

Governing Body of the Church in Wales

April and September 2023 (Llandudno and Newport)

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The Governing Body of the Church in Wales met twice in 2023, at Venue Cymru in Llandudno on 19–20 April and at the International Conference Centre in Newport on 5–6 September.

In April, the Archbishop of Wales's Presidential address focused on the climate emergency facing the world, and warned churches against falling into the trap of thinking there is little that they can do in response. He called for churches and church members to be prophetically active in their personal choices, their ministry to their communities and in their advocacy. He announced that he would be hosting an Environmental Summit in 2024 to bring together key stakeholders across Wales with the aim of making Wales an exemplar of good practice in these areas.

There was an extended debate on a report from the Working Group on the system of Episcopal Elections in the Church in Wales. The report, which was the third on the topic in recent years, was welcomed by members and a Bill implementing many of the recommendations was considered at the September session (see below).

A private members' motion, proposed and seconded by lay members from the Diocese of St Davids, was passed overwhelmingly. The motion provides that where a Diocesan Bishop has been signed off sick for a continuous period of sixty days or more, the Archbishop of Wales may exercise and undertake all rights and duties of the Diocesan Bishop for the duration of the incapacity.

Other minor constitutional amendments approved at the April session included the abolition of the minimum age requirements for Registrars and Ecclesiastical Judges and the standardisation of their retirement ages (at 70 for Registrars and 75 for Judges). Powers for Bishops to grant extensions to these maximum retirement ages were repealed. Consequential amendments to the declarations that such individuals must make when taking up these roles were also approved.

A fourth suite of Church in Wales 'Times and Seasons' materials prepared by the Standing Liturgical Advisory Commission was commended for use across the Province in accordance with Section 3 of the *Canon to Authorise Minor Variations to Authorised Liturgies 2022*. These materials focus on Creationtide and the stewardship of the environment. The Governing Body also received a presentation from the National Society on its work alongside the Church in Wales in resourcing church schools across the Province.

In September, the Presidential Address urged Dioceses and Ministry Areas to break new ground in their plans for evangelism and utilisation of the significant national funding previously announced to support evangelism and church

growth across the Province. The Archbishop encouraged a mixed ecology of outreach to provide a platform to share hope across Wales. He announced the formation of a new Learning Community of representatives from each Diocese to bring together exemplars from across the province to share best practice in these areas.

A significant proportion of the working sessions was devoted to small-group work to seek feedback from members on how the Governing Body was working, what it should spend more and less time considering, what the key priorities were for the Church in Wales and how the centre can best support the ministry of each Ministry Area.

The Governing Body gave approval to a Canon reforming the work of the Archbishop's Electoral College and the Bishops' Electoral Colleges. Much of the procedure surrounding the election of Bishops in the Church in Wales had been unaltered since the early years of disestablishment. Reforms introduced by this Canon include the ability for the College to meet online in preliminary meetings (hitherto all substantive decisions were required to be taken in a single 3-day residential session), thus enabling longlisting and shortlisting of potential candidates. These changes come into effect following the conclusion of the process to elect a new Bishop of St Davids this autumn.

The Governing Body also gave approval to a mechanism which will permit the Constitution of the Church in Wales to be updated to gender-neutral language on an accelerated timetable and to a reorganisation of Volume II of the Constitution so that all Canons governing relations with other Churches will be put into a new section, organised thematically.

A private members' motion from two clerics in the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon was debated, which (in its original form) called for the formation of an independent commission to review the success of the Church's strategy to group individual churches into Ministry (or Mission) Areas. The motion was amended to call instead for internal review and best-practice sharing, and the amended motion was comfortably passed.

In a key development for local congregations and their trustees, the Governing Body gave approval to amendments to Chapter IV C of the Constitution, permitting Ministry Area Councils to incorporate as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Unlike their counterpart PCCs in England, these Councils do not automatically enjoy incorporated status and limited liability. Ministry Areas may now operate their business through a limited liability CIO, following consultation with their Archdeacon and using a national template constitution approved by the Charity Commission and the Governing Body's Standing Committee.

The meeting also received presentations on the Church in Wales ecumenical work and addresses from the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales Trinity St David and the worldwide President of the Mothers' Union.

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