

## **General Synod - February 2012: A Synopsis by Salisbury Members**

**General Synod met for a group of sessions from Monday 6<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012 at Church House Westminster.** It being the sixtieth anniversary of the accession of our Queen to the throne, we started the proceedings by singing the National Anthem. Among those new members welcomed on the first afternoon was our own Bishop Nicholas. Also welcomed were representatives from the Roman Catholic and Coptic Churches, as well as two visiting women bishops who were in the gallery. There followed a Loyal Address, which is something the General Synod sends to the Queen from time to time. Archbishop Rowan paid tribute to the Queen's obvious and open Christian faith and pointed out that the position of Monarch is a Christian one, which begins with anointing with oil in church. The Archbishop said that what Her Majesty had inherited by birth, she had gone on to earn through service.

**Business Committee Report:** A debate on the agenda makes the Business Committee accountable to Synod. Speeches included a call for a debate on capitalism and the state of the economy, including the church's response to the Occupy Movement. It was suggested that the changing climate over civil partnerships and gay marriages has been given greater momentum by recent Government pronouncements and Synod ought to be able to debate these matters. Requests were made to give enough time to debate the Covenant, for Synod to meet three times a year, but for shorter meetings and for the further development of materials being sent out electronically.

**Assisted Dying:** The first main debate of this session's General Synod was about the recent report of the Commission on Assisted Dying chaired by Lord Falconer. This was an extremely one-sided debate and even the amendment to the original motion was accepted without disagreement. It is important to note that the motion and the amendment were concerned with the shortcomings of the commission and its report rather than with the issue of assisted dying as such. Nevertheless many participants in the debate took the opportunity to express their opposition to assisted dying and their support for the highest standards of palliative care. The Archbishop of Canterbury remarked that we have very good palliative care in this country. He used very forceful language in his speech saying that legalising assisted dying would be a 'disaster'. He and a number of other speakers saw the church's role as defending the vulnerable and the sanctity of life. Only one contributor to the debate reminded us of the need to take seriously the moral

concern of those who support assisted dying. The amended motion criticising the commission and its report as unbalanced, unrepresentative and methodologically flawed was carried with 284 votes in favour and none against. There were 4 abstentions.

**Questions:** Another way in which the central structures of the Church of England are held accountable to the wider church comes through the session we always have in which any member can ask any question and whoever holds responsibility for that aspect of the church's life has to come to the rostrum and provide an answer. Questions were asked about education; the huge loss of children in our churches; the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; the practical details of Methodist Holy Communion being celebrated in Anglican churches; the challenge of maintaining church traditions in the face of a common curriculum in training; the challenge of the increase of costs in higher education; issues surrounding human sexuality; the problems over obtaining visas for those from link dioceses; as well as questions about house for duty posts, the Olympics, the recent riots, the question of having married couples on PCCs, the Covenant and websites which promote adultery.

**Parochial Fees:** Given that each parish has its own individual point of view, the question of the restructuring of Parochial Fees is a thorny one and attracted more than twenty amendments to the proposals on the table. However, we ultimately agreed that heating and vergers should be charged for as extras, rather than be included any basic fees for weddings and funerals and that there should be a realistic increase in the cost of burial in an open churchyard. Other fees will increase, but they have been recalculated on the basis of actual cost and represent a more realistic contribution to the services provided by the church.

**The Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Measure:** This draft originates from the 'Hawker Report' of 1997 being first considered for revision a year ago. It seeks to update areas where the law has changed as well as including recent decisions by General Synod. Areas of safeguarding legislation are covered such as in disputes where a bishop may deal with clergy misconduct complaints but with access to a tribunal system for the more difficult cases. In 2009 General Synod wanted to restrict clergy from being members of certain organisations deemed incompatible with the Church's teaching on race equality. The new measure contains this but any such bodies that the House of Bishops may proscribe would be debated by the General Synod

providing 25 members agreed. The Measure in general removes the absolute right of appeal unless it is deemed by one of the judges that there is a real prospect of success. In essence it is hoped that these provisions together with others will reduce time and resources as well as changing the impression of much misconduct within the Church.

