

Report on the February 2014 General Synod from Salisbury Members

General Synod met at Church House, Westminster, from Monday 10th to Wednesday 12th February 2014.

Some very important debates took place, including the revision of the legislation to enable the **ordination of women to the episcopate**. If this particular debate took up a significant proportion of our time, it all sailed through with comparative ease and with a strong display of good feeling. The legislation will now be referred to the dioceses and our own Diocesan Synod will be asked to give its approval when we meet on 15th May in Salisbury. Things look hopeful for final approval to be given when we meet for the York Synod in July, in which case the first nomination of women as bishops could happen before the end of this year. It is important that we finish this business, which has taken up so much energy for far too long. The breakthrough has been in producing proposals which fully empower women to be bishops, but in a way which will allow those who cannot accept this change to flourish in our church.

Perhaps two of the most significant contributions to synod were the speeches from the **Archbishop of Canterbury**. The first of these was in fact the sermon he preached at the Eucharist on the Tuesday. He spoke of the experience of visiting South Sudan and what it had been like to have been to the City of Bor, where 3,000 dead had been buried and a further 6,000 lay in the streets, having been there for some ten days. He visited the Cathedral and was asked to bless a mass grave, before the clergy and leaders of the Cathedral Community were buried in it. He stood alongside Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul, who, when faced with the television cameras, spoke simply about reconciliation and the need to forgive. Archbishop Justin challenged us to be overwhelmed by God and to look outward. You can both read his sermon and listen to it by clicking on *Sermons* at:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/index.php>

The Archbishop's other major contribution was his Presidential Address, which he gave on the Wednesday. Again this can be found on the above website under *Speeches*. He spoke of the need for 'massive cultural change' within the Church of England so that people can flourish together despite deeply held differences on issues such as sexuality and women bishops. He spoke about the need to allow perfect love to cast out fear. In practice our church is often epitomised by perfect fear casting out love, which can only lead to the church imploding. He used

the concepts from *Game Theory* to warn of the situation of *Sum Zero*. We become so obsessed with looking at each other, with a growing sense of fear, that we lose the ability to work for any objective. He challenged us to accept an untidy church, in which there will be profound differences of opinion, but in which we can be committed to each other's wellbeing and flourishing.

There were some good and important debates in this short synod. A presentation was given from James Featherby and Richard Burrige (Chair & Vice-chair) of the **Ethical Investment Advisory Group**. EIAG advises the National Church Bodies on investing its portfolio of some £9 billion! It focuses on ethical, environmental, social and governance issues. They explained that whereas in the past EIAG had sought to disinvest from anything that might have appeared suspect, the Policy now was much more about engagement and seeking to influence, even if it meant getting scraped knees on occasions. "Life is messy," they stated, "It is better to be on the field of play than in the stands." Richard gave a masterly overview for a framework for Biblical ethics - which might be applied to many issues - Creation, Fall, Covenants, Incarnation, Atonement /Redemption, Resurrection and Eschatology! Particular areas of concern are alcohol, pooled funds and climate change which was subject to debate later in Synod and was undoubtedly much in everyone's thinking with the recent weather. Our own Paul Boyd-Lee is one of the eleven voting members of EIAG.

The other major issue which was brought before us on Day One was that of **Gender Based Violence**. Mandy Marshall of "*Restored Relationships*" spoke passionately about the importance of tackling this issue which is found in churches as well as in society as a whole. *Restored* is an international Christian alliance working in partnership to promote healthy relationships between men and women and to end violence against women. They seek to raise awareness of male violence and equip the church to stop it happening. They want to see churches and communities built on restored relationships where women are free from violence and the fear of violence by men. To find out more, go to www.restoredrelationships.org Please note the **Domestic Violence Helpline** is 0808 2000 247. You may also be interested to read Bishop Moses' (of Wau Diocese South Sudan) Lent Course which addresses this matter in South Sudan:

