

## July 2016 Group of Sessions of General Synod

This report has been produced on behalf of the Diocese of Salisbury members of General Synod as a means of reporting back to the Diocese on the July 2016 Group of sessions of the General Synod 2015-2020.

This Group of Sessions was much shorter than usual. We convened on Friday afternoon and the formal sessions finished after Saturday night's business. In order to make space for an important emergency debate on the outcome of the EU referendum, there were at least three requests from the chair of the Business Committee to change the order of business which Synod was happy to accommodate. Synod was less happy with the way in which we were rushed through the legislative and important routine work. The technology and human error let us down a little. There were 'problems with the app' which made it marginally more difficult to access papers on our devices and the voting cards hadn't been programmed properly and had to be reprogrammed overnight.

At this session, **Landesbischof Ralf Meister** (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland), co-chair of the Meissen Commission, opened business with a short address. He spoke of his deep sorrow at the result of the EU Referendum and reflected on the response of the German media, who had focussed on the economic and financial implications for their country, and not on those for humanity and justice. He reminded Synod of the peace we have enjoyed in Europe as a result of working together and trusted that as Christians, we can join together in the liberating message of the gospel in the future.

**The EU Referendum** We moved straight into an emergency debate on the EU referendum which the Archbishops had requested. In his address, the Archbishop of Canterbury reminded Synod we must deal with the result as it is and witness to the love of Jesus through the result. He said we must acknowledge the deep divisions in our UK society. Where people feel fearful and anxious, we will need to speak of welcome and continuing liberation. General Synod faces some challenges in respect of the EU result the first of which is to remind our nation that we 'do' God; to acknowledge and celebrate the authority and power of God; and continue to work for an integrated society. Following a series of speeches from both Remain and Leave voters, the Synod passed (with an overwhelming majority) a resolution and an amendment that included identifying a champion in each diocese who could make recommendations for creating stronger and more constructive links between local communities.

**Archbishop of York's Pilgrimage of Prayer** John Sentamu walked all across the York Province from Advent to Trinity and encountered 25,000 people along the way. He gathered people 5 times a day to say the Lord's Prayer and gave out prayer cards and prayer beads (also given to Synod members) to encourage prayer. He told this story: a Mum talked about her little girl who had recently learnt her alphabet and was so pleased that she kept repeating it endlessly. When she came to say her prayers at bedtime she said the alphabet again and her Mum, reminded her that she should be saying her prayers. The little girl responded with childlike wisdom: "Please God put all those letters into words for me."

**Anglican Consultative Council** On Friday afternoon we had a presentation from Maggie Swinson and Bishop Stephen of Chelmsford who had attended the recent 16<sup>th</sup> ACC meeting in Lusaka, Zambia. They reflected on the excellent welcome and noted that the Zambian President and Vice President had been present, evidence of the importance placed upon the Anglican Communion in this country. Both speakers said the Anglican Communion was becoming a reality, with a mission and foundations of unity on God's call to all of us as a family.

**Business Committee** We were urged to move through the business 'with pace and dispatch'. It was suggested that fringe meetings could be used to deal with questions that would usually be dealt with on the floor of Synod. As Chris Corteen said when she spoke, it very much felt like we were being chivvied along in the debate and would be again in February. She asked that the February sitting be extended to deal with the business which is backing up and important scheduled debates. Three speakers in, the chair of the debate was looking for a motion for closure and announced that it had been passed. It hadn't and he had to back-track and allow more speakers including Debbie McIsaac who asked that the Business Committee provide a report on the consultations of members they had conducted on the duration and length of Groups of sessions.

**Nurturing and Discerning Senior Leaders** A report from the Development and Advisory Group (DAG), a subcommittee of the House of Bishops, was presented by the Bishop of Truro. It was in response to a Private Members Motion brought by Jane Charman in July 2015 calling for the bishops to report to Synod. Jane Charman was the first speaker in the debate and asked whether senior church leadership is now an integral part of the Renewal and Reform programme and therefore part of synodical business from now on - but no assurance was given. The report itself was very positive about what had been achieved and stressed that participants had greatly enjoyed and valued the learning. Several very powerful speeches were made about the experience of people with disabilities who did not want to be seen as an 'issue' or included on a token basis but felt that they deserved the same opportunity to explore a vocation to leadership roles. The Bishop of Truro cautioned that DAG could not be expected to address the whole of the CMD agenda or singlehandedly deliver equality and diversity across the Church.

**Church Commissioners' Annual Report** The Commissioners manage £7bn portfolio of assets including investments forestry, land, private equity and shares in quoted companies. The annual target is 5% return is required it has been exceeded in the last 5, 10 and 30 years. The return for the year was 8.7% and £218.5m has been distributed across the country to fund mission, pensions, Bishop's ministry and cathedrals, and pastoral reorganisations. Its investments are ethically driven and reviewed regularly. Though the present watchwords are 'uncertainty and caution', reserves are such that the present level of returns to the church can be maintained for at least 8 more years.

**Questions** are normally a lively time at Synod but due to compression of the proceedings and possibly apprehension about the Shared Conversations, it was rather muted although there were the expected questions about the EU Referendum, Bishop George Bell case, Safeguarding and the Shared Conversations.

On Saturday, Synod had lots of legislative business to do. The **Draft Mission and Pastoral Amendment Measure** completed the Revision Stage and was approved. The Measure concerns many aspects of ministry, particularly the relationships among team ministries and the procedures for compensating dispossessed clergy. The revision process resulted in substantially revised compensation of twelve months with housing (or money in lieu). The patrons in team vicar appointments will continue to have a role. Three amendments were proposed but none were successful.

