

July 2022 - General Synod Report

General Synod met in July at York for the first time since the end of Lockdown. Being resident at the university for the best part of five days gives an opportunity to meet and make connections and finally get to know each other better. This Synod has over 40% of new members so extra time together is valued by new members and old hacks alike!

Much of this networking is done through Fringe Meetings at breakfast, lunch and after dinner, as well as stalls in the Exhibition Centre hosted by Church groups and agencies. My now familiar 'Chaplains on Synod' stall supporting an encouraging all sorts of chaplaincy being amongst them. The meetings cover a wide range of topics and our Diocesan team tries to attend as many as we can between us. Please ask any of us if you have a particular interest in the content of any of the meetings or get in touch directly with the organisers. A link to the list of Fringe meetings is [here](#).¹

There is also a very congenial quiz run by the Open Synod Group which raises funds for charity and gives us a chance for an evening off.

Among the main debates, (links to the preparatory papers are after each title), were:

The war in Ukraine ([GS 2259](#)) - An excellent briefing paper and a debate in which the intervention of an ecumenical representative from the Russian Orthodox Church made it clear that this war is 'atrocious and unjustifiable'.

Proposals to increase the number of representatives from the Anglican Communion in the group which will choose the next Archbishop of Canterbury ([GS 2260](#)) - There was a long series of amendments in the debate as to how much voice the Wider Anglican Communion should have in choosing the next Archbishop of Canterbury. In the end it was decided that the Canterbury CNC, besides having a majority of Church of England members will have a mix of representatives - lay and ordained, female and male - one from each of the five different regions of the Communion. A 'follow on' to this change was a recognition that the Bishop of Dover is the 'de facto' Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Canterbury and future elections for that post will take place as if they were such.

A Routemap to reach net zero carbon emissions across the whole Church by 2030 ([GS 2258](#)) - This debate was interrupted by climate activists calling for fossil-fuel disinvestment. However the Motion in front of us was aimed at addressing some of their concerns. We committed to being a 'Zero Carbon' Church two years ago and the document [Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by 2030](#)², would help the Church to achieve this ambitious goal. The *Routemap* is pragmatic and step-by-step - a voluntary guide rather than top-down order. Eight of the ten key actions to meet Net Zero are

¹ Fringe Meetings for July 2022 General Synod <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/Fringe%20booklet%20for%20General%20Synod%20July%202022%20%28updated%29.pdf>

² The report and supporting materials may be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/net-zero-carbon-routemap>

straightforward and the [Church Commissioners](#) had promised £190 million to help dioceses and churches make the changes needed to bring emissions down.

The election of members to the Crown Nominations Commission which selects diocesan bishops - The system has changed so people stand as pairs, which has successfully increased the number of young people of Global Majority Heritage, and the number of women. The electronic voting system didn't work properly, and 60 members ended up voting on paper forms, with complete confusion reigning. We'd just had a service with a lot of Taizé to get us into a contemplative voting mood, and the mood changed very rapidly indeed. There have been several appeals against the conduct of the elections as well as those elected which means that no elections have yet been confirmed.

Palliative Care and Assisted Dying ([GS 2266A](#) and [GS 2266B](#)) - This was a difficult and emotional debate on a motion which mixed requesting more funding for palliative care (on which we agreed) and rejecting assisted dying (on which some disagreed, not least because medical professionals who spoke pointed out that we had not had enough discussion or briefing materials to understand all the issues). The voting was in favour of the motion but, as the Archbishop of Canterbury pointed out, it was nowhere near as unanimous as last time Synod had this discussion.

Changes to PCC and Electoral Roll Membership ([GS 2254A](#)) - Being a 'regular communicant' is tricky in some Fresh Expressions of Church which may not be eucharistic. While agreeing to simplify the language of the Electoral Roll forms, we resisted removing the reference to being communicants, as we are a church of both Word and Sacrament.

Clergy Conduct Measure ([GS 2277](#)) - Replacing the Clergy Discipline Measure process. We voted to continue to develop plans to balance the need to sit lightly to vexatious complaints whilst taking serious issues with due seriousness, and at the same time offering appropriate pastoral support for both complainants and those accused.

