

## **Report on the York 2012 General Synod from Salisbury Members**

### **General Synod met for a group of sessions at York University from Friday 6<sup>th</sup> to Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2012.**

Because the motion on the ordination of women to the episcopate was classified as Article 7 business, the two Convocations and the House of Laity claimed the right to debate whether we were prepared to allow this matter to proceed to the full meeting of Synod on the Monday. The two Convocations are those of Canterbury and York. Each is made up on an upper house (bishops) and a lower house (clergy). The House of Laity have their own gathering. What was gained by these meetings is hard to explain, but we were all agreed that the legislation could be debated on the Monday (when we failed to vote for it).

After a number of routine matters to open the Synod, we were addressed by the Archbishop of Turku, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. He talked of the common questions that we face, which arise from the changing role of both church and religion in society. There is a move towards relegating faith to the private sphere of life, which gives rise to such issues as the wearing of religious symbols, the place of religion in state schools and so on.

**Business Committee Report:** The Business Committee, Chaired by the Archdeacon of Dorking (The Ven. Julian Henderson) sets the Agenda for each General Synod and forecasts future business. Their full Report (GS 1864) is available on the C of E website. The Chairman said that the main business, the debate on Women Bishops, meant there was a corporate sense of nervous tension in Synod as we discerned the mind of Christ and were guided by the Holy Spirit. He explained the consequences for the Agenda of decisions that might be made, such as a vote on Monday to adjourn the debate and refer it back to the Bishops. The end business would be brought forward.

Questions from the floor were critical of time wasting agenda items and the cost of General Synod meetings in York, suggested the 2002 rules for allocation of display stands in the foyers should be updated, deplored the absence of debate on church buildings and metal theft, asked for debate on the Church's mission and the relative role of clergy and laity and the need to decide how to handle the rejection of the formal Anglican Communion Covenant.

**Questions:** Of the 69 questions tabled, nearly a quarter concerned the C of E's response to the Government's 'Same Sex Marriage' consultation. Some questioners desired to make clear that part of its content was not a view held by all church members; others queried who was consulted prior to

finalising the document. In answer it was said that the submission was written in terms of the legal position of the C of E, after gleaning views from a wide spectrum of the Church.

Apart from this issue questions ranged widely, to encompass the new validation scheme for training, mission, ministry, and metal theft. The last of which attracted several supplementary questions seeking to speed up the process of detecting thieves and safeguarding against them in the first place.

On Saturday we spent much of the morning in discussion groups, which paved the way for a debate on:

**World Shaped Mission:** The report, which is available to parishes, identified new opportunities for mission with the use of such high speed communications as mobile phones, Skype, and email which can capture the bigger picture. There is a call for greater common participation with other faiths and agencies to create co-operation rather than competition. It is important to be alert as to where God is at and respond as his grace overflows beyond the Church. We should be going the mile barefoot with our brothers and sisters and listening to them. Parish initiatives and links are an important part of our response to God's mission in the world.

**Draft Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Measure:** This report which came for final approval, adds some additional areas of inappropriate behaviour to clergy discipline in respect of support or membership of racist organisations, and adds convictions for criminal offences and matrimonial orders, together with some amendment to the usage and membership of the disciplinary tribunal. After a short debate, the Measure was overwhelmingly passed in all three Houses.

**Diocese of Europe Measure:** The Diocese of Europe has been in existence since 1980 and incorporates 300 churches and 120 clergy. The Diocese of Europe Measure brings the diocese into line with all other dioceses in the Church of England. It gives the Church Commissioners and the Archbishops' Council the power to make financial provision for the diocese and strengthens the synodical governance of the diocese by allowing more decisions to be made locally.

There was overwhelming support for the approval of the draft measure. There was also recognition of the important role played by this diocese in reaching out to English speaking communities, something which has been experienced by some GS members when travelling in mainland Europe.

**Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure:** Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure. This was a first consideration of the Measure, the eleventh in a series dealing with uncontroversial matters that do not merit free standing legislation. The purpose is to 'tidy up' existing legislation on a number of unrelated matters. During the debate various points of detail were raised and members were invited to put their concerns in writing to the revision committee. The Synod voted to send the Measure forward to revision stage and also congratulated itself on being able to spell the word 'miscellaneous'!

**The Church of England Funded Pensions Scheme (Amendment) Rules 2012:** The main purpose of this rule change was to deal with the complicated and oft-amended s75 of the Pensions Act 1995 to ensure no alteration to, and continuity of, clergy pension entitlement for those clergy employed by 'minor responsible bodies'.

**Church Commissioners Annual Report:** Andreas Whittam Smith, the First Church Estates Commissioner looked at the management of the Church Commissions £5.2 billion of investments. He said that the economy is visibly slowing down nationally and internationally and a key risk for 2012 was a 'European accident'. The Church Commissioners have eight guiding principles one of which is to 'Look at mistakes full in the face'. An example in 2011 was the failure to invest in gold which resulted from the 'mind-set and thinking patterns' of Church Commissioners.