**The Diocese of Europe:** The Draft Diocese in Europe measure brought that diocese more into line with the rest of the Church of England in that it can now receive from central funds finance for mission. The costs of this will have to be shared by the remaining dioceses, leading to a small reduction in central funding for them.

**The Ordination of Women to the Episcopate:** The mood of Synod was calm, serious and determined as they took note of the overwhelming response from the Dioceses in favour of the Measure to allow the ordination of women as bishops.

Synod considered four items to do with the Draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure. These were taken over three days to enable Synod to give due consideration to these important matters.

On Tuesday we received a presentation on the draft illustrative Code of Practice drawn up by a working group of the House of Bishops. Questions followed. There was general support for the content and approach while recognising that further work will need to be done.

On Wednesday morning Synod received a report from the Business Committee on the results of the Article 8 reference to Dioceses i.e. the recent discussions of the legislation in our Dioceses and Deaneries. 42 out of 44 Dioceses had voted in favour and Synod scrutinised the full statistics in detail as well as the recorded opinions of some Diocesan bishops and the various following motions which some Dioceses had passed. Many people commented that General Synod now has a duty to act in accordance with the view so clearly expressed in the Dioceses and in the wider church. Others reminded us of our duty to take into account the needs of the minority who remain unable to support the legislation in its current form.

Wednesday afternoon was the 'big debate' on the Manchester and Southwark Diocesan Synod motions. The Archdeacon of Rochdale Ven Cherry Vann proposed the Manchester Diocesan Synod motion calling on the House of Bishops to use its powers to further amend the Measure and reintroduce the Archbishops' amendment, which had narrowly been

defeated last summer. This was countered by a Diocesan Synod motion from Southwark calling on the House of Bishops to refrain from amending the Measure. An amendment to the Southwark motion requesting the House of Bishops not to make any 'substantial' amendment received the support of Synod. The Southwark motion was then put as an amendment to the Manchester motion and was carried thus defeating the Manchester motion.

In the final discussion on Thursday morning it was significant that *some* of the principal opponents of women bishops supported the motion, which committed the Draft Measure and Draft Amending Canon for final drafting by the House of Bishops in May and eventual return to Synod in July. It remains to be seen how far the House of Bishops will heed the advice of Synod not to make further substantial changes which could even trigger another Article 8 reference to Dioceses, a prospect for which there was no appetite.

A huge sigh of relief was evident. However, much now depends of the House of Bishops, which meets in May. Many hope that the Bishops will hold their nerve and make no changes when they meet in May. Others voted for the measure to go forward to the House of Bishops in the hope that they will make amendments to make further provision for those who cannot accept women as bishops. Whether or not the final vote in July will achieve the necessary two-thirds majority in each of the three houses is far from certain.

**Violence in Nigeria:** Despite the accusation that the Synod agenda can seem out of date, sometimes the procedures of Synod do allow a fresh and current issue to be debated immediately and the Archbishops allowed a debate on the violence in Nigeria to be added to the agenda. As is so often the case, there were members of Synod who had personal and recent experience of the situation in Nigeria, not least of which was the Bishop of Durham, who presented the motion for debate. The motion, *'That this Synod, gravely concerned at the desperate plight of Christian communities in parts of Nigeria, as described in GS 1861, request the British Government to do all it can to support those in Nigeria seeking to protect religious minorities of all faiths and enable them to practise their religion without fear'*, was carried by 344 votes to 0 (with 1 abstention). Later in the week we were told that Christians in Nigeria had been in tears at this gesture of support from the Church of England.

**Anglican Alliance for Relief, Development and Advocacy:** An overview of the work of the Anglican Alliance was given by its director, Mrs Sally Keeble.

