

Report on the York 2015 General Synod from Salisbury Members

The final Group of Sessions of the present General Synod met in York University from Friday 10th to Monday 13th July 2015.

Before we began, the two Convocations met (Canterbury and York), as did the House of Laity.

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy came into force by an Act of Convocation.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2254378/clergy%20conduct.pdf>

Synod began with worship and the usual introductions. Then the **Archbishop of Uppsala**, The Most Reverend Dr Antje Jachelén addressed us. As leader of the Church of Sweden, which is one of the Porvoo churches, we are in full communion with her and her church. She spoke about communion, saying that it is about sharing the riches of tradition and is a matter of empowerment and not of seeking power. It is about finding unity in diversity. Above all, she said, it is about living with joy and engaging with a world which is crying out for credible words of hope. See:

<http://t.co/cReHFfnQpj>

The Archbishop of York delivered a very long Presidential Address. He began with a description of the death of Archbishop Janani Luwum, at the hands of Idi Amin, and went on to develop themes from John 17.

The Report of the Business Committee

This had to be curtailed, due to lack of time, but several people spoke, including questions as to why there was no debate on marriage or George Osborne's recent budget and why we were going against established custom by debating business matters on a Sunday. This last point illustrates one of the most obvious characteristic of this Group of Sessions, in that a large number of legislative items needed to be brought to a conclusion before the end of the life of this Synod.

Appointments

Synod agreed to the appointment of Matthew Frost (currently Chief Executive of Tearfund) to the Archbishops' Council. It was also announced that the Reverend Michael Gisbourne has been appointed a Chaplain to the forthcoming new

Synod. Synod had also agreed to the appointment of William Nye as the new Secretary General of General Synod. At present he is Principal Private Secretary to Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall.

The Report of the Standing Orders Committee

This was accepted, allowing new standing orders to be in place in time for Questions, which followed that evening.

Regulations for the Administration of Holy Communion

New regulations were agreed. The point of these changes is to make allowance for children to be authorised to administer Holy Communion. Any such scheme would have to be authorised by the bishop. In parishes, the PCC would need to agree. In Schools the Head Teacher would have to agree.

Ethical Investment Advisory Group and the National Investing Bodies.

A presentation was given on behalf of this important and influential body. They had recently published a Climate Change Policy which had begun with a study of biblical material as well as focusing on climate change's link with global poverty. An ordered transition to low carbon use is needed, but it was pointed out that simply pulling out of every questionable investment was not necessarily a good thing. Remaining investors could be a good thing if it means that the Church continues to exercise an influence for change. Disinvesting was always the last resort and, even then, the possibility to reinvest could be used as a means of influencing companies to change.

Questions

This session took place on the Friday night (8.30 to 10.00pm). As always, this allows any member of Synod to put any question about the life and governance of the Church, which has to be answered by the leader of the relevant group or organisation. The clever thing is not in the question posed, but in the supplementary question, which can be out from the floor of the house and will not have been seen in advance by the person answering the original question. Not everyone was

happy at the new system, whereby all the first answers were given in advance and in writing, so only supplementary questions were heard. Not all the questions were answered with grace, a point about which the Archbishop of Canterbury later apologised.

The full details of the primary questions asked, with the answers given, can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2260060/notice%20paper%20july%202015.pdf>

The Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure

An important debate on safeguarding was held on Saturday morning. This debate brings to a conclusion a lot of recent work on safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults, which will now pass into law. The measure sets out how only clergy who are in good standing may officiate (and robe) in our churches (although anyone can buy and wear a dog collar). It sets out how clergy can be suspended, how appeals will be heard and what risk assessments are needed if it is appropriate to reinstate clergy at a later date. The new regulations on safeguarding also deal with Licensed Lay Ministers, Lay Workers, Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councils. All alike will have a duty to act with due regard to the guidance on safeguarding from the House of Bishops and it is now a statutory duty for a report of safeguarding to appear at Annual Parochial Church Meetings. Having such 'due regard' also points to the fact that regular training on safeguarding is essential. Some good points were raised in the debate. All this will involve a significant rise in costs and it was noted that those regularly dealing with safeguarding cases themselves will need proper support. The issue of those exercising a ministry as funeral celebrants, often on the edge of the Church, but beyond these safeguarding provisions, was raised. As a result of this legislation, it is now mandatory for every parish to get its safeguarding provisions in place.

