

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT – JULY 2023 SESSIONS

Like the February sessions, this meeting was dominated by one subject, but unlike the earlier gathering, which was conducted in a spirit of courtesy and politeness despite sharp disagreement, it was thoroughly unpleasant, with rancour and hostility very much present. This included an accusation by one member that the Archbishop of Canterbury had lied and claims from others that there was a conspiracy to keep members uninformed about what was going on at the heart of the Church of England.

The decision taken by the Archbishops' Council shortly before the Synod met to terminate the contracts of two out of the three members of the Independent Safeguarding Board was inevitably the main subject which members wished to discuss. But with the need to include items which had had to be postponed from the February meeting, together with other topics which had to be decided at this meeting, there was insufficient time to give this matter the examination which many members expected. Such time as could be given was then spent in dealing with repeated points of order aimed at giving the two former members, who were seated in the public gallery, an opportunity to speak to the Synod. This was eventually allowed, but a decision by the Synod not to pass any kind of resolution as contended for by those who felt most strongly that the Church had acted wrongly provoked more fury. One member of the Synod resigned on the spot, and I suspect that we have not yet heard the last of this matter.

Despite this unpleasantness we did take positive action in a number of areas.

- We agreed to provide opportunities for young people to play a greater role in church governance at all levels, local and national.
- We took the first steps in producing a new Clergy Code of Conduct as a means of replacing the current Clergy Disciplinary Measure.
- We approved the use, by those parishes which wished to do so, of electronic service registers.
- We considered the contribution which faith was making to the rehabilitation of offenders.
- We approved changes to the governance of the church at a national level.
- We considered on a preliminary basis possible changes to the Mission and Pastoral Measure.;
- We discussed ways in which the Church could respond even more effectively to the climate emergency, with specific mention being made of our diocese's policy of spending money on capital works to improve the carbon footprint of our vicarages.
- We agreed to trial in a region to be determined the removal of all parochial fees for marriages with a view to establishing the potential for extending this policy throughout the country.

The Synod next meets in November, and to my mind will have to continue to meet three times each year if the present amount of business is to be properly considered. We have to get out of the present cycle of not scheduling sufficient time to deal with topics which are extremely important to a large number of members.

My colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions which members may wish to raise.

Robert Perry