



Prince Edward read a speech of encouragement and hope to the Synod written by the Queen, revealing her own deep faith. While recognising that there would be 'disagreements', she urged 'unity in fellowship'.

Archbishop Justin asked the Prince to convey the best wishes of the entire Synod to Her Majesty, and later in the proceedings, Synod agreed that a 'Loyal Address' to be sent to the Queen.

INDUCTION AND INAUGURATION

The General Synod met in Church House, Westminster on 15-16 November. This was the first meeting of the 5-year term (quinquennium) of Synod.

The meeting was preceded by an Induction Day for Members, explaining the workings and mysteries of General Synod and emphasising the responsibility that delegates carry in debating and passing legislation. Synod has protocols and procedures for how it conducts its business - in some ways similar to those in the nearby Houses of Parliament, but hopefully more collegiate and courteous than those of our neighbours.

All 6 of your elected representatives were in attendance (see over) . Sadly, Bishop Robert could not join us in person owing to Covid restrictions in Belgium and the risks of disruption to his very busy travel schedule around the Diocese, but fortunately we were still able to meet with him via Zoom on the 1st day of Synod.

The first full day started with an impressive choral Eucharist at Westminster Abbey, with an address from the Coptic Archbishop Angaelos of London on the subject of Zacchaeus' meeting with Jesus.

A recording of Archbishop Angaelos' address may be listened to at

<https://soundcloud.com/archbishopangaelos/meeting-zacchaeus-sermon-at-westminster-abbey>

The service was followed by a moving inauguration ceremony in Church House, Westminster, attended by Prince Edward who deputised for Her Majesty the Queen because of her back injury.



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Synod then got down to its main items of business, starting with a Presidential Address by our Archbishops. Video recordings of all these items are available on General Synod website (addresses on last page).

There were many recurring themes. Both acknowledged the difficulty, pain and loss of operating throughout the pandemic, but also the amazing resilience and achievements, including the vital role of churches in supporting and providing essential services for their communities. Both Archbishops mentioned the challenges lying ahead. It was also acknowledged that there were issues over which members of Synod disagreed, with a plea from both archbishops that Synod members listen respectfully and carefully to the views of others and work with an aspiration of 'good disagreement'

++Justin reminded us of the extent to which the proportion of the worshipping community within the population had shrunk from its 19th Century highs to be only 2% of the UK population in 2021.

++Stephen urged that our Church must not simply “manage decline gracefully”. He commented that “We want the Church of England to grow, and even if it doesn’t, then let our death be a grand operatic death. Let it be fantastic, and let’s not

crawl into a corner. Synod, let’s put this simple and joyful focus on Christ at the centre of all our discussions, especially from time to time when we do see things differently.”

MAIN ITEMS OF BUSINESS BEFORE THIS SYNOD

Presidential Addresses, Vision and Strategy

Both archbishops spoke at various times during the Synod and the Archbishop of York led the session on Vision and Strategy. There were many recurring themes. Both acknowledged the difficulty, pain and loss of operating throughout the pandemic, but also the amazing resilience and achievements, including the vital role of churches in supporting and providing essential services for their communities. Both mentioned the challenges lying ahead. It was also acknowledged that there were issues over which members of Synod disagreed with a plea from both archbishops that Synod members listen respectfully and carefully to the views of others and work with an aspiration of ‘good disagreement’. We were reminded that although Synod is a legislative body, it is not a parliament and there is no ‘opposition party’.

In their different ways, they also reiterated their commitment to the parish system, Archbishop Justin using the phrase the church ‘for England’, and Archbishop Stephen spending considerable time clarifying the concept of a ‘mixed ecology church’ and emphasising that most initiatives come through parishes. It is not a question of either/or, but of finding different ways to engage with different people. There was, however, the caveat that the church had always adapted and needed to continue to do so. The themes of ‘simpler, humbler, bolder’ and the three strategic priorities for the Church to be: ‘younger and more diverse’; ‘a church of missionary disciples’; ‘a church where mixed ecology is the norm’, were repeated throughout the Synod. The Archbishop also repeatedly brought the discussions back to a church, that is Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped.

Wealth Sharing Between Dioceses

There is considerable inequality in the level of financial reserves held by different Church of England Dioceses. With assets of over £100 million, the Diocese of Lincoln is the wealthiest Diocese, while Liverpool Diocese has assets of only £1.5 million. (Because of our different structure, our Diocese is not included in this list)

There are many reasons for the imbalance in capital reserves, which has arisen over a long period of time due to changes in population patterns and also from work taken since 1976 to manage assets to ensure that all clergy received the same stipend.

