

FEBRUARY 2012 GENERAL SYNOD SESSIONS: INSTANT REPORT

The General Synod met in London on 6th–9th February 2012.

Tuesday, 6th February, the first day of the Synod, was the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty The Queen's accession to the throne and the Archbishop of Canterbury moved a **Loyal Address to the Queen** expressing congratulations of the Synod.

The dates for the 2014–15 sessions of the General Synod were approved—10th–14th February 2014, 11th–15th July 2014, 17th–19th November 2014 (contingency dates), 9th–13th February 2015, 10th–14th July 2015 and 23rd–25th November 2015 (inaugural group of sessions of the new General Synod).

The appointments of 2 people to the Archbishops' Council were approved: Andrew Britton (an existing member) for a further term ending on 30th September 2013 and Miss Rebecca Swinson (a new member with a particular role to bring the voice of young people to the Archbishops' Council) for a term ending on 31st December 2016.

Mrs Sarah Finch, a member for the London Diocese, moved a **Private Member's Motion** expressing concern that the recent so-called "Independent Commission on **Assisted Dying**" convened by Lord Falconer was insufficiently independent to be able to develop proposals which would properly protect the interests of vulnerable and disabled people. The report of the Falconer Commission had been published between the original setting down of this Private Member's motion and the debate in February. The motion was therefore amended accordingly and enhanced by the reference to the positive and robust approach of the response articulated by the Bishop of Carlisle shortly after the Falconer report was published. The full motion was to affirm the intrinsic value of every human life and celebrates the ministry found within the hospice and palliative care movements.

The first day of the Synod ended with "**Questions**",—like Parliamentary Question-Time, - with most of the one hundred questions on the Order Paper being answered orally with the opportunity for supplementary questions in response. The questions are put to those who lead bodies such as the Board of Education, the Council for Christian Unity, the Ministry Division, the Church Commissioners, the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops, etc.

Tuesday 7th February:

Much of the day was given over to **legislative business**.

The Draft Parochial Fees and Scheduled Matters Amending Order 2012 was passed and will now be laid before Parliament. The background here is that the new arrangements for fees were structured under arrangements contained in the Ecclesiastical Fees (Amendment) Measure 2011. The Parochial Fees Order was put before Synod in July 2011 to address fees for 2012 was rejected and further reflection took place on the details of the fees and the matters for which fees could be charged. Now the heating costs and any necessary verger costs will not be included within the standard fee, thus allowing for a degree of local differentiation of circumstances. Memorial services, Services of Prayer and Dedication after a Civil Marriage and Thanksgiving Services for Marriage will now no longer attract a formal legal fee. Local arrangements with the participants will need to be made to cover the costs for such services. Further guidance will be given on these matters to parishes when the details of the new fees are published. Fees approved

will cover the years 2013 and separately 2014. In this debate, an increase in the fees relating to burials and certain other churchyard matters was approved through an amendment by the Synod.

The Draft Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Measure—the Revision Committee Report was received and, in due course, the further drafting of the Measure was approved. It will now go for final drafting and return to Synod for final approval in July 2012. This Measure will make it an offence under the CDM for a cleric “to be a member of or to promote, or express or solicit support for, a political party or other organisation whose constitution, policies, objectives, activities or public statements are declared in writing by the House of Bishops to be incompatible with the teaching of the Church of England in relation to the equality of persons or groups of different races.” Such a Declaration by the House of Bishops will require two-thirds of the House to be present and voting and the General Synod will also need to approve any such Declaration. Amongst other changes, there will now be a duty on someone who is “barred” under a Safeguarding provision to notify the Bishop if they are barred and a failure to give such notification will itself be a CDM offence. A cleric can now be suspended from office if in breach for an offence for which a sentence of imprisonment is passed on him/her or if the cleric is included in a barred list. The draft Measure also made some alterations to other provisions relating to the original Clergy Discipline Measure.

The Draft Diocese in Europe Measure was debated and committed to a Revision Committee. This could give powers to the Church Commissioners to pay out of the General Fund such sums as they think fit for purposes for the development of mission of the Diocese in Europe (which is not presently covered by the Church Commissioners purposes for grants which are made to other Church of England dioceses). The Diocese in Europe is one of the growing Dioceses of the Church of England. The Draft Measure also specifically provided for the Synod of the Diocese of Europe to constitute a Synod for purposes of Article 8 business, eg, the referral of legislation such as the draft Women Bishops Legislation to Diocesan Synods as part of the overall legislative process.

