

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT

23 – 24 April 2021

Once again the General Synod met via zoom.

After praying the Office and welcoming new members of Synod a motion was introduced by The Most Rev'd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, conveying to 'Her Majesty the heartfelt sympathy of the whole of General Synod on the death of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, assuring Her Majesty the honour in which his memory will be held by them and of their prayers for Her Majesty and all the Royal Family.'

The Most Rev'd Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York, gave a presidential address. He spoke about racial justice and diversity. He recalled the aftermath of the Brixton Riots (10 – 12 April 1981) where people of colour were often regarded with suspicion. This, he said, was for him an awakening of what racism could be. Diversity seemed to be a theme which entered into the debate on the review of the election process to the Crown Nominations Commission (the commission which 'elects' bishops to dioceses). There are various amendments to the rules making the whole process more democratic. The review considered ways in which the CNC could be truly representative and used three key themes: -

- (i) the role of trust and accountability in the shaping of our common life and creating confidence in a delegated body; and the responsibilities of those chosen as to their responsibilities as representatives
- (ii) the cultural context and the inclusion of different voices and perspectives
- (iii) the discernment and responsibilities of the electorate as they cast their votes

The commission looked at the differing social groups within our Church and wanted to make it more inclusive in the elections of members to the CNC. Inevitably not everyone would be able to agree with all the new rules recommended and so an amendment to 'receive' rather than 'endorse' the report was passed.

We were told that 'cultural change' is a necessity put upon us all in order to change racism, ensure sexual and other forms of abuse are detected and dealt with, and 'religious freedom' can be ensured.

We received a report on Safeguarding – a response to the recommendations made in the IICSA October 2020 report. It advocated greater transparency, justice for all victims and all involved, and independent oversight. Much has been achieved but there is still a long way to go. The Diocesan Safeguarding Officers would be able to make decisions independently from the bishops. An Independent Safeguarding Board is in the process of being set up. A redress scheme for victims and survivors has begun. Other work responding to the IICSA report is ongoing. It will mean further training for all in positions of responsibility.

Other business included a debate on International Religious Freedom. We heard from various speakers with experience of religious persecution around the world. His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, the first Coptic Archbishop of London, spoke of the execution of a 62-year-old Coptic Christian by ISIS and other persecutions. He said that we must create freedom for

others. The motion called upon the government to implement the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's independent review and to strengthen its commitment to upholding and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief for all in its foreign, international development defence and trade policy. Throughout the debate we were reminded of the persecution of Christians in the West as well as further afield.

Various pieces of legislation were presented in revision stages including safeguarding, clergy discipline and reform of the Church of England Pension Board.

The Business Committee are to meet on 24 May when, amongst other things, they will decide on whether we will be meeting in person at the next Synod planned for 9 – 13 July in York. We shall see . . .!

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Ely Diocese