Having last year dropped the head-line grabbing demographic time bomb, this year Mr Whittam Smith said that on current projections and using a profile based on 3% p.a. growth among younger adults, in 2040 it will move into net growth. 15% of Commissioners' income is distributed by the Archbishops' Council to mission projects. According to Whittam Smith, the review of these projects shows that no area is too difficult, churchmanship is irrelevant and leadership is crucial. But the Commissioners are frustrated because not all dioceses respond to their request for information on how the money has been spent and what their results have been. Also, he identified low levels of trust between the different statutory bodies of the church, a theme which came up in several guises during this sitting of General Synod.

**Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church:** A Fresh Expression is defined as "a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of the church." Fresh Expressions have been part of the mission strategy of the church for 10 years now and were endorsed in Synod's "Mission Shaped Church" in 2004. The purpose of the motion and debate was

to express gratitude to the team for its leadership, inspiration and effectiveness as a catalyst for over 1,000 fresh expressions, to affirm the mixed economy of church, to ensure the legacy is secured and that the new excellent report "Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church" and its recommendations would be incorporated into the programme to "re-imagine ministry" in all departments and boards of the church. At the same time the motion sought to affirm Fresh Expressions as authentic manifestations of Anglican ecclesiology arguing from Scripture, Tradition and Reason. The nine summary conclusions and the eight essential elements of an ecclesial community in the final chapter of the report/book are especially helpful. In the debate, which was one of the best aspects of this Synod, many stories of successful fresh expressions were recounted.

**On the Sunday morning we went to church at York Minster where the Archbishop of York presided and the Archbishop of Canterbury preached.**

**Additional Eucharistic Prayers:** The two new Eucharistic Prayers for use when children are present, discussed in detail at the February Synod, were given final approval without amendment. They are authorised for use from this September.

**Archbishops Council Report:** A detailed report was issued on the work completed in 2011 under the sponsorship of the Archbishops' Council (AC); it was also recognised that this work had continued successfully in the first half of 2012.

The three themes underlying the report were those identified by the Archbishops at the start of the current Quinquennium, namely:

- Contributing to the common good (engagement with the wider society)
- Going for growth (numerical and spiritual in the church)
- Re-imagining ministry (re-energise both lay and ordained ministry).

These three themes were considered as part of four objectives for the AC's programme of work in 2011:

- Enhancing the Church's mission
- Advancing the Church's work in education and lay discipleship
- Selecting and resourcing people to carry out public ministry and vocations
- Encouraging the development of Church buildings for worship and service to the community.

Generally the report was well received and there was wide recognition of the importance and success of the various initiatives. In fact it is encouraging to read that so much is happening.

Two important challenges were raised by GS members: the increasing importance of an ecumenical approach in many areas of mission and the need to give even more focus to lay ministry bearing in mind retirement of a significant number of stipendiary ministers in the next 5 years.

**Archbishops' Council Draft Budget for 2013:** Synod agreed the Budget of just under £29m spread between the following areas – Ministry Training (43%), National Church responsibilities (37%), Grants and Provisions (4%), Mission agency clergy pensions (2%), Clergy Retirement Housing (14%). In recent years there had been a shift in grant from National Support to Training reflecting the larger number of ordinands coming forward.

It was agreed that the overall apportionment for 2011 & 2012 should increase no more than 0.5% below the rate of inflation in those years and no more than the rate of inflation in 2013 to 2015. Additionally the portion for Training would go to no more than 1% above the permitted maximum.

The Archbishops' Council being acutely aware of the considerable financial pressure upon parishes and dioceses proposed an overall apportionment increase of 1.3% rather than the full 1.9% in expenditure. It means that £360k needs to be drawn from reserves. However, forecasts suggest this will be mitigated by £350k being added to reserves in 2012.

On a positive note, and in spite of a tight budgeting discipline, some increases have been agreed such as from £10 - £40k to support work among the Deaf and Disabled, as well as £35k for follow-up work for Church Schools of the Future to supplement their £250k received from the Church Schools Designated Fund.

Finally, there was strong support for the way the Council had structured the budget at a time of pressing financial hardship.

**Testing the Bridges:** This was a report on the church's response to the riots in the summer of 2011. A motion to take note of the report was moved by the Bishop of Bath and Wells who argued that many Christians played an important role in helping people during the riots. They did this because of their beliefs which motivated them to serve the common good. The help was given by Christians to rioters, their victims and the emergency services. The background to the disturbances was a lack of hope in the lives of many young people given the current economic situation. The Bishop argued that many church members felt ill-prepared for the riots and that we need to help people to find ways to respond in the future. Other contributors to the debate mentioned the lasting impact on the neighbourhoods affected, the fear felt by those living nearby, the importance of church buildings, the interfaith nature of the response

to the riots and the role of the media in causing the riots to spread. The motion was carried overwhelmingly. A following motion emphasising the need for better work experience schemes was adjourned with the understanding that more work needs to be done on this subject.

