

General Synod - February 2010: A Synopsis by Salisbury Members

General Synod met in London from Monday 8th to Friday 12th February 2010. Separate meetings of the Houses of Clergy and Laity took place before Synod began. Among new members of Synod welcomed was our own Richard Franklin, who had been elected to fill the place vacated by Alistair Magowan.

A presentation was given by the Bishop of Manchester, who had to explain why the proposals for the ordination of women as bishops had not been completed in time for us to discuss them. His committee faces a difficult task, as the Church of England is seeking both to ordain women as Bishops and to make provision for those who cannot accept the ministry of women in this role. He promised that the work will be finished by May, so that there can be a full debate on this issue when Synod meets at York in July.

Business Committee Report: The Chairman of the Business Committee (The Revd Prebendary Kay Garlick (Hereford) said that the Synod had a duty to bring to a conclusion as much legislative business as possible before the end of this five-year Synod. It would be important to clear it all except for that concerned with women bishops, on which we would concentrate at York in July.

The Agenda would encompass subjects concerned not only with the Church's ordering, governance and finance, but also with its engagement with wider society.

Questions: Questions may be put by any member of the Synod to those responsible. However, under Standing Order 106 (b) they may not contain any argument or imputation or ask for any expression of opinion (including on a question of law) or for any solution of any hypothetical problem. Officially, questions should be sensible and dull. So it proved – with very occasional flashes of controversy.

There were questions on training and ordinands, common tenure, Readers, Palestinian Christians, the Equality Bill, liturgy, the Church Commissioners, pensions, sexuality, the Revision Committee, education, and the common thread of finance.

We learnt that all Dioceses now have counsellors on bullying, that the average age of Church of England congregations is 61, and that some staff at Church House are holding a strike ballot. The Church Commissioners wrote off £40 million on a bad investment in New York.

The House of Bishops was asked, in view of the slow progress towards women bishops, if they would invite female observers 'so that the insights of

women are not lost to the Church at this high level of leadership and policy development'. The Archbishop of York replied that they would not ask women along – or they would have to invite every other interest group. There was a sharp intake of breath from more than half the Synod, including the female interest group.

Ecclesiastical Fees Measure: Several people voiced their concern about the operation of a new system that replaces that of an annual review but Final Approval was given by a substantial majority. In short the incumbent's fee will be paid to the diocesan board of finance (DBF) and power is being given to the Archbishops' Council to prescribe fees for up to five years. Where appropriate, incumbents will be able to waive the fees payable to the DBF and those for children under 16 will be abolished.

Mission and Pastoral Measure– Draft Measure for Revision: The Synod voted to take note of the report. Then the Mission and Pastoral Measure was finally approved

Draft Care of Cathedrals Measure: This legislation consolidated, corrected and made minor improvements to Care of Cathedrals Measures from 1990, 1994 and 2005. It makes it easier for Cathedrals and other bodies to apply the legislation.

Codes of Practice: We considered and approved 2 Codes of Practice containing new capability and grievance procedures. These are required in consequence of the new Terms of Service and will apply to all Office Holders; yes, even the Archbishops!

The procedures are intended to embody the principles of reasonableness which run as a rich vein through secular employment law. The capability procedure is based on the twin premises that support is infinitely preferable to sanction and that the procedure will be rarely used.

The care with which the codes have been crafted is only marred by the structural rigidity of the capability procedures which is probably a reflection of a certain nervousness about embracing all the practical implications of Common Tenure. James Humphery proposed 4 amendments designed to introduce some flexibility to let reasonableness reign. He garnered some support but the Archbishop of York wasn't about to break down the defences along which some bishops will stride and his amendments were lost. Find the codes at the General Synod pages of the national website under references GS 1774 & GS 1775.

Presidential Address: A wide-ranging address opened with a discussion on how one's freedom can be another's injustice. There is a boundary that is risky to cross on the Equality Bill without the state creating ideological powers that could be deeply dangerous for liberty in general.