<http://www.wau.anglican.org/index.php?PageID=lentad>

A major debate on **Safeguarding** took place, following recent issues in the Chichester Diocese. We were told that a major change was needed in the ‘very DNA of the Church of England’. We have to face up to the sad and shameful history of all our institutions, including the Church of England. We must also remember that these issues are not ‘history’ for the victims of abuse. Legal changes will be made to make us a safer church. As the Bishop of Chichester put it, “Our sacred space needs to be safe space”. This debate was a preliminary to actual legal changes, which will be put before us when we meet in July. Two major areas will be to reduce the risk of abuse and to provide the means to deal with abusers, both clergy and lay. There will be much stronger controls over who can or cannot serve as clergy, churchwardens and PCC members. In the same way, incumbents will not be able to invite others to lead worship unless they have been cleared through the proper safeguarding channels. Chris Corteen spoke of the need for constant monitoring and asked why Bishops retained the right to over-ride disqualifications, but the answer included the example of two young men getting into a fight and one being branded as a child abuser because he was 18 and his opponent 17. A level of common sense is needed, but we cannot have a situation where church leaders have the ability to cover up cases of the abuse of children or vulnerable adults.

Another important debate was on **Climate Change**. This was a motion put forward by the Diocese of Southwark. In moving the motion, Canon Giles Goddard said that all the evidence leads us to realise that we are creating climate change on a massive scale. All faith groups should be engaging in these issues. The motion called on synod to recognise the damage being done through the burning of fossil fuels; the fact that huge reserves are being held by the energy companies; the commitment we should have to care for our planet; the financial responsibilities we have as a major investing body; and to note that the Ethical Investment Advisory Group is reviewing its policy so as to take seriously issues of environmental concern. The motion, which was overwhelmingly carried, called for an alignment of our investing policy with environmental concerns, a report from the EIAG to be published before the end of the year and the establishment of a Working Group on the Environment. An amendment from Canon Margaret Swinson was accepted, which will reconstitute the Shrinking Footprint working group.

Other matters were discussed. In **Questions**, concern was expressed over those currently affected by the floods and the situation in South Sudan. An inordinate

amount of time was spent on questions about whether the Bishop of Bath & Wells should have been moved from his palace (in fact a flat in the palace) to an old rectory outside Wells. **The Church Growth Research Programme** 2011-2013 entitled ‘From Anecdote to Evidence’ was mentioned in several places and, in answering a question about this, the Bishop of Chelmsford said that “It takes more than a good priest to grow a church but a bad one will soon empty it”. In other places synod seemed to get lost in disjointed debate and what should have been a relatively simple process of receiving and approving changes suggested to simplify the **Church Representation Rules** ended up with a silly and lengthy discussion over the details. A discussion as to what clothes clergy should wear in church did not take place, due to lack of time. A significant discussion about the removal of God from the promise made by **Girl Guides** was watched from the balcony by many visiting guides. Should the Church of England be telling the Guides what they should promise? A medley of points of order followed in what seemed like a storm-in-a-billycan. In the end synod managed to pass an amended motion and the Guides promptly responded to say that God can be mentioned in a preface to the promise.

Sir Joseph Pilling presented the report of the working party he had chaired on **Human Sexuality**. This was very much a matter of presenting what is in fact a report to the House of Bishops and not a document signifying any change in the Church’s teaching. It is hoped that this report will lead to a process of facilitated discussion throughout the Church of England.

A farewell was said to **Stephen Platten**, who is stepping down as Bishop of Wakefield in the light of the fact that we have just abolished his diocese in a scheme to reorganise the dioceses of West Yorkshire. Stephen has served our Church with distinction, and will continue to do so, not least through his time as Chair of the Liturgical Commission.

A fuller report of the **proceedings of synod** can be found at:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod.aspx>

Synod will next meet in York in July, when we will be taking the final vote to allow the ordination of women to the episcopate. The current General Synod will be dissolved after the July 2015 group of sessions. A number of your existing members will not be standing again, so you are encouraged to start thinking about asking people to stand in the elections, or indeed whether you might stand yourself.