

GENERAL SYNOD – FEBRUARY 2023

A Report To Lichfield Diocesan Synod

DAY 1 – Monday 6th February 2023

The first day of this group of sessions started at 1.00pm with **Remote Meetings legislation**, which was required in order for General Synod to continue to be conducted in a hybrid fashion; with members unable to be physically present at Church House to join remotely via Zoom. This was an extension to the temporary measure which had been in place since the start of the pandemic. This was unanimously agreed and we then continued with **worship**, followed by the Archbishop of Canterbury welcoming new members.

The Archbishop then gave the **Presidential Address**, which was a call to unity in light of the prominent LLF debate which was to come. Following this we received the **Business Committee report**, which was a report outlining current and future business to be discussed. The Bishop of London, Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally, then gave a **presentation on Living in Love and Faith**, including highlights of the journey we have been on as a Church and key reflections ahead of the debate. **Question time** then ensued, with a broad range of topics discussed. It is worth noting that 206 questions were submitted and answered prior to this group of sessions, and due to the volume of questions concerning the LLF debate they had been split into non-LLF questions which were discussed on day 1, and LLF questions which were discussed on day 2.

DAY 2 – Tuesday 7th February 2023

The second day started with some legislative business, which saw the **Diocesan Board of Education Measure** being updated to 2023 regulations. Then came the **Miscellaneous Provisions Measure** – which was a number of unrelated items being proposed for reform, which would not necessarily merit an entire Canon or Measure by themselves. Bishop's Mission Orders were raised during this debate, in particular the way in which the new provisions meant that the termination of BMOs were at the bishop's discretion might put clergy, their families and congregations at risk. In response, Synod was assured that separate work on this matter was already underway.

The Archbishop of Canterbury then presented the **Loyal Address**, honouring the late Queen Elizabeth and her commitment to the Church, and praying that His Majesty King Charles might be blessed with wisdom and grace for his reign. This was followed by the second **question time** which responded solely to LLF related questions. The Bishop of London responded to most of these, which included many concerning the new pastoral guidance (to be discussed in July) and the Bishop of Lichfield answered supplementary questions on the liturgical resource aspect of the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith. **Resourcing Ministerial Formation** followed, which looked at the ways in which we are investing in ministerial formation (lay and ordained). The afternoon session was dedicated to **LLF Group Work** over 4 hours, where members of Synod were placed into mixed groups with facilitators, and joined by bishops who listened to discussions to take back 'grass roots' comments to their further discussions between now and July.

DAY 3 – Wednesday 8th February 2023

The third day started with the **Cost of Living** motion brought by Canon Dr John Spence of the Archbishop's Council, which pointed to not just praying for this crisis but also taking action - as individuals, as churches, as dioceses, as well as calling on the government to do more to address this situation. Following this, the **Draft Parochial Fees Order** was debated and accepted; an order which decided that for the rest of 2023 the parochial fees set in 2019 should increase by no more than 5%, and that in 2024 the fees should increase by no more than 5% from the 2023 levels.

The **LLF debate** commenced after lunch, with the Bishop of London bringing the motion followed by a couple of speeches from the floor, and then to the 27 amendments which had initially been tabled. Most amendments were lost, and most were a vote by houses which meant that due to the divergent views on this matter it would be very difficult to reach a majority in all three houses. The debate went on until after 7.00pm and was adjourned until the next day.

DAY 4 – Thursday 9th February 2023

Following morning worship the **LLF debate** continued, with passionate and personal stories shared by members of Synod. The Synod voted in favour of this item, reaching the required majority across all three houses. The Bishop of London thanked Geoffrey Tattersall QC for the excellent way in which he had chaired the debate, which was echoed by members of the Synod who gave him a standing ovation.

In the afternoon, Synod gave final approval for the **Diocesan Stipends Funds Measure**, which concerns the distribution of wealth between dioceses and had previously been debated in July 2022. Then the **Governance Review** presentation followed from the national church governance project board, detailing the trajectory for the way in which these bodies will be moving forward. **Safeguarding** was the next item of business, which was presented by the outgoing lead bishop for safeguarding (Bishop of Rochester, Rt Revd Dr Jonathon Gibbs) who acknowledged that the changes in safeguarding over the last three years has put pressure on clergy and parishes, but urged the church to not lose sight of the crucial work being carried out. This was followed by a presentation from the national director of safeguarding, Alex Kubeyinje, who praised the hard work and commitment of diocesan safeguarding advisers, clergy, bishops and diocesan secretaries. He then responded to some questions around redress for victims (therapeutic and financial) and the connection between sexuality and safeguarding. Various voices spoke out in the take-note debate which followed, expressing opinions on training, the national redress scheme for victims and a lack of confidence in the Church from abuse survivors. The Archdeacon of Lincoln then brought the final item of business which called on His Majesty's government to make charities, including churches, exempt from liability for **Insurance Premium Tax**. The motion was carried by a show of hands.

The Archbishop of Canterbury then prorogued (closed) the Synod until 7th July 2023, where we will meet in York for what I'm sure will be a full agenda.

Matthew Edwards (337)

House of Laity - General Synod