

General Synod: A brief review: 'Give up cynicism for Lent:' Archbishop Justin

The focus for February's synod was Mission and Evangelism. However, before we got to the point of discussing the important and substantive issues on the agenda we had to endure the pain of a long and protracted discussion on the pattern of future meetings. I felt for the chair of the Business Committee, our very own Canon Sue Booy, who had carefully researched when each and every county timetables half-term and had come to the conclusion that it is impossible to establish a timetable capable of keeping all of the people happy all of the time.

The first day finished with a review of the written questions posted in advance of synod, with time provided for asking supplementary questions. A very large proportion of the questions concerned the House of Bishops decision to publish guidance notes to be used in conjunction with the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism when marking a gender transition. The Bishop of Willesden was in the firing line on the podium as questions came thick and fast. He affirmed that, despite pressure and protestations, the guidelines stand and that the proper governance processes had been followed leading to the publication of the guidelines.

Synod spent some time debating, and then passing a motion, which will have consequences for our deaneries. Going forward it will no longer be possible for individuals (and officers) to serve on deanery synods ad infinitum, with the length of service being limited to two terms. It was also decided that, following a debate on parochial fees, PCCs would not be eligible (from 2020) to receive a fee where the entirety of a funeral took place at a crematorium (or council graveyard).

The debate around the internal workings of the Crown Nomination Process was hotly contested. The motions that the 2/3 threshold should relate to votes cast, excluding abstentions, and that among CNC members there should be transparency, with each member knowing how their colleagues had voted, were both lost. It is fair to say that there was some anger and frustration following the outcome of this vote.

Synod received updates from the Pastoral Advisory Group and from Dr. Eeva John, coordinator of the Living and Love in Faith project (previously known as the Teaching Document). Questions were welcomed from the floor with 'conservatives' and 'progressives' challenging those on the podium. Although the main body of work is scheduled for publication in 2020 the Pastoral Advisory Group have produced a pack called 'Held Together in the Love of Christ, Pastoral Principles for living well together.'

Synod engaged with a number of private members bills and it was agreed that a homelessness task force would be established which would look at ways of working with other agencies to reduce homelessness, whilst also considering how church assets, specifically land, might be strategically employed. A motion was also carried (Truro) asking synod to 'recognise the escalating threat to God's creation from global warming and climate change.' The Bishop of Burnley's motion that ministry on every estate in England should be a priority was overwhelmingly endorsed, despite the bishop's plea that synod should reject voting in favour of the motion if it felt unable to simultaneously commit to a substantial overhaul of church finance.

Whilst all Five Marks of Mission were addressed through the motions, deliberations and debates, it is worth noting that two Oxford speakers (me and +Steven) felt that more work needed to be done in order to ensure that Missional and Evangelistic aspirations don't make the short and immediate journey to strategy and tactics.

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