

# Report on General Synod from Salisbury Diocesan members – November 2010

## Opening of Synod

A new General Synod was inaugurated by Her Majesty the Queen following a service held in Westminster Abbey on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010. The previous day there had been induction sessions for new members of Synod to introduce them to how synodical government works. Now, on the Tuesday, we processed into the Abbey, having been through airport-style security checks. Clergy had to wear 'Convocation robes' which consist of cassock, gown, scarf, hood and preaching bands. Dame Mary Tanner was the preacher and she referred back to the difficult and divisive issues which threatened the unity of the early Church and which led to the Council of Jerusalem. She described our modern synodical system as something which had been a visionary initiative, yet was now in need of reform. We need something that is less confrontational, more open to listening to one another and based on 'the gathering together around the Lord's Table to receive food for the synodical journeying'. Once the service had ended, we moved back into Church House where the Queen inaugurated the new Synod.

## The Presidential Address

In his profound and authoritative Presidential Address, the Archbishop of Canterbury explained why he needed our support for the controversial Anglican Covenant. He based his appeal on II Kings 10.15, 'He greeted him and said, "Is your heart true to mine, as my heart is to yours?" Jehonadab replied, "Yes." "If so," Jehu said, "Give me your hand."'

Heart to heart Christian loyalty should enable Anglicans to join hands for the sake of the Gospel. We are called to grow the Church of England, to re-shape the Church's ministry and to focus our resources on need and opportunity.

In his great sermon on 'The Catholic Spirit', John Wesley said that we 'cannot all think alike, and in consequence...cannot all walk alike.' The Covenant did not invent a new orthodoxy or a new system of doctrinal policing or a centralised authority. It was not a tool of exclusion and tyranny.

He said it was an illusion to think the Communion could carry on as usual, without some changes, and a greater illusion to think that the Church of England can somehow derail the entire process. The Covenant was a tool with which disagreement could be managed, even if such disagreement could not be resolved.

Rowan said the other issue that was bitterly divisive in the Communion was our approach to same-sex

unions. We needed thoughtful engagement to understand how people who read the same bible and share the same baptism can come to strongly diverse conclusions. This is getting more urgent because the debate on sexuality has not really moved much. We should not be purely tribal about this nor driven by the need to make instant decisions.

The Archbishop urged us to surprise those who are looking on by our loyalty to each other. We should seek out those we disagree with and work till it hurts to share prayer and fellowship around the life of the Synod. We should arrive here ready to discover something, rather than simply determined to win. So we should look at how we 'do' Synod, finding more time to think together and to do theology together.

He ended by repeating, in the words of the King James Bible, as an agenda for this Synod's life and work: 'Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?'

## The Big Society

This was the first major debate the new Synod encountered. The subject is a major theme of the new Government, one which presents the C of E with enormous opportunities. The Bishop of Leicester, who moved the main motion, had previously sponsored an House of Lords debate on ideas surrounding the matter, and the Mission and Public Affairs Division has discussed with ministers how the Church could work in partnership with the Government to promote greater social cohesion.

During debate it was made clear that, in spite of the Comprehensive Spending Review, true community cannot be a cost cutting exercise. In fact it was hoped that initiatives such as 'Being Neighbourly', one where at a national level the Church can pursue its mission in alignment with the Big Society, would soon get the go-ahead.

The Archbishop of Canterbury welcomed the creation of a Big Society bank, and whilst speaking in favour of the whole venture, saw that our local principles should extend to global ones as well. He noted that the Government had increased its aid in this respect.

In general, members were enthused but saw the need to balance the provision of a service against retaining their Christian identity. Embracing the diversity of communities was a need and a challenge as well.

Synod after approving the report, supported a following motion calling for a feasibility study, benefactor funded, in association with other

Churches and Christian agencies to prepare business templates for various options which could be used by dioceses who choose to make partnerships in their local area, and to complete this in or before 2012.

### **The Anglican Covenant**

This was the second of the two main debates at the November sessions. The objective of the Covenant is to provide a means by which the Anglican Communion can hold together. At the end all three Houses of the Synod voted for the motion: "That the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant be considered." This decision, however, followed a thorough and vigorous debate during which many points were expressed. The motion was proposed by the Bishop of Bristol, the Right Reverend Michael Hill. He maintained that the covenant invites, "member Churches to commit themselves to greater accountability, consultation and the pursuit of consensus on issues that are new or controversial or may have serious relational consequences in the Communion." He also argued that the covenant does not undermine local autonomy. There were many good contributions to the debate.

Arguments in favour of the covenant included: 1. the view of the Archbishop of Canterbury that goodwill alone will not "get us through" and that we need to be "accountable to each other." 2. The judgement that it is "an attempt to square a circle [that] just about succeeds." 3. The importance of tidying up untidy relationships. 4. The opinion that Covenant provided a way of deciding which differences needed to divide the communion and which didn't. 5. The importance of backing the Archbishop. 6. The Bishop of Gloucester (the Right Reverend Michael Perham) said this was one reason he very reluctantly backed the Covenant together with his desire to "keep us talking". He enthused about the 'Indaba' process, specifically designed to do just that. 7. In her maiden speech to Synod one of our representatives, Debrah McIsaac, drawing on her personal experiences in a (very) large family, saw the Covenant as providing an opportunity to develop adult relationships for the sake of the inculturation of the gospel.

Arguments against the motion included: 1. the judgement that it is impossible and inappropriate to legislate for 'bonds of affection'. 2. The opinion that the Covenant overrides the local and thus ignores the importance of the context in which the gospel is lived out and proclaimed. 3. The language of condemnation in the Covenant. 4. The potential damage it might do to the independence of the Church of England. 5. The possibility that the Covenant might undermine prophecy in the Church.

6. The view of the Bishop of Lincoln (the Right Reverend John Saxbee) that Anglicans don't need a covenant because "we are a covenant" based on grace and goodwill and that without these things the covenant would fail anyway. 6. It was asked whether the word 'covenant' was appropriate and whether it was Anglican. 7. Canon Richard Franklin, one of our representatives, asked whether communion could be constructed by human means, whether it was not first and foremost a gift of God. He considered the Covenant to be a political, rather than a theological, document.

The motion was carried. In the House of Bishops, 39 voted in favour, none against, with one abstention; in the House of Clergy, 145 voted in favour, and 32 against, and 11 abstained; in the House of Laity, 147 voted in favour, and 25 against, and eight abstained. A variety of delaying and altering motions were all lost. Though the motion was carried with large majorities and the debate was of a high standard, the overall feeling left at the end was that we had reluctantly accepted something inevitable. We will now be considering the Covenant in this and the other dioceses.

### **Marriage**

Synod addressed the need to tidy up some aspects of the legislation relating to marriage. In 2008 the concept of Qualifying Connection was introduced. A motion was passed to address an inconsistency so that a person who has a qualifying connection with one parish in a multi-parish benefice or benefice in plurality would be able to marry in another church in that benefice or benefices. A prescribed form of words to introduce the publishing of banns of marriage was proposed and agreed. Final approval on both matters is still necessary.

### **Other matters**

The rest of this very short synod was taken up with the usual items, including a debate on the Business Committee report, questions and some rather dry legislative matters.

The next Group of Sessions begins on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> February.

Your synod members are always open to invitations to come and speak at Deanery Synods. They are Jane Charman, Richard Franklin, Alan Jeans, Nigel Lloyd & Chris Strain (clergy); from Ramsbury, Christopher Fielden, Robert Key & Debrah McIsaac; and from Sherborne, Paul Boyd-Lee, Ian Bromilow & Chris Corteen.