

SYNOD REPORTS

Introduction

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The impact of COVID-19 on the capacity to hold face-to-face meetings meant that the normal pattern of synods and assemblies in 2020 was almost totally disrupted. The Church of England's General Synod met in the normal way from 10 to 13 February, but the July group of sessions, which is normally held in York, was reduced to an 'informal virtual meeting' on 11 July. A socially distanced special session was held on 24 September at Church House and the November group of sessions was held remotely from 23 to 25 November.

The Governing Body of the Church in Wales held a special meeting in Bristol on 8 September with a very abbreviated agenda and a further online meeting on 9 September which was adjourned; its normal autumn meeting was held online on 3–4 November. The Church of Ireland's General Synod held a virtual meeting from 1 to 3 December and the Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church met virtually on 5 December. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had been due to meet in May; instead, there was a special live-streamed ceremony from a meeting of the Commission of Assembly on 16 May in the Assembly Hall to install the Rt Revd Dr Martin Fair as the new Moderator. The Assembly itself met virtually on 2–3 October.

General Synod of the Church of England

February, September and November 2020

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INTRODUCTION

This report covers the groups of sessions held in February, September and November 2020. Synod did not meet in July 2020 due to the ongoing

COVID-19 pandemic. It met in September 2020 for the sole purpose of passing the General Synod (Remote Meetings) (Temporary Standing Orders) Measure which enabled Synod to meet virtually for the first time in its history in November 2020.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

In February, Synod debated and passed the Channel Islands Measure, which arose out of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on the relationship between the Islands and the wider Church of England. The Measure enables the commission's recommendation that the islands be attached to the Diocese of Salisbury (changing from the Diocese of Winchester) by Order of Her Majesty in Council. In addition, it simplifies the process for applying existing Measures to the islands.

CATHEDRALS

The draft Cathedrals Measure came back before Synod in February, having been considered by the Revision Committee. Following debate and amendment, the Measure was passed in November. The Measure is a significant piece of legislation relating to the governance structure of cathedrals. In addition, it brings them within the definition of 'charity' for the purposes of the Charities Act 2011, allowing the Charity Commission to exercise regulatory and facilitative powers in connection with their operation.

DIOCESAN BOARDS OF EDUCATION

November saw the passing of the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure, an important piece of legislation relating to how the dioceses engage and work with church schools. Since the 1991 Measure there have been significant changes to the education landscape. In particular, the Measure makes suitable provision for academy and multi-academy trusts. The most significant change is in relation to how diocesan boards of education can be constituted for the purposes of charity law. The Measure also supports the Archbishops' Council's simplification agenda by including more efficient procedures for its future updating.

SAFEGUARDING

The Draft Safeguarding (Code of Practice) Measure came before Synod in November for first consideration and will now be considered for revision in full Synod. The Measure puts into effect one of the recommendations of the

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse by replacing the duty to have due regard to safeguarding guidance with provision for a safeguarding code of practice which may impose requirements on relevant persons. It will also expand the list of those relevant persons to include diocesan bodies such as boards of education and boards of finance, and those exercising safeguarding responsibilities both national and locally.

AMENDING CANONS 40 AND 41

Amending Canon 40 (which relates to religious communities) and Amending Canon 41 (which relates to service registers, ecclesiastical courts and Synod) were made, promulgated and executed.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing was affirmed and proclaimed as an Act of Synod.

The National Ministry Register (Clergy) Regulations 2020 were passed. The Regulations, made under section 2 of the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 2020, facilitate the collection and publication of information to enable a public register of licensed clergy to come into operation in 2021.

The Religious Communities Regulations, which set out the conditions that must be met in order to be declared a religious community, were passed.

The February group of sessions agreed motions calling on the Church to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2030; acknowledging and giving thanks for the commitment and legacy of the Windrush generation; noting the rise in paupers' funerals and directing the formation of plans and resources to take the issue forward; encouraging dioceses to act to combat the declining number of under 16-year-olds who attend church; commissioning a study to explore and address issues surrounding disadvantaged communities; and recognising the importance of legal aid to the most vulnerable in the justice system.

The November group of sessions agreed a motion recognising the challenge to life and well-being posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and, *inter alia*, called upon Her Majesty's Government to review the decision to curtail public worship. The Archbishop of York gave a presentation of the work of his vision and strategy group.