

The first in-person meeting of the House of Bishops since March 2020 was held over a two-day period (October 19 & 20) in York.

The Bishop of Manchester opened the meeting following opening prayers.

Two safeguarding items were presented for consideration and discussion.

The first item updated the House regarding changes in safeguarding governance, with the creation of the Independent Safeguarding Board and the recent appointment of the Board's Chair and a Survivor Advocate. The House noted the progress made to date.

The second item concerned House of Bishops Safeguarding Guidance on Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults that has been revised and presented to the House for approval.

The House heard introductory remarks by the Church's lead safeguarding bishop, and a presentation on Spiritual Abuse from Dr Lisa Oakley who leads the Spiritual Abuse Task and Finish Group. This was followed by discussion.

The House noted its thanks to the National Safeguarding Steering Group and the National Safeguarding Team for their work and affirmed the need for clear guidance on spiritual abuse. It was agreed that the paper should come back to the House in December with the NSSG further addressing points raised and bringing a full implementation plan.

The Bishop of Birmingham then took the Chair for the remainder of the first day.

The Bishop of Lichfield gave an update on behalf of the working group concerning Holy Communion and the Reception of the Elements. The House agreed that there should be further discussion of this issue, while confirming that it did not wish to propose a change to canon law in this area.

The following morning (Wednesday 20 October) the Bishop of Blackburn was in the Chair as the meeting began with a discussion on governance matters.

The Bishop to the Archbishops gave an update on the consultation process arising from the document 'Bishops and their Ministry: fit for a new context' which sets out plans for consultations on culture and structures for bishops and their ministries. The House noted the progress in plans for further consultation.

The Bishop of Leeds then spoke to the Governance Review Group Report which was published last month and generally well received. The House agreed to strongly support the report and its introduction to the General Synod.

The House then turned its attention to the Mission and Pastoral Measure Review Consultation Exercise and was addressed by the Head of Pastoral and Closed Churches. The Mission and Pastoral measure seeks to simplify some of the current complex legislation on pastoral reorganisation. The House endorsed the proposals for the review of the Measure and encouraged the Church Commissioners to sponsor legislation through the Synod. Â

The Bishop of London, accompanied by the Chief Enabling Officer of Living in Love and Faith (LLF), then introduced group conversations in relation to the work of LLF. The aim was to strengthen relationships and provide a strong foundation in the House when bishops are later called upon to discern together a way forward for the Church in relation to questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

The House then considered a paper from the Episcopal Reference Group of the Faith and Order Commission on the implications for Local Ecumenical Partnerships of decisions on marriage by other denominations. The House agreed to further work to be done on this.

The Bishop of Guildford then took the Chair and invited the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich to speak to the paper on Resourcing Ministerial Formation in his capacity as Chair of the Ministry Council. The House agreed to endorse the approach as set out in the paper.

The meeting closed in prayer.Â

(The meeting was held at a hotel in York given that social distancing and health and safety requirements meant that it was not feasible for the meeting to take place at Bishopthorpe)Â

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