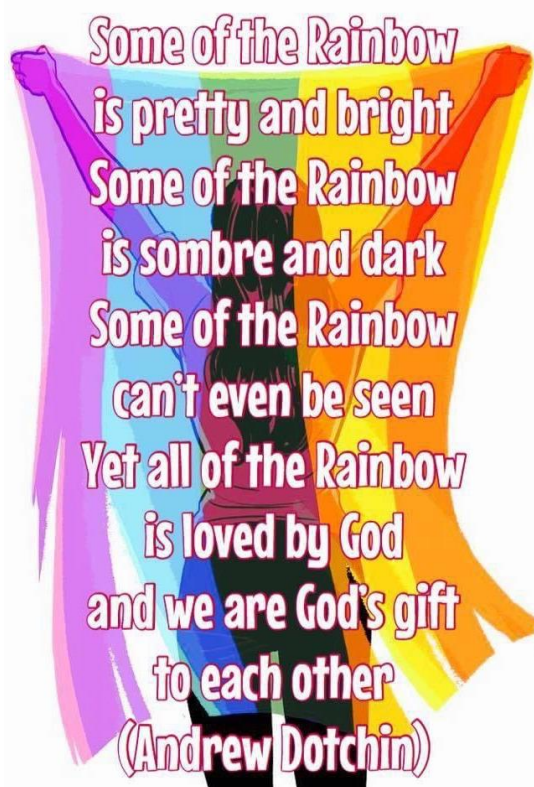
Affirming and Including Disabled People in the Whole Life of the Church ([GS 2270](#)) - This debate called for us to look at the language the church uses in its worship for disabled people, how we make their voices heard, how we enable their presence amongst us, and how we become a church where, as the Baptism service states, *'In God we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life'*. Working this out in our parishes and Diocese will take time but we owe it to every member of the Body of Christ to ensure that no member of the Body of Christ finds themselves excluded from the Body of Christ. Specific parts of the debate included:

- **A change in Rubrics** to make it clear that disabled people are fully included. Those leading worship are encouraged to use words which indicate that particular postures in worship are not compulsory. The imposition of new traditions is not intended instead parishes are invited to decide how to approach questions about posture inclusively in the hope that this will lead to the better enabling of participation by everyone.

- **An audit of disabled clergy** be undertaken to give an idea as to how many disabled people there are in the Church. No one is obliged to answer questions about disability, and a relatively high proportion who “prefer not to say” may be expected at first.
- Some dioceses have **Diocesan Disability Advisers** but appointments are patchy, resulting in areas where advice for parishes, or for disabled people, is effectively non-existent. Ideally Disability Advisers should be remunerated (many are voluntary), bringing greater accountability. Dioceses are encouraged to consider together how provision for Disability Advice can be offered across a cluster of dioceses or a region.
- **Diocesan Advisory Committees are expected** to have at least one person with knowledge or known experience of disability, to ensure that the needs of the disabled are considered with each faculty.

A ‘**Loyal Address**’ in which the Archbishop of Canterbury described the Queen as England’s greatest evangelist, pointing out that in the coronation the monarch gives their allegiance to God before anyone gives their allegiance to the monarch.

This Synod is learning to grow together and beginning to wrestle with the idea that we are a church that has always ‘*Lived with Difference*’. Perhaps the hardest part of the Synod was the group work session on [Living in Love and Faith](#)³ which, in answering the question, ‘*What the Bible means to us*’ felt very much like an orthodoxy test with members having to prove that they read and lived the Bible. However there was a balance to this in the exhibition of artwork produced in response to LLF (mine is pictured in this report) which helped people ‘read’ other people’s stories as well as the Sunday worship at York Minster. In the service the Archbishop of York managed to create a real feeling of community and fellowship in the midst of superb music and with the new Living in Love and Faith art installation (‘[Faith and Fracture](#)’) behind him; he asked whether it represents a stained glass window falling apart, or a deconstructed window coming together!



A complete record of papers and proceedings is available on the [Church of England Website](#) which members are encouraged to visit for a more in-depth report of proceedings⁴. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with any of our Diocesan Representatives if you would like further information on any of our discussions.

Andrew Dotchin

³ The Living in Love and Faith website with resources can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>

⁴ Proceedings of the July 2022 meeting of General Synod <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/general-synod-july-2022>