This situation has been made worse by the Covid pandemic where Dioceses which are highly dependent on congregation

collections and fund-raising as opposed to income from investments have seen their income dwindle.

Some initiatives are already under way for Dioceses to support one another, but charity laws hinder Dioceses from transferring their assets to one another.

In 2020, a Working Group from across the Church was formed to consider these issues, and based on their report, and following a lively and wide-ranging discussion about the issues and opportunities which might arise with the transfers of assets from one Diocese to another, Synod gave a clear approval to legislation being brought to a future Session to enable greater sharing of wealth between Dioceses

New Legislation Enacted

One of the key functions of the General Synod is to approve new legislation which will ultimately be submitted to the Queen for Royal Assent and to become part of UK law. At this Synod, there was only one item of legislation which confirmed a change to the Vacancy in See Regulations as an Act of Synod. This concerns the way that Synod elects people to serve on the Vacancy in See committees, i.e. the committees that select and recommend the appointments of bishops to vacant posts. This had been debated and approved at the last Synod, so the Act was passed in record time without any further debate.

The Future Governance Structure(s) Of The Church

In 2020-2021, a Review Group has been meeting to consider whether the current structures under which the Church of England is managed are the best ones for that purpose.

This meeting of General Synod received a progress report from the Group. The Report contained 17 recommendations, but emphasises that: “Honouring all people is central to the Church’s mission and it therefore follows that any governance structure must require all persons within it to be heard and respected. “

It is anticipated that more detailed proposals will be brought to Synod for consideration when we next meet in February 2022.

The Wealth Gap And Inequality

A motion initiated in the Diocese of Leeds, 'That this Synod call on Her Majesty's Government (UK) (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', triggered a very constructive debate and was amended to recommit the Church to 'working both nationally and locally to respond to human need by loving service, and to transform unjust structures of society which are creating the wealth gap'.

The wealth gap in Britain is wider than most countries across Europe, but the underlying messages are relevant to us all.

Both Archbishops spoke of the vision of the worth of every human being. Successive speakers highlighted the links between poverty and disability, sickness, racism, life expectancy.

Catching people's imagination, the Bishop of Chelmsford said, 'We worry about our lack of capacity, but really it is a lack of confidence that God will honour our good actions if, like Peter, in the storm on Lake Galilee, we will only step out of the safety of our rocking, capsizing boat, and walk on the water with Jesus'.

In order to demonstrate the support of Synod for this motion, members voted individually rather than by a simple show of hands. Unsurprisingly, the motion (as amended) was accepted by Synod by an overwhelming majority.

Living In Love & Faith

Living in Love and Faith was not directly on the agenda, although a background paper on progress was provided, and the continuing timetable was outlined in the chamber, with warm encouragement for delegates to engage with the materials. In his opening address, Archbishop Justin referred to his conversations with the Anglican Church in Ghana over proposed legislation in Ghana criminalising LGBTQ+. He said, 'homophobia, including the criminalising of LGBTQ+ people is always wrong in any context'. He also clarified that the Anglican Church in Ghana opposed the criminalisation of LGBTQ+ people, although it maintained its opposition to gay marriage.

The Prolocutor, Simon Butler, challenged this message saying that gay people in Britain suffered alongside those in Ghana, inviting a number of people to stand with plaques that read, 'Soon to be imprisonable in Ghana'. Another member warned of the inadvertent effect such statements might have on Christians in Ghana and elsewhere, which was repeated and acknowledged in a later session. The issue re-surfaced in 'question time', when the Archbishop resisted expanding on his initial statement.



ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2022

(Synod Paper GS2235 contains the details)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/25402>



The Archbishops' Council Budget, which funds work undertaken by National Church Institutions on behalf of the Church of England, was approved in July 2021 by the outgoing Synod, but an update was promised for November's new Synod.

The Chair of the Finance Committee, John Spence, delivered his customary tour de force presenting the 2022 financial update, particularly concerning the apportionment from the dioceses, equivalent to chaplaincies' contributions to the diocesan common fund, to which the Diocese in Europe makes a modest contribution. As a result of savings mainly through simplifying some bodies and procedures, the apportionment will be 3.7% less than agreed in July 2021.

John Spence acknowledged the considerable financial impact of Covid-19 across churches and cathedrals, outlining the support that had been provided centrally and was budgeted to continue and which includes the Lowest Income Communities Funding, from which the Diocese in Europe benefits in support of its ministry in areas where poverty is rife.

Our Diocese is also benefiting from the funding made available for curacies and received an extra grant a year ago related to Covid-19.

