

## Diocesan Synod – 25 April 2020

### Wide-ranging Miscellany at General Synod

It's extremely rare for an Archbishop in the Church of England to feel moved to criticise his own church in public - but that's precisely what Justin Welby did at the Group of Sessions held in London from 10 - 13 February.

The four days of business had opened with a fairly routine day and a half on Legislation, a timely reminder that Synod does not just exist for debate on a wide variety of issues but has a duty to enact Legislation.

Much of the remainder of the agenda was dominated by Diocesan and Private Members' Motions, most of them on topics currently in the news and therefore attracting many speakers. This is a summary of these Motions;

**Diocesan Synods:** Ways of Addressing and Reversing reasons why the CoE is generally less effective in communicating with, and attracting people from, more disadvantaged communities (*Leeds*);

**Private Members:** Windrush Commitment and Legacy (*The Rev Andrew Moughtin-Mumby, of Southwark*); A call for an undertaking at national, diocesan and parish levels to end, where possible, paupers' funerals (*Mr Sam Margrave, of Coventry*); and Legal Aid Reform (*Mr Carl Fender, of Lincoln*).

**Other Business:** There were also major debates on Safeguarding; Climate Emergency and a reduction in the Carbon Reduction Target; and Children and Youth Ministry.

It was on the first of the three Private Members' Motions that Archbishop Welby made an early intervention in the debate. The Motion before Synod lamented, and apologised for, the conscious and unconscious racism experienced by countless BAME Anglicans when seeking to find a spiritual home in their local parish church; and urged the Synod to ensure that the Church stamped out all forms of racism while increasing the participation and representation of lay and ordained BAME Anglicans throughout the Church.

After hearing the Archbishop say, quietly but with great authority, that he was "shamed" at the record of the CoE in welcoming and supporting half a million people from the West Indies who came to help to rebuild the post-war UK the Motion was overwhelming carried.

Similarly, the Motion seeking to end paupers' funerals was carried by 273 votes to nil with one abstention and that seeking Legal Aid reform was also carried with huge support. A background report on Legal Aid pointed out the Biblical demand for impartiality by the law, adding: "This demand is seriously undermined if there is not universal access to justice, without which there is no way in which rights can be exercised."

There was even greater backing, at the end of the debate on Safeguarding, on five recommendations of an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in respect of the Diocese of Chichester and its late Bishop, Peter Ball. The voting was 361 in favour with none against or abstaining. One of the five recommendations suggests that individuals who have failed to undergo a DBS check, or complete mandatory training, should not be permitted by ordained clergy to hold voluntary offices in the church.

Climate Change has become an issue of wide interest to Synod members over recent years and all parts of the CoE were on this occasion called upon to ensure that work is put in hand to achieve year-on-year reductions to reach net zero emissions by 2045 at the latest. Diocesan Synods are required to monitor progress every three years.

**For the Future:** All GS members were supplied with two reports looking to the future - first, notes of guidance for dioceses on the running of the forthcoming GS elections; secondly, for reflection and action by the clergy on the care and well-being of the clergy.

Also for the future, and more imminently, will come the retirement of “our” Archbishop, the Right Revd John Sentamu, on Trinity Sunday, 7 June.

He was abroad on church business and did not attend any part of General Synod but Archbishop Welby paid him this heartfelt tribute.

***“His devotion to Christ and his service to the Church of England’s something we rejoice in with great gratitude. Be assured of my prayers - and those of the whole church - for you and Margaret over the coming period of transition.”***

This report is no more than a snapshot of life at General Synod at the present time and any of your representatives will be pleased to enlarge on any subjects if asked.

*Colin Slater/April 2020*