The Draft Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Consequential Revisions Order 2012 was passed. This remedied an anomaly in the original statute introducing the Terms of Service Provisions and draws Team Vicars into the arrangements relating to any other office-holder if a Pastoral Scheme dissolves the benefice, archdeaconry, deanery or an office in a Team Ministry.

Diocesan Synod Motion—A motion from the Chichester Diocese to open up the appointment of Archdeacons to those who are in deacon orders and who are not in priest orders was defeated. (At present, the Canons require that an Archdeacon must have been in priest’s orders for at least 6 years.)

A Presentation was given on the Anglican Alliance for Relief, Development and Advocacy, whose work seeks to serve communities through the efforts of the Anglican Church worldwide.

The Draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure draft Code of Practice formed the subject of a Presentation by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, who had chaired the Working Party on the Draft Illustrative Code of Practice. He then took questions from members of the Synod. The Draft Illustrative Code of Practice indicates how the present draft legislation might work if it were to be passed. However, the final Code of Practice cannot be drawn up until the legislation has completed its legislative journey and it would then need to be approved by the General Synod.

On the Tuesday evening, a joint **Service with the United Reformed Church was held at Westminster Abbey** marking a sense of sorrow and penitence at the “**Great Ejection**” of 1662

when Reformed ministers who were unable to accept the Book of Common Prayer and the requirements of the Church of England as the Established Church were ejected from office. The memory of this occasion still felt within the United Reformed tradition. The service also recalled Anglicans who had lost office earlier in the Cromwellian period.

Wednesday 8th February

In an **Emergency Debate**, the new Bishop of Durham proposed a motion which was unanimously endorsed by the Synod on “**recent violence in Nigeria**”. The motion said “that this Synod, gravely concerned at the desperate plight of Christian communities in parts of Nigeria as described in GS 1861 (the briefing paper which can be found on the Synod website) request the British Government to do all it can to support those in Nigeria seeking to protect religious minorities of all faiths and enable them to practise their religion without fear”

The debate evidenced considerable personal contacts amongst members of the Synod with the Church in different parts of Nigeria.

Draft Women Bishops Legislation

(a) Report on the Reference to the Diocesan Synods of the draft legislation—a “Take Note” debate considered the report back from the Diocesan Synods, where all but 2 Diocesan Synods approved the legislation, but a fair number of Following Motions were passed, most of which sought to improve the “provision” for those unable to receive the ministry of ordained women bishops. During the debate the Archbishop of Canterbury indicated that he would value some space to enable the House of Bishops to look at the manner in which “provision” was made.

(b) On the Wednesday afternoon, **a full debate took place on a Motion from the Diocese of Manchester**—proposed by the Venerable Cherry Vann, the Archdeacon of Rochdale to the effect that “*This Synod calls upon the House of Bishops, in exercise of its powers under Standing Order 60(b), to amend the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure in the manner proposed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York at the revision stage for the draft Measure*”. The Manchester Diocese and several other dioceses had their diocesan synods passed Following Motions in these terms.

The Southwark Diocesan Synod had passed a motion substantially to the effect that *the draft Measure and Canon should be returned to the General Synod for final approval in July without any substantial amendments*. Because of the contradictory nature of these two Following Motions to arise from the Diocesan Synod, they were considered together by the General Synod in one large debate. *The Southwark motion was slightly amended and its amended form received the approval of Synod* in order to amend the main motion in the name of the Manchester Diocese. The full wording of the final motion is posted below.

That this Synod

(a) noting the significant support the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure has received in the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity of diocesan synods, and

(b) desiring that the draft Measure be returned to the Synod for consideration on the Final Approval Stage substantially unamended so that it can be seen if the proposals embodied in

it in the form in which it has been referred to the dioceses can attain the level of support required to achieve Final Approval,

request the House of Bishops in the exercise of its power under Standing Order 60(b) not to amend the draft Measure substantially."

At the point where there was a vote by Houses on whether to adopt the amendment, the voting figures were as follows:

Bishop	For 26	Against 16	Abstentions 5
Clergy	For 128	Against 64	Abstentions None
Laity	For 111	Against 85	Abstentions None

Whilst the amended Southwark motion prevailed with significant majorities at this point (and the Motion was interpreted as giving the House of Bishops a bit of scope to look at the nature of “provision”), some speeches in the debate reflected a substantial amount of concern that the “provision” was not adequate and this was also evidenced in the voting figures. (If these voting figures were translated directly into votes for and against the draft Measure at Final Approval stage in July, then the draft Measure would not achieve the necessary two-thirds majority in all three Houses of the Synod.) Much may yet happen between now and then summer, but the House of Bishops will have much to consider when they have their meeting in May.

