

## **GENERAL SYNOD, JULY 2024 – Summary of Main Items**

The July 2024 meeting of General Synod took place at York University from Friday 5<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July. It was a very busy meeting, combining “big topics” with legislative detail and several motions from Diocesan Synods. The papers we discussed can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/groups-sessions-information/general-synod-july-2024>, though once again be warned that the filing structure is quite daunting.

To my mind there were four key areas considered at the meeting, although it is likely that colleagues will think otherwise.

The first was the presentation of **GS2356 ARCHBISHOPS’ COUNCIL BUDGET 2025** [Saturday morning] by the Chair of the Finance Committee. This was a clear and thorough presentation on national finances and apportionment, but rightly set in the context of the wider challenges faced by the Church. This began with the data on attendance, showing that the Church of England has halved in size over the last 14 years, and pointing out the consequent impact on finances. Average weekly attendance in every diocese since 2015 is down by between 25% and 40%. More than 20% of our 15,000 churches have weekly attendance of less than 20. In some dioceses parish share is down by over a third since 2019. The number of regular givers has fallen by 30% over the last decade... There has also been a decline in the number of ordinands and the overall picture is increasingly unsustainable. The consolidated deficit across the dioceses in 2024 is doubling from last year to a total of £60m. The Chair of the Finance Committee was clear “*Our principal crisis is missional*”. As a church we need to refocus on mission and evangelism, underpinned by prayer for our nation to return to Christ. We need to be teaching that giving is part of Christian discipleship. And we need to work towards a time when today’s ministry is funded by today’s giving.

Safeguarding has figured significantly in recent Synod meetings, and this group of sessions was no exception. In February 2024, an independent report, The Future of Church Safeguarding, authored by Professor Alexis Jay, had proposed the establishment of two independent bodies: one responsible for delivering all Church safeguarding activities (currently managed by dioceses), and the other responsible for providing scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding. A ‘Response Group’ provided an update to this Synod, **GS2364 UPDATE ON SAFEGUARDING INDEPENDENCE** [Monday morning] but did not make firm recommendations in relation to the Jay Report, especially given concerns in some quarters that moving safeguarding activities from the dioceses into an independent charity was an untested model. A fuller report with firm recommendations was promised for February 2025. A Private Member’s Motion calling for a further independent KC-led inquiry into alleged abuse in the Soul Survivor network was also considered **GS2361 REVIEW OF ABUSE AT SOUL SURVIVOR** [Monday morning]. This was substantially amended by the lead bishop for safeguarding (+Stepney) with General Synod agreeing to consider recommendations from a KC-led inquiry which had already been launched, albeit with a narrower remit. This report was published in September 2024. Finally, there was progress towards a redress scheme for victims and survivors of church-related abuse, with Synod completed its revision stage of the relevant Measure

**GS2325 ABUSE REDRESS MEASURE** [Tuesday morning]. Inevitably, the recent publication of the Makin report will bring about more consideration of Safeguarding at our next meeting in February 2025. As a church we must continue to strive to improve our response to Safeguarding and we all have a part to play in that – let no-one deny the need to complete safeguarding clearance or training, it matters, lives are at risk!

Another key area was the **REPORT FROM THE WISDOM OF TRUST WORKING GROUP – GS2354 TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS WITHIN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND** [Friday afternoon]. This is still a work in progress and was seeking the views of Synod for progressing the work further. The report was frank about the situation we find ourselves in the Church of England:

“8. *However, the major and traumatising breaches of trust that have been of deep concern to the General Synod and many, inside and outside the Church, have brought profound and sustained breakdowns of trust into the life of the Church. It is in these areas that distrust is most profoundly evident. Racism, sexual abuse and issues relating to Living in Love and Faith all deeply affect the life and witness of the Church. The major breaches that have occurred have different dynamics but compound people’s suffering through the incidents themselves, and the way the Church may inadequately or inappropriately handle and respond to them.*”

Various suggestions were made of ways trust could be improved, but matters are unlikely to improve, whilst we continue to see behaviour in some areas that creates a lack of trust, conflict and unnecessary challenge throughout the Church

