

General Synod February 2023

Purpose of Report:	To inform Diocesan Synod of General Synod in February 2023
Action:	To note
Lead:	General Synod representatives

Monday 6th February

While most General Synod (GS) members can and have been able to meet face-to-face in this quinquennium, some have been unable to attend because of vulnerability, disability or ill health. Therefore, the first item on the agenda was to vote on extending the measure that was introduced during Covid 19 to allow hybrid meetings until 5th February 2026. The motion was carried. Some GS members on Zoom joined the meeting.

The Presidential address:

The Archbishop of Canterbury's address is available to view on the General Synod website. The following paragraph contains the main themes of his speech but cannot convey the conviction with which these words were spoken.

Acknowledging that General Synod faces challenging times, Justin Welby (JW) asked that there be a willingness to take our disagreement to the foot of the cross and to the empty tomb so that we can all be united in God's love. We were asked to listen to the Holy Spirit and to each other and he reminded us of Genesis 11 1-9, when God confused the language of the people building the tower of Babel and scattered them. He emphasised that scattering and gathering has been a theme of God's people throughout history. Our common language must now be Christian and to live in the light of God. There will always be differences, but these differences do not necessarily mean that anyone is far from God. Speaking of his very recent pilgrimage to South Sudan with the Pope and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, JW spoke of us being constructed as a people of love and this must be the message that is needed and communicated today. We should: 'Say it and live it.' No division is greater than our unity; our brother is never our enemy. To acknowledge that all of us come with burdens and we lay these on Christ and let God gather his children.

The report by the Business committee (GS2284): Synod members were reminded that legislation is the primary role of GS as required by parliament. Questions relating to the business of this synod, and which were debated included 'Safeguarding', 'Clergy disciplinary measures' and 'Legal notes on the prayers on living in love and faith (LLF)'.

Diocesan Stipends Funds; Amending Canon 42 (GS 2269A) and (GS 2255A): The former is to ensure that Safeguarding office will become fully independent of a Diocesan bishop. This latter measure allows dioceses to be generous to other dioceses by removing geographical

restrictions to pay clergy stipends. This is a permissive measure so that a Diocese may, if it chooses, finance work in other Dioceses.

Church of England Pensions (GS 2264) and other items were carried without debate, which reflected the level of agreement by synod to the proposals.

Presentation on 'Living in Love and Faith': This was given by the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally (SM). She highlighted that we should be living with love, working together, moving forwards with confidence and belonging to Christ. Whilst acknowledging that there is disagreement between bishops, it should be acknowledged by synod that God has allowed bishops to disagree. Questioning how this is possible, synod was reminded that we see through the mirror dimly. God's love is deeper and wider than ours. God calls us to live with our differences, to love together and to not exclude anyone. We are called to better understand our differences and to acknowledge homophobia. There is a need to include diverse voices while acknowledging that it is not always comfortable to walk together on LLF; however, to walk separately would be costly. The commended prayers are not to be imposed and there is a range of prayers to reflect the range of differences. Reassurances are there for all clergy, whether they will or will not use these prayers. Finally, SM emphasised that there is also the need to value singleness.

The full text of this address is available at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/LLF%20PRESENTATION%20-%20Bishop%20Sarah%20Mullally%206%20Feb%202023.pdf>

Tuesday 7th February

The day began with Holy Eucharist

Diocesan Boards of Education measure 2021 (GS 2285): These related to Church schools and the administration of Holy Communion and a clarification of the definition of head teachers and church schools.

Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous provisions) measure (GS2272A): This measure covered a wide range of provisions which would not merit free-standing legislation. Many of these were of a technical nature. Amendments put forward by the Save the Parish were carried – these were put forward to prevent Bishops having the power to unilaterally sell land or parsonages during an interregnum. This can now only happen with the permission of the priest-in-charge or PCC.

Loyal address: Archbishop Justin Welby recommitted the loyalty of General Synod to the King. This included the recognition of the challenges of the day and the vision of the King in his concern for climate change, his understanding of different cultures and faiths and how these differences strengthen us a nation.

Questions: The focus was on Living in Love and Faith and pastoral guidance.

Resourcing Ministerial formation (GS2286): Debate included issues of resourcing ministerial training of both clergy and lay ministers. It was noted that non-residential costs were under-represented. A system was needed to provide financial support that was accountable and

sustainable. To date, those institutions which train clergy have often felt they lack financial security and this motion was designed to address that issue.

Living in Love and Faith (LLF): This session ran from 15.00 to 16.45 and included group work with each group tasked to consider and reflect on the pastoral principles, the new prayers of love and faith and the pastoral guidance that will be given. Feedback was then given by the groups to a panel of bishops, who subsequently addressed the groups' concerns and hopes. Themes that arose from this session included:

- How we live with disagreement
- The church should guide people in Christian living
- A deep desire for God's grace to prevent separation
- A theological method to engage with every part of the church
- The celebration of celibacy and singleness
- Fear of what we are moving into
- The need for clarity
- Do the bishops have too much power?

Bishop Sarah Mullally reassured synod that the bishops had at all times sought the mind of Christ and that the unity of the church weighed heavily on the bishops. Bishops are called to be streams of development and to shape and change the church.

Wednesday 8th February

Cost of Living (GS 2287): John Spence (JS) moved this motion which had four aspects:

- Prayer must be at the centre and focus of all we do
- To commit ourselves across all worshipping communities to do all we can to support the most vulnerable
- To call upon his Majesty's government to give generous support to those who are falling into poverty and the organisation dedicated to supporting to them
- To commend steps to relieve some of the pressures on clergy, church staff and their families.