On assisted suicide, there are dangers of a legal framework as the freedom of one person to use it risks the freedom of others not to be manipulated or harassed or simply demoralised when in a weakened condition, where lives are undermined by a public impatience with protracted dying and 'unproductive' lives.

All have a claim to be heard in their own terms on the Anglican Communion Covenant and women bishops. Legislation needs to be framed with good news in it for everyone, not just for one group. Whatever is decided has to allow some measure of continuing dignity and liberty to all. As Christians, granting freedom sets free the possibility of contributing to each other's holiness.

Listening with a 'three dimensionality': "Seeing something in three dimensions is seeing that I can't see everything at once: what's in front of me is not just the surface I see in this particular moment." Seeing in three dimensions requires time to look more critically at solutions and to search for structures. Sometimes structures include an unwelcome degree of distance: e.g. for the Covenant and women bishops. But if used creatively, future reconciliations may happen.

Synod must not ask how it can win a conflict but what can be given. Freedom and mutuality risk being separated in the zero-sum, self-congratulating mode that some seem to be content with. The Church and Synod is capable of showing a different face to the typical Christian position of an anxious, self-protective image. Pray that God will reveal such a vision in us and for us.

Clergy Pensions Task Group Report: As is generally known, the (post 1998) clergy pension scheme is suffering the same fate as most others, and the notional deficit has now risen to £360 million, though this should reduce by the next valuation date due to higher Stock Exchange values.

Although changes were made only three years ago further changes must now be made to keep the contribution rate below 50% of the current stipend. Following wide consultation it is felt that 42% is the maximum acceptable, and to achieve this it was agreed that the following changes would take effect from January 2011, relating only to service after that date: (i) Contract in to the state second pension (S2P) and reduce the clergy benefit from 2/3 to 1/2 of final stipend. Benefit neutral and likely to cost less. (ii)

Post retirement increases to be limited to Retail Prices Index. (iii) Normal retirement age to be 68. (iv) Full pension to require 43 years' service.

Consultation had revealed only two dioceses to be in favour of considering changing to a defined contribution scheme, but the possibility of some kind of hybrid arrangement will be looked into.

Clergy Pensions Ill-health Retirement: The present ill-health retirement arrangements provide for a full pension irrespective of the length of service. This is seen as unsatisfactory – not only expensive but tending to discourage recovery and continuation in ministry. In future the emphasis will be on early recognition of potential problems and availability of a consistent standard of rehabilitation support. In appropriate cases of accident or long term illness the new capability procedure will be followed. Advanced pension benefits will be available on the basis of completed service but with a graduated enhancement.

Mission-Shaped Church: It was good to have a debate on the Mission of the Church and to realise how far the Church of England has moved in recent years. The notion of a church shaped for mission rather than to the desires of members is now universally accepted. We are a church no longer constrained but on the move, showing flexibility in a fast-changing culture. New legislation, the coming of Bishops' Mission Orders, training programmes and a large number of local initiatives all demonstrate a commitment to a new way of being church and to the task. The resolution might have not drawn such a polarisation between "traditional churches" and "fresh expressions" as many churches would want to describe themselves in the gap, so perhaps the phrase "inherited church in mission mode" might have been better than "traditional". However, the debate was very positive.

TV Coverage of Religious and Ethical Issues: Nigel Holmes (Carlisle) had worked for the BBC for many years – but he proposed a motion that criticised it (and Ofcom) by name because it used to be exemplary in its religious coverage, but now it "marginalises the few such programmes which remain". While the output of BBC TV had doubled over 20 years, the hours of religious broadcasting were fewer and at less accessible times. He said that while 70% of people polled said religion was important to them, only 21% of those who worked in television agreed.

Canon Gavin Ashenden (Southern Universities) said the media were hungry for us. The radio platform was there for the asking and we should engage with local radio.

The Bishop of Manchester moved an amendment that did not mention the BBC and expressed its

appreciation of those engaged in communicating religious belief. His amendment expressed deep concern about the reduction in religious broadcasting and called on mainstream broadcasters to nurture and develop expertise. They should create and commission religious content that covered the major festivals and portrayed acts of worship.

