

## **ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENTS AND OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD TO ALL MEMBERS OF GENERAL SYNOD**

We are writing to you at a time of national crisis. Many of you will have been affected in different ways by the terrible events that are currently unfolding in this country and around the world. Along with you, we continue to hold in our prayers all those who are suffering from illness at this time, as well as those many people who are mourning those who have sadly died.

We would like to thank everyone for all you are doing to follow official guidance to keep yourselves and others safe as well as for the work that many of you are doing in your local communities and dioceses to help the vulnerable. We are aware that we are having to be church differently at this extraordinary time and that doing so involves pain and sacrifice. We thank you also for all the ways in which no doubt all of you, in so many different ways, are contributing to those new ways of being Church, finding new ways to worship, and supporting our communities.

In our capacities as Officers of General Synod we have considered in detail the best decisions to take regarding the General Synod meetings that have been scheduled for the remainder of this year. In these discussions, we have taken account of the evolving situation and the Government's health advice as well as the wider context that we have referred to above.

Given the ongoing crisis, and in line with public health advice, we do not think it would be advisable for Synod to meet physically in July. We are therefore formally advising you that, as officers of Synod, the Presidents, Prolocutors, Chair and Vice-Chair have taken a decision to exercise their powers under Standing Order 2(5)(b) and (7) to **cancel** the **residential** group of sessions scheduled to take place in York in July 2020.

We would like Synod to have the option to be able to despatch its business remotely using teleconferencing software should it be unable to meet physically. The Synod's Constitution and Standing Orders do not currently enable the Synod to meet remotely. As matters stand, the usual means of amending them – by primary legislation in the form of a Measure and by the Synod passing amendments to its Standing Orders – is currently unavailable while we are unable to hold a physical meeting. For this reason, we would like to explore with the Government the possibility of Parliament passing legislation to enable the Synod to transact its business remotely when the option of a physical meeting is not available.

As it might not be possible for legislation to be passed by Parliament in time to enable the Synod to conduct business remotely in July, we are also looking at the possibility of setting up an informal online arrangement for Synod members to discuss urgent matters and ask questions using one of the dates previously reserved for the July General Synod. Whilst this would not be a formal meeting of General Synod, it would enable Synod members to hear more about how the Church is helping our communities through the crisis, to ask questions of the Archbishops, Bishops and other Church officers, and to contribute to the Church's discussion about the way forward.

The Archbishops have, under special provision contained in the Coronavirus Act 2020, requested an Order in Council to postpone the elections to General Synod by 12 months, enabling the life of the current General Synod to be extended by a further year and avoiding the requirement for dioceses to hold elections this summer. Should the Privy Council agree in May to the postponement of the Synod elections, the Inaugural Session of the new Synod will not take place until November 2021. This will mean that existing members of Synod serve for a further 12 months and that casual vacancies that arise before 13 July this year must be filled.

We would like to ask you to keep in your diaries the dates from 23 – 25 November 2020 which were originally planned for the Inaugural Synod. If public gatherings are permitted later in the year, we would like to consider the option of using some of these days for the General Synod to meet in order to despatch urgent business which could not be taken in July. In the event that large public meetings are not permissible or desirable in November 2020, we hope that the Parliamentary legislation referred to above will have taken effect by that point in order to enable Synod to meet on a virtual basis to pass legislation and transact other business.

Together with this letter, you would have received a link and a password to a survey, which asks whether you would be in favour of seeking Parliamentary legislation to enable the General Synod to conduct its business remotely should it be unable to meet physically. It would be enormously helpful to have your views on this question so that we can advise the Government and Parliament of Synod's mind on this. We would ask you to return your response to the survey questionnaire by **Tuesday, 12 May**.

We will be in touch with you again as soon as we can to let you know how we plan to proceed with making arrangements for the General Synod in July and in November 2020.

In the meantime, we would urge you to keep following the official guidance with regards to Coronavirus. We would also like to refer you to the practical advice and prayer resources which may be found on the Church of England website at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

We thank you again for your loving service to the Church, nationally and in all your communities, at this time.

Yours in Christ,

Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Most Revd and Rt Hon Dr John Sentamu, Archbishop of York

Revd Canon Simon Butler, Prolocutor of the Convocation of Canterbury

Revd Canon Chris Newlands, Prolocutor of the Convocation of York

Canon Dr Jamie Harrison, Chair of the House of Laity

Canon Elizabeth Paver, Vice-Chair of the House of Laity