The fourth key area was Living in Love Faith, another of our regular topics. In July this comprised two items – a **PRESENTATION WITH QUESTIONS** [Saturday afternoon] and a debate **GS2358 LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH** [Monday afternoon]. After the debate Synod passed a motion expressing support for the direction of travel proposed by the House of Bishops on LLF. The votes in favour of the motion were, as in previous LLF votes, very narrow: roughly 52% in favour and 48% against in the Houses of Clergy and Laity. The majority was slightly larger in the House of Bishops, but 17 bishops, some 43% of those present and voting, either voted against the motion or abstained, underlining the controversial and divisive nature of the House of Bishops’ proposals. These proposals include the bishops commending (probably from the time of the next Synod in February 2025) the use of “standalone” services of blessing for same-sex couples. The motion also asked for further theological work to be done by February 2025 on “...the nature of doctrine, particularly as it relates to the doctrine of marriage”. Many in the House of Bishops continue to maintain that standalone services of blessing for same-sex couples are not a change in the doctrine of the church and the lack of any sight of the legal advice in this matter continues to remain a significant part of the trust deficit in the Church of England, along with other issues that came to light both in the presentation and the debate – both worth watching on *YouTube* if you have time

In other items - There were the usual debates covering important national and global issues. Synod passed a diocesan motion from Liverpool **GS2359 HUMAN DIGNITY OF DISABLED CHILDREN** [Sunday afternoon] affirming the human dignity of disabled children and calling on churches to provide pastoral support to parents who have been

told that their child may be born with a disability. Synod passed a diocesan motion from Sheffield **GS2351 FOODBANKS AND INADEQUACIES IN SOCIAL SECURITY** *[Monday mornings]* noting the provision by many churches of food banks and calling on bishops to engage with the Government on 'serious inadequacies in the social security system', including the current two-child benefit limit. Synod also endorsed a diocesan motion from London **GS2365 NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER AND ACTION FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD** *[Tuesday morning]* highlighting the plight of persecuted Christians and calling for the creation of a National Day of Prayer and Action for the Persecuted Church around the World. This follows on from a Lichfield Diocesan Motion a few years back.

A draft of the new Clergy Conduct Measure, replacing the discredited Clergy Discipline Measure, received first consideration IN **GS2311 CLERGY CONDUCT MEASURE** *[Saturday afternoon]*. A motion calling on the Archbishops' Council to change clergy conditions of service to allow for 36 hours of rest in every seven-day period was also overwhelmingly passed in response to **GS2357 REST PERIODS FOR OFFICE HOLDERS** *[Saturday afternoon]*. On the final day, Synod considered **GS2366 HEARING AND RESPONDING TO THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE** *[Tuesday morning]* and affirmed a call for greater priority to be given to the voices of children and young people in the Church. Various other technical pieces of legislation were passed, although one motion proposing a 25% increase in the retainers paid to Diocesan Registrars **GS2367 LEGAL OFFICERS (ANNUAL FEES) ORDER 2024** *[Monday afternoon]* – a deemed item - was called in and dropped after significant opposition was expressed in the Synod chamber.

Recordings of the proceeds can be reviewed on the Church of England YouTube Channel:

Friday afternoon

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QEN527pJeY&list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QEN527pJeY&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=1)

Saturday morning

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9L7b2BVc9s&list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9L7b2BVc9s&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=2)

Saturday afternoon (including LLF presentation with questions)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_oP63WGqxb&list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_oP63WGqxb&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=3)

Sunday afternoon

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfYWmrOmkmU&list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfYWmrOmkmU&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=4)

Sunday evening

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13UFRIZXiro&list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13UFRIZXiro&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=5)

Monday morning (LLF)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOyifAvqCOg&list=PLcc\\_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOyifAvqCOg&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=6)

Monday afternoon

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4xxFhKxt5E&list=PLcc\\_HT5TegjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4xxFhKxt5E&list=PLcc_HT5TegjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=7)

Tuesday morning

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dIU-x4IrAM&list=PLcc\\_HT5TegjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dIU-x4IrAM&list=PLcc_HT5TegjpG4IWJ1S3Z0xMWZciaJzZU&index=9)

The next General Synod meeting is in London, from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

Chris Gill

08<sup>th</sup> November 2024