Report of the Standing Orders Committee: This was largely a tidying up exercise. Three amendments were proposed, one concerning entitlement to receive papers by a member attending a Committee to speak to them, and the others by Paul Boyd-Lee asking for Revision Committees to conduct their business in public, and seeking more time to consider Consolidation Measures.

The Anglican Church in North America: A simple Private Member's Motion inviting us to express a desire to be in Communion with ACNA generated 2 weeks of pre-synod email blast and counter-blast and a packed chamber.

ACNA has been formed by congregations which have left the Episcopalian Church in the USA and the Anglican Church in Canada over differences provoked by issues relating to same sex relationships. These have deepened into serious doctrinal differences which are generating enormous hurt, sacrifice and litigation.

In a charged debate we took the point that we weren't saying anything about TEC or ACC and expressed concern at the implications of the motion for those who feel compelled to stay in those two churches. Above all, we recognised the real issue we were grappling with was how to live with diversity; a familiar theme in this quinquennium.

The Synod coalesced round an amendment by the Bishop of Bristol which appeared friendly but which in fact neutered the original motion. Nevertheless, a point of sorts was made and it did the Synod good to have a debate in which passion, conviction and respect ran free.

Military Chaplaincy: A presentation by each of the three Armed Forces on the importance of Chaplains, both in leadership based upon a moral authority and love, but also on gracious magnanimity. Chaplains serve, unarmed, in the front line wherever the services are fighting to provide "a glimpse of heaven to those caught up in hell". Love is more important than faith, and there is no high or low church, evangelical or traditionalist, and sometimes on the front, as a result of expediency, delivering the Gospel takes precedence over Church Law! Please pray for those in the Armed Forces, and also for the Chaplains who continue to ensure God's presence is maintained even in the worst of circumstances.

Additional Weekday Lectionary: More work was done on the extra weekday scheme of readings, which is intended for such places as Cathedrals where many people come on a one-off basis. A lot of debate took place about the place of the Apocrypha in worship, but these references were kept in place.

Address by the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference: The Archbishop of Canterbury invited the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd David Gamble, and the Vice-President, Dr Richard Vautrey, to address the Synod. Their interesting address, on the Covenant between the two Churches affirmed the Methodist Church's commitment to a covenant relationship with the Church of England. The Covenant relationship was a "serious, deeply committed relationship....driven by a desire for mission". "Within God's overwhelming gracious covenant relationship with us and with our churches, we are in a covenant with each other; for better for worse, for richer for poorer, but always for the gospel....In other words we are prepared to be changed and even to cease having a separate existence as a Church if that will serve the needs of the Kingdom." The full address can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opento_god.content&cmid=3014.

Fresh Expressions: In addition to the Mission-Shaped Church debate there was an excellent presentation by Bishop Graham Cray, the Archbishops' Missioner and Team Leader of Fresh Expressions. He explained that the Mission Shaped Church report had given lift-off and released a new movement which is truly ecumenical, widespread, in all churchmanships and very diverse. He pointed out that we live in an era of new imagination, permission and resources. The underlying philosophy is "Seeing what God is doing and joining in," seeking to create contextual, costly incarnational communities for the kingdom. The FEs were becoming well supported by FEASTs (Fresh Expressions Area Strategy Teams) and much training and sharing of experience was happening. Bishop Cray said FEs had been used to describe many good initiatives but emphasised that a fresh expression properly understood is a new congregation, not a bridge to add people to an existing congregation; but it is "proper" church! The priorities for the next phase of FEs are: More, Better (sustained) and owned. There is a great need for self-supporting missionaries and for the church to invest long term. Go to freshexpressions.org.uk and sharetheguide.org to find out more.

