

## **Report on the York 2011 General Synod from Salisbury Members**

General Synod held a group of sessions at the University of York from Friday 8<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July. Synod began with the usual introductions of guests and then His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania addressed us. Much of his life had been spent as a professor in Athens, but then he was sent to Albania, a country in which the state had, it seems, completely destroyed religious faith and practice. His Beatitude has led that church to revival and founded some 150 new churches.

**Business Committee Report:** York Synods in the beautiful setting of the University provide more space than those in London for sharing and fellowship. The Times had suggested the four days had something of a “Summer School feel,” and so it proved. There was little on the agenda to set the pulse racing but more opportunity for conversation, listening and some excellent fringe events. Whether that is good or bad, the reader will have his or her opinion, but there is a feeling that a heavy agenda with lots of controversy may not be the way we should be a synod! The Business Committee set out the matters that would be discussed but did receive criticism for not creating space for debates on pressing contemporary issues including the situation in Sudan (South Sudan was born amidst tensions as we met; a text sent from Sudan by Bishop Graham was read out; Alan Jeans called for a debate on the situation in the Sudan), House of Lords reform, the economy and phone-hacking. Perhaps more flexibility is needed.

**Questions:** As usual a range of questions were posed. There were questions about the proposed changes to the number of Bishops in the House of Lords as well as consideration of allowing those in civil partnerships to be eligible to become bishops as well as a question on whether self supporting bishops would be considered in the future. Then we heard various questions about clergy recruitment guidelines including statistics around diversity and equalities and job sharing. The way some employers are interpreting the law about Christians expressing their faith was another topical question as was views on assisted suicide after the recent television programme. Other questions covered the stance of the Church on the importance of marriage, the relevance of Confirmation and which Bibles are authorised for use in our churches. Our own Chris Strain asked about the provision of more liturgical resources in the form of PowerPoint and about the future of theological training courses. Our own Christopher Fielden asked for a written reply to his question about putting pressure on the Government to allow visitors from the Sudan without the need for visas (due to the difficulties we have experienced as a

Diocese in obtaining them) provided they are financed and certain guarantees are provided from the Church.

There were 96 questions tabled in all but we only managed to get through 49.

**Presidential Address:** Archbishop Rowan started with a moving account of his recent visit to Eastern Congo. He discovered all over again why the Church mattered. Young men and women were abducted into the forest and forced to commit atrocities. Members of the Church searched for them in the forest and brought many back. They said, ‘The Church didn’t abandon us’. It gave Rowan a fierce sense that the Church mattered so intensely. It put into perspective the fashionable sneers that the Church lives with. There is nothing as transforming as a Church in love.

In the coming five years Rowan wants the Church to grow numerically and spiritually. Our appeal in mission is, ‘Walk with us as we walk with Jesus’. Christianity is not *advice* but *news*. News we communicate in our own faithfulness. Keeping faith is not the same as never changing. We have to change to stay the same – not changing in the same way as the world but finding words and acts that have the same effect as older words and action. Growth, service and renewed ministry depend on the constant return to and celebration of God’s promise.

We should celebrate a Church that deserves our loyalty because it is a visible sign of a faithful God – a Church in love.

**Payments to the Churches Conservation Trust:** This debate was to approve the grant for the next three years of a total of £4m to the Churches Conservation Trust. We learnt that this supports 341 redundant churches, of which two, one in Liverpool and one in London, will, this year, re-open as regular places of worship. The work is also supported by the Government and money has been guaranteed from them in the short-term. Whilst it appears that, in the past, this grant has been severely criticized, on this occasion it met with general approbation and was approved.

**Parochial Fees:** After several years’ work, a proposal was put to Synod to increase parochial fees by about 50%, but on the basis that all such charges as administration, heating, lighting and so on would be included in that fee. With some 25 amendments tabled, we were in for a battle! Speaker after speaker found fault with the proposal: you can’t standardize fees without taking into account the size of the church building, the regional differences, and poverty indices. A request for an adjournment to give the Archbishops’ Council more time to adjust the figures

was lost; and so was the main motion. The 2010 Fees will continue until a fairer proposal for fees comes back.

