These reflections are offered by Keith Cawdron, Chris Pye, Maggie Swinson and Debra Walker. As readers may be aware, David Martlew resigned from the Synod due to ill health. We would like to express thanks for him and to extend our sympathy and prayers to his family following his subsequent death.

This is not a comprehensive report but seeks to highlight specific issues for further consideration.

Special Guests

At the July Synod guests are present, as observers, from ecumenical partners in the Porvoo Communion and the EKD (German Evangelical Church) alongside a representative from one of the other Anglican Churches in Britain & Ireland. One of these guests addresses the Synod on the first day. This year the address was from the Bishop of Ribe, the Rt Rev Elof Westergard from the Church in Denmark who spoke from the perspective of a national church which, in spite of high membership, is working hard to engage with people through work with young families and opportunities for baptism. He also said that Denmark had a close relationship with the UK would miss that after Brexit.

We were also privileged to have with us the worldwide President of the Mothers Union – the oldest and largest women’s movement in the world.

Views from the Communion

This July the Anglican Communion representatives from outside the UK were present in their new capacity as non-voting members of Synod with the same rights to speak as the permanent ecumenical representatives. They therefore contributed to a number of debates, enriching our discussions.

Presidential Address

The Archbishop of York used his presidential address to encourage members to model good disagreement to the communities in which they live.

Safeguarding

This Synod had a significant focus on Safeguarding. However, in the debate on the Agenda, some members expressed concerns sufficient to draw an intervention from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He explained that he and the Archbishop of York were due to give further evidence to the Independent Inquiry and the Church would have hard questions to answer when the final report was published. However, it was not appropriate to pre-empt this work.

As Synod gathered on Sunday afternoon to focus on safeguarding, members and those in the press and public galleries were reminded that survivors and victims of abuse were present in the hall and following proceedings online. We began with a dedicated safeguarding questions session which was followed by a presentation from members of the National Safeguarding Steering Group. During the presentation developments since the last Synod were set out including the appointment of a Director of Safeguarding and a new case management system due to be rolled out in 2020. A Survivors Reference Group has been established and a Victims and Survivors Charter is being planned. A review of the Clergy Discipline Measure is also underway.

Synod then heard from Meg Munn, the Independent Chair of the National Safeguarding Panel, about their work. This group has a ‘critical friend’ relationship with the Church of England and a particular role in policy development. Phil Johnson, one of three survivor members of the Panel, also spoke and received strong applause for his contribution.

This was followed by questions from members.

Is safeguarding a standing item on your PCC agenda? This is best practice

Is your parish up to date with National and Diocesan guidelines regard to training, policies and practice?

Would you be happy to have an unannounced spot check?

Anglican Methodist Relations

General Synod agreed to continue work on closer relationships with the Methodist church but at a slower pace than had been hoped due to concerns
about the move towards full interchangeability of ministers in particular. The further texts and documents needed for the next stage will be worked upon and the matter is expected to return to Synod in the next 5 years. The proposals are still to be debated by the Methodist Church.

Consider discussing the proposals for greater unity with local Methodist Colleagues.

Looking Out

A motion on Serious Youth Violence and its impact on local communities attracted significant attention before Synod. The debate called for the impact of school exclusions to be considered and alternatives considered. The debate drew on the wide range of experience of Synod members from those offering pastoral support to young people to those working in the criminal justice and education systems.

A motion from Rochester Diocese on ministry to people with dementia commended this ministry, known as Anna chaplaincy, requested that its profile be raised and requested a report on progress on the Prime Minister’s ‘Challenge on Dementia 2020’.

Southwark diocesan synod submitted a resolution recognising that many refugees were highly skilled, and these skills were being wasted and calling for a lifting of the ban on working for those whose applications to remain in the UK take more than 6 months.

How might your church engage with young people and other agencies to improve support for potential perpetrators of violence?

The number of people suffering with dementia is increasing. How does your church support those living with dementia and their carers?

Consider how your church can support refugees.

Finance

The July General Synod agrees the budgets for the work of the National Church and the training of clergy. This Synod also received a presentation from the Triennium Funding Working Group around its three priorities: clergy, mission and growth.

Has your church considered what its priorities should be and tailored its finances to support those priorities?

Legislation & internal business

After much consultation, the Draft Cathedrals Measure was considered and successfully referred to the Revision Committee for detailed consideration and possible amendment

Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules which aim to reduce the complexity of the faculty process and facilitate inspection of documents.

The simplification process extended to the filling of parish vacancies. The Draft Legislative Reform (Patronage Benefices) Order 2019 was approved. The proposals seek to reduce delays and lift the burden on the PCC.

Looking inwards

The Bishop of Oxford introduced a debate which celebrated Fresh Expressions and encouraged churches to be imaginative in their development of new congregations, deepening discipleship and greater involvement of Fresh Expressions in the life of the local church.

Work on the Living in Love and Faith project continued during Synod through a progress report and then closed seminars and workshops.

Synod received a presentation on Clergy Wellbeing which was followed by a debate. This was not a matter of self-interest but was, rather, about good self-care without which ministry was compromised. At the end of the debate the Clergy Well-being Covenant was adopted and will, in due course, be proclaimed an Act of Synod. The proposals set out in the report GS2133 were to be developed into practical proposals.

The culture shift required by Setting God’s People Free, had begun but further change was needed if the whole people of God were to achieve their potential and the Kingdom of God. This would take time.

Further information and all the papers, including the Questions and their answers are available on the website