The next piece of legislation was to allow Diocesan Boards of Finance more flexibility in how they balance the spending of income against capital. This brings the Church of England more in line with other charities.

We moved on to legislation concerning **Ecclesiastical Offices**, which will allow greater flexibility in making shorter term appointments. Provision will be made, under certain circumstances, for a training post to be extended, or for short-term interim ministry to be put into a situation. Provision is also made for local funding of ministry.

Faculty Jurisdiction Rules

The Dean of the Arches, in introducing this item, made reference to the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel at Monte Gargano in 490AD. The Archangel consecrated the grotto there, so no further paperwork was needed! However, the Dean emphasised our need for paperwork and for doing things properly and in order, especially if we wanted to retain our ecclesiastical exemption from local planning regulations. These new rules provide for a relaxing of current processes so as to allow more things to be done without the need for a Faculty. Two lists of items have been produced. One is a list of things that parishes can get on and do without any consultation. The other is a list of things that can be done in consultation with the Archdeacon. A number of amendments were debated over such things as pianos (grand or not so grand) and armorial hatchments. One speaker suggested that we all need saving from blocked drains, bats and the Victorian Society. The Dean said that the issue of bats is a matter being pursued at the very highest level.

Ecclesiastical Property

Under certain circumstances PCCs will be given the right to engage in the buying or selling of certain types of property, but the value of such transactions should not exceed the value of their unrestricted annual income, nor can it exceed the value of £250,000. Such permission will not apply to parishes that fail to submit audited annual accounts. Some complained that the figures given in these provisions is too low, but Synod was asked to allow the introduction of these provisions at a conservative and cautious level, so that how they work can be assessed.

Single Transferable Vote Regulations

We also agreed to new regulations governing certain elections under the Single Transferable

Vote system. This is used for elections to General Synod.

Senior Leadership in the Church

A particularly important debate was introduced as a Private Member's Motion by Canon Simon Killwick. Any member of General Synod can propose a motion. If enough supporting signatures are added (with a requirement that at least 100 have indicated their support) then that motion has a chance of being debated on the floor of Synod. Some such motions (such as those on the nature of marriage) have been 'parked' by the Business Committee, because the matter in hand is already being dealt with in another way. Simon Killwick's motion was on Senior Leadership in the Church. It was a way of getting this subject debated in Synod, in the face of a strong feeling amongst synod members that the recent Green Report on senior leadership is being implemented without due discussion and reflection in synod. The motion simply required us to take note of the Faith and Order Commission report on 'Senior Leadership', but the debate allowed reference to both this report and the Green Report. An excellent debate took place. Concern was expressed over 'an inner circle of self-perpetuating power' and an overly corporate tone in senior leadership at this time. A helpful monastic contribution pointed to the Rule of Benedict and a way of living that sees God alone as our leader. One contributor said that we are called to be in the world, but not of it, whereas we sometimes seem to have bishops who are of the world, but not in it. The Bishop of Chelmsford challenged us not to forget the word 'sentinel' in the ordinal and he called for ministry which is both contemplative and prophetic. Canon Robert Key spoke of the need for us to be episcopally led. Canon Jane Charman presented an amendment which required the House of Bishops to report back to the Synod in a year's time about the effectiveness of the new arrangements for discerning and nurturing senior leaders. The amendment was carried.

Towards a Common Vision

A debate was held on this report from the World Council of Churches. This is only the second report of this type produced by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches since

1982, when they published 'Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry'. This new report is a 'convergence text', designed to help churches reflect on how close they are to common theological agreement.

