

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT FEBRUARY 2019

These reflections are offered by Keith Cawdron, Chris Pye, Maggie Swinson and Debra Walker. Sadly, David Martlew was unwell and not able to be present, he remains in our prayers.

The February 2019 Group of General Synod sessions reflected the role of Synod in making legislation, in looking outwards to shine the light of the Gospel on issues of concern in our communities and addressing internal church matters.

Views from the Communion

As has become the custom, the Archbishops had arranged for presentations by bishops from other parts of the Communion. This might be the last such presentation as one of the pieces of Legislation considered and approved during the sessions included having Anglican Communion Representatives on Synod on the same basis as Ecumenical representatives with the right to speak.

This time we heard from the Primate of the Church of North India and the Bishop of Kapsabet in Kenya who reflected on mission and evangelism in their contexts. These presentations put our issues into a wider perspective and remind us that we are part of something much bigger than we are.

How do we, in England, engage with and support Anglicans in other provinces of the Communion as they seek to share the Gospel?

Presidential Address

The Archbishop's presidential address included the opportunity to speak to those around us about our faith – he also encouraged us to live in hope and give up cynicism for Lent.

Legislation & internal business

The headlines from Synod, if you read the press, were that permission was given for churches not to hold services on Sundays. The

reality, of course, was a bit different with proposal being uncontroversial catching up with the reality that in many multi-parish situations it isn't possible for the clergy to say all the offices in every church in the benefice.

There was also extensive discussion about limited terms of service on Deanery Synod for lay people. The debate will be followed by further reflection by the Elections Review Group.

How does your parish or deanery encourage new people into church governance?

Synod also discussed electronic elections, ecumenical cooperation, parish records, appointment of DACs, and religious orders.

Looking out

The outward facing debates fell into two groups, the first being 4 mission and evangelism focussed debates and then several debates on issues relating to our national life.

The mission/evangelism debates focussed on Estates, young people, discipleship and ministry among young people. The Bishop of Burnley urged Synod not to support the motion on Estates Evangelism unless they were prepared to do something about it.

Young people should be a vital part of the church, as should our housing estates.

How is the church equipping people for ministry among and alongside those who are under-represented in our churches currently?

The debates which focussed on our national life and that of our communities were all passed with near unanimity and very little challenge to the majority view during the debate. They encouraged action locally, but of course can't mandate it, and there was very little explicit reference to partnership with ecumenical partners.

So, what did Synod say?

Homelessness: Synod heard an excellent speech introducing this debate and the debate that followed showed the experience of members in this area. Synod agreed to form a Church of England led Homelessness Task Force to draw up a plan and work together in partnership with other agencies inside and outside the church to deliver that coordinated plan.

The public gallery was packed for the debate on **Ministry among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities**. Synod members first heard from a Traveller and a professor specialising in this area, highlighting the racism and lack of support or welcome which characterises life for these communities. Synod then debated a motion which called upon church at all levels to challenge racism and hate crime directed at these communities and to extend and pastoral care locally.

Consider whether there are Gypsy, Roma or Traveller Communities in your area and what you can do to offer support and challenge discrimination.

The third specific debate concerned **advertising and gambling** calling on the government to reduce the advertising of gambling and to raise a levy on gambling firms to fund research, education and treatment programmes. The church was encouraged to be a place of welcome, support and education.

What has your PCC/Deanery Synod done to help protect those at risk from gambling or other addiction?

The final debate of the sessions was a motion from the Archbishops on **the state of the nation**. This motion acknowledged the challenges facing the country and government and called upon churches and church members to pray for MPs and civil servants, reaffirmed the churches commitment to holding the concerns of the poor at the centre of national policy and called upon politicians to work together for the common good.

How can each church and its members be encouraged to take prayer for our nation and its leaders seriously?

Looking in

There was a lengthy debate about the dates for forthcoming meetings, focusing on which days of the week February sessions would fall on. This was definitely not Synod at its best!

Synod continued its work the recommendations from the recent report on the **Crown Nominations Commission**. The key issues addressed on this occasion were the process for the appointment of the Lay Chair for the CNC for York, which was brought into line with that of Canterbury, and whether the voting on the CNC should be by secret ballot or not. After a robust debate the motion to move from secret ballots was defeated in the House of Laity.

In July a debate on the church's response to **environmental issues**, and specifically its work programmes, had been started but adjourned. At the end of the resumed debate Synod passed a motion which included a reminder to the church of its previous commitments and a call to every diocese to have its own environment programme. There was a commitment to report progress to Synod at least every three years.

Synod received its first presentation from one of the groups established to work on issues linked to human sexuality, the **Living in Love and Faith** group. The presentation was followed by a period of questions and the usual Question Time questions also reflected the interest in this topic from a variety of angles.

The draft covenant for **Clergy Care and wellbeing** was discussed in separate meetings of the clergy and laity. This matter will return for consideration in full synod in due course.

Further information and all the papers, including the Questions and their answers

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are available on the website [https://
www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-
thinking/work-general-synod/agendas-
papers/general-synod-february-2019](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod/agendas-papers/general-synod-february-2019)