

General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

June 2015

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INTRODUCTION

The General Synod met in St Paul's and St George's Church in Edinburgh from 11 to 13 June.⁴ In his charge, the Primus, the Most Revd David Chillingworth, told Synod that the most significant challenge before it was same-sex marriage; and he believed that the time had come when that fundamental issue had to be addressed. It had been an extraordinary experience to be in Dublin, the city of his birth, just after the Constitutional Referendum on Same-Sex Marriage, when the most Catholic country in Europe decided to make the change. Just because society changed, the Church did not have to change as well – but it clearly had to consider the possibility of change. And that is what Synod would do.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

In 2014 General Synod had rejected a motion to discuss same-sex marriage; however, it had agreed to hear a series of short presentations on the Cascade Conversations held during that year. The Primus had pointed out on that occasion that the changed context arising from the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 had made movement necessary and inevitable and that the Cascade meetings would continue. The 2015 General Synod returned to the matter and a major part of its business was devoted to the issue. The Doctrine Committee had put before Synod a comprehensive paper on the theology of marriage as an aid to its deliberations; the final vote was the outcome of a long period of discernment and debates on a series of motions.

The text of Canon 31 under consideration begins: '1. The Doctrine of this Church is that Marriage is a physical, spiritual and mystical union of one man and one woman created by their mutual consent of heart, mind and will

4 The agenda and papers are available at <<http://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/General-Synod-2015-Agenda-and-Papers.pdf>>, accessed 18 September 2015. I must record my thanks to John F Stuart, Secretary General of the Church, for his helpful comments on this note in draft.

thereto, and is a holy and lifelong estate instituted of God' and goes on to declare that '2. No cleric of this Church shall solemnise Matrimony except in accordance with the civil law of Scotland for the time being in force in relation to civil marriages'.

A series of options were offered for amending the Canon. Synod accepted that, whatever change might be made, a conscience clause would be included. The options ranged from the simple removal of section 1 to recasting the Canon by adding non-specific gender references or by adding a statement that within the Church there were two expressions of marriage: that it was between two members of the opposite sex and that it was between two persons irrespective of gender. An early amendment suggesting a further option of retaining the existing doctrinal statement but allowing clergy who wished to do so to solemnise same-sex marriages was rejected.

Voting was by secret ballot. The vote on Motion 9 – 'That this Synod receive the paper laying out the theology of marriage, thank the Doctrine Committee and recognise its work as providing material helpful to future discussion of possible canonical change' – was carried by 103 votes to 17, with 3 abstentions.

Synod then voted on how to take the matter further and agreed a choice between the various options for amending the Canon. The conclusion – made by a single transferable vote – was Option A: the removal from Canon 31 of section 1 in its entirety, so that the amended Canon would become silent on the doctrine of marriage. Motion 23 – 'That this Synod instruct the Faith and Order Board to instruct the Committee on Canons to prepare canonical material, reflecting the preference as to canonical options expressed by this Synod so that such canonical material can be considered by General Synod 2016' – was carried by 110 votes to 9, with 1 abstention. Motion 24 – for an instruction to prepare canonical materials to enable the registration of civil partnerships in churches of the Scottish Episcopal Church – was lost by 82 votes to 30, with 4 abstentions.

LAY REPRESENTATIVES

A series of motions to change the Canons in order to lower from 18 to 16 the age of eligibility for membership of General Synod, for service on a church vestry and for election as a lay representative were all carried at first reading stage. They will return to General Synod 2016.

MISSION AND MINISTRY

The Synod agreed a motion, proposed by the Primus, encouraging members 'to join the Scottish ecumenical initiative, promoted by Christian Aid, in praying for Israel/Palestine on the 24th day of every month'. The Primus reminded

members of the words of Archbishop Rowan Williams that ‘we have to prod, nag and encourage the religious leadership in the Holy Land on all sides to speak as if they believed in a God who acts, not only a God who endorses their version of reality’.

CHURCH IN SOCIETY COMMITTEE

The Revd Prof David Atkinson introduced the work of the Church in Society Committee. Synod agreed three motions on the ethical issues related to climate change and care of the environment, urging all congregations to pay the living wage to all staff by 2016 and welcoming the establishment of the Churches’ Mutual Credit Union.

SAFEGUARDING

Synod voted to adopt the Anglican Communion Safe Church Charter and to confirm the extension of the remit of the relevant provincial committee to include safeguarding not only for children but also for ‘vulnerable adults’.

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Synod agreed to the addition of *A Service of the Word* to the Schedule to Canon 22 (Of Divine Worship and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church) as an authorised service.

COLLEGE OF BISHOPS

The final session on the Friday morning was a presentation by members of the College of Bishops on various ways of engagement with the wider Church. The Primus spoke of the Scottish Episcopal Church’s relationships and role within the worldwide Church. One of the Scottish Church’s most important and historic relationships was with The Episcopal Church of the United States – historic because The Episcopal Church’s first bishop, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated in 1784 by the Scottish bishops – and at the conclusion of Synod he was to attend the General Convention of The Episcopal Church. The Primus had also been serving as Chair of the Reference Group for the Continuing Indaba movement, attempting to develop a culture of ‘honest conversation across difference’ across the Communion. The Reference Group recognised that, while ‘headline’ disagreements in the Communion were often seen as inter-provincial, every province experienced its own diversity and had to work within it.

MISSION AND MINISTRY SUPPORT GRANTS

The Synod agreed a new system of allocation of provincial financial grants to dioceses. The former ‘Grants for Ministry’ (an application-based system) have been replaced by a new block grant to support mission and ministry in the dioceses. The new system will operate on the basis of an automatic formula.

IVOR GUILD RIP

Regular readers of these reports may have noted the change in authorship. Ivor Guild CBE WS FRSE, who had contributed the annual report from the Scottish Episcopal Church Synod since its inception, died in January at the age of 90 while on holiday in Berlin. A former senior partner of Shepherd and Wedderburn LLP, he served variously as Procurator Fiscal to Lyon Court, Registrar of the General Synod of the Episcopal Church and Chancellor of the Dioceses of Edinburgh and St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane. A man of wide interests in art, antiquities and genealogy, he was appointed CBE in 1985 and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1990.

For almost sixty years he lived in a small apartment in the New Club in Princes Street, from which, as he used to say, he could walk to work in seven minutes. John F Stuart, the Secretary General of the Church, wrote, ‘It is a cliché, I know, but Ivor Guild was a “legend in his own lifetime”. There is a sense that an era has passed.’

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General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia

June–July 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The 16th General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia was held in Adelaide from 29 June to 3 July 2014. This report covers the major pieces of legislation dealt with at this session, as well as resolutions relating to the