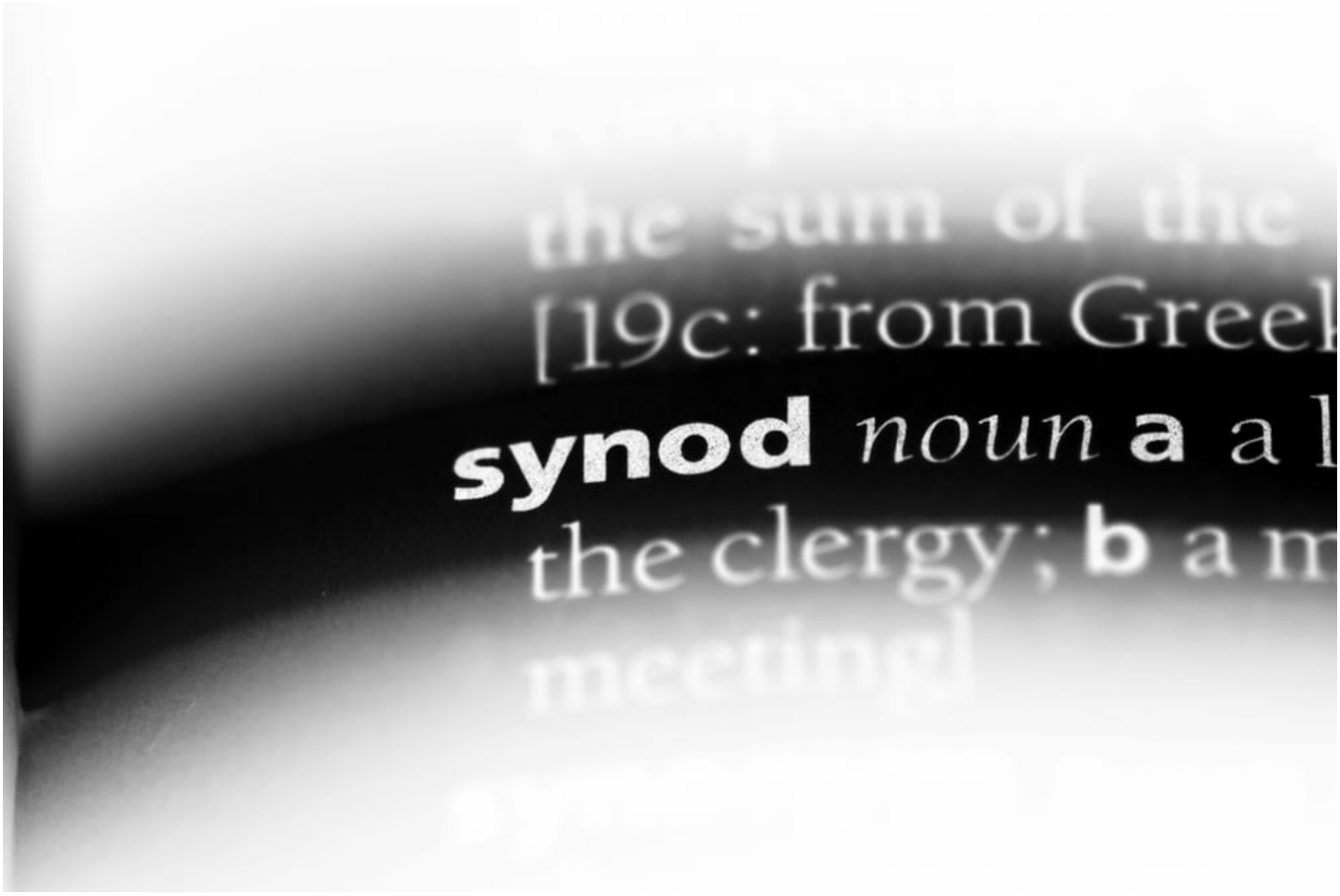


A Lay perspective on General Synod

By Ann Nadge, Parish of Hawthorn.

General Synod was recently held on the Gold Coast after two years of delay due to Covid. It began when almost 300 people gathered at dusk for Holy Communion on the resort tennis courts, the shade sails becoming our cathedral ceiling. Morning and Evening Prayer as well as a daily reflection on scripture sustained us in times of challenge.

In its parliamentary type processes, clergy and lay representatives from very different contexts across Australia debated Issues of doctrine, governance, church law, marriage, secular imperatives and stewardship. Under the skilful leadership of Primate Archbishop Geoff Smith, synod voted in support of motions including but not limited to:

- Advocacy to Attorneys General for raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14; raising the job-keeper allowance to lift people above the poverty line, and for palliative care funding
- Celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women
- Publication of the Creole prayer book in the Diocese of the Northern Territory
- Care for the environment and reduction of coal power stations
- Support of defence chaplaincy and veteran suicide prevention, for seafarers mission and commitment to remote dioceses and ministry in indigenous communities

- Ongoing attention to legislation in response to child protection and the Royal Commission recommendations
- Support of the Lutheran Anglican dialogue and the Common Ground statements, and
- The establishment and resourcing of the Families and Culture Commission in response to the National Family Violence Research project.

Synod prayed for the people of Ukraine and endorsed the Anglican Church of Australiaâ??s statement â??Deploring the breach of international law by the Russian government invasion of Ukraine.â?•

As well as times of great unity, there were times of division around contentious issues including the Anglican churchâ??s response to religious discrimination legislation and the possible impacts on our Anglican schools. Predictably, there was tension around the definition of marriage and the blessing and affirmation of same sex marriage as speakers debated doctrine and the interpretation of scripture in the context of the Appellate Tribunalâ??s decision.

Common ground was found in the motion that General Synodâ??

1. Deplores and condemns any behaviour that is disrespectful, hurtful, intentionally insensitive, bullying or abusive, and recognises and rejoices in the image of God as reflected in every human being, regardless of race, social circumstances, creed or sexual identity, and apologises to and seeks forgiveness from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) persons whom we have treated in this way.

2. Commits itself to fostering churches and fellowships where compassion and grace abound and where the love of God is expressed to all, so that our churches and ministries are welcoming, safe and respectful of all people.

Although conservatives and more progressive Anglicans supported the apology, divisions still remain. At this historic Synod same sex marriage was debated for the first time, a motion calling for the affirmation of same sex (civil) marriage was defeated (60% against, 40% for). As the Primate Archbishop Geoff Smith has reported, the Anglican Churchâ??s position on marriage has not changed.

In his opening address, Archbishop Geoff Smith reminded us that â??we have the opportunity to model disagreeing well, living with difference (and) appreciating nuance rather than polarity.â?• Preparations for the Adelaide Synod begin soon and as the media grapple to represent these complexities, let us pray for respect for each other, for our different contexts and cultures, build on what we hold in common, and where we differ, to seek guidance in the spirit.

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