, the power of the Chair to mute was effectively used! Exeter representatives, Revd Graham Hamilton, Emma Forward and Anne Foreman posed 6 questions, 4 to the House of Bishops and 1 each to the Chair of the Liturgical Commission (Bishop Robert) and to the Church Commissioners. There was quite a bit of heat around the questions concerning the process by which it was decided churches should close and the 30 or so were answered by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Presentation about COVID-19 was chaired by the Bishop of London and the Question and Answer session that followed led by Bishop Sarah and Bishop Robert - who made a great double act! Bishop Robert drew attention to the different experience and challenges facing rural parishes when the questions became somewhat urban focused. We had input from the Church's lead medical adviser, from the Church Commissioners, and a very informative background paper GS MISC 1251. The question time here was much more spontaneous since questions were in direct response to the Presentation, rather than submitted in advance.

Highlight of the day was the Archbishop of York's Presidential Address, delivered with warmth and clarity with the text still available on the General Synod July 2020 website. He spoke of the 'stripped back' nature of church life during lockdown – *"...we have come face-to-face with ourselves and through that discovered with alarming clarity that we are the places where God is to be encountered and it is in us and through us that God can be made known to others..."* He went on to model a different kind of Presidential Address by sharing the time with Archbishop Justin before reminding us in his conclusion that the Pandemic has not been the great leveller some suggested; the poor, vulnerable and those from minority ethnic backgrounds have suffered disproportionately. As we enter turbulent times and challenging decisions, he said, we are just going to have to learn to love one another, love the world and love God, so that we can be the place where God is revealed. Amen to that!

Anne Foreman

Meeting of General Synod 24th September 2020

1. Unprecedented is an overused word of late, but Thursday 24th September 2020 saw a meeting of the General Synod for which unprecedented was an accurate description! Instead of 500 or so attendees, 100 of us were temperature checked, hand sanitized, then

directed - masked and travelling one way of course, to individually allocated seats. Worship, followed by a shared Presidential Address the two Archbishops very different in style - both well worth hearing - and then we were off!

2. The single item of business was to pass a Measure (which has the force of law) in order to allow the Synod to meet remotely. This was necessary in order to fulfil one of Synod's primary tasks, that of passing legislation. Following the cancellation of the July Synod, there is an increasing amount of urgent and time critical business for synod to address, eg Final Approval for The Cathedrals Measure and Approval of the Archbishops' Council Budget, with its consequential impact on dioceses. And so to the rescue came the snappily titled "GS2176 Draft General Synod (Remote Meetings) (Temporary Standing Orders) Measure." Normally a Measure passes through three stages,

First Consideration, after which a 'Revision Committee works on the issues raised in the debate

Second Consideration debates the revised version and proposes amendments

Final Approval sought for the improved, amended Measure

This can be a long process, we're talking months, and Final Approval doesn't complete the journey as all legislation has to be approved by the Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee (on which Exeter MP Ben Bradshaw sits) before being submitted for Royal Assent. We had to complete the process in one day, and complete it we did as the voting figures show.

House of Bishops 14 in favour 0 against 0 abstentions

House of Clergy 42 in favour 0 against 0 abstentions

House of Laity 45 in favour 0 against 2 abstentions

3. As a member of the Steering Committee it became apparent to us that this Measure had to go through and that meant doing things a little differently, something everyone is getting used to! Being flexible and nimble is the name of the game. So we held a well-attended informal Q & A session, and, supported by the Church House Legal team, published in advance our reasons for resisting or accepting the submitted amendments. There were two particular concerns, that of excluding Articles 7 and 8 business (which deal with Doctrine) from remote meetings and a concern that remote meetings will become the norm. The Steering Committee took the view that to exclude or not Article 7 and 8 business was a decision for the Synod, which supported the position of excluding them. As to remote

meetings becoming the norm, that was not the purpose of the Draft Measure, rather it represents a practical 'needs must' response to the present situation.

4. So Final Approval was given and synod members who had, in the interests of safety, given up their chance of attending were warmly thanked, as was the Corporation of Church House and most especially the Synod Support Team and the Legal Office. There was acknowledgment of some of the positive aspects of Zoom; that it enables increased inclusion, that it is cost effective, that we are getting better at it. By the time our Diocesan Synod meets the Timetable and arrangements for the November General Synod will be published. It will be a remote meeting.

Anne Foreman 28.9.20

Meeting of General Synod 24th September 2020

A small (90?) but quorate Synod met in Church House on Thursday 24 September to take GS 2076 General Synod (remote meetings) (temporary Standing Orders) Measure through its entire Synodical process. Mrs Anne Foreman and I represented the laity and clergy of Exeter Diocese. We sat on allocated chairs spaced across the debating chamber, about 1.5m apart, wore masks throughout the day except when speaking, and Synod staff took great care to shepherd us through COVID checks and coffee breaks.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York gave a joint address, in which they apologised for errors made by the national church and emphasised that the local church is the centre.

Mr Geoffrey Tattershall QC, chancellor of Manchester Diocese, introduced the measure and explained that General Synod urgently needed to do certain financial and legal business in order to keep the church of England functioning. Until a Synod had met in person to pass this measure no business could legally be conducted by virtual means such as Zoom, and there was no parliamentary time available for the matter. It was essential that the whole measure was debated and approved in this one session.

He explained how the steering committee had sought the maximum consensus by holding informal meetings of the House of clergy and laity, and discussing potential amendments before the date of Synod. Synod quickly gave approval of first consideration and the measure was then formally revised clause by clause in full Synod.

Some amendments were accepted as helpful clarifications by the steering committee and were quickly approved. Rev Paul Benfield helped to clarify that the six officers of Synod could make the initial set of temporary Standing orders, but revising or renewing such standing orders would have to be approved as the first item of business by Synod. Fr

Thomas Seville moved an amendment to limit the measure itself with a sunset clause , but this was eventually rejected. The most lively debate concerned Mr Philip French's amendment to allow Article 7 business (changes to doctrine and liturgy) to be dealt with at a remote Synod, and most speakers thought this was within Synod's capability, but a minority argued that virtual discussions were a poor substitute for full Synod, and that the whole measure might be lost if this amendment were added. I am glad that Synod chose to reject this amendment.

All the amendments were debated by 1.30pm and Synod broke for lunch while the steering committee reviewed the measure. After lunch they introduced an uncontentious drafting amendment and the measure was carried almost unanimously, and Synod was prorogued by 4pm.

Several speakers emphasised the limitations of remote meetings - whether through poor internet, insecure connections and the missing elements of communication - body language, and audience response (applause, stony silence), the challenges of making oneself heard, or making points of order. The Synod staff and steering committee were congratulated on their painstaking organisation of the day.

The process of seeking consensus through informal consultation was time-consuming but worthwhile, and I hope that the Business committee will restrict Synod agendas to what is urgent and important, and allow Synod members the time for early discussion to compensate for the limitations of remote Synod, as well as time for Questions to hold the national institutions to account.

Graham Hamilton 1 October 2020