

Reflections on the November 2015 Group of Sessions of General Synod

This report has been produced on behalf of the Diocese of Salisbury members of General Synod as a means of reporting back to the diocese on the first group of sessions of the 10th Quinquennium of the General Synod 2015-2020.

It is our first report of the five year term and we would welcome any comments or feedback which can be addressed to our editor (Debbie McIsaac) at db@dball.com or any General Synod member.

Induction Day For new members to General Synod an induction is held on the day before the first session. William Fittall, the outgoing Secretary General, gave an overview of Synod, a word that simply means 'walking together'. There were presentations on Synod procedures, how to speak, vote, and ask a question and on the role of the Business Committee. The Chief Legal Adviser, Mr Stephen Slack, did his best to explain the legal processes and quoted from Otto Von Bismark, 'Laws are like sausages: it's best not to see them being made.' Canon David Porter and Sandra Cobbin from Coventry Cathedral's Centre for Reconciliation spoke about the progress of Shared Conversations on Human Sexuality. (Representatives of Salisbury Diocese met with those from Winchester and Portsmouth earlier in the month.) Synod itself will spend much of the July 2016 on these issues.

Queen's Speech The Inauguration ceremonies in Church House were respectful, dignified and, at times, humorous. The speeches looked to the past as a way for preparing for the future and drew on scripture as an inspiration: St. Paul reminds us that all Christians, as ambassadors for Christ, are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Spreading God's word and the onerous but rewarding task of peace-making and conflict resolution are important parts of that ministry.

The Queen celebrated the presence of the Preacher to the Papal Household, the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church; the recent visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch; and the participation in the Synod of observers from so many Christian traditions. The Queen encouraged Synod members to remember the progress already made, particularly drawing attention to the ordination of women as bishops, while acknowledging the challenges that are still ahead. The Queen concluded her speech by saying: "At the beginning of this new Synod, as you put your hand into the hand of God, my prayer is that, as we sang in that joyous hymn this morning, "His glorious light may shine ever on our sight, and clothe us round, the while our path illuming". You can read to full text online.

Presidential Address A few months ago at Lambeth Palace, a very old plumb line was found. At the start of this Synod, the Archbishop of Canterbury offered the image of God's plumb line being held against what we have, what we will build, what we stand for and how we conduct ourselves. At the start of this Quinquennium, what are our hopes and our fears?

Archbishop Justin began by saying that one of his fears is that we approach this Synod as a place of suspicion and conflict, a "hermeneutic of conspiracy" in one side must win and another must lose. He contrasted this with the hope of Acts 15 which 'brought great joy to all the believers'. His second hope was that we would build together and listen to discern the mind of Christ. His second great fear was that Synod would be too consumed by the inner workings of the Church of England. He asked Synod to demonstrate the self-sacrificial love of the Cross in our debates, in our care and concern, not only for the Church but for the nation, and indeed for the world.

Reform and Renewal Synod received a presentation on the Reform and Renewal programme with an opportunity for questions but not for debate. This was introduced by John Spence, Chair of the Finance Committee for the Archbishops' Council, a powerful speaker who made a favourable impression on new members. Updates were provided by different people on the various work streams. The Resourcing Ministerial Education work stream has just concluded a round of consultations with Dioceses and Training Institutions. The picture continues to change and the funding structure will now be divided into 4 rather than 3 bands. The controversial Nurturing and Discerning Future Leaders work stream is now being chaired by the Bishop of Truro. The 'talent pool' is now seeking to recruit a second cohort. Two new workstreams on facilitating lay leadership and the structure of lay ministries are being set up. A Salisbury representative, Chris Corteen, has already been approached to serve on a working group.