The final Motion - in the form amended by the amended Southwark motion - was passed on a show of hands without an actual count of the Synod members.

In the debate, the Archbishop of York again pushed for the use of some “co-ordinate jurisdiction” to enhance the “provision”.

The Report of the Standing Orders Committee—the Standing Orders Committee had reflected on recent concern in the Synod over the provisions for choosing a Chair for the Business Committee of the Synod. As a result, they had decided to recommend that the Chair of the Business Committee be elected by and from the Synod (rather than being appointed from a small number of people on the Archbishops’ Council). This election proposal was approved.

Thursday 9 February

The Synod took note of the **Report of the Revision Committee looking at additional Eucharistic Prayers for use when a significant number of children are present**, eg, at a School Eucharist. It approved the 2 proposed additional Eucharistic Prayers. These have yet to complete the Synodical process before they can be authorised for use. Copies of the prayers can be found on the General Synod section of the Church of England website.

The Draft Women Bishops Legislation returned for a further debate. The Steering Committee reported on some **further final drafting** of the text (subject to anything undertaken by the House of Bishops in due course). In the debate, some of the same tensions which had surfaced in the major debate on the previous afternoon were again here. Even on this procedural **“Take Note debate”**, a division (ie a vote) by Houses was requested. However, the motion passed. (Ahead of the debate, the Synod had to be informed of another technical point, namely, that as the prerogative interests of Her Majesty and the Prince of Wales were affected by this draft

legislation, their consents were necessary before final drafting stage. The Bishop of London reported their due consents.)

The Synod heard a **Presentation** from the Bishop of Sheffield concerning **Higher Education Funding Changes**. These would impact on the provision of training for clergy and certain lay ministers, and if steps were not taken to address these changed circumstances, the Church of England would face significant additional cost in providing such training. Steps are being taken to mitigate the costs and attempts are being made to find a shared authorising body for necessary training rather than—as at present—having different schemes and courses authorised through different universities and educational providers. Assurances were given that having a shared authorising body would not mean that all curricula would be identical, but that scope remained for the particular emphases of the different churchmanship/theological traditions of the Church of England to be retained.

Professor Anthony Berry moved a **Private Member's Motion** relating to the **Reform of the House of Lords**. Since the motion was first put down for support from Synod members, events had moved on and the Archbishops had made a submission to Joint Parliamentary Committee on the draft Bill on the House of Lords Reform and a group involving certain other individuals from the different Houses of the General Synod had been working to continue to engage with Parliamentary authorities over possible reforms. The Synod approved the motion supporting the submission and the continuing engagement of this synodical group in the process and looking for a further update be brought to the February 2013 General Synod sessions. A key concern was to ensure that any reform which comes about should meet the proper needs for a Second Chamber in Parliament. The continuing presence of some Lords Spiritual in that Second Chamber is believed also to be important, but to reduce the number of those Lords Spiritual from the present total of 26 would have significant implications for how the Bishops could sustain their ministry in their own dioceses as well as sustain their ministry to the House of Lords.

The last main business for the Synod was the debate on **Healthcare and the Church's Mission**—led by the Bishop of Bristol. This debate took place in the context of the Government's attempts to reform the National Health Service. The Synod's motion affirmed the ministry of all who promote health and wholeness in body, mind and spirit and recognised the particular roles of chaplains in the NHS. It called upon the Government to apply as a test to any proposed changes to the NHS "whether they are best calculated to secure the provision throughout the country of effective and efficient healthcare services provided free at the point of delivery and according to clinical need". It commended the work of mission agencies and the networks of the Anglican Communion "in embodying the Church's contribution to health and wholeness and promoting fairer sharing of health resources worldwide."

At the end of the Synod sessions, **the Archbishop of Canterbury** gave a **Farewell** speech in honour of **the Bishop of Chichester**, the Right Reverend John Hind, who is due to retire. Synod members were reminded of the Bishop's considerable contributions to the theology, especially in an ecumenical context and in an international context. The Synod was also informed of the Bishop's multi-lingual expertise and of the fact that he was a black belt in judo!