

Summary of General Synod – February 2006

Motions, votes, background documents and audio of the debates are all available on the web at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/feb2006.html> .

Women bishops

Three sessions on the issue of women bishops began with a presentation on the ecumenical responses to the ‘Rochester Report’, *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, followed by contributions from ecumenical representatives and questions from Synod members. Synod then reflected on the ‘Guildford’ Report from the House of Bishops’ Women Bishops Group, including the possible option of ‘Transferred Episcopal Arrangements’ (‘TEA’) before voting to take note of the report.

Finally, the Archbishop of Canterbury led a wider debate on the issue and Synod called for further work on the basis of the ‘TEA’ proposals, which are intended to meet the essential needs of those who could not accept that women should be bishops, while avoiding the creation of any new jurisdiction, diocese or province within the Church. The House of Bishops will now produce a statement of the theological, ecumenical and canonical implications of pursuing that route for discussion in July.

Ethical investment

A report from the Ethical Investment Advisory Group highlighted the impact the Group aims to make on corporate behaviour through constructive engagement. A follow-on motion was carried, urging Church investment bodies to monitor the activities of companies in which they invest, including Caterpillar Inc, specifically with regard to the situation in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

Rural issues

With 10,000 churches at the heart of communities, the Church of England has one of the most extensive networks in rural England. A major agenda item focused on their contribution to rural community development, commending the workbook *Seeds in Holy Ground* and calling on dioceses and government to ensure rural churches are adequately resourced.

The Church’s built heritage

The Bishop of London led a debate on the maintenance of the built heritage by urging a “campaigning spirit sufficient to rouse the sleeping giant that is the Church of England to see the many opportunities our buildings offer... We want a network of 10,000 activists who are prepared... to present our case for the cash to help the community achieve some of its most cherished goals”. Synod supported the recommendations of the report *Building Faith in our Future* and carried a motion calling on

Government to increase financial support for the care, maintenance and repair of church buildings, and to continue the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme beyond March 2008.

Bicentenary of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade

Synod endorsed plans co-ordinated by the Churches Together in England 'set all free' campaign to mark the Bicentenary of the Act, in March 2007, invited churches to consider ways of applying pressure to end modern slavery and aligned the Church of England with the 'Stop the Traffik' campaign. The motion carried asserts that the Church, "recognising the damage done to those who are the heirs of those who were enslaved, offer[s] an apology to them".

Reader Ministry

Synod endorsed the work of the Church of England's 10,000 Readers as 'crucial to the mission of the Church' and requested the Archbishops' Council to 'consider how this nationally-accredited office should be developed, and Readers more fully and effectively deployed, in the light of the welcome recent introduction of a great variety of patterns of voluntary local ministry, both lay and ordained'.

Other topics

A report on conversations between the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain pointing the way to closer practical collaboration was commended. Regulations on admitting baptised children to Holy Communion, designed to replace existing guidelines, were given final approval. Synod asked for further work to be done on the implications of patenting of genetic sequences of the human genome.

Synod also affirmed the importance of healthcare chaplaincy as a necessary part of wholeness and healing, encouraged healthcare chaplains and volunteers in their work and requested Government, NHS Trusts and other healthcare bodies to ensure the continuing provision of resources for spiritual care.

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