

## **General Synod, Westminster, 10th - 13rd February 2020**

For an overview of the Group of Sessions: [Agenda Papers](#).

This was my penultimate group of sessions as a Synod Representative and hence my final one in Church House. So, having travelled regularly to this building for 25 years, it was going to be four days of some mixed emotions.

Every Quinquennium has its flavour - we have had one on refreshing liturgy and restructuring the Church of England governance (Turnbull Report) (1995-2000), one where we continued to try to restructure the Church of England governance (Bridge Report) and began to discuss the fault lines within the Anglican Communion (Windsor Report) (2000-2005), at least two on Women Bishops (2005-2015) and the current one (2015-2020) has been dominated by how our church struggles with Human Sexuality. The last three years have been preoccupied with the fall out from the defeat in February 2017 of the House of Bishops' Report on Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations. This group of sessions came shortly after the release of [guidance](#) from the House of Bishops on Heterosexual Civil Partnerships.

### **Monday 10th**

Synod always starts with the same pattern of activity. So it was that we had Opening Worship, Introduction and Welcomes, Business Committee Report on the Agenda and a Presidential Address. A recording of the debates is available on the Church of England [website](#).

The House of Bishops came in for some criticism of its guidance in both the report on the Agenda and later in questions.

The Archbishop of Canterbury laid out the significance of what will be happening from 2020 onwards in relation to the Church of England, the Anglican Communion and elsewhere by talking about the elections to General Synod, the Lambeth Conference and the church's involvement in COP 2020 in Glasgow. He also spoke of the need for the whole Church to engage with the materials shortly to be published by the Living in Love and Faith project ([LLF](#)).

The reason for the failure of the February 2017 report was that it was going to produce a set of teaching resources without reflecting seriously enough on the change of culture into which it was attempting to speak. The LLF materials are considered as Learning resources to aid that reflection. The intention here is to spend a year to do this.

Two major items preceded Questions.

First we started a Measureathon! Normally we take a relaxed approach to deal with legislation with First Consideration, Revision Stage, Final Drafting and Approval being taken over up to three groups of Sessions. This time we wanted to get through a whole measure in one Group of Sessions! Unheard of!

About seven years ago there was a breakdown between the Bishop of Winchester and the Channel Islands over the suspension of the Dean of Jersey. The Islands subsequently have been, temporarily, under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Dover. The measure being put forward was to transfer jurisdiction 'permanently' to the Bishop of Salisbury. There were

many sensitivities expressed during the debates over the next few days (including those who were concerned over the fact that the Islands had yet to enact the Women Bishops Legislation).

The debate was introduced by the former Bishop of London who gave us the best quotable phrase of the Quinquennium. He said he was now in the "Springtime of my Senility". Always good to start by lightening the tone. However, with good grace from all concerned, the measure was pushed through to Final Approval by close of play on Thursday.

The other important item was to approve the Act of Synod following the Covenant for Clergy. This was consequential on the Covenant being passed last July and will mean that Covenant will now be proclaimed in every Diocesan Synod. The text of the Covenant can be accessed [here](#).

Questions (and many of the answers and most of the supplementaries) were predictable. We had the record number of questions and unsurprisingly not all were able to be answered in the time available. For those suffering insomnia questions and answers can be accessed [here](#). For the bold the recording previously mentioned includes the supplementaries and their answers.

## Tuesday 11th

Today was varied and although it included lots of exciting legislation and governance matters (Cathedrals Measure, Channel Islands Measure, Church Representation Rules and Standing Orders) the interesting debates were threefold.

First up was the one on Deanery Synod Term Limits. You may recall in my report of last February that there was a lot of unrest about the proposal to limit, by default, the number of consecutive terms for Parochial Representatives to Deanery Synod to two (with an opt out provision). To prevent this from happening we would have had to reject all the proposals in the Draft Church Representation and Ministers Measure. There were consequences to that which meant that those who were opposed to the Term Limits change graciously allowed the Measure to be enacted provided that the question of Term Limits could be brought back for possible revocation or revision as early as possible.

This was the subject of a very large consultation exercise which resulted in the Synod being offered the opportunity to agree to a change whereby the limits would be an opt in provision that an APCM could vote for rather than it being imposed.

The next was a presentation followed by an innovative question and answer session on the LLF project and the work of the Pastoral Advisory Group (**PAG**). This was very informative but the choice of people to come and ask questions of the panel led to the divisions in our church to be made highly visible.



You will notice that I have included here a picture of the "in the round" question and answer panel. I was able to do this because the rules for taking photographs in the chamber have been relaxed.

