



Open Synod Group Newsletter Jan 2014

President

The Rt Revd John Packer, Bishop of Ripon & Leeds

Mrs Caroline Spencer, Canterbury (Chair)

Women Bishops; A Healing Process begins.

The House of Bishops statement GS1886 and the decisions of GS in November marked a decisive step forward. This "better way" is by grace and trust and less law. There is to be a national framework for provision of requested and provided alternative Episcopal oversight; the House has promised to ensure that there will be appropriate Bishops for requested oversight. General Synod and the wider church can learn much from the use of facilitated discussions; we

did listen to and hear each other in new and clearer ways. A case of less party and more process, working with transparency, openness and reconciliation. It was quite a humbling experience too.

We are set to move to maintain a broad but not unbounded church, inclusive of all our traditions to work together for the sake of the Gospel.

OSG Open Meeting and AGM

Tuesday FEB 11th at 7.30

Speaker; John Spence, new Chair of the Finance Committee of the Archbishop's Council, who will speak about current and future issues (but no doubt including some insights into the finances of the Church of England).

At the close of General Synod business; the venue is Room 3 in Church House; The evening will include a hot meal

We hope to see you there!

The AGM will also be held on this evening. Please consider whether you are willing to join the OSG committee.

Episcopally led, Synodically ...?

Tim Hind reflects;

A Synodical commonplace is that the church is episcopally led but synodically governed. But what does that mean?

We (GS) do form a mechanism for legislative change and at the base of it we enact things that may become the law of the land. However, I think our role is more subtle than that.

Our role as Synod is both legislative and opinion forming. We debate things like women's ministry and liturgical change and by doing so change the practices of the church. We also engage with the great social issues of the day and as a result have debated all aspects of life including drugs, Trident, the national lottery and female genital mutilation.

The question that needs to be asked is whether it does any good.

The legislative stuff is necessary. The other stuff is vital but the trick is to ensure that it is heard where it matters.

Good relations between Synod staff and the organs of government are the key to ensuring that the mechanisms are in place to get our message across. This works but they will still ignore us from time to time.

So Synodical Governance I would say is working. Synod Opinion Forming is still work in progress.

Synodical Government; spotlight on laity.

Christina Rees explains:

General Synod House of Laity Electoral Reform

Following the 2010 General Synod approval of a Private Member's Motion, an Election Review Group was set up to review how the House of Laity of GS and the houses of laity of diocesan synods are elected. There was to be particular consideration given to whether the current system produces a fully representative group of General Synod lay members.

The Electoral Reform Review Group looked at **four options**:

<i>Electorate</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Deanery synod members	though with the intention of revitalizing the system, especially by providing better information on the candidates and encouraging a higher voter turnout.
Diocesan synod members	This option was rejected as being even less potentially representative than the present system
Universal suffrage, (in Diocesan Constituencies)	a one member, one vote option, which was rejected for being too complicated and cumbersome, although it was acknowledged to be the most democratic system, and potentially capable of producing the most diverse electorate.
Deanery electoral college	members would be chosen specifically to vote for members of General Synod. This would enhance the likelihood that they would take this duty seriously, and arrangements could stipulate a suitably diverse membership.

A majority of the Election Review Group preferred the electoral college option, which General Synod rejected in November 13. It's not quite back to the drawing board, and the group will consider new information and possibly even take a new approach in determining the best way forward. Watch this space..?

Synodical Government; spotlight on the Diocese?

At November sessions the London Diocese motion on GS processes was roundly trounced, with members refusing to move to next business in order to throw it out. The motion was not well formed and while the chair of the Business Committee was surely right that much is happening in GS to get better practice, the London motion also reflected a wider gap between the knowledge of the 'in group' (ie us) and members of

diocesan synods And by implication is the system of Synodical Governance between GS and Diocesan level working as well and as constructively as intended? The Business Committee were also concerned and have had some discussions with the London members.

From research (OK... casual empiricism) it appears that dioceses have somewhat different practices; e.g. some encourage Deaneries to bring proposals to DS while others seem to discourage them. Some have private members motions on agendas, while others almost never do. And the time scales of "motion(s)" seem terminally long. Perhaps it has become timely to find ways for Diocesan Synods to share good practice and help GS with its work.

