

General Synod Report

February 2023



LIVING
IN LOVE
& FAITH

This Synod was dominated by the outcome of the Living in Love and Faith project (LLF). Prior to Synod, the House of Bishops had issued a statement indicating that there was no intention to change the doctrine of marriage, but that they would be commending new prayers for use in a variety of pastoral situations and replacing the pastoral guidance, “Issues in Human Sexuality”, with a new updated document. They also invited Synod to lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people.

Feelings, understandably, ran high on this issue. The Bishops acknowledged that for some, the proposals did not go far enough and for others they went too far. Nonetheless, whilst acknowledging that the bishops, too, were divided, there was sufficient agreement in the College of Bishops (i.e. all current Church of England bishops) and the House of Bishops (the bishops who sit on General Synod) that allowed them to make this proposal.

Prior to the public debate, Synod members participated in a private group discussion, reflecting on the process and the proposals. Members were encouraged to be honest and to express both personal feelings and theological convictions.

The debate itself spilled over into a second day and took roughly twice as long as the agenda had indicated. It was for the most part conducted with respect and compassion. There was recognition that the Church is deeply divided on this issue, and the pain that caused to the unity we value.

It is indicative of the number of issues involved in this question that the debate involved no fewer than 28 amendments. Although some amendments carried more sympathy than others, in the end only one amendment was carried, clarifying “that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England”. The motion, as amended, was carried in all three houses of Synod (Bishops, Clergy and Laity).

As feelings continue to run high in the aftermath of the debate, it is worth noting the following:

- That the prayers are still in draft form and need to be refined by the House of Bishops;
- That the pastoral guidance to replace “Issues in Human Sexuality” has yet to be drafted;
- That the House of Bishops has stressed that it will consider the feedback from Synod, both from the private group work and the issues raised in the debate; and
- That the Archbishop of Canterbury has assured Synod that he will consult with the wider Anglican Communion.

This is therefore a first step, rather than an arrival point. Although the further refinement could, in principle, be conducted entirely by the House of Bishops, it is expected that Synod will have further involvement, probably in July, over the next steps.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has engaged with this process, both by engaging with the LLF materials over the past few years and by getting in touch with our General Synod reps around the time of Synod. This process is very taxing for those on General Synod, emotionally, spiritually and physically. Please hold our Synod reps in your prayers and help to look after them, whether or not you agree with them.

Other business was available...



Loyal Address

The Archbishop of Canterbury gave the first Loyal Address to the new King and Supreme Governor of the Church and paid tribute to the late Queen and her lifetime of faith and service. The archbishop looked forward to the Coronation, hoping he didn't repeat the mistake of one predecessor who put the crown on back to front!

Cost of Living Crisis.

Synod had an opportunity to express the Church's concern over the cost of living crisis. The motion:

- Asked the Church to continue to pray for those whose efforts help mitigate the human suffering of the crisis;
- committed dioceses and worshipping communities, to do all we can to support the most vulnerable, even as many of our own members are falling into hardship themselves;
- Called upon the government, for policies that offer generous support to those who are falling into poverty and the organisations dedicated to supporting them;
- commend the steps taken by dioceses and charities to relieve some of the pressure on clergy, church staff, and their families, recognising the leadership they offer to their communities.'

The motion was carried.

Miscellaneous Provisions Measure

This dull and innocuous sounding piece of legislation was actually rather full of useful nuggets of practical business, including:

- Making permanent provision for hybrid meetings, allowing access in person or by Zoom, to replace the current temporary measure.
- Removing the 'sunset' (expiry) clause on the Legal Reform Measure, which streamlines our legislative processes for removing "a financial cost, an administrative inconvenience, or (c) an obstacle to efficiency.
- Removing the requirement for the General Synod to approve a revision of the Code of Practice under the Safeguarding regime.
- Removing the requirement for the General Synod to approve a change to the name of a suffragan bishop's See.
- Allowing cathedrals to appoint lay people as residentiary canons.
- Patronage rights for patrons disqualified under the Church Representation Rules to be exercised by the Diocesan board.
- A new requirement that those responsible for the care of Churches should also have regard to the importance of environmental protection (as well as to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission).

And lots more! The Measure is expected to return to the Synod for the Final Drafting and Final Approval Stages in July 2023.

And the Rest...

- Safeguarding featured twice, once in the final approval of Amending Canon No 42, which turns Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers into Diocesan Safeguarding Officers, thereby giving them more clout within diocese to ensure safeguarding regimes. Later there was an update on safeguarding generally from the outgoing lead bishop, Rt Revd Jonathan Gibb.
- We addressed a number of pieces of legislation concerning Diocesan Stipends Funds, Church of England Pensions, Diocesan Boards of Education, and Parochial Fees.
- Synod called on the government to exempt charities, including churches, from liability for Insurance Premium Tax and considered the latest proposals for resourcing ministerial formation.