

GENERAL SYNOD

In Each Generation

A programme for reform and renewal

1. In obedience to the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples the Church's vocation is to proclaim the good news afresh in each generation. As disciples of our Risen Lord we are called to be loyal to the inheritance of faith which we have received and open to God's Spirit so that we can be constantly renewed and reformed for the task entrusted to us.
2. The spiritual challenge of reform and renewal is both personal and institutional. A year ago we encouraged the creation of a number of task groups to discern what has been happening in parishes and dioceses, to ponder the implications of the *From Anecdote to Evidence* findings and to reflect on the experience dioceses have had in developing their mission and ministry. The groups were asked to explore specific aspects of the institutional life of the Church of England, where on the face of it, there appeared to be scope for significant change.
3. The work of these four groups - on the discernment and nurture of those called to posts of wide responsibility, on resourcing ministerial education, on the future deployment of our resources more generally and on simplification - is now being published. It will be the main focus for the February meeting of the General Synod.
4. We are grateful for this opportunity to put on record our thanks to Lord Green, the Bishop of Sheffield, John Spence and the Bishop of Willesden for chairing each of the four groups. We are also grateful to the chief officers of the Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners and Pensions Board for their review of the work of the National Church Institutions, a copy of which is also being circulated for information.
5. Renewing and reforming aspects of our institutional life is a necessary but far from sufficient response to the challenges facing the Church of England. The recommendations of these four groups have to be seen in a much wider context, as a means not an end. They will be considered at the Synod in the light of a paper that explores what it means for all Christians, lay and ordained, to be a community of missionary disciples.
6. They also need to be approached against the background of the wider range of ongoing work to promote numerical and spiritual growth, contribute to the common good and reimagine ministry. We are continually encouraged in our visits to parishes and dioceses by the many signs of life and growth in the numbers of people coming to faith and growing in faith. General Synod welcomed in November 2013 the creation of an Archbishops' Task Group on Intentional Evangelism. This group will be producing its first report in the next few months.
7. Meanwhile the Church of England continues to have a significant impact in all kinds of positive ways in the life of the nation. There is a remarkable breadth and quality of service and commitment offered through community ventures, food banks, credit unions and many other initiatives through cathedrals, parish churches, and fresh expressions of church. There are sure grounds for hope both in the grace of God and in the dedication of God's people.
8. The urgency of the challenge facing us is not in doubt. Attendance at Church of England services has declined at an average of 1% per annum over recent decades and, in addition, the age profile of our membership has become significantly older than that of the population. Finances have been relatively stable, thanks to increased individual giving. This situation cannot, however, be expected to continue unless the decline in membership is reversed.
9. The age profile of our clergy has also been increasing. Around 40% of parish clergy are due to retire over the next decade or so. And while ordination rates have held up well over recent

years they continue to be well below what would be needed to maintain current clergy numbers and meet diocesan ambitions.

10. The burden of church buildings weighs heavily and reorganisation at parish level is complicated by current procedures. The Sheffield formula allocation of priests is no longer generally observed, while the distribution of funds under the Darlow Formula has no emphasis on growth, has no relationship to deprivation and involves no mutual accountability. There is no central investment in reaching out into the digital and social media world. If the Church of England is to return to growth, there is a compelling need to realign resources and work carefully to ensure that scarce funds are used to best effect.
11. The four task groups whose reports are now being published each identifies changes which are designed to enable the Church of England to be better equipped for meeting the challenges that it faces.
12. The report on the discernment and nurture of those whom the church identifies as called to posts of wide responsibility has a number of aims. It seeks to ensure proper care for those involved, a genuine diversity in those available for appointment, excellent theological and spiritual preparation and a familiarity with the key elements necessary for day to day working.
13. The Resourcing Ministerial Education report explains why we must also be more prayerful and proactive in our approach to promoting vocations to full time ministry - lay and ordained. That includes seeking a significant and sustained increase in the numbers of those coming forward for full time ordained ministry.
14. The report sets out proposals for continuing to grow the number and quality of candidates, for improving their formation - both pre - and post-ordination - and for sustaining them in the ministry to which God has called them. We need to make it easier to enable a proper diversity of candidates to be identified and called. New investment in lay ministry and leadership is essential. To support parish and diocesan efforts, we must consider national initiatives for lay development.
15. There can be no single strategy for the Church of England's mission and ministry. The proposals have been developed in the light of what bishops and dioceses said when consulted. There will continue to be 42 diocesan strategies, each of which are entitled to national support. In developing and supporting leaders, we must ensure they are equipped and can call on the expertise they need. We want to consider how funds might be made available which dioceses can use to further their plans to achieve numerical and spiritual growth.
16. As the Resourcing the Future report explains, church funds distributed from the nationally managed endowment are a small part of total church resources. But they still need to be used for critical impact. The report proposes the replacement of the Darlow Formula with allocations based on population, income and deprivation levels, and the creation of a new funding stream available for growth initiatives. In short, such funds will have a bias to the poor and a commitment to spiritual and numerical growth.
17. The fostering of mutual support and mutual accountability is at the heart of the proposals. The release of funds is linked to clear plans for their use and clear eyed review of their impact, as judged and monitored by peer groups. The report notes that, while the Sheffield Formula no longer works, there will continue to be a need for arrangements to ensure an equitable distribution of stipendiary curates.
18. The Simplification report identifies specific legislative changes which are needed to remove hindrances to mission in relation to pastoral reorganisation and clergy deployment, to streamline processes and to tackle redundant paperwork. The recommendations take account of a widespread consultation process.

19. If all the above has to be done within the confines of current funding there will be a long period before its impact can be real, not least given the need to support dioceses through the transition from the present way in which national funds are distributed. We are, therefore, grateful to the Church Commissioners for being willing to produce a report that opens up the issues around whether, for a period, they might be prepared to modify the way in which they currently seek to ensure inter-generational equity when determining what level of funding to make available from their permanent endowment.
20. These four Task Group reports, the report on discipleship and the document from the Commissioners cover a wide range of issues, some of them complex. We are grateful to the Business Committee for being willing to make significant time available in February for engagement with them. It is particularly welcome that as well as debates there will be the opportunity for questions and discussion in groups.
21. The decision making processes and timescales vary as between each of the reports and this is reflected in the texts of the motions before the Synod. They have been prepared in the light of the supportive discussions at the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops and the Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners.
22. At this stage the motions focus primarily on vision, principles and next steps. Further development is still needed on some of the proposals and consultation required on many of the detailed outworkings before the relevant bodies, which on matters involving legislation includes the Synod itself, can reach conclusions. We hope, therefore, that Synod members might be prepared to resist the temptation to overload the motions with a large number of amendments on points of detail.
23. In a few months' time the life of this General Synod will come to an end and fresh elections will take place in readiness for the first meeting of the new Synod in November. This is, therefore, a good moment for taking stock of the challenges and opportunities facing us. We believe that these reports, to be discussed in February, provide a basis for developing and delivering a major programme of renewal and reform within the Church of England as a matter of urgency.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, by the power which is at work among us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.”

✠ Justin Cantuar:

✠ Sentamu Eboracensis

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