**Pensions Schemes [Sodor & Man]:** In a Thomas the Tank Engine flashback, we heard how the Bishop of Sodor and Man is also the Dean of St German's Cathedral in Peel. The Bishop now wishes to separate the roles, so the Vicar of Peel, becomes the Dean ex-officio. There is no increase in costs to the national church, but there are some pension implications. The new Dean will not be entitled to an uplift in pension provision for his or her new status! The Rules and Regulations were so approved.

**Mission Action Planning:** Synod overwhelmingly supported an amended motion calling on the Archbishops' Council to work with the House of Bishops to develop priorities for a national mission strategy supporting all sections of the Church in their own growth and mission planning. Some speakers from dioceses already having mission plans expressed concern that having to comply with a single national plan might restrict their existing activities. However, as other speakers pointed out, the exercise would benefit by providing a vehicle to share good and successful practice. In addition it moves forward the paper *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* that Synod debated last February. Namely, 'To take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the C of E ... To reshape or reimagine the Church's ministry ... So as to make sure that there is a growing and sustainable Christian witness in every local community; and to focus our resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity.'

**Higher Education Funding:** An important debate took place about Higher Education Funding. Government cuts in funding pose a significant challenge for the Church. As an interim move, further funding will be made available by the Church to allow many university sponsored courses to continue, although funding on these courses for those over the age of 50 will no longer come from central funds. In the longer term the Church of England will explore other routes to accreditation, while also seeking to maintain an element of partnership with some of the key universities nationally.

**The Anglican-Methodist Covenant:** The Anglican-Methodist Covenant was initiated in 2003 to look at areas of co-operation between the two denominations. The main areas of co-operation have been the Diaconate and local mission. The Joint Implementation Committee had produced an interim report which was presented to Synod. It had also been earlier presented to the Methodist Conference where it had been received positively.

There was clearly general support for this focus on Christian unity and the progress to date. An

electronic vote following a take-note debate on the report resulted in 269 votes 'for', 12 votes 'against' and 14 abstentions. Although some viewed progress as slow, there were a number of areas where co-operation was commended: joint preparation for marriage, bereavement counselling, joint confirmation preparation, joint initiatives towards Kingdom growth, Fresh Expressions of church. Partnerships to date have mainly been at the parish level and the report suggested that this should now be widened to working together at the diocesan level (although recognising that some churches may choose to opt out).

It was noted that details of the covenant and areas of co-operation are not widely known. It was expected that the interim report would encourage improved communication.

On the Monday night a report was also given about the United Reformed Church.

**Admission of Baptized Adults to Communion:** A motion from Bradford Diocesan Synod asked that people may be admitted to communion even if they were not desirous of being confirmed. Our own Chris Corteen spoke in favour of the motion. The argument for this change was that in a way it would regulate what is already common practice. It was argued that the need for confirmation before communion was a Victorian innovation and that communion before confirmation is already in place for children, so why not for adults? Not everyone follows the precise pattern of baptism, followed by confirmation followed by communion. The proposal maintained that baptism is the sacrament of initiation and that once baptised we should be able to receive Holy Communion. One bishop argued against that particular position, affirming the importance of confirmation. Another speaker argued that other forms of re-affirmation of baptismal promises could be preliminary to communion, but another bishop maintained that confirmation was the C of E's way of doing that. Some speakers argued for a fully open table policy and one stated that receiving communion was the means of her becoming a Christian. A procedural motion was advanced proposing a move to next business. This was clearly carried, meaning that synod cannot return to this subject during this quinquennium. The issue remains a live one, however, and the debate caused people to think hard about some important issues.