The Alliance draws together the Anglican family of churches and agencies to focus work locally on poverty reduction and injustice, under three broad headings: 1) Development (for example, capacity building, youth empowerment); 2) Relief (the direct response to conflict and natural disasters, for example Pakistan floods and the Sudan crisis); 3) Advocacy (for example, food security and climate change)

Specific projects, under each of these headings, are set through consultation with Anglican churches in the developing world. The Alliance is not a funding agency and neither does it run its own programmes. Rather, it assists local churches and groups to undertake projects by facilitating the sharing of best practice and expertise. In this sense, it is very different to many development agencies. The website [www.anglicanalliance.org](http://www.anglicanalliance.org) provides an impressive 'World Map' of its ongoing initiatives.

**The Appointment of Archdeacons:** A Diocesan Synod motion from Chichester sought to permit Permanent Deacons to be admitted to the office of Archdeacon. Their main reason was that the Diocese had a cohort of experienced deacons who were considered suitable for such an office, but were prohibited by Canon C22 which requires Archdeacons to have been in priest's orders for six years. Chichester maintained that nothing in the role and function of an Archdeacon required them to be priests. Synod disagreed, with many speakers affirming the fully sacramental nature of priests undertaking Archdeaconry roles. Being a priest among priests, and being a priest to the Bishop and Laity was essential. After a division by houses the motion was lost in all three. We affirmed the ministry of Deacons in the Church, and the response to what is the collective noun for Archdeacons: awesome!

**Standing Orders:** Synod is ruled by a formidable collection of Standing Orders. The key question for consideration this time was how the Chair of the Business Committee is appointed. The Business Committee controls and oversees the agenda of Synod and the person who chairs it fulfils one of the most significant roles in Synod. New Standing Orders were agreed which allow Synod to elect the Chair of the Business Committee and it was also agreed that the position should be open to any member of Synod, whether bishop, clergy or lay.

**Additional Eucharistic Prayers:** *"You sent your Son to live amongst us, Jesus our Saviour, Mary's child. He suffered on the cross; he died to save us from our sins; he rose in glory."* This is an extract from one of two new Eucharistic Prayers which were very well

received by Synod following careful revision since the July 2011 debate. They are now referred to the House of Bishops and should be returned for final approval in July.

The two new prayers contain all the required theological elements – a thanksgiving, a Sanctus, a calling on the Holy Spirit, a remembrance and a response. They are written in a language and style which is accessible to children but also poetic and dramatic, capturing the imagination. They are shorter than most of the existing prayers and cannot say everything, but these prayers will be extremely valuable options for those churches with a good number of children and for schools. We look forward to their authorisation. *"Pour your Holy Spirit on us that we may love one another, and work for the healing of the earth, and share the good news of Jesus, as we wait for his coming in glory."*

**Higher Education Funding Charges:** The church is responding to serious funding challenges in a rapidly changing HE sector. There is also a need for greater simplicity in the way we deliver formation for ministry. The Phase 1 report of the Sheffield working party to Synod last July made 6 recommendations about a possible way forward which were unanimously carried. As Bishop Stephen remarked, this degree of unanimity is quite rare in debates about theological education!

Since July a Phase 2 working party has been doing further work on the main recommendation: *that the Church of England with its partner churches establish a single suite of HE awards suitable for IME 1-7, Reader training and independent students, with a single HE set of validation arrangements.* Two main fears had been expressed: is the process moving too fast and will a single curriculum make it difficult to sustain a range of different church traditions? The bishop pointed out that the HE sector is changing rapidly and unless urgent action is taken we will face an unmanageable increase in fees. The aim is not to move to a common curriculum but to a common set of awards which will leave plenty of room for diversity. The distinctiveness of Training Institutions tends to derive more from the character of their common life than from the content of the curriculum as such.