**Draft Legislative Reform Measure** This item was to bring about speedier way of repealing obsolete or overly burdensome pieces of legislation. The Bishop of Rochester presented the motion and gave some colourful of examples of the kind of thing meant. This was followed by a number of speeches, including one from Debrah Mclsaac, expressing concern that the proposal gave a great deal of power to the Archbishops' Council and risked circumventing Synod, an anxiety that seems to surface at regular intervals at the moment. There was support for the principle but anxiety about what might happen in practice. For instance, a scrutiny committee would provide checks and balances but who would appoint the members? This was a first consideration debate and the motion was duly referred to a Revision Committee.

**Draft Inspection of Churches Measure** While this was presented as a simplification Measure to replace the 1955 Measure, several speakers including Debrah Mclsaac said it would complicate and centralize the regime for care of our buildings. The Archbishop of Canterbury expressed some caution about the proposal and asked whether we should try to fix what is not broken. The debate was adjourned and can only come back on the agenda by permission of the Business Committee.

**Amending Canon 36** This Amending Canon covered a number of different matters.

**Vesture** After a period of consultation the Bishops have now agreed that Synod should begin the legislative process to allow clergy to dispense with vestments at services and occasional offices having consulted and gained agreement from PCCs and those people affected. The clothing must be 'seemly' and there was some rather witty suggestions as to how that might be interpreted. The Bishop of Salisbury spoke and made the point that some clergy currently already dispense with vestments as appropriate and to his knowledge no complaints have been received and so argued whether there was a need for the Canon to be amended.

Others also had concerns about young people needing to identify the person in authority and that vestments were helpful for this.

**Suicide and Baptism** The amending Canon will now allow those who have taken their own life or who have not been baptised to be buried with all the usual rites without further enquiries being made. Clearly this was very much welcomed by Synod.

**Excommunication** – this is no longer applied and so will be removed from the existing Canon!

Synod had some reservations about merging the above issues into one amending Canon. Whilst Synod voted overwhelmingly for the Amending Canon to go to the Revision Committee before returning to Synod for final debate and a vote, there were concerns that the vesture part may be more controversial which would jeopardise the other parts of the Amending Canon which Synod would almost certainly want to see carried. The Business Committee was strongly urged to bring the matters separately to the Revision stage before coming back to Synod for a final vote.

**Update on Renewal and Reform** is the name now given to the overarching initiative launched in the last Quinquennium. Its three goals are to: contribute as the church to the national good; facilitate the growth of the church in numbers and depth of discipleship; and re-imagine the church's ministry. Unlike many Synod papers, a vision for Reform and Renewal GS 2038 is clear, precise and delightfully brief. During the debate, the detail was picked over but its clear direction was applauded and overwhelmingly endorsed.

**'A Church of England Vision for Education'** compiled by the Education Division was universally praised as were our schools which reflect a unique resource for the church through which a Christian influence can reach our children, their families, and the local community. The last paragraph of the report alludes to recent government legislation of academization which might well change the status of many of these schools as they move into Multi-Academy Trusts. Gill de Barry in making her maiden speech said that small rural schools would be vulnerable and that it's through the schools we can reach into the younger generation with Christian values.

**Archbishops' Council 2017 Budget and Apportionment** The total expenditure was up 9.4% above last year to £37.7 million. Although 3.4% of this will be found from Apportionment increase, the rest will be derived from external sources and the Council's restricted funds. The increase is due to rising numbers of ordinands, grants made to the parish support scheme, additional provision for safeguarding, and the pilot digital church project, with smaller amounts for the clergy retirement housing grant, and resourcing the occasional offices project. For a third year the Corporation of Church House is granting rent relief equivalent to increasing apportionment by 7%. In spite of this, there is still a shortfall of £470,000 which will be met by drawing down capital from the Church & Community Fund but hopefully later funded by the Corporation of Church House. Synod approved the budget. There were encouraging comments from members, two of which bear repeating: first it was pointed out that if the Reform & Renewal programme is going to be successful, the budget would inevitably have to rise in future years and this would show the fruitfulness of the work; secondly, one diocese mentioned having an on-line pastor who now deals with hundreds of communications each week, a most cost effective way of promoting digital evangelism.

## Shared Conversations

On Saturday night, the formal group of sessions ended. The fringe groups left, the stands were dismantled and the press were excluded. After worshipping together in York Minster on Sunday morning, we gathered together again and participated in the final stage of the Shared Conversations, a process which started following the publication of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality, known as the Pilling Report, in November 2013. There were three 'circles' - the College of Bishops (September 2014); the Regional conversations (April 2015-March 2016); and members of General Synod (July 2016). At each stage the St. Michael's Protocols applied <http://www.sharedconversations.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SMH-Protocols.pdf> and all those who have participated in the conversations continue to be bound by them

Some of you will have seen the Statement following conclusion of Shared Conversations Process. For those who have not, it said;

Over the last 2 days members of General Synod have met in an informal setting in which they have listened and been heard as they have reflected together on scripture and a changing culture in relation to their understanding of human sexuality.

Throughout these conversations, deep convictions have been shared and profound differences better understood. The Shared Conversations over the last two years now come to a conclusion with over 1300 members of the church directly involved. It is our hope that what has been learned through the relationships developed will inform the way the church conducts whatever further formal discussions may be necessary in the future. It is our prayer that the manner in which we express our different views and deep disagreements will bear witness to Jesus who calls us to love as he has loved us.

In comments to members of Synod at the end of the Shared Conversations the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said:

"At the heart of it is to come back to the fact that together we seek to serve the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and in whom there is never despair, there is never defeat; there is always hope, there is always overcoming; there is always eventual triumph, holiness, goodness and grace.

That is for me what I always come back to when it all seems overwhelming.

Thank you so much for your participation. Let us go in confidence. Confident in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead."

As always, we would welcome any comments or feedback which can be addressed to any General Synod member.