John Spence highlighted how members of the clergy were increasingly among those needing to use foodbanks and how the number of requests for financial help had increased. That those families and individuals, in communities across the country, who previously 'were just about managing', have now moved into the 'not now managing' group. He warned of a realisation that we have not seen the worst of this crisis and that once families and individuals move into a state of deprivation their situation will deteriorate and this will make recovery far more difficult. John Spence noted that the church is the biggest force for social good in this country and asked that government recognise its important role. This is in the context that all UK charities have seen an average drop in income of 60%.

The church has created 'warm spaces' initiatives, which alleviate loneliness and isolation and also promotes a network of kindness to become a visible friendly human presence in every community. The church gives a message of hope. There are challenges in the rural community where individuals in need may not be able to access a food bank, so the small-scale pantries that have become established in many rural churches are essential. Unfortunately, many rural churches that have no toilets and heating are unable to provide 'warm spaces'.

During the debate the Archbishop of York stated that teachers are giving toothbrushes and toothpaste to pupils. Children are now arriving at school with empty lunch boxes and to then fill them with food from the school food bank.

The motion was passed unanimously.

Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous provisions) measure (GS2272A): This debate, which had been suspended on Tuesday, continued and all items were carried.

Draft Parochial Fees order 2023 (GS 2288): To increase the fees by 5% in line with the 5% increase in clergy fees, and not to increase in line with inflation. There was a debate on an amendment to consider the merits of amending the fees in line with fees payable for funeral service at a crematorium in line with fees payable for a funeral service in church. Another amendment moved that the fee be payable to the parochial church council (PCC) and not the diocesan board. Neither of these amendments were carried and the motion passed in its original wording.

Debate on Living in Love and Faith (GS2289): The Bishop of London (SM) moved the motion: 'That this Synod would recognise the commitment to learning and deep listening to God and to each other of the Living in Love and Faith process, and desire with God's help to journey together while acknowledging the different deeply held convictions within the Church'. The debate was listed to run from 1400 to 19.15 (five hours). The full motion can be found at: <https://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/living-in-love-and-faith/>

The motion contained six elements as well as 27 amendments that had been submitted. Sarah Mullally expressed her hope that there would be a dialogue in love but recognised that for some people the division in opinion would be too great to be able to work together. Others were concerned that they would not be excluded because of their sexuality. The hope was that these two groups could just about touch each other and although there might be disagreement, there should be no division.

The debate heard views from those who believed in traditional teaching on Holy matrimony and from those who felt excluded and 'second class citizens' in the Church of England due to their sexuality.

In response to a request, JW reassured synod that he would consult with the wider Anglican Church. He was overcome with emotion at one point and paused before speaking of the conversations that he has already had with many primates within the Anglican Church. He spoke of the dangers that people in the LGBTQI+ community would face around the world and the consequences this motion would have but also the consequences to those in our country if it was not passed.

With eight amendments still to debate, the motion was suspended to the following morning.

Thursday 9th February

The debate on LLF resumed at 0930 and ended at 1230. Only one amendment (67) was carried. This was to insert at the end of the motion: '*Endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England*'.

In her closing address Bishop Sarah Mullally reassured synod that the bishops had heard the concerns of all those who had spoken and specifically that the *Prayers of Love and Faith* are a resource and do not represent a new liturgy. There is freedom of conscience regarding whether clergy do or do not use them these prayers. The church has excluded members of the LGBTQI+ community and this requires repentance and change and will not be easy. We must all commit to this journey together to create braver and safer spaces.

The bishops will now take all the concerns raised and bring the Pastoral Guidance document to General Synod in July.

The final vote cast for the motion was:

	For	Against	Abstain
House of Bishops	36	4	2
House of Clergy	111	84	3
House of Laity	103	92	5

Consequently, the motion was carried.

Diocesan Stipends Funds (Amendment) Measure GS225A: This was a final drafting and was passed unanimously and undebated.

Draft Amending Canon No. 42 (GS2269A) was passed unanimously for final approval. This calls for a Bishop to appoint a safeguarding officer for his/her Diocese.

Governance Review (GS2290) asked Synod to welcome a report from the National Church Governance Project Board. The background to this is that the Church is looking to simplify its central structures, including trimming down the responsibilities of the Church Commissioners. This debate was ultimately adjourned – it had overrun as a result of the LLF debate, and there was timed business to be discussed.

Safeguarding (GS2293) This was an update from the Safeguarding Team. The Bishop of Rochester (who is now stepping down from the role) asked Synod to “take note” of the report <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/GS%202293%20Safeguarding%20%281%29.pdf>

During the debate, points were raised around the difficulty and emotional toll taken on the staff which had included death threats. The Archbishop of Canterbury reminded Synod that the Bishop of Rochester was stepping back because nobody ever undertakes more than 3 years in the role due to the emotional strain when listening to accounts of abuse survivors.

Insurance Premium Tax (GS2265A and GS2265B) is a Diocesan Synod motion from Lincoln, which asks the Government for an exemption on insurance premium tax on churches and charities. Gavin Kirk, who brought the debate to General Synod, gave examples of situations where PCCs had tried to cut back on insurance costs as a way of paying parish share, often putting the buildings at greater risk. The motion was passed unanimously.

Prorogation of Synod (including prayers and a blessing) brought the session to its close.

A public record of all legislation discussed, and the outcome thereof, may be viewed at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/general-synod-meetings>

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