

## Newcastle Diocesan Synod

### General Synod Report – July 2024 Sessions

For this group of sessions your General Synod reps worked over a 5-day period and many different topics were discussed, legislation passed and directions of travel decided upon. This is not every item of business but just an overview of what business we discussed.

#### 1. Address to General Synod

We had an address by our guest the Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Most Rev'd Dr Tapio Luoma. Every Synod a senior ecumenical guest is invited. Archbishop Luoma spoke about the link with Manchester Diocese (in a similar way we have a link with Møre, in Norway). For many years they have run joint confirmation youth camps and we heard about that wonderful exchange for young people.

#### 2. Wisdom of Trust in Church of England

The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich explained in a paper presented to Synod that this was an interim report of the working group with more to follow in February. Prof Veronica Hope Hailey, University of Bristol, gave a lucid account of research thus far which highlighted our problems which are well known; in particular, abuse, with the handling of the aftermath, and LLF discussions. She added that the solutions are known to us and what we must do is comply with our own teaching. While there was some concern that there had not yet been sufficient evidence taken from the Laity, there was much appreciation that the report was based on both theology and academic rigour.

#### 3. Church Funds Investment Measure

Revision and subsequent final drafting and approval.

#### 4. Chancel Repair Measure

Revision and then final drafting and approval.

#### 5. Amendments to the Standing Orders

Relating to Crown Nominations Committee (CNC) members was proposed. The debate on this item looked at a number of amendments relating to the make-up of the Central CNC. The amendments looked at processes, that if one of a 'pair' (of which there are 12) are unable to continue on the CNC for any reason they can nominate a person. They suggested that the CNC would be able to co-opt a GMH representative, as well as allow assistance to be provided if someone with a disability is elected to the CNC. All of the amendments were accepted.

#### 6. Archbishops' Council Budget 2025

Initially we were told that the missional challenge was more important than the financial challenge. Over the short time of debate it became clear that both were challenges requiring attention. We were given statistics showing the decline in church attendance, donors, and the average size of donations over the last 10 years. On the positive side was the increase in take up of the Parish Giving Scheme and a slight increase in attendance since COVID, although not yet to the size of 2019. In discussion of the flow of funds in the church it was noted we had reached a point of needless complication and contraflow so a review to simplify will be

undertaken. It was stated that several dioceses were currently operating on deficit budgets with further shortfall being masked by gapping posts.

It was noted that the Church of England has a lot of funds but these are held very unevenly between parishes and between dioceses. Whilst the individual budget allocations were approved it was noted that Clergy stipends, pensions and retirement housing were all under review as clearly in need of uplift. Many issues in this debate related to individual dioceses as is evident.

There was another debate on a motion from Winchester Diocese to approve an amendment to **Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service)** to state that an office holder is entitled to not less than 36 hours of rest in any period of seven days. This was passed clearly.

We discussed the **Clergy Conduct Measure** – revision stage, this is the Measure that will eventually replace the Clergy Discipline Measure. Likely to be finally approved in February 2025.

## **7. Safeguarding Code of Practice**

The Code of Practice, which had been issued to Synod well in advance of the meeting, was approved and will be brought into use on 31 July 2024. There was healthy discussion on the burden of training required against the burden placed upon victims and survivors; strong support for the latter overruled the former. It was also noted that this is a journey that we have started and it is not over; we need to prevent a culture of ‘done and boxes ticked’. In discussion on workarounds for those with disability or disadvantage in person training was endorsed. This not only helps those who have difficulty online but provides a richer session when done as a group such as the PCC. One PSO was applauded for sitting through all the courses with newly elected/appointed officers in his parish. It was very disappointing to learn that one of the Deaf Anglicans Together had to pay for her assistance to complete the courses.

## **8. Safeguarding Independence Update**

The Synod noted the update from the Response Group. While some wanted to move more quickly to implementing the recommendations of the Wilkinson and Jay Reports, it was agreed to wait until the Feb 25 General Synod to consider the detailed analysis of the structural options under consideration. Included in this will be the definition of safeguarding; recommendations on spiritual abuse; the role of bishops in decision-making on safeguarding cases.; and better understanding of independence in these new structures. For those who are interested there is a report available that sits behind this piece of work available here:

[gs-2364-update-on-safeguarding-independence.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](https://www.churchofengland.org/gs-2364-update-on-safeguarding-independence.pdf)

The legislation called **Abuse Redress Measure** was discussed and this is financial redress and support available for victims and survivors of abuse. This is completely separate from the dealing of complaints within the civil or ecclesiastical courts. It is at revision stage, to return in Feb for final approval.

## **9. Inquiry into Allegations of Abuse Within the Soul Survivor Network**

An inquiry into alleged abuse in the Soul Survivor Network is clearly needed and strongly supported. A private member’s motion was amended by the Bishop of Stepney, lead bishop for Safeguarding, to bring the inquiry into line with emerging safeguarding best practice including listening to survivors and to feedback lessons into the future of Church

safeguarding. It was also noted that we need to learn how to deal with cases involving very powerful leaders and we had a good debate on the sometimes damaging culture of leadership especially in large churches.

#### **10. Living in Love and Faith**

After a lengthy debate, we voted in favour of the proposals to move the work forward to enable stand alone services of 'Prayers of Love and Faith' for same sex couples. The work on 'pastoral guidance' in particular concerning the civil marriage of clergy (in same sex couples) will be brought to General Synod in February 2025. Various other pieces of work will come with this with the idea that 'Issues in Human Sexuality' a document that all clergy have to assent to will be replaced by this new guidance. The detail of what will be in it, will not come to General Synod until next year.

#### **11. Human Dignity of Disabled Children**

We had a fruitful debate on supporting parents who have children with disabilities in a much better way. Support needs to be offered at the point at which parents find out the child may have a disability – often during tests before birth.

#### **12. Foodbanks and Inadequacies in Social Security**

We debated this important topic, and the motion calls on the church, in particular the Lords Spiritual, to work with the government to tackle this important issue.

#### **13. Day of Action for the Persecuted Church**

There was a motion put forward for this to happen. Many people commented that there are days set aside by other denominations, therefore we need to work collaboratively. The importance of offering both prayers and action to support Christians in other parts of the world where they are persecuted was emphasised.

#### **14. Hearing and Encouraging the Voice of Young People**

We heard from a large group of young people in a very inspiring presentation and debate. Young people want to be part of our church, helping us make decisions and able to contribute in all our structures. There was an emphasis on encouraging young people to be a more prominent part of our services (as opposed to being taken away from a service to do children's activities for example). A really good demonstration of how listening to young people can change perceptions of what they want to contribute to.

As always, if you would like any further information or conversations please get in touch. We are offering to come and speak at your Deanery Synods over the next few months – do please ask us, we only come if we are invited!

Lt Gen Robin Brims  
Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth  
Nicola Denyer  
Rev'd Canon Ian Flintoft  
Rev'd Robert Lawrance  
Rev'd Claire Robson