

General Synod – July 2022.

These notes are partially drawn from the reflections of my Synod colleague Revd Canon Dr Tim Bull, as I was unable to attend the full session, although I did have the good experience therefore of seeing how Synod works online as well as in person. (nb: this session of Synod was held while the government was still Her Majesty's.)

Opening Remarks

These came from Archbishop of the Congo, Archbishop Titre Andre George who reminded us that the meaning of words can change depending on where you are in the world, a good example being “poverty”. Archbishop Stephen Cottrell cautioned us to prepare for sorrows and failures as we attempt to be faithful to Jesus and encouraged us to renew our life of prayer.

Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by 2030

This is a positive and voluntary plan towards achieving Synod's ambition to reach Carbon Net Zero by 2030. We were reminded that each year or month of delay brings us closer to disaster and this affects people around the world. It is incumbent upon all of us to care for God's creation; if we are not caring for creation, we are not being Christian. Sometimes we should dare to do something ambitious and audacious, although most of the difference requires individual, and entirely feasible changes in behaviour. The routemap was overwhelmingly approved.

War in Ukraine

Synod debated a motion calling on Christians to pray for the situation in Ukraine and calling on Her Majesty's Government to work to secure peace. Debate was had over whether the peace should be “just” or “negotiated”, and eventually both words were included in the final motion. Synod was reminded that peace-making is a beatitude and a characteristic of God, that we should pray for our armed forces and their chaplains, and we should not demonise the Russian people. The motion was resoundingly carried.

Crown Nomination Commission (CNC) for the See of Canterbury

Debate was had as to who should appoint future Archbishops of Canterbury. The archbishop has little role with the Diocese of Canterbury itself, and it was therefore agreed that their representation on the CNC should be reduced

from six to three, to work alongside the six members from General Synod. Synod agreed to increase the representation of the Anglican Communion from one person to five. Discussion took place as to whether this change increased or diminished a sense of colonialism. There was some unrest at the increased number from overseas, and questions were asked as to whether the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury should be looked at before deciding how that person might be appointed. The motion passed.

Legal and Administrative Business

A report was shared on national funding of diocesan work, such as our own Reaching New People project. Future spending plans were presented and approved. A move to independent safeguarding was endorsed. Synod agreed a total returns approach to the way that the Pensions Board manages its investments. An increase in fees to church legal officers, in line with earlier promises was approved. A change was agreed as to who could stand for PCCs so as to make it easier for people from Fresh Expressions of church to serve. New funding for theological colleges and courses was supported. It is widely agreed that the Clergy Discipline Measure isn't working, so Synod voted to investigate changing it.

Assisted Suicide

Many people shared their stories in what was a moving debate on assisted suicide. There were those both in favour of the current position and those supporting relaxing the rules. Synod heard about the untiring efforts of health professionals, including healthcare chaplains. We were told that "choice" has become an idol of our times and encouraged to talk more about death. We were reminded that assisted dying is not about shortening life; it's about shortening death. At the end of the debate, Synod supported the current position, while urging the Government to invest more in palliative care.

Affirming and Including Disabled People in the Whole life of the Church

I am told by those who have been members of General Synod longer than myself that it is unusual for Synod to vote in complete favour of a motion, with nobody voting against and also nobody abstaining, however that's exactly what happened with this motion to do more to include all people with additional needs in church life. The ideas surrounding this were wide-ranging and included: removing non-inclusive rubrics such as "please stand" from liturgical resources, gathering information about the current involvement of disabled people, asking that Diocesan Advisory Committees should have a disabled person as a member, and encouraging dioceses to (jointly) appoint

disability advisers. We also need to address bias and prejudice such as asking if we could imagine having a bishop who uses a wheelchair. If not, why not.

Age Verification for Pornography Websites

Another debate where stories were sensitively and thoughtfully shared. The motion to call on the Government to introduce age verification was almost unanimously carried. Questions were raised as to the practicality of this though, not as a voice of dissent but one of honest realism.

Other thoughts.

There were several fringe meetings and workshops over the duration of July's Synod. I attended very powerful and thought-provoking sessions on racism and how we overcome it, and how we include those with additional needs in our churches. I was moved at how some of the voting processes were bookended by worship and prayers. There were also discussion groups for the whole of Synod around Living in Love and Faith, with some tensions over identity, gender and sexuality. We wait to discover the next steps on this journey at our Synod gathering in February 2023.

Revd Rachel Wakefield.

2022