**Manifestation of Faith in Public Life:** This Private Member's Motion called on Synod to 'express its conviction that it is the calling of Christians . . . to manifest our faith in public life . . .'. The background paper referred to the perceived loss of the church's influence and marginalisation of faith attributed by the mover of the motion to human rights and equality legislation. More than two dozen people spoke on the main issue or one of the two proposed amendments, both defeated. The second amendment was to take the necessary steps to have the motion embodied in a Canon on the basis that it would 'send a clear message.' The Dean of the Arches, a senior legal officer of the church, responded forcefully to the suggestion that a Canon could or should be used for this purpose. The motion passed with 10 votes in favour for every 1 against but the number of abstentions was high, signalling some unease that not all of the issues and the implications of the motion had been flushed out.

**The draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure and accompanying Draft Amending Canon** were scheduled to take the whole of Monday but as things turned out only the morning was needed. Predictably this debate attracted a lot of media attention and a large number of requests to speak. It had become clear in the weeks leading up to Synod and at the Convocations on Friday that the House of Bishops' amendment to clause 5 of the Measure had rendered it unacceptable to many supporters of women bishops and the Measure was now likely to fall. This was a catastrophe to be avoided and over the weekend the Business Committee had been working hard behind the scenes to plan the right approach to the final approval debate.

The Archbishop of York in the Chair called the Bishop of Manchester as Chair of the Steering Committee to propose that the Measure now be finally approved. Without taking any further contributions, he immediately called the Bishop of Dover, also a member of the Steering Committee, to move a procedural motion to adjourn the debate. There followed a passionate but well modulated discussion on the proposed adjournment in which most supporters of women bishops wanted to adjourn while most opponents preferred to proceed. Objections to the amendment to clause 5 were teased out in detail. Supporters declared that they could accept the provision it offered but not its presence on the face of the Measure – they wanted the House of Bishops to reconsider. Opponents stated that although

it did not give them what they wanted it was better than nothing and they did not wish to give it up – the House of Bishops had given a lead and should not bow to pressure. The Archbishop of Canterbury was granted a ten minute speech and admitted that the House of Bishops had made a mistake while also defending the good intention behind the amendments.

At the end of the morning the Synod approved the motion for adjournment with 288 in favour, 144 against and 15 abstentions. The Business Committee confirmed that the House of Bishops would discuss the legislation again in September and there would now need to be a further meeting of the whole Synod in November.

**The Church School of the Future:** This report was introduced with a very compelling call for action: *Local authorities are in melt down – they are short of cash. RE is excluded from the new Baccalaureate. If we don't do anything, the Church School could disappear. Now is the time to do something.*

The review considered four broad areas in detail:

- The challenge facing the church school system in the future.
- The defining characteristics of church schools.
- How the church school family might develop and grow.
- How school should be supported at diocesan and national levels.

A total of 26 recommendations were made, underpinned by 3 major themes:

- The need to fully grasp that church schools are at the centre of our Christian mission and are not an optional extra.
- There will be a direct impact on diocesan strategy through providing increased capacity for school support.
- The importance to develop the distinctiveness of church schools.

The report was well received although it was recognised that two areas were not adequately covered by the report:

- The importance of Foundation Governors and their related training.
- The need to provide clergy with additional training in order to take on more influential roles in church schools.

**Israel & Palestine:** A private member's motion, presented by Dr John Dinnen (Hereford), asked our support for The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme, as well as for other aid agencies working among Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and other areas. It also asked us to support all Israelis and Palestinians working for justice and peace. On one level this was one of those motions which it is hard not to support, but there had

been intensive national lobbying before Synod met and many were uncomfortable about a debate which seemed to be politically one-sided. The motion was easily carried, but the level of abstentions was unusually high.

**Vacancy in See Committees:** The motion sought to correct an irregularity in the Vacancy in See (VIS) Regulations which particularly affects smaller dioceses. It arises from a situation when there are an insufficient number of members of a committee to satisfactorily form the 'six' needed for the diocesan contingent joining a Crown Nominations Commission. Bradford diocese that brought the motion may have previously overlooked the importance of keeping up their numbers on the VIS committee. This reason caused some General Synod Members to call for a 'move to next business' but the majority were anxious that the right of Diocesan Synods to bring business to the General Synod should be respected, so a short debate ensued. In the event, Synod narrowly agreed the motion that regulations be amended 'to ensure that Vacancy in See Committees have at least 21 members'.

**PCC Powers Measure:** A private members motion was passed calling on Synod to prepare legislation to allow PCC to own property, which is not vested in Diocesan Boards of Finance. On the face of it, this seemed reasonable, but there was a number of hidden agendas at work during this debate and Synod will have another chance to address these issues when draft legislation has been prepared.

**Farewells:** The AB York formally and warmly acknowledged the contribution to the Synod of the Bishop of Beverley, Martyn Jarrett and the Bishop of Blackburn, Nicholas Reade. The whole Synod offered their thanks to Margaret the stenographer, who records every word spoken in our debates on a manual stenograph, for her 30 years service. One farewell had to be omitted, which was the farewell to Archbishop Rowan Williams. As things turned out, he will now have to return for the November Synod as again we debate Women Bishops.

Having curtailed the debate on Women Bishops, the Synod was drawn to a close on the Monday evening and there was no business on the Tuesday.

The next meeting of General Synod will be from Monday 19<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012 at Church House Westminster.