4. General Synod report - February Group of Sessions 2020

President Address, the Archbishop of Canterbury

- “As we disagree profoundly with one another, we must remember two things…First, that we love one another and are bound together by Christ’s sacrifice and our mutual recognition of the face and work of God in one another. Second, we cannot change the culture, or even the minds, of other people anywhere near as easily as we can change ourselves.

- When we keep Jesus Christ at the centre of our lives, we can find our brokenness and our uncertainty is tended to, that there is a balm, and that we are cared for …So much of the anxiety which leads to our arguments, divisions and party politics in the Church comes from anxiety and fear. They in their turn come from not casting our anxieties on Christ.

- And here is a secret that we all know and keep from ourselves and from each other – we do not have to be perfect all the time. We minister and witness through our broken humanity, despite ourselves, because then we point to the perfect wholeness of Christ.

- This year and the years to come are years to achieve change, to make progress in the mission of God – to be a light to the world…Let us join hands with our fellow Christians and together in our brokenness and our faith, walk with God towards a world where justice and righteousness reign, and the love and peace of Jesus are found in everyone.”

Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing

- The covenant has been declared an Act of Synod. Dioceses are invited to take part in a ‘Big Conversation’ to guide its implementation. The covenant commits parishes, dioceses and the wider church to sharing responsibility for the welfare of ministers and their households. This includes promoting access to pastoral supervision for clergy such as coaching, consultancy or mentoring.

Draft Cathedrals Measure

- The draft Cathedrals Measure, which seeks to strengthen Cathedral governance, successfully passed the revision stage. It will come back to Synod in July for final approval.

Living in Love and Faith

- The LLF teaching resource, looking at questions about human identity, relationships, marriage and sexuality, will be launched in July. The Bishop of Coventry, Christopher Cocksworth, said that this would mark “the beginning of a period of whole Church learning, leading to discernment about a way forward”. This will last “for at least a year” with dioceses encourage to hold their own conversations.
Windrush debate
- Synod voted to apologise for racism experienced by black and minority ethnic people in the C of E since the arrival of the Windrush generation. Synod also expressed ‘gratitude to God’ for the ‘indispensable’ contribution to the C of E made by people of BAME descent. Members voted to redouble efforts to combat racism and to work towards greater participation of BAME Anglicans in all areas of Church life. The Archbishop of Canterbury personally said he was “sorry and ashamed” about the Church’s history in this area and said we must be “radical and decisive” in addressing the issue in the future.

‘Pauper’ funerals
- Synod called on the Government to oversee the development of basic standards for public health funerals, run by local authorities. There has been a 70% increase in the number of public health funerals between 2015 and 2018 with practices and standards of pastoral care varying widely across the country.

Net zero carbon target
- Synod voted in favour of all parts of the church reaching net zero by 2030, rejecting the 2045 target contained in the original motion. The revised motion calls on the Church to urgently examine what is required to reach the new target and to draw up action plans. The Bishop of Salisbury, Nick Holtam, the Church of England’s lead bishop on Environmental Affairs said: “Synod has set an ambitious target for the whole Church of England to respond to the urgency of the Climate Crisis. To reach Synod’s target of 2030 will not be easy, and requires each of us to hear this as an urgent call to action. But this is a clear statement of intent across the Church and to wider society about our determination to safeguard God’s creation.”

Safeguarding
- Synod voted to endorse the Church’s response to the recommendations from IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) and urged its national safeguarding steering group to work towards a more fully survivor-centred approach to safeguarding, including arrangements for redress for survivors. Bishop Jonathan Gibbs will take over from the Bishop Peter Hancock as the lead safeguarding bishop in April.

Channel Islands legislation
- Synod approved recommendations by the Archbishop’s Commission for the relationship of the Channel Island to the wider Church of England, including a recommendation for episcopal oversight of the Islands to be transferred to the Bishop of Salisbury. Previously oversight has rested with the Bishop of Winchester. The proposed changes will now be considered by the Island authorities with a view to Privy Council approval later in 2020.

Legal aid
- Synod backed a motion recognising legal aid as an ‘essential public service’ that needs to be preserved ‘for the benefit of the nation.’ The motion calls on the government to explore ways of alleviating the impact of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act, which became law in 2013, on some of the most deprived and vulnerable communities. People involved in private family law cases and with immigration difficulties are often now ineligible to receive legal aid as a result of changes brought about by the Act.

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