



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

**Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich**

GS(23)P30

Purpose of Report:	To inform Diocesan Synod of General Synod in July 2023
Action:	To note
Lead:	The Venerable Sally Gaze and the Reverend Virginia Williams General Synod representatives

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT JULY 2023

The July 2023 meeting of General Synod took place at York University from Friday 7th to Tuesday 11th July. This is a summary of the main items. Full papers and recordings of synod sessions can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/watch-general-synod-live>

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS The theme of the Archbishop of York was unity – Unity already exists, we need to find ways to express it. We were taught to pray “Our” Father – not yours or mine but ours.

UPDATE ON LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH Sadly this conversation with members of the three groups developing the tools to implement what was agreed in GS in February felt more divided as ever. One group has been working on the Prayers of Love and Faith, another on Pastoral Guidance for using the Prayers and a third on Pastoral Reassurance. All are intertwined. It felt like they had an impossible task. Bishop Sarah Mulally reiterated many times that it was not possible to achieve agreement or even consensus. The groups have now been disbanded and a new steering group being formed to enable proposals to be brought to the November Synod.

SAFEGUARDING This session started with a speech from a survivor’s perspective regarding the disbanding of the Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB). Synod was then given an account from members of the Archbishop’s Council as to what happened leading up to the disbanding of the ISB, what has happened since and what will happen in the future. As the two people who were asked to step down were in the public gallery and had been named, several requests were made that they should speak and eventually a way was found for them to do so within GS rules. There was obviously a lot of mistrust, misunderstanding and mistakes, there were also apologies and an agreement that an independent review would take place regarding what happened. Subsequently two items were approved by a large majority:

- an outline bill setting out a Safeguarding Redress scheme, initially underpinned by £150m of Church Commissioners money.
- A code of practice for Safeguarding reviews, aligning our processes with external good practice.

THE ENVIRONMENT also featured prominently: We had a presentation from the National Investing Bodies (NIBs) – i.e., the Church Commissioners, the CofE Pensions Board and CCLA. By working in partnership with even larger investors in groups such as the Transition Pathway initiative and Climate Action 100+, the NIBs have had a significant influence on the environmental policies of many companies. Having recently ended their last remaining oil and gas investments, the NIBs are now focusing on major energy consumers such as cement, steel, and automotive industries. Later we debated a motion on “responding to the climate emergency”. Among other things, we discussed:

- a. commending the NIBs’ recent disinvestments.
- b. urging dioceses to review and update their environmental policies.
- c. urging dioceses to commit significant expenditure to reduce the carbon footprint of vicarages.
- d. optional changes to baptism services to include references to environmental care.

While (c) and (d) received significant opposition during the item-by-item debate, the full motion incorporating them was eventually passed with a very large majority.

CHURCH REPRESENTATION RULES New rules were approved to ensure that all PCC members sign a declaration which states they are not barred from holding public office. There is also the possibility of voting for PCC members where the number is fewer or equal to the places available and people are automatically accepted. If any member of the electoral roll requests it and the PCC agrees, a vote will be taken for each new member.

NATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE The report of the Church Governance Committee was presented and recommendations to simplify and make structures more transparent were accepted with the development of a CENS group.

REVISION OF THE MISSION AND PASTORAL MEASURE There was a lively debate, but the report was finally welcomed. Concerns about the parish were largely met with reassurances that with the new processes for the revised MPM would follow a more pastoral approach, would be taken with wider consultation across the board, and processes making it easier for parishes to respond to local situations. A new term was introduced so rather than talking about suspending churches we can talk about churches being in a fallow period with recognition that the hope is that efforts can be regrouped and the church re-energised at some point.

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REGISTERS were approved to be available to those who want to use one. You can access it via a Church Near You

INCREASING THE INVOLVEMENT OF “YOUNG” PEOPLE IN SYNOD AFFAIRS A motion was passed to (a) co-opt 3 “young people” to General Synod as soon as possible, and (b) to ask Archbishops’ Council to bring forward proposals for establishing a gathering of young CofE adults to engage with and discuss issues that they themselves see as important, and for this gathering to engage with General Synod. (At the moment, “young” means 18-25 years old. Once safeguarding implications have been addressed, it is hoped to extend this to 16–17-year-olds.)

REVITALISING THE PARISH FOR MISSION We affirmed the parish system as a central component of our “mixed ecology”, welcomed the Church’s commitment to increasing the number of ordinands and encouraged each parish and Diocese to use Mission Action Planning to become more effective in parochial mission.

REDUCTION IN CHURCH MARRIAGE FEES There was a passionate debate about the rightness (or not) of charging couples to get married in church. Several speakers argued that we should not discourage poorer folk from getting married, and that encouraging marriage in church is a great missional opportunity. Some argued that we cannot afford the loss of fees, but others argued that the loss of income from fees would be more than covered by voluntary gifts on the day and by subsequent giving of the new disciples. In the end, an amendment was passed to hold a regional, time-limited trial, the cost to be funded by Archbishops' Council.

Other significant items included **THE CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH TO THE REHABILITATION OF PRISONERS** and the **ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL BUDGET 2024**, noting that recent reductions in central costs have saved around £3m/year and also, that in spite of high inflation, the share requested from Dioceses is 5.2% below the level of 2019 and 2020. We also said farewell to John Spence, Chair of the Archbishop's Council Finance Committee and one of the most remarkable people many of us have met.

The next General Synod meeting is in London, from 13th to 15th November.

Your Elected Synod Representatives from the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich are:

HOUSE OF CLERGY: Revd Canon Andrew Dotchin, Ven Sally Gaze, Revd Virginia Williams

HOUSE OF LAITY: Tony Allwood, Jeanette Appleton, Andrew Gray