

Summary of General Synod, February 2007

698 words

The General Synod of the Church of England was held at Church House, Westminster, from Monday 26 February to Thursday 1 March 2007.

Human Sexuality

Two extensive debates on private members' motions on lesbian and gay Christians and civil partnerships formed a significant part of the agenda of the recent group of sessions. Following the first debate, the motion as carried read:

‘That this Synod

- (a) commend continuing efforts to prevent the diversity of opinion about human sexuality creating further division and impaired fellowship within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion;
- (b) recognise that such efforts would not be advanced by doing anything that could be perceived as the Church of England qualifying its commitment to the entirety of the relevant Lambeth Conference Resolutions (1978: 10; 1988: 64; 1998: 1.10);
- (c) welcome the opportunities offered by these Lambeth Resolutions, including for the Church of England to engage in an open, full and Godly dialogue about human sexuality; and
- (d) affirm that homosexual orientation in itself is no bar to a faithful Christian life or to full participation in lay and ordained ministry in the Church and acknowledge the importance of lesbian and gay members of the Church of England participating in the listening process as full members of the Church.’

The second carried motion read:

‘That this Synod

- (a) acknowledge the diversity of views within the Church of England on whether Parliament might better have addressed the injustices affecting persons of the same sex wishing to share a common life had it done so in a way that avoided creating a legal framework with many similarities to marriage; and
- (b) note the intention of the House to keep their Pastoral Statement under review.’

Future of Trident

Synod discussed the current public debate about the replacement of the UK's 'nuclear deterrent', particularly within the context of 'Just War' theory. In the motion carried following the debate, Synod voted that the proposed upgrading of Trident is contrary to the spirit of the UK's obligations in international law, and the ethical principles underpinning them.

Criminal Justice

Synod considered the challenges faced by the criminal justice system as a result of prison overcrowding and changes in the system of supervising offenders; it carried a motion requesting that the government take steps to promote effective non-custodial sanctions and seeks to restrict the use of prison to cases where it is clearly necessary. The motion also raised concerns over the treatment of certain groups within the criminal justice system and stressed the need for opportunities for offenders to engage with the gospel through the ministry of chaplains and churches.

Church Schools

Five years on from Lord Dearing's report on Church of England schools, Synod reviewed progress and endorsed further strategies for the development of the Church's work with schools.

Media Standards

A debate on the impact of various forms of media on human behaviour concluded with a motion that affirms the Church's support for the highest media standards and expresses concerns at the current tendency to exploit the humiliation of human beings for public entertainment. Synod noted the lack of regulations covering the sale and display of sexually explicit material within the printed media; it also sought to encourage further research on the influence of the media on behaviour.

Clergy Pensions

Synod endorsed the recommendations of the Archbishops' Council on how to take forward the results of the major consultation exercise on *Clergy Pensions: the Way*

Forward. Details of these recommendations are available from the Church of England's website.

Other Business

The draft Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure was given final approval. This legislation aims to improve the Church's structures and processes in a way that will enable it to further its mission, including by introducing the concept of 'mission initiatives'. Draft legislation giving effect to the recommendations of the review of Clergy Terms of Service was committed for revision, and the Church of England Marriage Measure was sent for further revision.

The Archbishop of Canterbury gave a Presidential Address updating Synod on the Anglican Communion following the recent Primates' meeting in Tanzania.

Background papers for each debate, alongside links to an audio archive of each session, are available at:

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/feb2007.html>

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