

**REPORT OF THE GROUP OF SESSIONS OF GENERAL SYNOD
NOVEMBER 2021
DIOCESE OF SALISBURY**

MONDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2021

Induction

Monday was the Induction Day for this new Synod. Approximately 60% of Synod members are newly elected members so an induction was essential to get us all up to speed on current issues around the vision of 'simpler, humbler, bolder' and terms like 'mixed ecology' and a church of 'missionary disciples'.

The induction programme made sure that we were confident in the business formats – Introductions, Presidential Addresses from one or both of the Archbishops, Presentations with Questions, Take Note debates on, for example, the Business Committee Report and other items of business that would take place next two days. The mock debate on proposed legislation for every parish to have a parish dog was fun, hilarious and taught us some of the protocols such as standing or indicating if you wished to speak and hoping to be called. Obviously the majority voted in favour on the motion . . .

There was also a chance to hear about the fringe meetings that happen at Synod and many opportunities to meet new people. One of our members loved meeting Paul, an organist from up North, who had hot pink hair. A sure way of getting called to speak!

TUESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2021

In the morning, members of Synod and invited guests gathered in Westminster Abbey for a Service of Holy Communion. His Royal Highness the Earl of Wessex attended. There was no procession which avoided the cold wait in the cloisters but there was the pageantry of clergy who wore the prescribed dress including hoods of various shapes and colours. The preacher was His Eminence Archbishop Angelaos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London who took as his text Luke 19: 1–10.

Inauguration and Opening

After lunch, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, welcomed the Earl of Wessex representing Her Majesty, to the new Synod. He began by asking the Earl to thank Her Majesty for her years of service to the Church and the Nation.

He spoke about our isolation during covid lockdown and the consequent importance of relationships and our duty to one another. He said we should 'walk together' and give our attention to all the issues raised. God walks with us and the Church of England is called to support everyone. He asked the Earl of Wessex to convey to the Queen our appreciation of her prayers for us and assure her that we pray for her.

The Earl of Wessex responded and read the Queen's speech to Synod. The Queen wrote that she hoped that Synod would find the wisdom to balance change with continuity. The Gospel had remained the same and had brought hope during Covid. She knows that it is important to bring people to God, and she asked for God's blessing on the Synod.

The Archbishop of York thanked the Earl and said that the Gospel shone though the Queen's words. He said that he is grateful for Her Majesty's example to us. He then outlined the

priorities of the current Synod. The Archbishop of York said that at the heart of the vision for a 'simpler, humbler, bolder' church which has been in development for more than 2 years are the five marks of mission. If we don't attend to the first two (to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and to teach, baptise and nurture new believers) then not much else is going to happen.

Welcome to the First Church Estates Commissioner

Mr Alan Smith was welcomed as the First Church Estates Commissioner by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Alan Smith (not to be confused with the Bishop Alan Smith!) has been a Church Commissioner since 2018 and was Senior Advisor - ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) Risk and Inclusion, and former Global Head of Risk Strategy at HSBC. Listen to the Welcome and Mr Smith's response starting at 8:48 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7rAldeH2Oc>

Presidential Address

The Archbishops' Presidential Address focussed on the nature of change. We were reminded that there has never been a moment when the Church was without change, whether it is from without, through society and culture or from within, from the command of Jesus Christ to be transformed and to travel together in transforming the world. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, spoke of the transformational change in the disciples in the catch of fish in John 21. 'You have caught nothing? Throw your nets on the right side'. This was a reminder that without him we achieve nothing – empty nets and empty lives but with him, by intensive listening to his voice and acting in obedience to his command, anything is possible.

It is this energy, together with reflecting on lessons from the past ('walking backwards into the future' as ++Justin put it) that spurs us on in the journey, through the most profound change the Church has known in peacetime in 400 years with all that the Covid pandemic has thrown in our path.

We have many failures from which to learn, not least in safeguarding; many challenges ahead, not least in human sexuality; and many models of mission to embrace. To save the parish does not mean to stop church planting. To church plant does not mean abandoning the parish. Instead, we seek to be God-shaped, Christ-centred people who seek to fish on the right side, listening to the stranger on the shore, telling us where and how to fish.

The theme of journeying was taken up by Archbishop Stephen, reflecting on the diversity of views of this new Synod. He said: "The aim is not to reach agreement by means of contest between opposing positions but to journey together to see God's will, allowing differences to harmonize, to meet each other with respect and trust, to believe in our unity'.

He emphasized that we walk in uncharted territory because of Covid, climate change, rapidly changing culture and numerical decline. We don't have a map but it is our task to draw the map and to work out what it means to be the Church of England in and for this day and age, being humbler, simpler and bolder.

It will be for this Synod to lead the way in planning for growth and to declare the good news of Jesus, allowing the five marks of mission to shape us, so that we too will cast our nets on the right side.

