General Synod July 2018

This year we had a mixture of debates some of which focussed on internal affairs and some which spoke to the larger world. And of course, some did both.

Into the latter category fell the session on Saturday morning on Safeguarding. An issue of huge importance for the church internally, but also, we were all conscious of the world outside and especially the survivors who were watching us. There was a presentation before the debate itself. This was given jointly by Dr Sheila Fish of the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and Jo Kind of the survivors group MACSAS. She began by telling is that she had volunteered for MACSAS for about 7 years and had been abused as a young adult while working for the C of E. She told us that the Synod needed the expertise of survivors and that inviting survivors to address the Synod was a step in the right direction. She spoke of the impact of abuse on her wellbeing, meaning and purpose. She asked us to note the courage that it takes to report the harm done to us and the courage it takes to come here to the representative body of the Church that caused us harm. MACSAS exists to give immediate support to help people survive the process of reporting abuse to the Church, for many survivors feel or are made to feel like they are the problem. She told us that a change of culture is needed within the church, to ensure that the Church was a safe place. She asked us to keep our focus on people and peoples needs and instead of turning away from survivors walk towards us. The House of Bishops Safeguarding group have proposed to run 3 workstreams covering: the improvement of support to those abused; a more robust approach to clergy selection and disciplinary proceedings; and independent oversight. These were all agreed by Synod. A related issue of a more centralised approach to Safeguarding did not gain much support largely on the grounds of the perceived need to keep delivery at a more local diocesan level (and indeed good safeguarding is really delivered at a local parish level).

This was a deeply uncomfortable and disturbing morning as we heard comments and stories about the process and the survivors and were led to understand that although much has changed there is still a very long way to go. I make no apology for spending this much time on this one debate and ask you all to consider carefully what you know about safeguarding processes in your own parish and how much attention you pay to ensuring that they are upheld appropriately.

**Workshops and seminars – including Human Sexuality:** The work of the House of Bishops is continuing on the topic of human sexuality and the next tranche of papers will not be before 2020. Though not formally part of the Synod’s business, an important feature of the York session was a series of workshops/seminars on Saturday afternoon which brought members up to speed with the initial progress on related research into biblical, theological and biological matters. Please continue to pray for those involved in this complex task.

There were also some very good seminars on evangelism including the launch of a new resource: ‘Talking Jesus’ available at [www.talkingjesus.org](http://www.talkingjesus.org/)

**Environmental Issues:** Two papers were considered on Sunday afternoon:

* The Church of England’s approach to active investment putting pressure on companies to improve their environmental impact is having a real impact and has been applauded by the UN and other agencies. The first matter debated and agreed focussed on further sharpening up the church’s approach to ethical investment particularly in regards of fossil fuel producers.
* The second debate sought to introduce measures to quantify how well the church is progressing towards meeting its Carbon Dioxide emission targets set some time ago (a reduction of 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050). In the event this was adjourned, for further consideration of the methodology and related costing, for discussion in February 2019.

**Nuclear Weapons:** The general tenor of the debate was not supportive of the possession of nuclear weapons and Synod resolved by a large majority to urge the UK Government to progress nuclear non-proliferation etc issues with greater urgency and clarity. There were many passionate speeches on the subject mostly opposing nuclear weapons and some good inputs from local speakers such as +Chris, The Chaplain of the Fleet and Lt Gemma Winterton representing the Armed Forces synod who urged us to remember the human cost involved in manning the submarines that carry the weapons that are there for our protection.

**The (UK) National Health Service:** Synod has urged the government to set up a Royal Commission on the UK’s health and social care needs and it resolved to call upon the UK Government to implement the findings of House of Lords Select committee report of April 2017 with particular regard to: care in transposing urban models to rural contexts; the adequacy of social care as population ages, and recruitment of health professionals.

**Report of the Cathedrals Working Group:**This group has been looking into governance issues in Cathedrals prompted particularly following issues at Peterborough and Exeter (NB there is no truth in the media stories that the Church is looking to sell-off these two Cathedrals!). The report makes a series of recommendations (all accepted by synod) to improve the governance and management of cathedrals in order to ‘sustain and enhance the vital role that cathedrals play across the landscape of the Church’s mission and public life’. The recommendations cover: overall governance systems (and the need to separate overarching matters from day to day management), improving leadership and management, more robust financial arrangements, better consideration of issues relating to major building projects and improved safeguarding (essentially to be aligned with that of the relevant diocese). Here in Portsmouth our Cathedral governance structures are in the process of being modified to reflect these changes

**Legislative issues:** A considerable number of legislative issues were considered. They are all at differing stages in the synodical process with only one (the first listed below) being fully completed. Many of the documents have emerged consequent upon previously passed ‘enabling’ legislation which should in due course reduce the timescale for enactment.

**Ecumenical Relations Measure (and Canon 38):** This is aimed at providing a greater degree of coherency in application and now embraces all other Trinitarian Christian denominations This will now be presented to Her Majesty for adoption.

**The Church Representation Rules:** The ‘rules’ have been updated and now provide greater flexibility.

The ‘Rules’ now enter the next stage of the General Synod process – it will be some time before they can be enacted and used.

**Ministers Measure:**Of particular interest is the introduction of flexibility in respect of the requirements for the reading of Morning and Evening prayer. This was agreed by Synod and the Canon will now undergo final drafting.

**Canon 40 (Religious Communities):**This was an initial paper seeking consider the questions of ownership, support, facilitation and safeguarding issues in Religious Communities.

**Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure:** This seeks to tidy to several uncontroversial issues – but of particular interest is more flexibility afforded to the Church Commissioners in respect of funds available through Archbishop’s Council and making it simpler for a family to ask someone other than the local incumbent to take a funeral service (eg at a crematorium). Many detailed amendments were rejected by synod and this issue now passes to the ‘Revisions Committee’.

**Church Property Measure:**Of primary interest to UK dioceses, this simplifies matters associated with disposal of property etc. It now passes to the Legislative Committee.

**Church of England Pensions Measure:** No changes of principle, this consolidates a considerable amount of procedural documentation. It too passes to the Legislative Committee.

**Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Measure:** This is a mixed bag of measures all aimed at simplifying current documentation including the national clergy register. Nothing particularly noteworthy – it now passes to the Revision Committee.