

General Synod Report Feb 2019

This February synod agenda was varied, but with a number of motions pertaining specifically to evangelism and ministry. There was a good amount of time allowed for legislative business, and a motion that was tabled by the Archbishops to speak about the impending Brexit, and our divided nation.

We began with separate meetings of the houses of clergy, laity and bishops to discuss the Covenant of Clergy Wellbeing, and to hear how the consultation process is going (do join the conversation at: <https://www.sheldonhub.org/features/pages/clergy-covenant-wellbeing-c-of-e>)

The main excitement about the Business Committee Report was about the timings of General Synod 2021-2023, in the next Quinquennium. At the moment we meet twice a year, once over a weekend and once mid week. It was proposed to meet more often over a weekend, in the hope to encourage younger working age laity to stand for election. An amendment was passed that set the dates of the 2023 February Synod for 9 days - we were relieved to discover this was so that the Business Committee could survey the new members on which half of the week would be preferable.

Synod then heard from two Bishops in the wider Anglican Church who spoke about the mission and ministry in the dioceses of Jabalpur in India and Kapsabet in Kenya, often whilst suffering extreme persecution. The Archbishop of Canterbury focussed in his presidential address on the importance of fellowship between Christians in the midst of disagreement and asked us all to give up cynicism for lent.

We then approved the appointment of two members of Archbishops' Council, who had been through a competitive interview process. One of these is Reverend Charlotte Cook, an assistant curate in Edmundsbury and Ipswich, who is now ex officio on General Synod.

We then had Questions, which had a considerable number (30+) on the House of Bishops Transitioning Services Guidance, but also about safeguarding, ordinand training, and the Church's response to various world issues. We did not manage to get through all 120 in the time allotted, though that isn't unusual.

Thursday's Agenda was predominantly legislation. Perhaps the most important piece of legislation was the revised Church Representation Rules, which were up for final approval, to be published 2020. One item which failed to be revised in July seemed to be the cause of much concern for synod: the proposed rule to put a two term limit on lay members standing for deanery synods (which individual churches can opt out of). Though some spoke in favour of the change, the majority of speeches spoke against it. As this was final approval, nothing could be done to alter this rule, bar voting the whole measure down, so it passed but with some reassurance from representatives of the Business Committee that they would look at a potential mechanism for reviewing it before it takes effect in (wait for it) 2026!

One item you may have heard about in the news was the change to no longer require each Parish Church to have a service of Holy Communion and Morning and Evening Prayer each Sunday, instead replacing this with more up to date expectations concerning benefices as a whole. This went through without any discussion or debate, and yet the media chose to run with this as their main story from synod, as it plays well with their narrative of church decline. In reality, it was about tidying up a law which already had provision to be dispensed with in multi parish benefices, and makes no substantive difference for parishes.

We passed the Fees measure setting parochial fees from 2020, despite a last minute rebellion led by Bishop Philip North who is opposed to the charging of fees for occasional offices. A surprising number

of people voted with him. One slightly contentious change is the removing of the £30 PCC element for cremations and cemetery funerals.

We almost ran out of time for the scheduled business discussing the creation of a national Homeless Task Force, but synod protested, and so it was squeezed in. This was passed overwhelmingly, with moving speeches about the terrible consequences of the rise of homelessness in this country.

This was followed by 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 are the PAG's *Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together*, which calls on Christians and churches to examine their attitudes and prejudices around sexuality.

On Friday we passed an Environmental motion to equip churches 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, and we voted to make it a priority for the whole Church of England in the coming year (and beyond).

After an hour or so amending some of the Synod's standing orders and rejecting two proposed changes to the voting on the Crown Nominations Commission, there was a motion about ministry to children, coinciding with the release of new Church of England resources for families to use in the home.

We rounded off business with a motion on Estates Evangelism, with Bishop Philip North calling on the whole Church to do everything in our power to plant a church on every urban estate, and to enable the ministry already there to thrive despite a lack of resources. There was some discussion about how to encourage more from working class estate backgrounds to be ordained, as well as some of the challenges and opportunities that are afforded in such contexts.

On Saturday we began with a motion about ministry in Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities. We heard some tragic stories of racism, of genuine challenges in relating to traveller communities, and of the fantastic work of dedicated chaplains in some areas.

Mark Russell put forward a private members motion about the importance of Youth Evangelism, and we heard some frustration from those who felt we had had similar motions in the past, but little progress had been made. We passed this motion with the hope that we will prioritize youth ministry in the coming years.

An important motion from the Mission and Public Affairs Council called on the government to seek to curb pernicious gambling advertising, particularly with regard to advertising online and in sport. The statistic that struck home is that more children gamble online illegally than drink or smoke. There was some discussion about whether the Church is qualified to talk about the problems of gambling when so many of our churches benefit from lottery money, with the response that this motion was primarily about a form of advertising rather than gambling itself.

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. Much was said about the need for the divisions in our society to be healed, and for the Church to provide the space for this to happen.

It was good to have so much time given to motions about mission and ministry, though few of them were about the allocation of resources towards this end, with the notable exception of the creation of the Homeless Task Force. Some have expressed concern that it's hard to have so many priorities at once, but we can give thanks that they are the right ones, which work towards building the Kingdom of God in our nation.