

Report of the General Synod held in July 2018

The July General Synod was held over 5 days in York. We had an additional person from St Eds. and Ipswich - Annika Mathews, who is one of three (non-voting) representatives from the Church of England Youth Council. It was a busy and at times quite intense weekend. It is impossible to cover all that happened in detail in this short report, and a more detailed account can be found on the Church of England website (where there is a verbatim Record of Proceedings) and in the *Church Times* supplement on 13 July 2018.

Friday: After the initial formalities and welcomes, Synod was addressed by three guest speakers.

The Most Revd Humphrey Peters from the Anglican Communion in Pakistan spoke about the history of Pakistan and the terrible plight of Christians today. He spoke about the history of the country and how in 1947 there were 60 million people in West and East Pakistan, 15 million of which were Christian. Current figures show 200 million people now live in that area. The Christian population has diminished to now being only 3%. Although the situation in Pakistan is dire, his faith still provided him with hope. He felt there should be an attempt at reconciliation and spoke about the success of several interface initiatives which he had arranged.

The Most Revd Archbishop Albert Chama from the Province of Central Africa spoke about the immense size of the province of Central Africa. He, too, spoke of the suffering of Christians as a result of the political climate in the Country. Reconciliation is also a large part of his ministry and he asked us to take time to think about situations outside our own domains and to pray for the plight of Christians in both Pakistan and Central Africa.

Our third speaker was Landesbischof Ralph Meister from Germany. He addressed Synod on behalf of the ecumenical guests. He spoke of times of uncertainty and how it is easy to list the crisis with which we are all faced in this world, but as Christians we have a responsibility to set the standards. As Christians we are empowered by God and we are liberated by his grace. Simply giving up is not an option. As Jesus walked and talked with his two disciples on the road to Emmaus, so we too must follow his command and go make disciples of all Nations.

The next item was presented by Canon Sue Booy who summarised the agenda for the July sitting, highlighting its diversity of content. There was a mixed reception from the Chamber. One member felt that the decision not to timetable any discussion regarding the sexuality/transgender debate, was not acceptable and that procrastination was ruining people's lives. Synod was informed that the November dates would not be used this year. David Lamming raised an objection to this, stating that he felt we should meet in November to give Synod the opportunity to fully discuss the findings of the IICSA report, which was due to be published in the Autumn.¹ Synod voted to take note of the report. Friday concluded with Questions. There were 83 plus follow-ups. Bishop Martin was one of those answering the questions.

Saturday began with an address from Archbishop Sentamu. He reminded us about the problems which the Church has faced over time due to political changes and attitudes. Synod was reminded of the need to keep the Church alive, not only for its own members, but for others among whom we live. He concluded his address with reference to 1 Peter 3:13-16, which instructs us on how to respond whenever we are under threat because of our faith.

Safeguarding was the next agenda item. We heard first from two speakers. Dr Sheila Fish spoke about learning from mistakes and moving from a blame culture to a just culture where the voices of survivors of abuse are heard and acted upon. The second speaker, Jo, was a survivor of abuse. Her message was both moving and at times extremely uncomfortable to hear. She said "I have no idea who you think you are safeguarding, it certainly isn't me". Jo highlighted the need to move away from talking about what we should

¹ At the conclusion of the 'Peter Ball' IICSA hearing on 27 July 2018 the inquiry Chair, Alexis Jay, said that they hoped to publish a report 'in the first quarter of 2019', so it appears that Synod will not be able to discuss any recommendations until July 2019.

do, to taking action. The very clear message was that survivors believe that much of the abuse could have been avoided had it been mandatory to report child sexual abuse - openness brings respect. The Bishop of Bath and Wells then spoke to his motion (GS 2092), the premise of which is safeguarding is at the heart of the Church. He called upon the House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council to ensure that the plan of action as outlined in his report be implemented as a matter of urgency. Synod voted to accept.

Saturday afternoon we moved away from the Chamber and were invited to attend a number of workshops and seminars. Each member from Eds & Ips attended different events and will be happy to talk to you individually about their experience. (Timings were adjusted to enable those who wished to do so to watch the England v Sweden World Cup quarter-final on the big screen in the main hall!)

Sunday Morning: We joined the regular congregation for their Eucharist at York Minster. The address was given by Archbishop Sentamu and the choir was in excellent voice.

Sunday afternoon began with a presentation from Loretta Minghella (First Church Estates Commissioner), who reported back on the work which had been undertaken since 2015 with companies in which the Church is a shareholder to get them into line with the Paris Agreement on environmental issues. This was followed by three debates. The Bishop of Manchester moved the first motion in relation to Climate Change and Investment (GS 2093). The Bishop of Oxford proposed an amendment urging disinvestment from any fossil fuel company not on an unequivocal path by 2020 to align its business plan with the Paris Agreement to restrict global warming to well below 2°C. The debate centred on whether to divest and lose our voice, or stay and fight for climate change. A compromise was reached, whereby a different amendment was accepted that we would stay until 2023, when we would disinvest if the companies had not done enough. Enid Barron then moved on behalf of London Diocese a motion about environment programmes at a local level (GS2094A and GS 2094B). Concern was expressed at the administrative burden this would place on individual churches and following an amendment put forward by Canon Spence, Synod agreed that costings needed to be looked into before voting on this motion and the debate was adjourned until February 2019. A third debate followed on a motion moved by the Bishop of Chelmsford on the Ethics of Nuclear Weapons (GS 2095): the motion was carried by 260 votes to 26 with 21 abstentions.

Monday. The morning began with presentations on the Annual Report of the Archbishops' Council (GS2096) and the Archbishops' Council's Budget and proposals for 2019 (GS2097). Canon John Spence spoke in an informative and (for those of us without a financial background) very coherent and concise manner. He spoke not only of finances, but of the Church as a whole, of the decline in Church attendees, and likened the situation to Harvest. We need to invest (sow seeds) in order to reap rewards. Annika's contribution to the debate (she spoke about young people and giving) led to Canon Spence inviting her to go along to the Finance Committee and give them her advice.

The rest of the morning and afternoon were dedicated to legislative matters and David Lamming represented St Eds. and Ipswich magnificently. The business included the revision stage of the draft Church Representation and Ministers Measure, which includes a complete revision of the Church Representation Rules – likely to come into force in 2020.

Early evening, Synod debated the Long term Sustainability of the National Health Service (GS 2089A and GS 2089B), on a motion moved by the Bishop of Carlisle on behalf of the Carlisle Diocesan Synod. A number of amendments were put forward in relation to the financing of social care, not all were accepted, but at the final vote Synod supported the motion. Unfortunately we ran out of time to hear a report from the Archbishops' Evangelism Task Group (GS 2098).

Tuesday began with a Presentation by the Church Commissioners, moving on to the reappointment of Dr Jonathan Spencer as Chair of the Pensions Board (GS2099), and Canon John Spence as Chair of the Finance Committee (GS2100). Following a report from the Cathedrals Working Group, which Synod voted to accept, it was time for farewells and prorogation.

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