

General Synod 19-21 November 2012

The General Synod of the Church of England met in November for three days at Church House, Westminster to discuss the final stages of the women bishops legislation, with an agenda that also included the Anglican Communion, the Living Wage and youth unemployment.

The agenda provided, on the Tuesday, for the Synod to deal with the final stages of the major legislative process which was designed to make it possible for women to be bishops in the Church of England while also making some provision for those who, for theological reasons, will not be able to receive their ministry.

Following a celebration of Holy Communion at which the Archbishop of Canterbury presided and preached, debate was resumed on the motion for the Final Approval of the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure, in the form it took following its further amendment by the House of Bishops in September. The motion was lost, failing to secure the necessary two-thirds majority in the House of Laity. The detailed voting figures were as follows - House of Bishops: 44-3; House of Clergy: 148-45; and House of Laity: 132-74. The vote in the House of Laity fell short of approval by six votes.

In consequence the draft Measure will not proceed further. A Measure in the same form cannot be reintroduced in the lifetime of this Synod unless the six officers of the Synod give their permission for that. However, draft legislation to allow the consecration of women to the episcopate which took a different form could be introduced before 2015 without the need for such permission.

Other business

On the Monday, there was a presentation about the recent meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Auckland, New Zealand. It included reflections on the process with regard to the Anglican Communion Covenant. That presentation was followed by a debate on the reference to dioceses of the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant. As a majority of dioceses had voted against adopting the draft legislation it could not be presented for final approval.

On the Wednesday, Synod endorsed a motion from Southwell & Nottingham Diocese calling for changes in the law to allow children admitted to communion but not yet confirmed to distribute the consecrated bread and wine at celebrations of Holy Communion.

Then the Synod passed a Private Member's Motion which affirmed the Christian values inherent in the concept of the 'Living Wage' and strongly encouraged all Church of England institutions to pay it.

The Synod also decided to meet in July and November 2013 but not in February.

On Wednesday afternoon, the Synod considered recent research by the Church Urban Fund and the Frontier Youth Trust on youth unemployment and its long-term effects on those concerned. The Synod commended church and community initiatives providing training and other support.

This was the final meeting of the General Synod at which Dr Rowan Williams presided as Archbishop of Canterbury. The final business for the group of sessions was a motion, moved by the Archbishop of York, expressing the Synod's gratitude to Dr Williams and offering him and Mrs Williams its best wishes for the future. This was passed with acclaim. [532 words]