**Archbishops' Council Audit Committee Report:** This very brief but succinct report was well received. The financial audit had progressed without problem and in the last couple of years negotiation had reduced the external audit fee by half as well as simplifying and reducing workload. The committee's responsibilities extend far beyond balance sheets to the whole work of the Church particularly with

regard to risk assessment. In this respect, a Director of Risk Management (& Audit) had recently been appointed and the committee will be working with him to consider the measurable effectiveness of several areas of the Church's work like selection for ministry, funding allocations and so on.

**Report of the Archbishops' Council:** This body has the brief of overseeing and directing most of the boards and councils that comprise the central church's work. Beside this it has initiated a number of projects such as that for weddings and will soon be considering funerals and baptism. Synod members were treated to a visual presentation of its activities with a lively commentary by the youngest member of the Council, Mark Russell (who is also CEO for the Church Army). This was followed by a session of spontaneous questions answered by a panel of four members of the Council, which provided a valuable opportunity to hold the Council to account. There were comments about the written report's layout such as whether its photos could not be better and more appropriate to the subject and there was agreement that the visual verbal presentation more than made up for this. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ seemed to be missing from the report and this would be looked into for future reports. In all, about a couple of dozen questions probed into a variety of areas including finance, church growth, fund allocations, and outreach to younger people.

**Eucharistic Prayer when Children are Present:** The Bishop of Wakefield (the Rt Revd. Stephen Platten) asked Synod to consider two new Eucharistic Prayers designed to be used when children are the majority present at a Eucharist. He argued that such prayers had long been sought after. He maintained that there had been wide consultation and that they had sought to produce prayers that were not patronising but were comprehensible. One of the prayers incorporates questions and answers reminiscent of the Jewish Seder. There was broad support for the prayers but the responses of other speakers in the debate were very varied and frequently contradictory. Some asked for a more adventurous approach and it was also claimed that the prayers were a bit too 'teachy'. The importance of drama and symbol was mentioned by one speaker. The material was committed for revision in committee.

**House of Laity Elections:** This was a motion requesting Synod to reconsider the way lay members of General Synod are elected. Was there a better more inclusive method of discerning those people who could potentially serve on General Synod? The under 40's and ethnic minorities are woefully underrepresented. Currently only members of Deanery Synods can vote. The debate on this motion seemed to indicate that the laity of the Church in

general has no real understanding of General Synod and how one gets to serve in this way. Our own Robert Key participated in the debate with the suggestion that the vote could be given to all people on the parish electoral rolls.

The motion was carried so we can await the results of a review in due course.

**Minority Ethnic Anglican concerns:** We had made slow progress over 25 years in reducing racial inequality and there was still a wide gap between rhetoric and reality. In the past five years the number of ethnic minority members of General Synod had risen from 14 to 15. One priest reported that in his London Church the congregation was 90% black but the PCC was 100% white.

Archbishop Rowan said the challenges were clear and achievable. We should work too with Roma and travelling people. Many speakers argued that progress is far too slow and a challenge to us all.

**Archbishop's Council Draft Budget:** This draft budget covers the central costs of the Church of England and includes ordination training, activities run nationally from church house, contributions to clergy retirement housing, pension contributions for clergy working with the Partnership for World Mission and some grants. The 2012 budget is £28.65m which corresponds to an increase of 1.8% over the 2011 figure.

Overall, there was full support for this budget and the approach taken to set it. Although there is a formula, linked to inflation, to arrive at an annual budget, the current high level of inflation would have led to an increase of around 3% which was considered unacceptable by the Archbishop's Council. Accordingly, a more conservative review arrived at the current budget.

Within the budget, there were increases/decreases across the various key areas of focus. Spending on Ministry training and national support was increased in line with the church's focus on mission. Also, the contribution towards clergy retirement housing was increased. On the other hand, legal and other central costs were decreased.

The only controversial issue was the removal of an advisory post to assist Deaf & Disabled Christians (£70,000), although it was expected that a lower level of cover could be absorbed by other parts of the central organisation.

**Generous Love For All** was a report from the Presence and Engagement Task Group on the Anglican tradition of bearing witness to the whole community, particularly in the field of multi-faith relations. We heard of a £5m grant from the Government to fund the Near Neighbours scheme which has established four regional centres in

Leicester, London, Bradford and Birmingham and of the successes that have been achieved not just in these cities but also in such places as Burnley, Oxford and Slough. The report received overwhelming support.

