

Report on the York 2013 General Synod from Salisbury Members

General Synod met at York University from Friday 5th to Tuesday 9th July 2013.

The Synod began in the usual way, with new members and ecumenical guests being welcomed. The Venerable Cherry Vann was welcomed as the new Prolocuter of the Province of York. The Bishop of Skálholt (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland) addressed Synod. Various Measures and Instruments were declared to have reach the next stages of their legislative journeys. The Business Committee presented their report, which is an explanation as to why things have or have not got on to the agenda. Two private members motions had accrued support from over one hundred members each, but both deal with the current controversy over marriage and will be debated together at a later stage. Comments were made about the lack of spontaneity in debates and the restrictions imposed by the current system of running debates. Appointments were confirmed to the posts of Clerk to Synod, Chair of the Appointments Committee, Chair of the Finance Committee, Chair of the Pensions Board, and Auditors.

The Archbishop of Canterbury delivered his Presidential Address. It was a powerful address in which the Archbishop spoke of the revolutionary times in which we are living. As a church we need to sit light to any baggage we are carrying and be prepared to grasp the opportunities before us. He spoke of the sexual revolution, particularly the rapid change of attitude over marriage. There is a real sense of antagonism against the church that he detects in the House of Lords. He was *'struck by the overwhelming change of cultural hinterland. Predictable attitudes were no longer there. The opposition to the Bill, which included me and many other bishops, was utterly overwhelmed, with amongst the largest attendance in the House and participation in the debate, and majority, since 1945. There was noticeable hostility to the view of the churches. I am not proposing new policy, but what I felt then and feel now is that some of what was said by those supporting the bill was uncomfortably close to the bone.'*

The address can be read (or viewed on video) at:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5098/archbishop-justins-presidential-address-at-general-synod>

The usual session of Questions took place on the Friday evening. Why is there so little debate around evangelism, discipleship and church growth? There will be in November. Why was "Men and Women in Marriage" from the Faith and Order Commission published a year before the Pilling Report? The first is about what is understood to be the church's existing position, the latter is about the future. Why are there no conservative evangelical diocesan bishops? It depends on your definition. What is a clergy blue file? A file that is blue that the Bishop keeps on each clergy person. How are the 8 women who will sit with the House of Bishops to be chosen? – by a college of senior women priests. When will the new draft Baptism Liturgy asked for in 2011 be trialled? Soon, but has taken time to get it right. These were just a few of around 50 questions calling the Synod and its bodies to account that were asked at the end of Day 1 of the Synod

The Ordination of Women to the Episcopate:

General Synod debated a number of important matters during this group of sessions, which are represented in this report, but the one which took up the most time and attracted the greatest attention in the press was the question of the ordination of women to the episcopate. It will be remembered that this issue has been debated for a very long time. The first Deaconess was appointed in the Church of England in 1862; the first woman to be ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church was Florence Li Tim-Oi in 1944; the first woman to be ordained to the episcopate in the Anglican Church was Barbara Harris in 1989; and in 1994 the first women were ordained as priests in the Church of England. In the Church of England we have *agreed* that women shall be bishops, which is why the final vote last November so shocked people. What failed then was not the principle that we ordain women as bishops, but the legislation that would make this possible. We had spent a long time discussing the matter and we had consulted with the dioceses. Forty two out of the forty four dioceses had agreed. Yet when it came to the end of the process, and a vote which needed a two-thirds majority in each of the three houses (bishops, clergy & laity) of General Synod, that majority was short by six votes in the House of Laity.

The matter is decided. Women will be ordained as bishops. Yet we still struggle to produce a scheme

which makes this possible. Many of us believe that a simple law that states that women can be bishops is all that is needed. Yet those who cannot accept this are asking for provision to be included in the legislation that will make clear their place within the Church of England. We thought we had reached a solution last November, but it was not to be. We cannot go back to that scheme. Something very different will be needed and the process to produce a different approach was what we debated at this recent Synod.

