

REPORT ON GENERAL SYNOD THURSDAY 8 TO SATURDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2018

For the first time, Synod met over part of a weekend in London to see if it would be easier for members with 'substantial week-day commitments.' If we stay with it, hopefully it will encourage lay people who work and have to take unpaid leave to stand for election to General Synod.

Another less novel first is that the Business Committee categorised Synod business under four headings and presented its Report on that basis. We are going to have a go at reporting to you on the same basis: *Standing Items* (1), *Legislative Business* (2), *The Church in the World* (3) and *Ordering the life of the Church* (4). As you will see, some items sit rather strangely in the category into which they have been slotted.

All are encouraged to read the extended report on Food Wastage (see later in report). We can all do something this Lent to combat it. You will note that it is a Diocesan Synod motion which often starts as Deanery Synod motions. If there is something you think that General Synod should be debating, get your Deanery to consider passing a motion or raise it with one or your Diocesan or General Synod reps.

Churchwardens especially may find the precis of the Digital Evangelism presentation interesting (see later in the report). Note that Church House London is going to provide 'free, modern, accessible and easy to use websites' for churches to link to their *A Church Near You* page from Summer 2018.

STANDING ITEMS

Report by the Business Committee

After the Business Committee presented its report, as usual there were many questions including: the timing of distribution of papers including answers to Questions being sent out before Synod meets which could lead to contrived supplementary questions and media speculation; lengthy reports being received by members later than is useful; the short time being given to the urgent issue of discussing how we may disagree on significant issues, yet the number of days that Synod meets is reducing; how to bring about a change of heart and culture to show marginalised people that Synod has been listening and action is being taken; and how can we be more relevant as part of the Church in the World. In answering, the Business Committee Chair assured Synod that these concerns are being considered but also reminded us that all present are communicators so it is up to everyone in their deaneries to communicate our business at a personal level.

Questions

As usual, a large amount of time was given over to supplementary questions from the floor following the prepared answers. And again, questions about human sexuality, safeguarding, and the recently published Carlile report (and happily, a pause to pray for victims of abuse) dominated the proceedings. It was interesting that the only report that made it to the Times newspaper was the Bishop of Coventry's apparent tacit approval that cathedrals allow Freemason's services - not, I believe, what he intended! There were also other important questions concerning the progress of the implementation of GS2056, "Setting God's People Free", the report on better representation of lay ministry in the church and questions about encouraging children and young people to become more involved in the Church.

LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS

Amending Canon No.36 (GS 2029D) and Amending Canon No. 37 (GS 2029DD)

Two pieces, namely burial in churchyards of those that have taken their own life, and vesture which clergy wear during church services, were promulgated. Both of these started as Private Member's Motions.

Draft Ecumenical Relations Measure (GS 2046A)

The first stage of legislation permitting interchange of ministry with specific ecumenical partners was introduced to Synod. This is the first fruits of a Simplification Task Group Committee about mission

initiatives. At one level it would allow leading intercessions and lesson reading, whilst at another it concerns preaching or assisting at marriage and burial services. The guiding factor is likely to be whether they are authorized to perform these functions in their own denominations.

Draft Miscellaneous Provisions Measure

Introduced from the Chair as the afternoon's treat, this report came amid a long and complicated afternoon of procedures and points of order. Two things to be noted are that 1) Church Commissioners will be able to release the income from their capital to the Archbishop's Council for mission in general, to reach a wider range of activities; and 2) increased flexibility will allow funerals to be officiated by someone other than a resident parish priest, while ensuring goodwill towards the parish priest. Sue de Candole, our Diocesan Registrar is the Revision Committee's consultant.

Church Property Measure (GS 2083) *First Consideration* This measure seeks to consolidate with corrections and minor improvements, a number of enactments relating to church property. A debate was not required.