The last piece of excitement for the day was the debate on Windrush and its Legacy. This debate was a necessary opportunity for the church to apologise wholeheartedly for its

institutional racist past and present. The debate gave rise to many anecdotes about dreadful treatment to people of colour in the early days following Windrush. It was peppered with additional stories from recent years which showed that attitudes still need to change radically. The unconscious bias within the church is still ever present and needs to be eradicated.

### Wednesday 12th

Wednesday started with a magnificent Bible Study led by Isabelle Hamley, Chaplain to Justin Welby. Taking her text from 1 Peter 3 she took us through the seemingly countercultural words to demonstrate that the text was a levelling up of the relationships between men and women rather than the reinforcing of stereotypes.

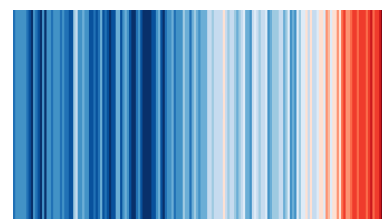
The rest of the day was packed with important issues. Having said that there was so much packed into the morning that many members suffered reduced energy levels in the afternoon. This was a pity as the issues relating to Paupers' Funerals, Children & Youth Ministry and legislation about Diocesan Boards of Education had reduced attendance.

The morning was given over to the Church's response to the IICSA recommendations on Safeguarding and Climate Change.

Bishop Peter Hancock, Bath & Wells, has been lead Bishop for Safeguarding for four years. During this period the amount of activity has been immense and this is now beginning to be recognised by the survivor community. This was Bishop Peter's swansong as he passes the baton to the Bishop of Huddersfield who, like Bishop Peter, has a heart for solving the problem. In a very moving speech, Justin Welby acknowledged the contribution of Bishop Peter by reading a letter from a survivor who thanked him for all his work.

Needless to say, the church accepts the recommendations of IICSA and has agreed to give the green light to proper reparation (including funding) to the survivors. There will be further waves of revelations regarding past cases. Many of the details of these are already in the public domain and will reignite concerns about the practices of the church. It is good to hear that the actions taken recently are beginning to be recognised but it is clear that our church is not complacent as it gears up to the next phase of activity.

The biggest shock of Synod was the amendment of the proposal for dealing with Climate Change to bring the date by which the church would go for Zero Carbon to 2030. This sent shock waves through the proposer's camp. Funnily enough the environmental activists have been angling for a positive response for years. When they asked us to approve 2045, the Synod responded by saying not fast enough. The picture (above) comes from the Climate Lab Book website and shows Annual global temperatures from 1850-2017.



This debate coincided with the Church of England Pensions Board's announcement of an allocation of £600m to a new **FTSE TPI Climate Transition Index** which reduces its carbon intensity by almost 50%. (TPI - Transition Pathway Initiative.)

The only other item of note to get people excited was, strangely, the allocation of Seats for the forthcoming General Synod Elections in the autumn. Here there was a move to increase the percentage of seats allocated to the Canterbury Province to allow for the inequality

(inequity?) between the representation per synod members. This was resisted. In reality we need, probably, to look at the distribution of Dioceses between the provinces to lance this particular boil which comes up on a quinquennial basis.

### **Thursday 13th**

We had two more debates which looked at poverty. The first related to the effectiveness of mission to disadvantaged communities. The second bemoaned the the impact legal aid reform on disadvantaged people and called on the government to alleviate this impact.

We had a relatively lively debate on the election rules for General Synod which highlighted the concerns some had over the move to electronic voting.

The Elections this year coincide with those for the Deaneries. Because of this there is a danger that many Deaneries will not have a timely meeting in advance of the elections and that new electors will have little or no knowledge of the major issues. I suggested to Synod that, perhaps, Deaneries could invite new Deanery Synod members to their final Synod meeting of the current triennium as a taster for their new role.

We finished with some farewells. The most notable absentee from this was the Archbishop of York, Sentamu, who had said that he had wanted to have nothing said about him. Justin Welby said that his absence made it easier to say what he was going to say! Let the reader understand. He was able to include the fact that Sentamu's middle name meant that he was ideally suited to being Archbishop of York as "Mugabe" was "E ba Gum" backwards.



### **July**

Our next meeting, and my last, will be in York. As the last of the quinquennium it will be wrapping up an awful lot of legislation that it will be necessary to enact before the new Synod starts. The biggest non-legislative issue will be LLF (again).

### **November**

In the autumn the bright shiny new Synod will be formed and a new quinquennium, post the Lambeth Conference, will be started. The Church of England will have embarked on a year long examination of the LLF material and will be beginning to come to terms with the push to reduce our Carbon Footprint to Net Zero by 2030.

### **Tim Hind**

### **Bath & Wells**