

GENERAL SYNOD RESUME OF THE WINTER 2019 MEETING (20th – 23rd FEB, LONDON)

INTRODUCTION

This note, for members of Diocesan and Archdeaconry/Deaconry Synods, summarises the key points of interest to the Diocese from the Feb 2019 sessions of General Synod held in London. As always, if you want more details you can find these on the General Synod website (link at the end of this note). ++Justin Welby set the scene for the sessions noting that we are all part of the Body of Christ irrespective of our position, background etc. His underpinning message was the importance of HOPE. He suggested that something to give up for Lent might be cynicism!

HUMAN SEXUALITY (GS Misc 1200)

Readers will recall that how the Church addresses the complex issues of 'Human Sexuality' (ie LGBTI+ matters) has been the subject of an ongoing series of work streams. This Session received an update on this work under 2 headings: 'Living in Love and Faith' and 'Held Together in the Love of Christ'. You can find details in the GS paper referred to above. Of particular note is that six 'pervading evils' (*prejudice, silence, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy, prejudice and misuse of power*) have been identified as being a bar to good pastoral practice in the Church.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES (GS 2094A, 2094B & GS Misc 1212)

This continued a debate adjourned from the July 2018 Session to enable evaluation of costs and availability of suitable 'tools' for parishes to use. This has now all been resolved and practical guidance will now become available to parishes etc on how to consider and reduce their carbon footprint. The underpinning principle is that the Church must be seen to be taking an active position on Climate Change and the aim of this proposal was in support of this.

EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP (GS 2118)

Members wholeheartedly supported a proposal to promote evangelism at a local level in the coming year and beyond, equipping lay and ordained people to be more confident in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives.

HOMELESSNESS (GS 2110A & 2110B)

Whilst not of direct relevance to us, there is agreement that work in partnership with UK charities should be taken forwards to address the issue of homelessness and street sleeping.

MINISTERING AMONGST CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (GS 2121)

Given that most members of the Church can trace their involvement back to childhood, there is considerable merit in promoting the ministry of children and young people using approaches appropriate for this purpose (including liturgy and worship structure). Members agree that encouraging children is an essential means of growing the Kingdom of God.

'ESTATES' EVANGELISM (GS 2122)

This seeks to reverse the experience of recent years where churches and incumbents in areas of social & economic deprivation have been declining. ++Justin Welby noted that this is essential though it will be uncomfortable. Members agree that this was an important initiative. It might not be directly relevant to us – but the corollary is perhaps currently 'unchurched' communities?

GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES (GS 2123)

Synod was reminded that this group remains one where racial prejudice continues to be considered 'acceptable'. This is consequent on historical prejudice and inappropriate stereotyping. Synod determined that the Church at all levels must speak out against such prejudice, evaluate the provision of sites and consider the appointment of diocesan chaplains to provide pastoral care.

ENCOURAGING YOUTH EVANGELISM (GS 2124A & 2124B)

Introduced by the irrepressible Mark Russell, Synod agreed to affirm the importance of this matter, commended the work of Diocesan Youth Officers (and urged the appointment of more DYOs) and consider fresh ways of reaching young people.

ADVERTISING AND GAMBLING (GS 2125)

Synod strongly supported a proposal to urge HMG to reduce the quantity and pervasiveness of advertising of gambling particularly where this is aimed at children and young people. In addition Synod proposes a levy to support issues arising from gambling and encourage churches to be a focus for support and education

STATE OF THE NATION

Introduced by ++Justin Welby, the debate was focused on supporting the poor and marginalised in society. Although Brexit came into the debate, this was not the principle objective of the motion. Synod endorsed the need for dioceses and parishes to hold in their prayers those with political and executive responsibilities, reaffirmed a commitment to putting the voices of the poor and marginalised at the heart of the nations concerns and called upon the nations leaders to work for the common good at a time of division.

GENERAL & LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

The 'Church Representation and Ministers Measure' (GS 2046BB) reached its final stages and has some important consequences for us:

- Electronic voting – particularly valuable to us given the vagaries of local postal systems!
- There is scope for flexibility in the determination by dioceses of the number of Chaplaincy reps to be elected to Deanery/Archdeaconry Synods.
- For (English) parishes PCC members need a Safeguard Check because Parishes are charities in their own right with consequential legal duties. This does NOT apply to our Chaplaincies. However the principle is sound and + Robert will discuss this with the Safeguarding Team.
- And finally people will only be able to undertake 2 consecutive periods on Deanery (and Archdeaconry in our case) Synods - unless a Chaplaincy Annual Meeting agrees otherwise by a formal resolution. Annual Meetings will need to take a view!

Parochial Fees etc (GS 2116): This proposal relates to 'fees' for weddings and funerals in English parishes for 2020 – 2025. Funeral fees (should there be any?) caused some debate but noting that the approach could be varied in the future, the proposals were agreed subject noting that they could be varied in the future. For us, it sets the level of 'donation' we can seek (which can be subject to 'Gift Aid' if the payee is a UK tax payer).

Appointing Bishops (GS 2120): A proposal to make the appointment of Bishops a little more open by making the voting process a little more transparent (at least to members of the nominations group) did not gain members approval.

David Coulston

27 February 2019

On behalf of 'Team Europe' (who have contributed to this text – as always please forgive any residual 'typos'!!)

House of Bishops: Bishop Robert

*House of Clergy (elected members): Debbie Flach, Giles Williams, Tuomas Makipaa**

*House of Laity** (elected members): David Coulston, Tjeerd Bijl*

** Tuomas was not able to be with us due to personal circumstances*

*** Madeleine Holmes has now moved permanently to the UK and has therefore stood down as a representative for Europe. We would like to pay tribute to Madeleine for her wise counsel and fellowship as a member of Team Europe. We hold Madeleine in our prayers.*

NB this will result in an election for a 'Casual Vacancy' from the laity in due course – please watch this space.

The relevant General Synod website is at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod/agendas-papers/general-synod-february-2019>