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Food wastage – a Diocesan Synod Motion from St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

This important motion was welcomed by all members of Synod, however, as there were several amendments moved to change the wording of the motion, valuable time was lost in the debate. It was no surprise that everyone who spoke supported the motion. The following points give a flavour of what was said. We heard:

- Stories from rural parishes where local farmers struggle to provide food for supermarkets who then reject their products for not meeting their criteria. Food wasted as crops are ploughed back into the fields.
- The need to question the policies of supermarkets – e.g. 2 for the price of 1 sales – which often lead to extra waste. Sell by dates – are they really needed? Younger people often abide by these.
- Commendable stories of food banks and charities who recycle food which would otherwise be wasted
- Reports from schools telling of the imaginative ways children are being educated about waste.
- Reminders that this is a global problem for our global church
- Instances of people being drawn to Christian faith through witnesses in Christian food banks and feeding programmes.
- Cafes opening using all items of food which are past their sell-by date.
- A call to support the MP Frank Field, who has drawn attention to the 1 million lonely pensioners in danger of dying of hunger. He hopes to reintroduce a programme from before World War 1 when church members regularly visited lonely older people with food and spent time in fellowship with them.

We in Salisbury Diocese, could certainly take on many of the challenges and ideas we heard about.

Valuing people with Down's Syndrome – a motion proposed by the Bishop of Carlisle

This was a very positive debate for Synod where we heard so many heart-warming stories and personal testimonies as to the value of those with Down's Syndrome. It soon became apparent that this motion had been crafted to give support to similar statements from other national groups and agencies. This meant that two amendments that were concerned with valuing the life of those with Down's 'before' birth were defeated with the Bishop drawing Synod's attention to other statements the Church has made on the topic of abortion.

Perhaps the most moving contribution to the debate came from the Rev Rachel Wilson. Delivering her maiden speech from a wheel chair, she related how her parents completely ignored medical advice to terminate her life, how she praised God that living with disability was not a disaster. She encouraged Synod members to foster those with disability, so they could become what God intended them to be.

An amendment calling on the churches in Iceland and Denmark where Down's Syndrome births have almost been wiped out to question practices was not carried. One amendment which called for parents of Down's babies to be assured of support was successful and, as amended, the motion was then carried unanimously.

Presentation on Digital Evangelism

On Saturday afternoon we had a presentation from Adrian Harris, the Church of England's head of digital communications. He discussed how they are using the internet and social media to bring people to faith. In particular, he discussed the success of the Christmas 2017 #godwithus campaign, which reached 6.8 million people, 1.5 million more than 2016's campaign. These campaigns are important because 89% of the British population use the internet regularly and 57% use social media regularly.

The Church of England and *A Church Near You* websites have been recently relaunched; pay them a visit as they are now much more mobile-friendly and engaging. The CofE website now has plenty of video content that lots of local churches are utilising. There are many resources available online for churches, and all you have to do is text 'Lent' to 88802 to join the 2018 Live Lent campaign and access resources.

A Church Near You's relaunch has created new personalised home pages, with up to five editors for a church's page, and it is now much easier to add pages. The number of page views was up 50% in December 2017 compared to 2016, and there are now 56,000 church services listed. Peak traffic was on Christmas Eve when 68% of visitors to the website were new. Church House is going to provide free, modern, accessible and easy to use websites for churches to link to their *A Church Near You* page from Summer 2018, so keep an eye out if your church's website could do with an update.

Presidential Address, The Most Reverend Justin Welby

The Archbishop of Canterbury gave a very thoughtful and wide-ranging speech on reimagining the Church and how we see ourselves. He started by saying: "We have agreed to reimagine: we have started down that road with faith and reimagination; we have not yet reimagined it all." How do we rise to change? The temptation is always to go with tradition as change unsettles at a personal level. Radical change without being aware of the traditions that underpin and secure the structures to which we belong is likely to lead to disaster. Any tradition that cannot adapt is doomed. He said we have to imagine the Church anew in each generation with faithful innovation and care for one another.

Anglican Communion invited speakers and Companion Links in the Anglican Communion (GS 2081)

Three Anglican Communion guests from three very different places that are all on the front-line of Christian presence and mission spoke to us: The Bishop of Peshawar, Humphrey Peters; the Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba; and the Archbishop of Polynesia, Winston Halapua. They received a standing ovation ahead of a debate about Companion Links.

