

General Synod report

April 2021, meeting remotely

Royal condolences

- ++Justin led the expression of condolences to the Queen following the death of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on April 9.

Presidential address

- ++Stephen gave the presidential address focusing on racism in the Church of England in the wake of the Panorama programme on the same topic.
- He said: "I'm not standing here to defend our record. Nor am I saying everything will be ok. It won't be, unless we take action. I'm saying that there is racism in the Church and it must be confronted. But no longer by words. We have to do something. We have to become the change we long to see."
- ++Stephen spoke about the Anti-Racism Task Force [which has now reported], its call to urgent action, the Commission which will come out of it, promising that the matter will come back to General Synod "in due course".
- He continued: "It is...a gospel imperative for the Church of Jesus Christ to oppose racism in all its forms, to prophetically call for racial justice, and to challenge the white hegemony which so often still controls the narratives of the world."
- "Racism is a sin. Like all sin it must be confronted with a call to repentance and with the healing, reconciling promise of the gospel."
- And quoting +Graham Tomlin: "It is the gospel, not a secular agenda that drives the Church's vision for racial justice so that the Church genuinely reflects and demonstrates the varied and multi-faceted wisdom and grace of God in Christ."

International religious freedom

- Synod passed a motion on the importance of freedom of religion or belief, urging Christians who enjoy this freedom to advocate for the same freedom for others, including those of other faiths and no faith.
- The motion also called on the government to implement the recommendations of +Truro's independent review of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians, concluded in 2019.

Clergy discipline

- Synod approved the Clergy Discipline Rules 2021, which sets out the rules by which the Clergy Discipline Measure (2003) operates. It covers areas such as efficiency, clarity, active case management and vulnerable witnesses.
- Synod also approved a new Code of Practice in relation to clergy discipline. The Code doesn't have the force of law but compliance with it is considered best practice. One of the things the Code highlights is a procedure for more minor complaints where use of CDM protocols is not warranted.

Crown Nomination Commission

- Synod voted to receive and implement the recommendations of the report *Responsible Representation* which looks at the election process for the Crown Nominations Commission (the body responsible for discerning those to be nominated for appointment as diocesan bishops).
- Presently, there are six permanent members of the CNC, plus the two archbishops and a secretary. When a new bishop is sought, the relevant Diocese sends a further six elected members to represent the 'local' perspective at the CNC. In future, permanent members will be increased from six to twelve. Further, these members will be paired and elected by General Synod. The pairs would themselves decide which of them would serve as part of a particular episcopal selection (or draw lots if they can't agree!).
- In part the thinking behind the change is to encourage diversity and a less sectarian approach to the CNC. To stand the best chance of being elected to the CNC, prospective members, so it is argued, will need to appeal across the Synod spectrum and so will need to stand with someone with different views.
- The chair of the CNC review group, Aiden Hargreaves-Smith, said that it had sought a broader *theological* view of representation, where people look beyond their own particular interests. The preferred model, he said, was "something which recognises that our identity is in Christ and our membership of the Body of Christ. Candidates should represent that body without distinction and be credible representatives of the body as a whole."

Safeguarding

- Synod unanimously approved the draft Safeguarding (Code of Practice) Measure, which strengthens and clarifies the obligation to follow safeguarding guidance.
- The Measure, which needs to be approved by Parliament and then presented for Royal Assent, will apply to a wider range of people who work closely with the Church (known as 'relevant persons') and is a statutory code which must be taken into account at all times. It replaces the existing duty to have 'due regard' to safeguarding guidance which was criticised by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) for lacking clarity and not being well understood.
- Synod also 'took note' of a safeguarding update from the Church's lead safeguarding bishop, Jonathan Gibbs on national projects and work streams in response to recommendations made in the IICSA October 2020 investigation report.

Farewells

- Synod said farewell to three bishops (Salisbury, Bath and Wells and Portsmouth) and the chair of the Business Committee, Canon Sue Booy, The new Business Committee chair is Canon Robert Hammond.

Canon Martin Gainsborough
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