

A second bill also amended Chapter XIV, removing the ceiling on the amount by which pensions payable to members and to the spouses of deceased members of the Church of Ireland Clergy Pensions Fund can be increased from one year to the next. In addition, any such increase was no longer restricted to taking effect on 1 January in the following year.

### **Charity legislation**

The Charities Regulatory Authority in the Republic had requested a rearrangement of the contents of Chapter XVII of the Constitution (relating to charitable objects in the Republic of Ireland) following the review of the group of pilot parish applications made in 2022. There is no alteration in any aspect of regulation of parishes; the bill enacting these rearrangements simply places the required clauses in a separate section. Passing the bill enables the process of wider parish registration to recommence.

### **Various administrative amendments**

As the Board of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, had changed its name to 'Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin' the constitution was amended to reflect this change in name.

The General Synod declaration form was amended to provide a space for an email address for correspondence.

The General Vestry declaration form was amended to remove the requirement for members to repeat their postal address within the form.

Being mindful of modern communications, the requirement to attach a notice regarding revision of vestry members and the notice of the Easter Vestry on the door of the church was removed from the Constitution. Once the bill was passed, one member of Synod noted ruefully how it was a shame to lose the historic echoes of nailing documents to church doors!

doi: 10.1017/S0956618X23000534

## **General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church**

June 2023 (St Paul's and St George's Church, Edinburgh)

John F Stuart

Secretary General, Scottish Episcopal Church

### **Introduction**

The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) met from 7 to 9 June 2023. The meeting was held in hybrid format, with most members attending in person and a small number online.

In his charge to Synod, the Most Rev'd Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness and Primus, reminded the Church of the call to care and paid tribute to congregations which had stepped up to support refugees. Noting that the Synod was to be asked to consider an action plan to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030, he encouraged the Synod in renewing its understanding of the custodianship of creation. He later welcomed the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Right Rev'd Sally Foster-Fulton, who had been invited to address the Synod – the first time such an address had taken place. The Moderator herself stressed the importance of working together and expressed her hope for the Church in Scotland to embrace every opportunity for love and to shake off the things which impeded the two Churches' ability to make a difference together.

### **Alterations to Canons**

A first reading at General Synod commences the process for canonical change. After first reading, the proposed change is sent to Diocesan Synods for consideration, returning the following year to General Synod for second and final reading.

### **Calling and election of bishops**

A second (and final) reading of alterations to Canon 4 (renamed *Of the Calling and Election of Bishops to Vacant Sees*) was approved after lengthy debate. The content of the Canon reflects the Synod's decision in 2021 favouring a limited revision of the Canon rather than a more radical reinvention of the electoral process. The former Canon provided for an initial process in which a Preparatory Committee (consisting of both provincial and diocesan members) produced a shortlist of a minimum of three and maximum of five names. The shortlist was made public, and the candidates were presented for election by the Electoral Synod (its membership largely mirroring that of the Diocesan Synod). In the event of the process failing (for example, if the minimum shortlist could not be attained), the process was re-run and, if it failed again, the right of election defaulted to the Episcopal Synod, consisting of the seven diocesan bishops.

The new Canon retains the respective roles of the Preparatory Committee, Electoral Synod and Episcopal Synod but reimagines the process as a single one in which there are three distinct stages. It provides that the diocesan bishops will be present at the preliminary meeting of the Electoral Synod, the intention being that, if the election ultimately passes to the Episcopal Synod, they will have heard at first-hand the needs and aspirations of the diocese as it seeks to discern its new Bishop. The new process also dispenses with the publication of the shortlist of candidates and states that candidates' names will remain confidential. Only the name of the elected candidate will be made public.

It also provides that if the first stage of the process is 'unsuccessful' (for example, a shortlist of at least three names cannot be achieved, or the Electoral Synod declines to elect any of the candidates), then it is run for a

second time with the minimum number of names on the shortlist being reduced from three to two. If that second process is unsuccessful, the election passes to the Episcopal Synod.

The new Canon reflects concerns expressed in consultation discussions in the Church in the previous year by placing an emphasis on training in discernment for those involved in the electoral process, on the practical care of candidates during the process and on the need for prayer and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit throughout. The new Canon is accompanied by a commentary and guidelines designed to assist all those involved in the electoral process.

### **Ecumenical relations**

A first reading was given to Canon 15 (*Of the Admission of Clergy of Other Churches, Provinces and Other Dioceses to Officiate*), which gives expression to the ecumenical relations of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Until now, the focus of the Canon has been the formal recognition of those churches with which the SEC is in full Communion. It has also addressed the question of eucharistic hospitality, but only in the context of specific local ecumenical partnerships. The Canon has not kept pace with various ecumenical developments, including agreements entered into by the SEC which are not agreements of full Communion but which permit limited exchange, such as the Reuilly Agreement, the EMU partnership between the Episcopal, Methodist and United Reformed Churches in Scotland and the St Andrew Declaration with the Church of Scotland.

