

# General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

June 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) met in virtual form on 10 and 11 June 2021. In his charge to Synod, the Most Rev'd Dr Mark Strange, Primus, encouraged Synod members not to place their light under a bushel. The COVID-19 pandemic had denied people opportunities normally available to them to make their light shine and, at times, the bushel had felt very close. He reminded Synod members that in the valley of the shadow of death one need fear no evil. The evils of child poverty, the plight of refugees and unwarranted attacks on individuals in the public eye were all current evils to be confronted. Despite everything, the place of quiet waters and the comfort of the Shepherd's rod and staff still brought hope and joy, even in a pandemic.

## ALTERATIONS TO CANONS AND RESOLUTIONS

There were no changes to the Code of Canons or Digest of Resolutions of the Church in 2021. However, the new two-year reading process for the adoption of authorised liturgy was followed for the first time, with an amended version of the *Scottish Liturgy 1982* incorporating alternative eucharistic prayers receiving its first reading. The revised liturgy now passes to diocesan synods for comment before returning for a second and final reading in 2022. The revisions to the liturgy comprised modifications to language, in reference both to humans and to God, to reflect changes in English usage since the 1982 Liturgy had first been adopted. The changes also included formal adoption of gendered language alterations which had been permitted for experimental use since 2010. In addition, the Synod approved a proposal to add to the Scottish Calendar the name of Jane Haining, a Presbyterian missionary who worked with Jewish children in Hungary and perished in Auschwitz. The Church of Scotland had been supportive of such an inclusion by the SEC.

## FUTURE VISION AND STRATEGY

The incoming convener of the provincial Standing Committee reported on joint proposals of the committee and the College of Bishops to develop a statement of

vision with accompanying strategy objectives and an action plan. It would include an expressive and inspiring vision and identify priorities for action across the Church at provincial level in the following ten years, with a view to growth in membership. Synod members participated in online breakout groups to discuss matters in detail, feedback from which was briefly reported later in plenary session. The Standing Committee will take forward the work and report to General Synod 2022.

The Convener also paid tribute to the SEC's Advisory Group, which had worked to support the Church throughout the pandemic by producing guidance and regular updates for congregations. Since the meeting of Synod in December 2020, the Standing Committee had also established a Recovery and Renewal Fund to receive applications from dioceses, and which was designed to assist the Church generally as it emerged from lockdown.

#### ST ANDREW DECLARATION WITH THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Synod met in the month after the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had approved the St Andrew Declaration. The Synod similarly approved the Declaration, which comprises a series of acknowledgements, including a recognition by both Churches that each belongs to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ; that both share in the common confession of the apostolic faith; that the Word of God is authentically preached in both Churches; and that the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are faithfully administered. Without fully recognising each other's ordained ministries, the Declaration acknowledges each Church's ordained ministries as possessing the inward call of the Spirit and Christ's commission through the Church. It also acknowledges that personal, collegial and communal oversight (*episkopé*) is embodied and exercised in both Churches in a variety of forms. The Declaration contains commitments by both Churches to respond to their common calling to proclaim the reign of God to all people of Scotland by strengthening partnership in ministry and mission.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE

In response to a General Synod motion of 2020 calling upon the SEC to work towards achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, an action plan on climate change was brought forward and adopted. It contains several points of guidance and specific actions to be taken by congregations, dioceses, the province and individual church members. The Synod asked the Standing Committee to set up appropriate structures to enable action at provincial level and a new provincial Environment Group is in the process of being established.

It also received a video presentation from members of the provincial Youth Committee calling for action, rather than words, in relation to climate change.

#### ELECTION OF BISHOPS (REVIEW OF CANON 4)

There was continuation of a discussion which had taken place at General Synod 2020 on whether the process for electing bishops in the SEC should be revised. The Canon 4 Review Group brought forward a report placing two options before Synod: that in future either bishops would continue to be chosen by an electoral synod in their diocese (as happens at present); or election would be undertaken by a smaller electoral council, which would include representation from the wider province. An indicative vote favoured, by a very clear majority, continuation of the current system, on the understanding that a number of improvements would be introduced.

#### CLERGY STIPENDS

The Synod received a report from the Administration Board on work undertaken by the Clergy Remuneration Package Interim Review Group. Since 2000, standard stipend in the SEC has been set at a level equivalent to the Church of England National Stipend Benchmark (NSB). The report noted that increases in that benchmark had not kept pace with inflation in recent years. The Synod agreed recommendations that, for 2022, standard stipend be increased in line with increases in the Church of England NSB or the consumer price index (CPI) if greater and that, from 2023, standard stipend should rise at 1 per cent above the rate applied to the Church of England NSB or by 1 per cent above the CPI if the latter is greater, until such time as standard stipend reaches a level equivalent to the 2006 standard stipend scaled up in accordance with the CPI. In subsequent years, standard stipend is to be increased by the same percentage uplift as the Church of England NSB, subject to a triennial review in the light of changes in the CPI.

#### COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Synod adopted a procedure for handling complaints within the Church. It was recognised that the procedure represented a first step and would need to be supplemented in the year ahead. Several amendments were brought forward and accepted during the debate, including an instruction to the Administration Board to consider whether an independent complaints officer ought to be appointed.

## BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

A bullying and harassment policy for the SEC was presented to Synod. It was the subject of lengthy debate and a number of amendments were proposed, some of which were included in the final adoption of the policy.

## CLERGY TIME OFF

New guidance concerning provision for holidays and time off for stipendiary clergy was approved. Principally, the new guidelines envisage a five-day working week for clergy rather than the norm of six which has previously applied.

## ETHICAL INVESTMENT

The Synod approved proposals from the Ethical Investment Advisory Group for a framework for the application of ethical investment policy principles to investments held in pooled funds by the SEC's Unit Trust Pool, the vehicle which holds provincial investments, as well as some diocesan and charge investments.

## OTHER MATTERS

The Synod approved the annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020 and set the provincial quota for 2022 at the reduced level of £660,000. This reflects a policy brought forward in 2020 to ask dioceses to contribute a lesser amount of quota than would otherwise have been the case for 2021–2023, thereby providing some leeway for dioceses and charges at a time of financial challenge.

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