

Report on the York 2014 General Synod from Salisbury Members

General Synod met at York University from Friday 11th to Tuesday 15th July 2014.

The Ordination of Women to the Episcopate

Out of many important debates, the most prominent one was the debate and vote on the ordination of women to the episcopate. A great array of satellite vans and TV cameras surrounded the Central Hall of the campus during the day. We began the debate at 11.15am and did not finish voting until 4.45pm. The principle, that there are no theological objections to the ordination of women, was agreed some forty years ago. We have taken our time over this. In November 2012 the then proposals failed to reach the required two thirds majority in each house (bishops, clergy & laity) by only six votes in the House of Laity. This time it was different. Since November 2012 there has been a process of facilitated discussion between people of very differing views which has produced a very different feeling in Synod debates. Instead of mapping out different 'constituencies' to cater for different views within our church, we have moved to a position of seeking one another's mutual flourishing. As Archbishop Justin has put it, you do not throw out members of your family because you disagree with them. Canon Jane Charman was on the group which produced the legislation and she contributed to the debate. There were some remarkable speeches given, with a great deal of graciousness from some of those who had fought long and hard against the ordination of women. Paula Gooder's opening speech was stunning, as was the final speech of the day from John Spence.

The legislation was passed by overwhelming majorities. By the time you read this, it will have already been processed by the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, ready to pass through the Commons and the Lords after the summer break, before going to the Queen for her assent. The final part of the process is that the Archbishop will need to formally declare the legislation to be law, when we meet again in November, and it is likely that we may well know the identity of the first of the women to be ordained as bishops before the end of the year.

You might like to go to:

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england/sets/general-synod-july-2014>

You will find there audio recordings of all the debates and much else beside. You might also go to:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2028847/inreviewaugust14.pdf>

where you will find a very good colour synopsis produced by the Church of England. The remarkable final speech by John Spence received a standing ovation and it can be viewed on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsIE0xB5Qfo>.

Full video recordings of all the sessions can also be found at:

<http://channel.vbrick.com/churchhouseconf/Index.aspx>

With so much material now available online, this synopsis will be somewhat briefer than has been the case in the past, but here are some of the other issues that we dealt with:

Safeguarding: There was a major debate about safeguarding. In the light of the report into the situation in the Diocese of Chichester, the Church of England is taking steps to strengthen safeguarding processes to ensure that our churches are both sacred space and safe space. We need an openness to hear the voice of anyone who is distressed, the ability to disqualify from PCCs and synods any who have a conviction against children or vulnerable adults, or their suspension if they are pending trial. There will a duty to have regard to the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and training in safeguarding will be compulsory. No clergy will be able to operate in our church (or robe) unless authorised to do so by the bishop. What we were debating was a draft measure. In the light of the debate, the necessary legislation will be revised and then brought back for final approval.

Questions is always an interesting moment to get the feel of what concerns people. For the 90 minute evening session on the Friday there was the opportunity to question any branch of the Church of England organisation on any question of concern and a senior member of the Church of England has to answer. Questions are submitted in advance, so the person answering the question has a readymade answer. But then the questioner can add in a supplementary question, for which the person answering will have had no prior warning. 'Same-sex marriage' featured in a number of questions, no doubt a foretaste of discussions to come.

'The Common Good' was the theme of an important debate about how we should work together to serve the common good. First we had a talk by the

Reverend Jim Wallis, entitled 'The Uncommon Good'. He made the point that the idea of serving the Common Good has become uncommon. Self-interest seems to be the order of the day and he suggested that, for many people, their 'significant other' was now their mobile phone. He said that the wealth of the 400 richest Americans equals the wealth of the poorest 150 million. He said that as Christians we need to be committed to the common good and to improving the state of the world. We broke into groups for discussion and then returned for a debate. Jim Wallis also preached in York Minster where we attended the Sung Eucharist on the Sunday.

Clergy Robing was the subject of a whole evening session, with a private members motion calling for a change in Canon Law to allow clergy to dispense with robes with the agreement of their PCC. It might be asked why, with so many other matters to discuss, we spent time on this. Yet is it important that members can bring motions to synod for debate and the current law on robes is widely ignored. Synod is the place where rules and canons are made and adapted and we need to spend some time on what might be considered to be matters of housekeeping. Bishop Nicholas spoke in this debate. We also had a debate about changes to the Church Representation Rules.

Baptism Liturgy was debated with the drafts of some new words for the rite of baptism coming under our scrutiny. It was felt that the existing liturgy is too far removed from people's lives to make sense to them. There is a view that the answer is to teach people what the language means, but an increasingly mission-orientated church is sympathetic to making changes to such things as language and robes as we seek to engage in the lives of those beyond the walls of our churches.

The Church Mutual Credit Union was introduced by Antony Macrow-Wood, from our own diocese. Antony is not a member of General Synod, but he has been a driving force in getting this Credit Union off the ground. It is due to be authorised this summer and to be operational in October. Initially this will be a credit union of clergy and church workers, but it is planned to open out membership to a wider group of people. To keep in touch with how this is developing, go to:

<http://www.cmcu.org.uk/>

There was an important debate on the **Armed Forces Covenant**. The essence of this is that we have a duty of care to those who have put their lives on the line in the service of our country. This becomes a more

urgent issue as regular troops become fully garrisoned in the UK and as we become more dependant of reservists, who are by definition more integrated into their local communities. This is an issue which is particularly relevant to our own diocese.

A motion was put drawing our attention to the fact that next year is the 800th year of **Magna Carta**. This is of particular interest to us in the Salisbury Diocese as our Cathedral has one of the four original copies of this great document. Canon Robert Key spoke in the debate.

The Archbishops' Council presented the central budget for the year including:

£13,437,670 Training for Ministry

£11,103,305 National Support

£1,264,314 Grants and provisions

£772,500 Pension contributions (& Missions)

£4,151,591 CHARM Scheme

A presentation was made about the **CHARM** scheme, which provides housing for retired clergy, as well as presentations on the annual reports of the **Archbishops' Council**, the **Church Commissioners** and the **Audit Commission**. Paul Boyd-Lee is a member of both the Archbishops' Council and the Audit Commission.

On the final morning a draft measure about **Church of England Property** was presented, the motion being moved by Canon Robert Key, who chairs the revision committee dealing with this measure. Debbie McIssaac also served on this committee. The purpose of this measure is to give PCCs greater powers in owning property, whilst preserving important aspects of diocesan involvement.

This was followed by the start of the process to introduce Amending Canon 35, which makes provision for **children to distribute the sacraments** in parishes and schools, subject to local approval. Archdeacon Alan Jeans, a member of the Steering Committee for this item, proposed the motion.

In the tradition of formal farewells being given to retiring bishops, speeches were made thanking the **Bishops of Burnley and Oxford** for their contributions to Synod and to the life of the Church.

We next meet in November. A new Synod will be elected in 2015. Please consider whom you might propose or second. Might you stand yourself?