

## General Synod Report February 2024, Lynn Nichol

The General Synod met for 5 days, from Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> February to Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February at Church House, Westminster. The Synod continued to debate Living in Love and Faith, safeguarding, legislative issues as well as issues of national importance and social justice, such as War in Ukraine and Racial Injustice. There were three Private Members Motions debates focusing on bullying of clergy, clergy pensions and removal of divorce as an impediment to ordination. There was also a Diocesan Synod motion on codes of conduct for PCCs.

I hope the following report gives you an insight into the issues discussed and the outcome of each debate. Just to note, where there was a counted vote, either of the whole Synod or by houses, rather than a show of hands, I have given the results in the following order, for/against/abstentions.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to discuss anything. If you would like further details, the following [Link to February 2024 papers and information about sessions and debates](#) on the Church of England website will give you more information.

### Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2024

#### 1. Presidential address

There was a welcome to new members of Synod, followed by a presidential address by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

2. **Report of Business committee** – this provided an explanation of how the agenda is prepared and developed.

**4 Vacancy and See committee regs** – this consolidated several changes brought in over the last few years, including filling vacancies on the Vacancy and See Committee, it aimed to tidy up the rules and making them more ‘user friendly’. **The motion was carried unanimously.**

5. **Parochial Fees** – this motion proposed by London Diocesan Synod requested an amendment to the Parochial Fees Schedule, to enable a small fee to be paid to the PCC for funeral services that take place at Crematoria. **The motion was carried and will come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025.**

6. **Questions - 225 written questions** were submitted prior to Synod and responded to in writing.

Written questions raised by Worcester Reps with answers are below:

**The Revd Canon Claire Lording (Worcester)** to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board: Q113 The Pensions Board says that changes to their retirement housing scheme will not affect existing CHARM residents. Why are those who request to move to more accessible and appropriate housing in later life being told they will not be housed by the Pensions Board but must now move to other providers?

**Clive Mather** to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board: A The proposals set out to enable choice for future retirees about their retirement housing plans do not imply or require any change to the services offered to existing residents. The Board continues to support retirees seeking a move in later life. However, this question highlights some confusion around what that support involves, and I am grateful for the opportunity to set the record straight. When someone approaches the Board to start to explore a move later in life, we will work with them to look at their circumstances, where they want to move to, and what might be available in the area. So great is the demand from those who are newly retiring and will otherwise be homeless, that they will naturally get priority under the CHARM scheme as currently configured. This means that those seeking a move in retirement could have a longer wait if relying on a Church property to be available. For this reason, we will work with the individual to explore options with other providers which might appropriately suit their needs. This might include a move to purpose-built, more accessible accommodation as appropriate. While exploring alternative options is often the quickest route to a move, we may also consider moves to available Church homes. Every situation is different and much depends on the circumstances of the individual involved.

**The Revd Canon Claire Lording (Worcester)** to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board: Q114 How does the Pensions Board propose to support any retiring clergy and their partners who take advantage of the proposed house purchase scheme but, due to a change in circumstances, find they cannot afford a mortgage and lose their homes?

**Clive Mather** to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board: A Today 5 in 6 clergy have their own housing arrangements in place at retirement, including homeowners with mortgages. So the situation described in the question is already a possibility, and indeed one which we have occasionally seen. Where a clergy pensioner household approaches the Board in this unfortunate circumstance, we will always consider what we can do to help. This might include offering support through our Welfare Advice service to look at various avenues of financial help so that the household might remain in their home, or in some circumstances, supporting a move to new accommodation. As part of setting out ideas to enable choice about retirement housing plans, the Board has put forward ideas that might make homeownership a more realistic prospect for those in stipendiary ministry and at retirement who wish to explore it. These ideas have received strong support, particularly from younger clergy. 46 Working with regulated institutions on new products will be essential to ensure that appropriate checks are carried out and advice received, just as for anyone else embarking on homeownership.

**Professor Lynn Nichol (Worcester)** to ask the Chair of the House of Bishops: Q178 In the light of recent legislation banning single use cutlery and food containers within the food industry, will the House of Bishops encourage the elimination of single use plastic in all places of worship, in particular the consumption of cellophane-wrapped flowers and floral foam (a single use plastic, that breaks down to microplastics), many of which are still being used in most churches throughout the UK?

**The Bishop of Norwich** to reply on behalf of the Chair of the House of Bishops: A Local churches are increasingly aware and looking for ways to cut down on single use plastics. The best way I have found to encourage sustainable actions within our churches is to encourage churches to participate in the A Rocha Eco Church scheme. The scheme suggests that churches do not use single-use plastic cups, plates or cutlery, instead steers them towards reusable or at least compostable products. A Rocha have also produced two resources to help churches become more sustainable when it comes to church flowers. This document, Church Flowers and Sustainability, encourages churches to use locally grown, seasonal flowers, gives advice about alternatives to floral foam, and suggests that people ask florists to wrap flowers in brown paper instead of plastic. The second document includes case studies so that people have some real-world examples of how to make the change. The Diocese of Sheffield recently hosted an Eco Church celebration and invited the renowned floral designer Jonathan Moseley to run workshops on sustainable flower displays.