The bishop took a number of questions from which the following points of interest emerged: Overall cost of the new arrangements will not be higher than at present although some individual costs may rise. Due diligence will be exercised in the choice of a validating body against a robust set of criteria – we would not just be looking for the cheapest offer. A single validating relationship should not reduce the Church's bargaining

power as it will be renewable every 5 years. Dioceses must decide individually whether they will opt into the new arrangements for LLM/ Reader training and IME Part 2 as there will be no central funding for these. Consideration will be given to how training for children's and youth ministry could be offered under the new arrangements. There is no desire to 'smother' Regional Training Partnerships and the new arrangements will hopefully strengthen them – although it was not stated how this would happen. The new arrangements are not a back door way of reducing the number of Training Institutions

A Phase 3 working party has now been set up and will map Training Institutions' existing curricula and listen to how they will use the new awards. It will oversee both curriculum design and the new validation arrangements.

**The Reform of the House of Lords:** Currently 26 Bishops sit in the Lords. In May 2011 The Government published reform proposals that included cutting this to 12. Last summer a small working group was established and in October 2011 the Archbishops sent in a formal Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee, welcoming the commitment to continue some reserved representation and proposed that other faiths should also be represented. This private members motion asked for a working group with members from all three Houses to prepare a formal response from the Church of England. This was agreed, though in fact an extended group including laity was established last year. It met earlier this month and will meet again as work on the reform Bill progresses.

**Health Care and the Church's Mission:** This item emerged from a report from the Mission and Public Affairs Council and the resolution and debate centred on three issues. The first was on the role of the church in health and well-being where, as the Bishop of Bristol said in his opening address, the Church has never waived in its commitment. Indeed health and well-being is a central part of the church's mission and takes many and various forms.

The second issue, which was described as 'timely and prophetic' reference, was the Church's role in the reform of the NHS and the Church's responsibility to speak up for the health and well-being of that institution as part of the social compact. The need for the reform of the health care system was recognized and the question was posed as to whether the Health and Social Care Bill will deliver a renewed NHS with the implementation of the reforms presenting as many challenges and opportunities as the Bill itself. The National Church called on the Government to provide a

health system which was universal, free at the point of delivery and based on clinical need not ability to pay. On this issue, a member of Synod working in the health service said that the NHS was already thinking differently and that the church must start to think differently about how it supports the NHS.

The third area was the provision of chaplaincy services in which the Church has played a central and essential role. Chaplains provided 'spiritual care' which everyone in the country had a right to receive and 'religious care' for those who had an adherence to a faith. Any critique that chaplains were expensive and unnecessary was untrue. Spiritual and religious care was not just an add-on but essential aspects of health and well-being needed not only by patients and their families but also by those who worked in the health services.

Every part of the community shares in the responsibility for caring for every part of the health care community. One member drew attention to the vast number of people who have life-limiting ailments but spend little time in hospital or in other places where chaplaincy services are provided. While some will be in contact with local churches most will not have links to religious and spiritual support which can and should be provided in the community. It was proposed in the debate that the Church and local churches should see how it can they can work with the NHS to provide this support. That may be right but clearly, that particular member of General Synod did not come from a Diocese where the important ministry of Lay Pastoral Assistants was flourishing, unlike Salisbury!

The best anecdote during the debate was from the Bishop of Bristol. A chaplain offering communion told him that some of the responses he had received from those who declined were, "No, I asked for Corn Flakes" and "I can't, I'm not circumcised" and finally, "Not for me, I'm Church of England". It was a welcome light moment at the end of a very long sitting.

Before this group of session was prorogued, Archbishop Rowan gave a warm speech of thanks and farewell to John Hind, **Bishop of Chichester**, at the end of a long and distinguished career, which had not only included his time of Bishop in Europe and then Bishop of Chichester, but also a great number of years a chair of the Faith and order Commission, for which work he had been honoured by the award of a Lambeth Doctorate of Divinity.

Synod next meets from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> July in York