The changes to the Canon were accepted, but not without concerns being expressed on the floor of Synod about the nature of eucharistic hospitality with churches outside the Anglican and Porvoo Communion or the Old Catholic Churches.

Some consequential changes to Canon 16 (*Of Others Who May be Permitted to Officiate in Churches*) also received a first reading.

### **Climate change and church buildings**

A small but significant change to Canon 35 (*Of the Structure, Furniture and Monuments of Churches, and the Due Care thereof*) received a first reading. That Canon provides a process for approving alterations to church buildings, and the change to the Canon will require any such alterations to adhere to net zero guidance issued by the provincial Buildings Committee.

A proposal that quinquennial inspection reports on church properties include an energy performance certificate was also approved by incorporation into the Synod's Digest of Resolutions.

### **Safeguarding**

A new Canon 65 (*Of Safeguarding in the Church*) received a first reading. In 2020, the General Synod had approved a new safeguarding policy based on the Anglican Communion Safe Church Charter. The underlying purpose of the new Canon 65 is to set out the respective powers and duties in relation to safeguarding at different levels in the Church, in the light of the new policy document.

## Alterations to liturgy

Alterations to authorised liturgies are subject to the same two-reading process as alterations to Canons.

The Synod gave a second reading to three Pastoral Offices for Priests, Deacons, and Readers and other Authorised Lay Ministers respectively, the Offices having previously been authorised for experimental use in 2017.

A first reading was given to liturgies for Lent, Holy Week and Easter for use with *The Scottish Liturgy 1982* and *A Service of the Word 2015*. Those liturgies had also been authorised for experimental use in 2017.

## Climate change

In 2020, the General Synod had resolved to work towards achieving net zero carbon emissions in the SEC by 2030. In 2023, the Synod received a Net Zero Action Plan (2023–2030) and affirmed the direction of that plan as enabling fulfilment of the 2020 resolution. The plan charts a pathway to bring the Church together as it approaches the challenge of climate change. It is primarily an internal strategy document and is supported by other materials including a toolkit to resource congregations and net zero cards to stimulate discussion and action locally.

## Season for Christian life

A presentation was given by members of the Steering Group for the Season for Christian Life, the Season being in part the SEC response to the Anglican Communion's call to intentional discipleship. It was explained that the Season is not a project to be imposed, but rather an invitation to members of the Church to 'live your best Christian life'. Its purpose is the enlivening of Christian faith and life and will be expressed in different ways in different places. The Steering Group invited discussion groups at Synod to respond to various questions so it could respond appropriately to the needs of congregations and individuals.

## College of Bishops

The members of the College of Bishops gave a presentation based in part around the five Marks of Mission and the experience of the bishops at the Lambeth Conference 2022. The bishops invited discussion groups at Synod to offer the College questions on topics to which the Synod wished answers. In a second session, later in the meeting, the College gave preliminary responses to the questions asked, of which there were approximately 40. The College undertook to provide written answers to all questions in the fullness of time.

## Other matters

The Synod approved the annual report and accounts for the General Synod for the year ended 31 December 2022. Provincial quota had been substantially

reduced in previous years as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the intention that there would be a phased increase to previous levels. The Synod approved the Standing Committee's proposal to set quota for 2024 at £715,000.

The Synod agreed a proposal from the Standing Committee that the next decennial review of the formula for diocesan representation on General Synod (including the number of Synod members) should be deferred until the membership statistics for the SEC for 2025 are available.

The Synod also received reports on the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Ghana in February 2023, on developments in lay learning, on new Master's courses to be offered by the Scottish Episcopal Institute and on the new Initial Ministerial Education 2 Programme for those in curacies. It also considered issues of health and safety and risk management and introduced as part of the diocesan Dean's congregational inspections a duty to review congregational risk registers and risk assessment records. The Synod concluded with a presentation by members of the Provincial Youth Committee.

doi: 10.1017/S0956618X23000546

## General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

May 2023 (Assembly Hall, Edinburgh and online)

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### Introduction

The Assembly met on 20–25 May with the Right Rev'd Sally Foster-Fulton BA BD as Moderator. She is Head of Christian Aid in Scotland and has served as a Parish Minister in the Church of Scotland and in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Rt Hon Lord Hodge DPSC was re-appointed by His Majesty as Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly for a second year. The Church has roughly 284,000 members (2021 figures) and around 1,200 charges.

### Governance

The General Assembly approved the creation of a *Book of Confessions* forming the Church's subordinate standard. The Book, to include the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Scots Confession*, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds and the 1992 *Statement of Faith*, must now be approved by Presbyteries under the Barrier Act 1697. This is significant because, if approved, it will change the position of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as the principal subordinate standard of the Church and would be a change from the practice of most other Presbyterian Churches.