

SYNOD REPORTS

EDITED BY FRANK CRANMER

Governing Body of the Church in Wales

**14–15 April 2021 (online), 6 September 2021 (ICC Newport),
8 September 2021 (online)**

MATTHEW CHINERY

Head of Legal Services, Representative Body of the Church in Wales

INTRODUCTION

Depending on how one counts it, the Governing Body of the Church in Wales met either two or three times in 2021. The April session was conducted entirely online, but the September sessions were split between a physical meeting on Monday 6 September and an online meeting on Wednesday 8 September.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The legislative agenda for April was unusually light, with no substantive amendments to the Constitution of the Church in Wales being made. The most notable resolution passed was a declaration of a climate emergency, and the adoption of a target for the Church in Wales to reach net zero by 2030 (or as soon as possible thereafter). Further to this commitment, an amendment was passed to the Church in Wales Ethical Investment Policy requiring the Representative Body to divest its equity holdings in companies deriving more than 5% of turnover in fossil fuels, to be implemented by the end of 2021.

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCILS

A private member's motion to permit Parochial Church Councils ('PCCs') to incorporate as Charitable Incorporated Organisations was debated but withdrawn by the proposer before being put to a vote. Whilst the debate indicated support

for the principle (unlike their English counterparts, Welsh PCCs do not enjoy the status of a body corporate), the Governing Body wished for further work to be undertaken on the detail of the proposals before approving any amendments to the Constitution. The matter is likely to return in 2022.

RETIREMENT OF THE ARCHBISHOP

At the end of the April agenda, a farewell tribute was paid to the outgoing Archbishop of Wales, the Most Reverend John Davies, ahead of his retirement in May. Tributes were led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, whom the Governing Body welcomed as a guest for the final session of the meeting.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

The September meeting[s] had a much more extensive legislative agenda. Almost the entirety of the first day (the face-to-face meeting held at the International Convention Centre in Newport) was taken up with a Bill to authorise an experimental rite of blessing of same-sex marriages and civil partnerships. After lengthy debate in both the Committee stage (where amendments were considered) and at final approval stage, the Bill was passed with a two-thirds majority in each of the three Orders (Bishops, Clergy and Laity). The Bill permits each Diocesan Bishop to authorise use of the Service (printed as an Appendix to the Bill) in their Diocese, for an experimental period of five years from 1 October 2021. Clause 2 of the Bill makes it clear that no cleric shall be obliged to officiate at such a service.

ELECTION OF THE NEW ARCHBISHOP

After a one-day adjournment for members to travel back home, the Governing Body reconvened via the now-familiar medium of Zoom. Legislative business included amendments to the procedural timetable for the election of the Archbishop of Wales. Previously, the Constitution held that the election process could not commence until any vacant diocese had its diocesan bishop elected, consecrated and enthroned. As a result of the change, the Archiepiscopal electoral college may be summoned as soon as the vacant diocese has had the Confirmation of Election of its new Bishop.

OTHER CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Changes to the Constitution were also approved to remove *ex officio* PCC membership from subwardens (which had been proving logistically challenging in some multi-church parishes) and to make formal provision for the first time

for motions to be brought to Governing Body for debate by a Diocesan Conference. The Governing Body also continued its revision of the Constitution to insert gender-neutral language—‘chairmen’ have now become ‘chairs’.

Away from legal matters, in both April and September considerable time was given to discussion and debate about the Church in Wales in a post-pandemic world. Additionally, in April the Governing Body declared its wish that 2022 be declared ‘a Year of Biblical Literacy’ across the Province. The September meeting heard an update from the Bishop of Bangor on the preparation of resources to assist churches in marking the year.

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General Synod of the Church of Ireland

September/October 2021

CATE TURNER
Member of Synod

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Ireland Synod took place from Thursday 30 September to Saturday 1 October, meeting again by electronic communication technology. Being the first meeting of the triennium, it was for many their first experience of General Synod; yet the online format was a more familiar medium than it had been at the last meeting held in December 2020.

BUSINESS

Unlike the pared-down business of last year, the proceedings were more in keeping with the usual Synod format, albeit debate was still somewhat impaired by the remote format. There were five Bills before Synod, one dealt with General Synod representation, three Bills related to Boards of Nomination for appointment to vacant parishes and one addressed the proposed merger of the Dioceses of Tuam and Limerick.

GENERAL SYNOD MEMBERSHIP

The bill for a phased reduction in members of General Synod – which had been deferred last year – was brought forward this year. It amended the allocation of