

Diocese of Newcastle
GENERAL SYNOD REPORT: 13-15 NOVEMBER 2023

Note by the Revd Claire Robson
on behalf of the Newcastle General Synod Representatives

1. General Synod met in November for an additional session primarily focussed on the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) in next stage of the Living in Love and Faith process. At the beginning of the Synod the Archbishop of Canterbury gave an impassioned Presidential Address reflecting on our membership of the global Church in a time of suffering and calling for a ceasefire to end the continuing bloodshed in Gaza. He called the Church to be a community of reconciliation, non-violence and prayer and asked Synod to stand in silent prayer for the people of Israel and Palestine, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, and for God's Church in the Holy Land. Archbishop Stephen Cottrell then asked us to strive to see Jesus in one another as we address the realities of our divisions, especially those relating to LLE, reminding us that we had previously agreed that there should be no place for homophobia in our Church and encouraging us to follow the example of Jesus who calls us to unity that the world may believe, and to do so in love.
2. Synod approved the introduction of the Redress Measure, setting the process of proper provision for survivors of abuse on a statutory basis. A number of amendments to Standing Orders and the Vacancy in See Committees were also made as well as provision for the Deans of Jersey and Guernsey to join the Vacancy in See Committee for Salisbury following the earlier transfer of the Channel Islands from the Diocese of Winchester to the Diocese of Salisbury.
3. On Monday a presentation was given by Bishop Sarah Mullally followed by speeches by the Bishops of Worcester, Guildford, Southwark and Winchester who hold a variety of positions on the PLF. A lengthy debate on amendments to a motion presented by Bishop Sarah Mullally ensued over the next two days. An amendment from the Bishop of Oxford was agreed, requesting the House of Bishops consider the possibility of permitting stand-alone services for same-sex couples on a trial basis.
4. Amendments calling for a degree of structural differentiation were debated but not carried. Before the final vote Synod heard from the Archbishop of Western Australia who spoke of the Church as a broken body which needs the broken body of Christ to grow into the fullness of his love, encouraging us to make our decisions based on that love, choosing to be faithful and to hold onto one another, reflecting the promises we make in marriage. The Archbishop of the Province of Central Africa spoke of the cost of division within the family of the Anglican Communion and asked us to walk together in loving relationship rather than rushing too hastily into change.
5. The motion, as amended, reads: *'That this Synod, conscious that the Church is not of one mind on the issues raised by Living in Love and Faith, that we are in a period of uncertainty, and that many in the Church on all sides are being deeply hurt at this time, recognise the progress made by the House of Bishops towards implementing the motion on Living in Love and Faith passed by this Synod in February 2023, as reported in GS 2328, and encourage the House to continue its work of implementation, and ask the House to consider whether*

some standalone services for same-sex couples could be made available for use, possibly on a trial basis, on the timescale envisaged by the motion passed by the Synod in February 2023.'

6. Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley has been asked to lead the next stage of the implementation of the LLF process along with the Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow. Further information about how the PLF might be introduced is expected in the coming months along with Pastoral Guidance relating to clergy in same-sex relationships. If the PLF are offered as an 'opt-in' resource to the Church no clergy person or lay minister could be required to use them.