

## General Synod Report for Portsmouth Diocesan Synod



*Church House, Westminster*



*A General Synod debate (in person!)*

As in most areas of life, these have been strange times for General Synod.

Since Diocesan Synod last met in June 2020, General Synod has not been able to carry out most of its business. But we are hoping to be able to hit the ground running for the November 2020 session, with business carried out remotely.

There have been two main legal developments since May 2020 (the first came into force just before the last Diocesan Synod meeting):

- The **General Synod of the Church of England (Postponement of Elections) Order 2020**: This, in essence, postponed the dissolution of the current General Synod from 2020 to 2021, and provided for the elections to be held in the autumn of next year, instead. An amendment order has also been passed, but this does not affect the main thrust of the Order.
- The **General Synod (Remote Meetings) (Temporary Standing Orders) Measure 2020**: General Synod could previously only pass legislation by a vote of members physically present at the session. This is an important piece of new legislation designed to enable General Synod to carry out all its functions by meeting remotely. It does this by giving the power to amend the Standing Orders so that most of the business of Synod can be carried on “*without all of the persons, or without any of the persons, being together in the same place*”. It was passed by a special meeting of Synod on 24 September 2020, has been swiftly through Parliament, and on 22 October 2020 the motion was passed that it be “*presented to Her Majesty for Royal Assent*”. At time of writing, Royal Assent has not yet been given, but this should be something of a formality.

## So, what has General Synod done since the last meeting of Diocesan Synod?

A lot of the governance business relating to the work of General Synod is carried on through the House of Bishops, the Archbishops' Council, through reports, steering groups, committees *etc, etc*. This has very much continued throughout 2020. As far as the business of General Synod itself is concerned, however, the key milestones have been as follows:

- The **July 2020 residential sessions in York**: these were necessarily cancelled. They were replaced by a Zoom meeting (which had no powers to pass legislation) on **Saturday 11 July 2020**. This was a one-day meeting, which included worship, reflection, addresses from both Archbishops, and question time.



Archbishop of Canterbury

Archbishop of York

A Zoom delegate...

- We were later invited to present our views electronically as to whether we were broadly content with proposals for legislation to enable remote meetings. The results were overwhelmingly in favour.
- A short Zoom meeting of the House of Laity on **8 September 2020** heard from the new Archbishop of York about the work he is leading on Vision and Strategy, of particular importance in light of the consequences of the current pandemic. It was also able to discuss the processes for passing the proposed Measure. (*The House of Bishops and House of Clergy/Convocations made their own meeting arrangements*)
- A socially-distanced special meeting of General Synod, in person, took place at Church House in Westminster on **24 September 2020**. It was designed to be (and was) *just* quorate, most members of Synod agreeing not to attend. The only business was to pass the General Synod (Remote Meetings) (Temporary Standing Orders) Measure 2020. This was passed overwhelmingly in all three Houses, with just two abstentions, and no votes against.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod/agendas-papers/general-synod-september-2020>

## What comes next?

Assuming Royal Assent for the Measure, and that the necessary changes to Standing Orders are prepared (neither of which should be a problem), there will be a **full programme of business, by Zoom, on 23-25 November 2020.**

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At the time of writing, the timetable has been published, but not the various supporting papers. The sessions include, for example:

- Ratifying the changes to Standing Orders
- Presidential address, and discussion in break-out rooms
- Discussion on Vision and Strategy
- Archbishops' Council Budget 2021 and Apportionment
- Presentation and debate on Safeguarding
- Question time
- **Legislative Business:** much routine business, and also:
  - Enactment of Amending Canon No. 40 (Religious Communities)
  - Cathedrals Measure – Final Drafting and Final Approval
  - First Consideration of Measure amending Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016
  - Diocesan Boards of Education Measure – Final Drafting and Final Approval
  - Regulations under section 2, Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 20[21] (national ministry register)

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