Realising the Missionary Potential of Church Buildings: Presentation by the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division: The presentation was given by the Bishop of London and Mrs Ann Sloman (Chairman of Church Buildings Council). It was very

much related to the Diocesan Synod Motion that followed and enumerated many of the fine examples of church buildings being used for community use. Particular emphasis made about the need to put pressure on MP's to try to retain the Listed Places of Worship Scheme which expires in 2011. The government needs to recognise the place that churches play in community development. Several references were made to www.churchcare.co.uk where much useful advice can be found for parishes seeking to develop their community use. (*Interesting statistic – 47 pubs close for every one church that is closed*)

Diocesan Synod Motion – Repair of Church Buildings: This motion came from the diocese of Ripon and Leeds and was amended in a small way. The proposer spoke of the importance of buildings as tools for mission, as ways that can help the government meet their targets for social cohesion – but also as significant drains on the resources of small congregations, made worse by the threat to funding. All speakers supported the motion; here and in a fringe meeting on this subject Hereford Diocese's 'toolkit' was commended and the following website may be useful to many <http://www.hereford.anglican.org/churchgoers/commUnityPartnershipandFunding/aboutusandlatestnews/toolkit.aspx>

The need for well thought out vision and strategy was re-iterated, as well as consulting with the diocese from the outset. Rob Key was the last speaker and emphasised the importance of pressurizing ministers in respect of funding. The motion passed with 248 in favour and no abstentions and none against is rather too long to print in full, but recognised the valuable financial help received in the past and called on HM Government "to substantially increase the amount available for the repair of listed church buildings and to give an early commitment to continuing beyond March 2011 the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme."

Going for Growth- Transformation for children, young people and the Church: The Report was influenced by the findings of the Good Childhood Inquiry. In its first paragraph it states, "the task of Christian nurture must be seen not only in domestic terms as something taking place within the families and generations of the Church (*though, as Chris Strain pointed out, it does not make this assumed statement adequately*), but also within the larger context of the Church's universal mission to humanity." The document goes on to explain this context as the parish, every community, places of further and higher education and beyond the walls. Three Guiding Principles are said to be: The absolute value of each child and young person, the importance of relationship and the establishment of the Kingdom

of God here on earth. These points are linked to the five Marks of Mission. The "Call to Action" importantly calls the church to three things: to work towards every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ, to be in the process of and enable transformation, and to support those working with children and young people. The Report is a contribution but could have gone further.

Parity of Pension Provision for Surviving Civil Partners: A private member's motion. The Civil Partnership Act gives surviving civil partners the same pension rights as surviving spouses of deceased clergy, but only from the implementation of the Act in 2005. This proposal called for equality of civil partners with spouses, i.e. disregarding the implementation date. A well-presented motion which succeeded by being argued on the basis that the church ought to be seen to be being more generous than required and which surprisingly survived two amendments which would have watered it down considerably. There will be a cost to the pension scheme which is difficult to quantify.

Violent Computer Games: A Private Member's Motion tabled to express concern about the potentially desensitising and damaging effects upon children and young people of computer games containing gratuitous violent and sexual content, and call upon the Government to review their policies. This motion has taken 18 months to reach Synod debate. As a result, it had to be amended to bring it into line with current developments e.g. the Byron Report. The debate was, typically, one-sided and ended with 168 votes for and none against.

Science and Belief: A very good debate took place on the relationship between science and belief, with notable contributions from some very able scientists and mathematicians. One theme was the way in which modern science leads us into a sense of wonder. The fight between science and belief was described as a fight between a shark and a tiger.

Confidence in the Bible - Diocesan Synod Motion from Chelmsford: This was the final debate and a fitting end to this group of sessions as it pointed to an important event that all Christians could both promote and participate in next year; namely the 400th anniversary of the Authorised Version of the Bible. Evidence highlighted a great decline, even amongst churchgoers, in the regular reading of Scripture, so this would be a great opportunity to reverse the trend and reintroduce people to the treasure they are missing. Synod requested dioceses, deaneries & parishes to undertake local initiatives to further this celebration. They unanimously passed the amended motion.