What happened in York is that we spent a day in facilitated discussion groups in an attempt to get us to talk *to* each other – rather than *at* each other. The process was set up and led by Canon David Porter, who was Director of Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral, but is now Director for Reconciliation at Lambeth Palace. Most groups proved to be a positive experience and the process led into a session of interactive drama for the whole synod. All of this took place on the Saturday and was designed to help change the mood and perspective of synod when we came to debate the matter for much of Monday. We cannot go back to the detailed proposals that failed last November. This time the House of Bishops has given a clear lead in suggesting a simpler scheme, which will depend more on grace than law. Provision for those who cannot accept the episcopal ministry of women will be made, but not at the cost of compromising the status of future bishops (of whatever gender). The debate which took place was an extended argument in which a number of people tried (without success) to move the proposal more towards formally legal provisions, but all such attempts failed. It seemed that there has not been any real change of heart since November. But the new proposals from the bishops were accepted and there was an overall majority of 80% in favour of pressing ahead with a process which could bring us to a final vote in 2015. What did come out of this weekend was a new commitment to work together in a facilitated process so as to find a way to make the ordination of women to the episcopate a reality within a couple of years. This continuing debate has become very damaging to the church and, as Canon Jane Charman pointed out in the debate, if we do not put our own house in order, Parliament will surely do it for us. Sir Tony Baldry (Second Church Estates Commissioner) made a similar point, that members of Parliament are getting restless and we must sort this matter out within the next two years.

Challenges for the Quinquennium: This item presented progress made on the House of Bishops and Archbishops' Council report to the new Synod in January 2011 having the theme of Contributing as the national Church to the common good', 'Facilitating the growth of the Church', reimagining the Church's ministry'.

Synod was encouraged to learn that studies showed the wide variety of its current outreach, particularly within an increasing secular society. One diocese told of the £1m released for new mission work and how this had enabled a large impact with young families resulting in 2000 extra people awakened to God. They are not alone in this and other dioceses have encouraged similar enterprises.

Several speakers highlighted the fact that though we use the term 'mission' we do not always know what we mean by it. Thus it was helpful that Synod approved a Following Motion clearly indicating that our intention must be the re-evangelising of our nation which needs to be put at the centre and heart of our mission.

On the Sunday we worshipped together at York Minister. The Archbishop of Canterbury presided. The Archbishop of York preached. His sermon can be read at:

<http://www.archbishopofyork.org/articles.php/2937/archbishops-sermon-at-general-synod-service>

Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2013: The Rules under consideration aimed to provide a single, comprehensive set of rules that replace the existing three sets dating from 1992 & 2000, and aims to make the process just, expeditious, cost effective & simple. In particular the new completely rewritten Rules offers the Archdeacon wider permissions for certain proposals; interim faculties for emergency or urgent cases; & a standardised list of Minor Works provisions. Simplified forms will also help the administration for Faculties.

The debate supported the proposals & requested effective communication between DAC & PCCs, & greater flexibility in the use of church buildings. The motion was carried.

An amendment was moved which aimed to clarify whether the funding of proposals was "private or by the way of gifts". An additional explanation was proposed. The motion was carried.

A short debate on whether the Rules be approved followed, asking for clarification on the use of electronic signatures; more transparency from the use of DAC consultants' advice; & concerns about the time taken for decisions. The motion was carried.

Miscellaneous Provisions: This was described as being a matter of tidying up the toy cupboard, by simplifying legal procedures and cutting out bureaucracy. Amongst the long-forgotten toys were burial measures dating back to the nineteenth century. These were all quickly dusted down and returned to rest.

Safeguarding: The General Synod voted unanimously (360 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions) to support the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham's Motion to endorse the Archbishops' Statement of Apology, to urgently establish better safeguarding arrangements, to have new legislation in place within two years and to report back to the General Synod by February 2014 on action so far.

The debate started with a period of contrite silence. The Church of England had failed comprehensively. We had protected the institution, not the abused. Our failure was sinful. We must move swiftly, with compassion and justice. The Archbishop of Canterbury said our response was only the beginning of a process to change the culture and behaviour in our Church because we are all called to live in the justice of God and we will each answer to him for our failings.

Welfare Reform: Archbishop Justin had trailed this debate in his Presidential Address when he had quoted Pope Francis' desire for a "Poor Church for the poor." Just the day before, The Children's Society had launched their damning report on Child Poverty. As the proposer of the motion said, "This presents a deeply worrying picture", and during the debate we were shown a series of harrowing pictures as a result of the different cuts in welfare, on a variety of parts of the community, in a variety of parts of Britain. As the Archbishop of York graphically pointed out, "Until we pay a living wage for a proper day's work, we shall always have people living in poverty." The whole theme of the discussion was summed up by the Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, when he said, "Justice for those in need, must be our most important priority." Not surprisingly, the motion was carried overwhelmingly, with just one person voting

against it, ("Who's he?", one wonders) and seven abstentions.

Three into One: On Monday afternoon synod addressed the plan to combine three Yorkshire dioceses. We considered a scheme drawn up by the Dioceses Commission to abolish the dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds and Wakefield and to replace them with what some have dubbed the 'super diocese' of Leeds, sometimes called 'West Yorkshire and the Dales'. The objective behind this is to reduce the bureaucratic weight of three dioceses to further the mission opportunities for the church in this part of Yorkshire. The plan has the full backing of the dioceses of Bradford and Ripon and Leeds but many in Wakefield, including the bishop, opposed it. With the backing of the Archbishop of York, however, it gained strong support in synod and was passed overwhelmingly.