#### **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

1. **Code of Conduct for PCCs.** Chelmsford Diocese Synod requested a review of the need for a code of conduct for PCC members. **The motion was carried** – Bishops 30/1/1 Clergy 128/23/4 Laity 105/52/8.
2. **Safeguarding Independence.**

The Synod watched extensive prerecorded video input from Prof Alexis Jay summarising her recently published report and recommendations to the Church of England. Prof Jay commented that safeguarding is not at the standard expected. This is **not** a reflection on the safeguarding professionals in the Church of England and Diocese, but the overall context they are required to work in. Synod voted to take urgent action by a very large majority. **Motion carried Counted vote of Synod 337/21/20**

3. **Land and Nature**

**The Synod debated and passed a motion on promoting biodiversity on church owned land.** Specifically, in relation to our Diocese it

- a. Requests Diocesan Secretaries to task a named person / committee in their dioceses to create an action plan to achieve the 'Land' section of Eco Diocese at Silver level by 2026.
- b. Requests that Chairs and Secretaries of all diocesan property/finance committees to incorporate nature positive objectives into their asset management policies within the next 6 months.
- c. Calls on parishes with land they manage or influence to create a simple land management plan, with reference to the guidance and examples from Caring for Gods Acre, work towards an increasing level of Eco Church, including the actions in the 'Land' section, and record the biodiversity of their green spaces, through taking part in Churches Count On Nature each year.

**Motion Carried**

4. **Synod Code of Conduct** - The Synod voted to support a motion requesting the business committee to revise the General Synod Members' Code of Conduct and present their proposals to Synod at a future group of sessions. **Motion Carried**
5. **Future of Work** – We debated a motion on the future of working in the context of the development of AI and 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. Amendments were passed that encouraged parishes, diocese and cathedrals to pay the living wage and to explore the impact of AI on women. **Motion Carried.**

### **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2.30**

#### **1. Racial Justice: furthering the implementation of 'from lament to action'**

The Synod debated the need to further embed racial justice in the life of the church and **passed the motion unanimously.**

#### **2. Bullying by lay officers**

The Archdeacon of Blackburn brought a private member's motion asking the Archbishop's Council to address the unacceptable behaviour of bullying and the serious pastoral problems it creates.

**Motion carried by a large majority in the vote of the whole house, 273/15**

#### **3. Love matters: Archbishop's commission on families and households**

The report identifies 4 key priorities:

- Maximise the protective effect of family.
- Ensure that all loving relationships matter and are valued in everything we do.
- Give every child the best possible start in life.
- Tackle the societal issues which limit people's ability to flourish.

and asks for serious work to be undertaken as to how recommendations to Church and Government can be developed and worked out in practice. This report has been described as 'quietly explosive' by a member of the House of Lords, portraying the situation many households find themselves in in the UK today. A summary of the report can be found here. [Love matters: Archbishop's commission on families and households.](#)

**Motion carried in a vote by houses Bishop 23/0/0 Clergy 97/30/19 Laity 97/38/12**

### **Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February**

#### **1. Church Commissioners' Response to links to transatlantic Chattel Slavery**

The Synod heard an update on the work of the Church Commissioners including the new impact investment fund set up to respond to the 'great crime against humanity' of transatlantic chattel slavery. Further information available at this link [Church Commissioners work on links to transatlantic chattel slavery and its investments](#)

#### **2. Parochial Fees Order**

Synod **agreed** the parochial fees order that will come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2027.

#### **3. Chancel Repairs (Church Commissioners Liability)**

This measure aims to reduce the burden on PCCS/Cathedral Chapters and formalise the statutory duties in respect of chancel repairs on land owned by the Church Commissioners. **The motion was carried.**

#### **4. Reappointment of members of the Archbishop's Council**

Two members were reappointed to the Archbishop's Council, Charlotte Cook and Joseph Diwaker.

#### **5. Estates Evangelism**

The Synod were asked to dedicate itself to achieving a worshipping community on every significant social housing estate and specifically from our local perspective called on Diocese to include strategic mission and ministry plans on planting and renewing churches on social housing estates/marginalised communities.

**The motion was carried unanimously 364/0/0**

#### **6. Clergy Pensions**

In a private member's motion Dr Ian Paul requested the Archbishops' Council, the Pensions Board, and the Church Commissioners to work together with dioceses to explore ways in which the level of clergy, pensions and stipends might be improved in a sustainable manner ..and in doing this work to have regard to the findings of the Clergy Remuneration Review and in particular the policy that the National Minimum

Stipend should, in future, on average, increase in line with inflation (as measured by CPIH) subject to three yearly reviews and the need to review this position if high levels of inflation establish themselves.'

**The motion Carried unanimously 382/0/0**

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

The Synod returned to the Living in Love and Faith debate. The Bishop of Leicester moved the motion, 'That this Synod welcome the further work carried out on Living in Love and Faith and the focus on reconciliation and bridge building; and ask that the proposal for a set of commitments through which the whole Church can continue to pursue the implementation of the motions previously passed by Synod on Living in Love and Faith, be brought back to Synod as soon as possible.' The Synod debated LLF over two sessions.

**Unusually, there was then a motion put to Synod from the floor to move to next business (ie not to move to the final vote on the motion).** The proposer suggested that those from different views from across Synod were united in that agreeing that we didn't know the precise commitments that we were being asked to vote on, the debate had been conducted in a good spirit and a vote on the motion may not help the process move forward. **This was carried by a large majority 322/69/20.**

We expect more detailed proposals to come back to Synod in July.

#### **Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

- 1. Church Funds Investment Measure.** This measure proposing that the Central Board of Finance Church of England funds should be converted to Charity Authorised Investment Funds (CAIFs) was passed.
- 2. War in Ukraine and challenge to international order** - The Synod debated a motion calling for continued efforts to establish peace, justice and reconciliation in Ukraine. **Motion Carried – 254/3/2**
- 3. Removal of divorce as an impediment to ordination** Synod voted by a large majority to request that the Archbishops' Council introduce the necessary legislation so that a diocesan bishop or acting diocesan bishop rather than an Archbishop may grant a faculty to remove the impediment to ordination of those who are divorced.
- 4. Farewells** - The Synod said farewell to the Bishop of Durham who is retiring shortly.

Lynn Nichol,  
Diocese of Worcester Representative, House of Laity  
29<sup>th</sup> February 2024