The Bishop of Guildford said the debate was the starting gun for the pre-Lambeth hospitality programme and challenged Synod to see these connections as an integral part of our mission, discipleship and even Reform and Renewal. Following the debate, the Synod approved a motion which affirmed the companion links between the Church of England's dioceses and other parts of the Anglican Communion.

ORDERING THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Discerning in Obedience - A theological Review of the Crown Nominations Commission (GS Misc 1171 and GS 2080) The title of this item characterised the thoughtful and theologically balanced report which was presented by Prof. Oliver O'Donovan. It gives an admirable account of the office and work of a bishop as well as of the workings of the CNC. It highlights the need for a richer understanding of the dynamics of vocational discernment, greater trust and transparency in the way the CNC operates, and for a renewed emphasis on the theological abilities of candidates alongside other qualities. This process, previously shrouded in secrecy, is to become a little more open, with the candidates meeting each other and the CNC members, and with open voting rather than a secret ballot.

After a 'take note' debate, Synod voted that the proposals, which were almost unanimously welcomed, would go forward. An oversight group will now be responsible for the implementation of the recommendations and will report back to Synod regularly, beginning in July.

Safeguarding: Presentation on national developments and on the Church of England's preparation for the Independent Inquiry into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) (GS Misc 1172 & GS Misc 1173)

The papers including the reports *Independent Peter Ball Review: An Abuse of Faith* by Dame Moira Gibb, and the *Independent Review into Bishop George Bell* by Lord Carlile of Berriew, QC.

Prior to the presentation, members of Synod were invited to join survivors of abuse by the Church, for a two-minute silent vigil in front of Church House. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, lead bishop on safeguarding, introduced the difficult, challenging and demanding issues facing the Church today. A DVD with voices of survivors told their stories. The Bishop of Chichester spoke of the determined team work aiming to right the wrongs that took place in his Diocese. Adequate funding for safeguarding provisions and training is essential. There is no excuse for the abuse of power by perpetrators in cases of abuse. The Bishop of Gloucester spoke about the impact of the Peter Ball case within the Diocese. She spoke of the deep shame and sorrow that she and others feel following this case. It is the responsibility of us all to keep our parishes safe for all. Sir Roger Singleton, member of the National Safeguarding Panel gave an overview of changes and reviews of national and diocesan safeguarding practices. He emphasised the need of a cultural change to the seriousness of safeguarding, especially in every parish across the Church of England.

The Bishop of Bath and Wells thanked all those who shaped the presentation, especially the survivors for their courage in coming forward. He outlined the National Safeguarding Framework, and the Promoting a Safer Church Policy. The IICSA inquiry will offer an apology for past failures and an opportunity to learn and improve our safeguarding provisions. We were left in no doubt that other incidents will come to light.

Invited speakers from the Methodist Church and Mission and Ministry in Covenant (GS 2086)

In 2014 Synod asked the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) to undertake further work into the questions of the Methodist Church becoming one of those churches with which we are in communion and all priests and presbyters serving in either church being eligible to serve in both churches including presiding at the Eucharist. What is now being considered includes the President of the Conference (a one-year appointment) being ordained as a bishop and the Church of England would accepting existing presbyters as if they had been ordained by a bishop as one of the 'bearable anomalies'.

The two speakers from the Methodist Church were lucid, engaging and at times passionate as they advocated the ever-closer union of our churches. Revd Ruth Gee (from a village in Wiltshire and former President of the Methodist Convention) explained the challenge facing Methodists to accept and acknowledge bishops and apostolic succession. Revd Gareth Powell (Secretary to the Methodist Conference) pointed out that John Wesley would be strongly advocating our reordering and togetherness. They were given very warm, extended and appreciative applause.

For this key debate, there were more than 50 requests to speak. Fenella Cannings-Jurd spoke against the motion and Keith Leslie, who is married to a Methodist lay preacher, spoke in favour. Some speakers challenged whether there could be doctrinal alignment. Both Archbishops supported the motion noting that we must move forward. On a vote by Houses, the motion that further work should be done was overwhelming supported but the hard work is still to come.