Report by the Business Committee GS 2233

The Business Committee does not and cannot create business for the Synod. Instead, it orders the agenda of business 'ready to go' and tabled by the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishops as well as Diocesan Motions and Private Members Motions. The 'take note' debate on the Business Committee Report allows the members of Synod to comment on what is on the agenda *and* what is not which leads to speeches of frustration.

The Chair of the Business Committee, Canon Robert Hammond, presented the Report reminding us of the extraordinary past two years, and that 60% of members are new to Synod. He asked us to be careful and respectful of one another.

It is rarely possible to include very recent events in the formal agenda but Questions are sometimes used to do so. On this occasion, the Archbishop of Canterbury was called first to speak and addressed the Ghana legislation seeking to criminalise homosexuality. He said that the criminalisation of the LGBTI+ community is abhorrent. He has been having conversations in private, and cannot disclose these discussions without threatening the security of those with whom he is speaking. A following speaker spoke as a member of the LGBTI+ community on Synod and asked that Synod accept this community as fully part of the voice of Synod.

Some items of business were not ready to be brought back to Synod, including the Clergy Conduct review, which will return in 2022. A timetable for the reform of the Clergy Discipline Measure, which is still causing clergy much distress, was requested.

Covid concerned members had in effect been excluded from this group of sessions. Provision for a "hybrid" Synod meeting with people attending both in person and online was requested. The need for a review of the recent General Synod elections and improvements to the process were highlighted and will be undertaken by the Elections Review Group.

The motion to take note of the Business Committee report was passed.

Generosity and Diocesan Finances GS 2234

This Diocesan Synod motion from the Diocese of Sheffield asked that legislation be drafted that would allow dioceses to share their historic wealth with other dioceses across the whole Church of England. There is a huge disparity in finances between dioceses: the North of the country is much poorer than the South. There was a lively debate in which it was made clear that this was the start of a conversation about discerning the direction of travel for this Synod.

This issue was due to be debated last July but due to covid was delayed until the start of this new Synod. Bishop Pete Willcox said he felt this had been in God's providence because it is a highly complex issue involving many different financial areas and it could take the whole duration of this new Synod to work out the details properly.

Generosity and serving those most in need are at the heart of Christian life and witness and the Church is being urged to model it internally as we also seek to explore what living Jesus-shaped lives means for the wider life of the nation. Dioceses were urged to consider how they can start to live generous lives without waiting for legislative change and were

encouraged to explore total return accounting. The Bishop of Manchester explained that the Church Commissioners financially support the poorest and most in need. If dioceses did this too, it would be of great benefit. There was an impassioned speech in support of this motion, using the imagery serving kingdom banquets across the nation, a vision of hope and a much-needed antidote to the language of decline in the Church. On a show of hands, the motion was clearly carried.

Questions

The Questions session is an opportunity for some to beat the same drum, for others to play a new instrument, but it is especially important to attempt to hold some functions and bodies to account.

Six years ago at the first Group of Sessions of the last Quinquennium, there were 46 written questions. For this first Group of Sessions, 132 questions had been submitted and written answers given. Given the number of questions and the time allowed, it is never possible to get through the whole list so topics are taken in rotation. There is then the opportunity for a maximum of two supplementary questions to be asked. The purpose of the Supplementaries, which are usually answered on the spot, are to get behind the pre-prepared answers.

This controversially came to the fore with the last series of questions before the end of the session relating to the prohibition on the use of individual cups for the Eucharist. Put simply, the obvious question was asked in General Synod for the first time - why is it allowed to receive the bread in the form of wafers which were never part of 'one loaf', yet it is not permitted to receive wine in small cups poured from a single vessel? The question was ruled out of order but for what reason was not clear.

We made it less than half-way through the questions. At the end of the session, a 'Point of Order' was made requesting that the Business Committee allot more time to answering questions given their essential function for ensuring accountability. The Point of Order was greeted with applause.

WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2021

After worship in the Assembly Hall, there was a motion that the Loyal Address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen.

The Wealth Gap between the Rich and the Poor - GS 2170A and 2170B

This item came to Synod as a Diocesan Synod Motion (Leeds) and called on the government and all political parties to adopt an explicit policy of reducing the wealth gap between the rich and the poor and the disadvantages that flow from it.

The statistics are sobering, shocking even. We were reminded that the wealthiest 0.1% own as much in total as the poorest 50%, and inflation has just been announced as running at 4.2%. The financial inequality caused by disability was brought Synod's attention with a disability 'price tag' being between £500 to £1000 a month.

During the debate, the worth to society of lowly paid workers was highlighted, and we were asked to consider what we can do as a Church. Proverbs 31 8-9 exhorts us to 'speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, and for the rights of those who are destitute'.

Revd Jane Palmer spoke in the debate and reminded us that ‘all things are possible with God’. We, as a society, need to move from greed to generosity, and we can only step out from the safety of our boat onto the water with Christ, who will always support us.

The motion was passed with an amendment stressing the need for action.

