

# SYNOD REPORT

## General Synod Report

8th-10th February 2018

### Church House Westminster

General Synod met from Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February in London. We met on a Saturday for the first time and we wait to see how the business committee reflect on this innovation in terms of planning future dates.



In general, the atmosphere was the most positive that I have experienced in my first two and half years on synod, no doubt related to the avoidance of any discussions around the sexuality agenda.

### Choosing New Bishops

We were pleased to receive an extremely well written report from Professor Oliver O'Donovan, which was a Theological Reflection on the role of the Crown Nominations Committee. Professor O'Donovan and his team had done such a good job of drafting the report that most questions had been pre-empted by the clarity of the writing and the deep thought that gone into producing it. We heard that the report has already influenced the way that the committee has been working for the better. Perhaps the main issue addressed was the pitfalls that came from operating a culture of secrecy around the whole process. The report has made helpful suggestions in this area.

### The Anglican Communion

Archbishop Justin had invited three archbishops from the Anglican Communion to be with us to share about the importance of the communion from their perspective. We heard about the very different contexts that some of our sister churches find themselves in, from the politics of South Africa, the persecution of Pakistan and the Polynesian Pacific (our link diocese) and rising seas.

The witness of the statistically small Church of Pakistan and their profound commitment to being the body of Christ for the healing of their own internally bruised nation was particularly moving. There was an encouragement for every diocese and parish to make Anglican Communion links a core part of our own strategic mission.

### Food Waste

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich brought a motion about Food Waste, which had no shortage of amendments and calls to our government to act with positive measures towards supermarkets, charities and consumers in regard to better stewardship of our resources. Over half of food waste comes from households throwing food away.

### Methodists and Anglicans

The Bishop of Coventry presented the motion 'Mission and Ministry in Covenant,' which was an exploration of our ongoing conversations with the Methodist Church. In particular, the next steps we might take towards the recognition of each other's ministries. The direction of travel seems to be that after further discussion and agreement, we might move towards the possibility of serving in each other's churches as Priests and Presbyters interchangeably, particularly in terms of working together to cover areas where trained Priests\Presbyters are thin on the ground.

The Methodist conference is working on how it understands episcopacy and how they might embrace the historic episcopate, initially through the ordination of the president of the conference as a bishop by three Anglican Bishops. There is a recognition that the whole process will take time and that for a generation of church leaders, there would be an anomaly of the recognition of the ministry of some Methodist Presbyters by the Church of England even though they are not episcopally ordained. As the chair of the conference ordains new Methodist Presbyters, over

time, new Presbyters would all be episcopally ordained. There were significant concerns from some that there needs to be more thinking about the relationship between episcopacy and Eucharistic presidency and we accepted an amendment towards that end.

### **Safeguarding**

We will all be aware of the increasing attention given to safeguarding in the Church of England. The Saturday morning report on current practice and initiatives in light of some of the horrific abuse that has gone on historically, as well as the poor handling of such cases, made this the most sombre session of the Synod. As a whole church from the Archbishop's down to every Priest, Parish and PCC, churchwardens and church member, we need to be taking this matter very seriously.

Survivors of abuse were present in the gallery during the proceedings; we listened to recorded interviews with victims of abuse which outlined how they had been let down by those to whom they had disclosed.

The Bishop for Safeguarding, Peter Hancock (Bath and Wells) and others shared what steps the Church of England is taking to make the church a safe space for all.

Archdeacon Justine suggested that we seek to set safeguarding within a pastoral context, using Christian language of love for our neighbour. She made the point of the danger of seeing the safeguarding movement as the 'professionalisation' of one aspect of pastoral care, that other qualified people apart from me are responsible for, when we should see it as neighbour love.

In an earlier session of questions, Carl Fender (Stamford Deanery) asked a couple of questions about terminology used around those who disclose abuse, suggesting that 'complainant' might be a more accurate word in legal investigations, rather than 'victim' or 'survivor of abuse.'

Training is crucial to safeguarding and the C of E has increased financial investment (5X) into the training of office holders and those working with children and vulnerable adults.

In Lincoln, we are so grateful to Debbie Johnson and the work of her whole team. Do make the most of the training that her team provide for the whole diocese.

### **Religious Communities**

We recognised the renewal of interest in religious communities and made a commitment to working out how such communities relate to the structure of the Church of England as a whole. The Bishop of Chelmsford reminded us that the British Isles were not evangelised by parish priests but by religious houses. He made the point that the same might happen again in terms of the re-evangelisation of these islands.

### **Digital Evangelism**

We received an impressive report on the impact of Digital Evangelism and how the improved C of E website, A Church near You, Christmas and Lent campaigns, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were adding up to a greater presence on the web. The team from Church House are available for digital training days around the country, so watch out for one if your parish is interested.

### **Valuing People with Down's syndrome**

Perhaps the debate that created the most media impact was the unanimous support given to the proposal to value people with Downs Syndrome. We had an excellent debate in light of the new non-invasive prenatal testing that could well see an increase in the 90% termination rate of those diagnosed with Downs Syndrome in the womb.

The Bishop of Carlisle made it clear that this was not a debate about abortion but about supporting those with Downs Syndrome. The purpose of the motion is to enable the Church of England to influence other national bodies and advocate for those with Down's syndrome.

The unanimous vote has been a great boost to the Down's community and we need to pray that the mission and public affairs department at Church House is able to use the motion effectively with both the government and the NHS.