In an impassioned round-up, John Spence re-iterated his profound commitment to the church and its ministry in spreading and living out the Gospel and his commitment to finding ways of using its financial resources to support that.

It was particularly bad timing that as Synod was considering this matter, the UK Government released figures showing that inflation had now exceeded the 4% barrier and therefore starts to become a significant consideration in budgeting. In reply to a question from Clive Billenness, however, John assured Synod that he was monitoring the inflation issue carefully.

Synod voted positively to 'take note of the paper', i.e. to accept it, and gave John a standing ovation.

QUESTIONS ASKED AND ANSWERED

At each meeting of the Synod, under General Synod Standing Orders, members are permitted to submit 2 questions each to the National Institutions of the Church, which are then answered by a member of the appropriate body or Committee.

The questions must be questions and seek factual answers, and not legal opinions or responses to hypothetical situations. Written answers are provided to all questions which are accepted as valid.

Similar to Prime Ministers' Questions, however, each questioner may then pose an oral Supplementary Question without giving prior notice of its content. This is always a very lively and animated session for which the Chair needs the discernment of Solomon and the patience of several saints to maintain good order.

Because this session is very heavily time-limited, not every questioner will have the opportunity to ask a supplementary question, and at this meeting of Synod, only about half of the questions were reached.

Some dissatisfaction was expressed that the period should be made longer in future meetings of Synod, so we will see happens in February.

Clive Billenness did submit 2 questions, both of which were reached during the session, thereby enabling him to ask supplementary questions. (Questions 22 & 68)

Smitha Prasadam also submitted a question but unfortunately it was not reached within the time allocated to this agenda item and so no supplementary question could be asked. (Question 121)

All the questions and written answers can be found in the Synod Question Paper on the Synod website,

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/25785>

but the supplementary questions are reproduced below with a verbatim note of the answer given:

QUESTION 22 - SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

I am grateful for the commitment to try to achieve a consistent approach to the use of confidentiality provisions and I recognise the complication of church bodies all being separate legal bodies. However, under the Charity Commission's guidance on the preparation of annual accounts, known as FRS102, there is a provision to include in the Additional Notes To The Accounts any information which might assist stakeholders in their understanding of how money is being spent.

Can, therefore, an instruction be issued to all church institutions to include in their additional notes to their accounts the total amount of money paid out in the financial year where confidentiality clauses formed part of the settlement. While declaring a total would not disclose any sensitive personal information about individual cases, it would serve as an overall indicator of the extent to which such clauses were being used by different institutions.

The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, the Rt Rev Martin Seely replied:

"I will pass that on and ask for its consideration"

(This question led to an article being published in The Times on Saturday 21 November)

QUESTION 68 - SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

I welcome the Bishop [of Huddersfield's] news that the definitions of abuse have been updated to address what my own research and the numerous e-mails I have received from victims has revealed to be a significant problem within churches both inside and outside the Anglican communion. May I ask what arrangements will be made to consult more widely on these definitions, including with the victims of this form of abuse so that the circumstances under which a safeguarding response will be made can be clearly defined and understood and included in training for safeguarding officers.

The Bishop of Huddersfield, the Rt Rev Jonathan Gibbs replied:

"There is a process under way at the moment whereby the draft policy "Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults" has been through an extensive process of consultation and is coming back to the House of Bishops all being well at its meeting in December. That process of consultation has included consultation with victims and survivors of abuse. That is always a hugely important part of how we handle these things.

Essentially again we are caught... *[the Bishop paused]*and what the guidance will seek to do is to clarify at what point does something move from being unhealthy behaviour towards abuse. That's one thing. There is a spectrum of behaviours. And on the other hand when is this genuinely a safeguarding matter, which the usual answer to is "Does it concern a child or a vulnerable adult?" And there is also need for clarity about what is meant by those terms.

So the short answer to your question is "Yes, the process of consultation is under way and secondly we are in the process of what that guidance looks at. We hope and believe that it will offer considerable help in providing clarity over dealing with these difficult cases in the future"

The entire Question and Answer session is online at the General Synod's YouTube Channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7rAldeH2Oc&t=15509s>

starting at 2hrs 35 mins into the recording.

Meet your 6 new representatives elected to General Synod

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All Synod Papers are available online to read as well as a record of all votes cast where the vote was taken by name and not by a simple show of hands.

You can find these at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/about-general-synod>

Sessions of General Synod are also webcast live on the internet, and can be watched in dedicated playlists on the Church of England's YouTube Channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/c/TheChurchofEngland/featured>

The next meeting of General Synod will take place in February 2022.