Archbishops’ Council Budget 2022 and Apportionment 2022 Update GS 2235

A holding budget for 2022 had been approved by Synod in July on the basis that the Archbishops’ Council would provide an update to Synod at this November Group of Sessions.

Canon John Spence, Chair of the Finance Committee of the AC, explained that:

- AC’s total annual expenditure is c. £150m
- £100m of the expenditure is grants made by the AC from funds it receives from the Church Commissioners and other funding bodies
- The updated Budget relates to the balance of the AC’s annual expenditure for 2022 of some £52.5m. It will be funded largely by the dioceses through the “diocesan apportionment” (£31.3m) and by the Church Commissioners (£13.4m) in 2022.

The net result of the updated estimates, in comparison with the figures in the July holding budget, is:

- an increase of £0.4m in the gross expenditure planned for 2022;
- a decrease of £0.8m in the total diocesan apportionment; and
- an increase of £1.5m in funding from the Church Commissioners.

By way of background

- the aggregate economy of the Church of England is c£1.7bn of which c.£1.1bn comes in through the c12,500 parishes;
- of the parishes’ c.£1.1bn, the parishes on average remit about one-third to the dioceses to support the dioceses
- the dioceses in turn pay their ‘diocesan apportionments’ to the National Church.

The total of all dioceses apportionment for 2022 is £31.3m or roughly 3% of all parishes’ income.

Parish giving is the biggest single driver of the Church’s finances. It is 10% below that in 2019 largely due to Covid. More worryingly, the level in September 2021 was 2% down on a year earlier.

Questions about the Church Commissioners ‘windfall’ of £500m during the pandemic and whether the AC should encourage the Commissioners to release this to the parishes to enable them to clear their deficits from 2020 were posed. The Archbishops’ Council is in discussions with the Commissioners about future funding.

Synod voted to take note of the Report.

Appointment of a member of the Archbishops’ Council GS 2237

Mark Sheard was re-appointed to the Archbishops’ Council for a further term until February 2027.

Vision and Strategy GS2238

Three priorities from the Vision and Strategy approved by Synod in July 2021 are:

- a church where 'mixed ecology' is the norm.
- a church of missionary disciples and
- a church which is younger and more diverse.

The presentation by the Archbishop of York focussed on an understanding of what 'mixed ecology' means and doesn't mean. It envisages many different ways in which the Christian life is expressed and seen in each parish throughout the nation in addition to the usual Church services. Central to this is the revitalisation of the parish system for mission so that, in every parish, there is some form of viable and sustainable Christian presence that is appropriate to the nature and context of that parish and its communities.

There is no blueprint. The variety of Christian gatherings and expressions that could be established will be limitless reflecting the local context and neighbourhood. They might include a meeting in a school, an eco-church, a contemplative prayer group, a gospel choir or a gathering that meets and worships online for example.

The Archbishop said that it is this vision which results in the much-discussed aspiration to create 10,000 new Christian expressions within the next ten years. If we do this everyone in the country will have access to an appropriate expression of church in their community. The vision envisages much greater lay involvement in mission and outreach.

Some of the questions that followed pointed to the need for training local youth pastors (Mike Tufnell) and the value of existing Pioneer training for lay leaders (Paul Bradbury).

Report by the Governance Review Group GS2239

The group had met via Zoom through the past 18 months to explore the reform of National Governance structures. The Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, who presented the report, stated they were seeking practical changes to relieve the burden on Diocesan and Parochial structures referring to the financial costs of the National Church Institutions with seven governance levels and 122 committees. The costs of governance are part of the diocesan apportionment.

The core of the report suggested sweeping away many of the existing governance structures and establishing a Church of England National Services, with trustees forming the management group. It was not yet become clear how, by whom, and at what levels the bishops would perform their roles as leaders, managers and teachers. It was noted that the technical capacity for effective oversight of a huge umbrella of responsibilities might mean that some current areas may be lost between the gaps.

A number of questions followed such a how would the clergy and laity voices of Synod be heard in this new Trustee model, would Disestablishment be on the agenda, and where were the institutional and representational checks and balances (Debbie McIsaac). The Bishop of Leeds responded that this was a starting point and much more work would need to be completed before a firm proposal was brought back to the Synod. With 60% of Synod being new members, we had the opportunity and the necessity to decide how we can be more fit for purpose as we redefine the governance for a future Church of England.

Farewells

The farewells to Bishops and people in senior positions who are sitting in the gallery is usually one of the most interesting parts of Synod. You learn about people who have had significant roles and it often fills in the back story. At this meeting of Synod, there was a farewell to: Dr Eve Poole, the Third Church Estates Commissioner; Mrs Caroline Boddington, the Archbishops' Advisor on Appointments and Development and referred to as 'the most important person in the Church'; the Bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Lowson; and the Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman on her second retirement.

This report has been prepared from contributions from the members of General Synod from the Diocese of Salisbury and the Channel Islands.