Financial Business: Synod went through the usual summer business of approving the budget for the year. The material was presented and a debate followed. Each section of the budget was then put to the vote. Details of the budget can be found at:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1788136/gs%201900%20-%202014%20budget.pdf>

Church Commissioners' Annual Report: The Chairman of the Commission, Mr Andreas Whittam Smith, presented an outline of the Commissioner's Report. He touched on 3 main areas:

1. The value of the fund: the value at the end of 2012 was £5.5 bn which was £250m higher than at the end of 2011, even after significant distributions.
2. Investment performance: the investment objective is to generate a return of RPI + 5%, in order to meet the pension obligations and to grow, in real terms, the support for the church. Over the past 20 years, the fund has experienced average growth of 9%. In 2012, the fund grew by 9.7%.
3. Financing research into church growth: the Commission is offering grants to churches in deprived areas which are growing.

Looking ahead, 2013 was expected to be a good year, although the Eurozone and Middle East remained significant risks to world financial markets. The key challenge was to 'just do the work' of finding the right investments and managing them carefully. The Chairman also stated

that consideration was being given to joining a consortium to invest in the 300 branches of RBS, recently put up for sale, to establish a strong regional bank under the well-known name 'Williams and Glyn'.

Most questions focussed on ethical aspects of investment and the ability of the fund to meet future pension commitments, being in mind the large number of priests expected to retire in the coming 5 years. In response to the latter, the Chairman gave his assurance that the fund would be able to meet these commitments.

The full text of the report is available online at

www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchcommissioners/annual-reports.aspx

During Synod, we were very much aware of the events occurring in Egypt. His Grace Bishop Angaelos of the Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the UK, was present at the start of Synod, but had to fly out to Egypt later. He was back with us on the Tuesday morning and he addressed Synod at the start of the day. What he said can be found at:

<http://copticcentre.blogspot.co.uk/>

Some changes to representation of the Convocations in General Synod: A report was presented putting forward various proposals to smooth out some anomalies concerning north south representation and also a proposal to remove University representation. Further work remains to be done and the report was noted.

Elections Review Group: The 2010 round of General Synod elections had been reviewed and recommendations were brought to Synod. A number of uncontroversial and technical amendments will now go forward. The number of seats allocated to the Northern and Southern Provinces will be decided by Synod. The Diocese in Europe will have its allocation of Clergy increased from two to three, and Laity from two to three. The reorganisation of Dioceses in Yorkshire means a reduction of two Diocesan Bishops. It was recommended that the six places on Synod reserved for University representation be abolished. This was hotly resisted by them. Minority ethnic candidates would be encouraged to stand for election. Nominations for elections and voting

electronically was technically possible and proposals will be worked up.

The present system for electing Members of the House of Laity by lay members of Deanery Synods has been unchanged since 1970 and was unsatisfactory. Synod was asked to consider instead a new electoral college consisting of the elected lay members of PCCs or the elected lay members of Diocesan Synods. A third option would be 'universal suffrage' – every person on our electoral rolls would have a vote. After less than an hour the debate was adjourned until the next session of the General Synod.

Farewells were given to Andrew Britton (Chairman of the Finance Committee), James Jones (Bishop of Liverpool), Anthony Priddis (Bishop of Hereford), Geoffrey Rowell (Bishop in Europe) and Michael Langrish (Bishop of Exeter)

All of the material for General Synod can be found on the web at:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod.aspx>

Here you will find the various papers that are used in the debates, together with a much fuller report of the proceedings. Often there will be video or audio files of debates, although you may need to wait a few days before all the material from the recent Synod is available. While Synod is in session, live feeds from the debates can be accessed through the internet. Details of speeches and sermons from the Archbishops can be found on their own websites.

We produce this short summary so as to feedback to the diocese, but we are always ready to visit Deanery Synods (or other groups) to talk about the work of General Synod and how current issues are being handled. It is also useful to us to know your views on different issues, which helps to inform us as we engage in the debates. Your Synod members are:

Nicholas Holtam, Jane Charman, Richard Franklin, Alan Jeans, Nigel LLOYD, Chris Strain, Debbie McIsaac, Paul Boyd-Lee, Ian Bromilow, Chris Corteen, Chris Fielden, Rob Key

The next meeting of General Synod will be from Monday 18th November 2013