

# General Synod Report

February 2022



The new General Synod held its first meetings last November. It was a little like freshers' week at university: lots of newcomers, new friendships under way, introductory presentations from senior personnel, and several organisations advertising their wares ... but not all that much real work was done!

We met again from 8 - 10 February and, although the pace will quicken in due course, attention was given to some of the issues which the Church of England must tackle - now and in the coming years.

## Church of England

Two key topics - racial justice and legislation in support of the Church of England's target of 'Net Zero' by 2030 - are highlighted in this report (please see the inset boxes opposite and overleaf).

We received a presentation on the projects and workstreams being undertaken by the **National Safeguarding Team** (NST) and the work undertaken to date by the Independent Safeguarding Board (ISB) (see [GS2244](#)). A call for a "full independent assessment" of, and debate on, the work of the NST was, in effect, voted down. As one speaker put it, the train (NST) had left the station and was picking up speed: the last thing we should do now is stop it in its tracks!

Many members of General Synod particularly value the opportunity to raise questions. In light of feedback received after the meetings in November, more time was allocated to **Questions**. Further, there was an attempt to reset their tone in the direction of greater candour in replies and, without forgoing inquiry, scrutiny, and accountability, seeking to foster a sense of mutual collaboration when raising questions.

## Racial Justice

The opening day of Synod was dominated by the debate on racial justice with an introduction to the Archbishops' Racial Justice Commission, and an update on racial justice work. This was a 'take note' debate on [GS2243](#) which meant that Synod had an opportunity to listen to a presentation given by the Chair of the Commission, Lord Boateng, contribute to a debate, and then vote. It is a way of moving business forward for Synod and the Church.

Lord Boateng's speech was a clarion call for action, not words. He emphasised to Synod that racism is a hurt to us all and not least to Jesus Christ. He pointed out to us that Parliament, as a whole and on the Government front bench, looks different from not just Synod but the Church. This did not happen without intentionality and action. The Church has plenty of policy and good intentions. What is needed is implementation and resource. The Commission is one resource, he said, here to wash our feet, but also to hold our feet to the fire.

Responses in the debate were rich with personal reflection, including indictment of loss of trust and the need to rebuild trust. The call made for resource was given comfort by John Spence, Chair of the Archbishops' Council, who assured Synod that money would be found.

Synod carried the motion on a show of hands. No votes against or abstentions were recorded.

We were introduced to the '**difference**' course which encourages helpful habits - be curious, be present, and re-imagine - to bridge divisions and transform relationships.

### **Net Zero 2030 Faculty Jurisdiction Rules**

Several amendments to the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules, intended to make it easier for churches to reduce their carbon emissions and help meet the Church of England's target of being net-zero carbon by 2030, were considered. The main changes approved are:

- steps such as draft-proofing doors and windows, fitting new non-fossil fuel boilers, providing electric car charging points, insulating heating pipes, introducing soft furnishings, and certain types of Wi-Fi installation are now in List A (where normally no faculty or consultation is required) or List B (where normally no faculty is needed but consultation with, and consent from, the archdeacon is required);
- churches will be required to consider the Church of England's 'net zero guidance' (available [here](#)) when formulating and submitting relevant proposals;
- churches seeking to replace an existing fossil fuel boiler with another, on a 'like-for-like' basis, or to replace an oil tank, will now require a full faculty application.

The majority of these steps were overwhelmingly approved by General Synod. However, the decision to require a faculty for 'like-for-like' replacement of a fossil fuel boiler was the outcome of a very close vote: 142 voted to include this in List B (requiring consultation but no faculty) while 145 voted in favour of requiring a faculty.

The *Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules 2022* will be laid before Parliament and are expected to come into effect on 1 July 2022.

We received and 'took note' of a report of the **Clergy Remuneration Review** ([GS2247](#)). A survey of clergy that received over 3,700 responses revealed that 62% of respondents reported to be living comfortably or doing all right. However, concern was expressed for the 13% who were finding it quite or very difficult to manage and the 25% who were just getting by – particularly as a cost-of-living crisis is now beginning to bite.

The **Governance Review Group** (GRG) has developed proposals to reform the National Church Institutions which exist to serve and support parishes and dioceses. It is widely recognised that these need simplification and rationalisation. However, General Synod

wanted more time to consider, and be consulted on, its proposals. So, while not willing at this stage to "welcome" the GRG's report ([GS2239](#)) we thanked the GRG for its work and invited the Archbishop's Council to engage with stakeholders on its recommendations and bring forward, where necessary, draft legislation.

A presentation, video, and contributions from the floor illustrated ways in which the **Setting God's People Free** initiative had begun to bear fruit and pointed to the aim, as part of the vision and strategy for the 2020s, to "fan into flame the everyday faith of every disciple" so that all of us who gather in church on Sunday can shine as lights for Christ in the world - in our homes, neighbourhoods and workplaces – from Monday to Saturday.

### **Church of England and the Anglican Communion**

The Archbishop of Canterbury has key roles at diocesan and national levels and across the Anglican Communion. A consultation is under way on proposals to "give the worldwide Anglican Communion a greater voice" on the Crown Nominations Committee which nominates future Archbishops of Canterbury (see [GS2253](#)). Our debate was part of this consultation, which remains open until 31 March, and several thoughtful contributions, expressing varying views, were made.

### **Slavery, Human Trafficking, and the Persecuted Church**

Two items of business came before General Synod at the formal request of Diocesan Synods. Durham invited us "to ask HM Government ... to ensure proper provision for the ongoing support and protection of trafficked minors". Lichfield invited us to "request that ... dioceses offer support to link dioceses where the church is facing persecution and ... [that] the next Lambeth Conference address the issue of the persecution of Christians". These motions were developed to draw attention to ways in which dioceses, parishes, and individual Christians can help and pray for victims of modern slavery and support persecuted believers (see [here](#) and [here](#)) and, in the latter case, to ask HM Government to implement in full recommendations made in the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review. These resolutions, as amended, were passed unanimously and resoundingly.