**Christians in the Holy Land:** The Archbishop of Canterbury made a presentation concerning a conference which was to take place the following week on Christians in the Holy Land. A DVD was shown and this was supplemented with comments from the Archbishop. He noted the severe decline in the number of Christians in Israel, and especially the West Bank area, and hoped that the conference would be part of a response which included celebrating the presence of Christians (and not just holy sites) in the land, a greater awareness and understanding, education and practical support. A fund would be set up to offer financial support through "Friends of the Holy Land." He concluded by asking for prayer and interest and by stating that practical measures were important, not just platitudes and polarised views.

**Church Commissioners Annual Report:** The report was presented by the First Church Estates Commissioner Andreas Whittam-Smith. He opened by telling us that the investment fund had performed better than similar funds and, from a value of £4 billion in February 2009, had risen to £5.3 billion. The first priority was for resilience in the context of world financial risks and the small possibility that America would default on its national debt. He pointed to the resilience in their investments in agriculture and, increasingly, diversification would be critical to resilience. The question put to managers of the Commissioners' assets is "how will you protect our assets when times are tough?" and the Commissioners emphasize diversifying their holdings so as to be away from the epicentre of shocks in the markets. They would, for example, be investing in timber in America.

Liability for clergy pensions was capped in 1998 and, as those clergy headed towards retirement, demands on funds would increase, peaking over the next decade, which pension liabilities will put the greatest strain on funds.

In answer to a question about whether additional funds could be made available to dioceses in difficulty, he said that the Commissioners held to 'intergenerational equality', which means that the Commissioners will not distribute this money if the real value of the fund would thereby be changed. They need to hold six months of expenditure in liquid form.

The question that prompted the most press coverage was the member who said there was a time bomb in ageing congregations (we had heard earlier in the Session that the average age was 61) and ever

diminishing number of stipendiary clergy as retirements outstripped ordinations. The First Commissioner used the corporate analogy. He said that he has seen many good companies, well managed which had nevertheless failed. He urged all to have a real sense of crisis about the situation.

#### **The Reorganization Schemes [Compensation]**

**Rules:** Under the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, when a reorganization of Dioceses' structures takes place, provision must be made for abolishing the offices of a suffragan bishop, archdeacon, cathedral or chancellor or registrar. If the posts cease to exist, then some compensation package is required to be made for the post holder who is losing their office. Little debate was had and the Compensation Rules were approved.

**The Church and Education:** The National Society celebrates the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its founding in 1811 when the vision of its founders was a church school in every village. The Bishop of Oxford described the coalition government's reforms in education as the most 'seismic' since 1945 and amongst those changes, identified three themes. First, with most schools becoming academies, the role of the Local Education Authority will become minimal. There is the opportunity for Diocesan Boards of Education to provide services such as human resources, finance and building expertise to schools, not just church schools, provided that they are sufficiently well-resourced. Secondly, there is concern about RE provision for several reasons including that RE is not a subject on the International Baccalaureate, teaching time for RE has been cut back, and the quality of RE teaching is patchy. Teaching, and RE teaching in particular, should more explicitly be seen as a Christian vocation. The third theme was the question of admission. The Church schools have a dual commitment to distinction and to inclusiveness, to serve the local community and church families. This is not a new commitment but it needed to be emphasised as we rise to the challenges of the new educational regime.

**Prorogation:** On the final day, the Archbishop of York (who had been ill recently and missed Synod up to this point) received the Deputy Prolocutors for York, Revd Dr Meg Gilley and Canon Simon Killwick, before proroguing the General Synod at 12.30 pm.

#### **The next Group of Sessions will be in February 2012.**

*Members of General Synod are very willing to attend meetings of Deanery Synod to give a report on proceedings or to talk about specific topics from the national agenda. A list of members can be found in the diocesan directory.*