Global Warming The Archbishop of York and Mrs Sentamu had visited the Diocese of the South Pacific, which incorporates the islands of Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and 33 other smaller islands. Since 1995 there has been a significant rise in the sea level and villages and even a cemetery are now under the sea. Many people have had to relocate inland and one island (pop. 150,000) will soon have to be evacuated. A moving DVD of the 'Pacific Prayer of the Ocean' was shown <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC3Q6o9vS3M>. The book 'Affluenza', which challenges the lifestyle of the West, was commended.

Migrant Crises Synod is not always able to debate timely issues so an opportunity to debate the Migrant Crises was most welcome. In his introduction, the Bishop of Durham pointed out that there are some 60 million refugees across the world. We focus on the Middle East human eruption of movement because it directly affects the EU and UK. The government was congratulated on its continued financial support in overseas aid, second only to the US. Synod urged that more refugees must be accepted and dioceses, deaneries and parishes must be prepared to actively support any increase and openly offer hospitality to those permitted to enter England. A note of caution was added by one speaker that the CoE was likely ahead of the British public in its open acceptance of more immigration and we must be prepared to consult, talk and persuade others. The outcome of overwhelming support for this motion was never in doubt.

Ecclesiastical Judges, Legal Officers and Others (Fees) Order 2015 - GS2007

The proposal sought to bring the remuneration of Diocesan Registrars and Chancellors with regards to their fees for legal services to the Bishop and Diocesan offices into line with the rest of the legal profession. It is worth noting that our own Registry and Chancellor often offer more than is required with regards to time and services provided. The most significant change in the new fees is a 23% increase in Faculty Fees, and the debate focussed on whether this was fair. Alan Jeans, Archdeacon of Sarum tried to make a speech outlining concerns from our Registry and DAC, but was not called. However, Paul Boyd-Lee was called and raised a number of concerns. The motion was approved.

Report of the Church Buildings Review Group GS2008

This comprehensive report takes a wide ranging look at the way in which the Church of England discharges its responsibility for nearly 16,000 church buildings. The main recommendations include:

- Secure more long-term assured financial support for listed cathedrals and church buildings
- Change the law to create some specific new flexibilities for parishes and dioceses
- Strengthen diocesan strategic capacity and include building reviews into mission and ministry planning
- Establish a single team at Church House on church buildings issues

The debate was generally supportive of the report, and again our Archdeacon wished to speak with regard to the need to support small rural congregations and concerns about the previous grant process for Listed Places of Worship Roof grants, but was not called. The 67 page report is well worth reading, and can be found online on the Church of England website.

https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2392305/gs_2008_-_report_of_the_church_buildings_review_group.pdf.

The motion was approved, and will be referred for further discussion and action in the National Church Institutions.

Public Perceptions of Jesus The presentation given by the Bishop of Bristol, Rachel Jordan (National Advisor for Mission and Evangelism) and Gareth Russell of the BARNAs Group on their research into the public perceptions of Jesus offered many interesting and potentially valuable insights. The study sought to find answers to questions such as 'what do UK adults know and believe about Jesus Christ and his followers?', 'what do they know about Christians?' and 'how often do we talk about Him?'. Beyond the headline-grabbing statistics reported in the secular press, such as 40% of the population do not believe Jesus was a real, historical person, the presentation given at Synod did highlight some areas: 67% of those surveyed said that they know a practising Christian who is a follower of Jesus Christ, but only 1% know a Church leader. What does this say for evangelism? The rest of the Christian population needs to be empowered, for it is the Christian masses with whom non-Christians have the most contact.

Questions There were 42 questions with written answers circulated before the session. They ranged from "how many people are employed by the Cof E that are paid in excess of £100k?" to "why do bishops wear mitres?" It is always entertaining to watch Synod members bobbing up and down to ask their supplementary questions which then have to be responded to there and then. Our own Debbie McIsaac asked a couple of questions about how Synod could encourage different speakers in debates rather than the 'usual suspects'. And our own Paul Boyd-Lee asked a question concerning legislation currently going through Parliament which could impact on freedom of religious expression. To see all the questions and answers go to <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2408128/questions.pdf>.