The Church Commissioners' Report

The Commissioners have consistently beaten their long term target over the last thirty years and 2014 was no exception, being another good year. This was within a policy of increased diversification, an ethical framework, and much engagement with those businesses that are questionable in these respects; they included supermarkets and their alcohol policy, or lack of it, and BP moving to carbon neutral environment. Amongst the Commissioners at present there is a strong sense of the necessity for income from investment on the one hand, and their social responsibility on the other.

Archbishops' Council Report

The Council has a vision of a Christian presence in every community in addition to seeking God where He is already present. This is about the national church, it is about tending to relationships and acknowledging growth that is manifested in so many different ways and discerning how the spirit is moving amongst us. Much of the Council's recent work has been devoted to facilitating the Reform and Renewal programme which has been presented to more than half the dioceses so far. These presentations have drawn out a large number of needs and constructive ideas. All these are now being considered by the various task groups which have been charged with agendas leading to Church growth.

On the Sunday the Synod attends the Eucharist in York Minster. The Archbishop of York presided and the Archbishop preached. He spoke about the danger of being overcome with fear, as we seek to be the Church in our modern world, and for the need to find confidence in the truth that It is God who calls us, sanctifies us and sends us out. See:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5588/archbishop-of-canterburys-sermon-at-york-minster>

Alternative Texts for Baptism

New texts were agreed. These are extra texts, which do not replace the doctrinal foundation of the main texts, but they have been produced to be very user friendly and are likely to be widely used throughout the Church of England. The new texts were described as being a 'gift' to the church, but the warning was given that liturgy is more than text and proper preparation of baptism candidates is essential. These new texts come into use in September.

The Structure of the Church of England

This was an important debate on a motion that had originally come forward as a diocesan motion from the late Diocese of Wakefield. It was said that we are not the Church of God with a mission, but rather the God of Mission has a Church. If we are to be realistic about reform and renewal, we need to re-examine our structures. Is Synod fit for purpose? There is far too much fighting our own corners. Could not administration be done very differently? There is a great need for more joined up thinking. We moved on to the next business, so no vote was taken, but at least these issues had a good airing.

Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns

The committee gave us a presentation. The point was made that the ministry and leadership of the Church of England no longer looks like or represents many of the communities we serve. It was said that we are less the Church if we are not the Church of all God's people,

Annual Budget

Canon John Spence presented the annual budget. He described the present budget process as being broken, although he assured us that the Church of England is not bust. The present budget is a 'sticking plaster budget' and a renewed approach to budgeting will be in place for 2017. The 2016 budget will seek a 2.5% increase from dioceses. One sharp increase in costs from from staffing the safeguarding process.

The National Society

We had a presentation from the National Society. Chris Strain asked an important question about the

need to ensure that Religious Studies is retained as part of any future curriculum.

Climate Change

In terms of time allocated, the major item of the agenda at York was Climate Change. On the Sunday afternoon Paula Gooder had led a session to prepare us for group bible study on the subject on the Monday morning. Two major debates followed. The first was led by our own Bishop Nicholas. He pointed out that care of the environment is the fifth mark of mission. People are causing climate change. There is no Planet B. In the last 100 years we have burnt fossil fuels which took a billion years to lay down. Climate change has a far greater impact on the poor of our world. At root this is a spiritual problem as we seek to put 'we' at the heart of everything. He called for personal fasting and for long-term sacrificial investment. Two excellent debates took place. The second one, introduced by the Bishop of Manchester, concerned investment policy. The need to influence disinvestment in fossil fuels was emphasised, but often the Church of England can have greater influence in investment policy by remaining a critical shareholder. We disinvest when companies stop listening.

Conclusion

Farewells were given to the Bishops of Gloucester and Lichfield, as well as to several other people. The 2010-15 Synod was drawn to a close, but only after we had celebrated the Eucharist together.

If you wish to read any reports or other papers from General Synod, they are all to be found on:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/july-2015-group-of-sessions.aspx>

You can find sound files from Synod at

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england/sets/general-synod-july-2015>

We now need to elect members of a new General Synod. You can find useful information at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/synod-elections-2015.aspx>

Nomination papers in our diocese are now being issued