Synodical Government; the Inter-Diocesan Finance Forum: what on earth is that?

Caroline Spencer reflects;

When the Archbishops' Council was formed (and the Central Board of Finance, CBF, abolished), each diocese was invited to send THREE reps to a new body, the Inter-Diocesan Finance Forum IDFF (intended to be the DBF Chair, the Diocesan Secretary and a diocesan GS member – to keep that connection to GS which is responsible for taking financial decisions). Since I had been the CBF rep, I was appointed to the Canterbury GS place – and so it has remained ever since.

In the Bad Old Days, the CBF had a representative from each diocese. I was the Canterbury rep which somehow was part of the package when I was appointed by the CBF to the governing body of the then Canterbury Christ Church College (now University). We met twice a year at Church House, and extraordinary meetings they were too. We diocesan reps sat in rows at individual little tables with our name and diocese prominently displayed; the Big Wigs sat at a long table on the opposite side of the room (carefully beyond throwing distance, it felt to this novice) and Told Us Things. Then we went home.

Over the years, the IDFF has developed from an enlarged gathering for Telling Us Things into a much more interactive and worthwhile forum. We sit round tables, café style, share experience and discuss issues together as well as listen to presentations from all the NCIs. The IDFF is not a decision-making body, but it is a useful forum for the NCIs to test ideas, share forecasts and seek opinion from all the dioceses at the same time. All the senior NCI staff attend. Diocesan feedback is elicited and recorded – and it is very rare for a diocese to be unrepresented. It is a vast improvement on the CBF and, in my view, works well.

Synodical Government; Appointments and Accountability?

Tony Berry.

All GS members get quite regular notification of appointments made via the Appointments Committee. Have you ever wondered how X or Y seem to be in favour while talented people with great gifts appear to be ignored? A faint suspicion of quiet party lobbying and jockeying has pervaded the process. But even here the winds of change have blown with the officer circulating members with a list of appointments to be made and inviting expressions of interest. Progress! But no role spec; no person spec. No criteria that can be seen.

However has there ever been a process of the appointees being invited to give an account of their stewardship of the roles that they take up? There are occasional forays into this when members have spoken of their experience of say the Anglican Consultative Council. But there seems to have been little requirement for an account to be given. Maybe this writer has the wrong model and perhaps the

appointments are seen as a kind of position freehold where the individual may interpret the role and position as they please. Next step; from Freehold to accountable tenure? As part of openness, transparency and effectiveness?

Janet Atkinson : 1932-2013

Shirley-Ann Williams remembers:

One of the many pleasures of being a General Synod member is the interesting people we meet and the friends we make; the 'down side' is the sorrow when a friend dies. Such sorrow is the price we pay for the privilege of having shared a small piece of Janet's life.

Janet and Jeremy met at Oxford when they were students. Such as was the custom in those days that they had to obtain Senate's permission when they wished to become engaged! She had a large family who brought her the many joys and at times the anxieties that we all experience in family life. All this and her happy marriage with Jeremy provided the background for her remarkable years on synod from 1985 – 2010. Janet's life was undergirded by a strong faith and a commitment to the Gospel imperatives such as 'love thy neighbour as thyself' and 'go out into the world to make disciples of all'.

Her career as a teacher, a WEA activist, a J.P., and many years as a Samaritan formed part of her character. At Synod she was a Church Commissioner and then on one of their committees when she no longer wished to be a part of the main Commissioners' body. Janet was a very competent Chair at Synod and member of many Revision and Steering committees.

At OSG Janet became a most competent Vice Chair and was an excellent organiser of the bar at our Quiz and other fun evenings. She and I usually went together to the Minster service in York and were equally moved by psalm 150 each time at the close of the service.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have counted myself amongst the many friends and colleagues of Janet. She now rests in peace and has surely risen in glory.

OSG Officers & Committee Members

Mrs Caroline Spencer, Canterbury (Chair)
John Ashwin, Chichester (Secretary)
Mr John Freeman, Chester (Treasurer for the next few weeks!)
Mr Stephen Barney, Leicester (Membership Secretary)
Professor Tony Berry, Chester (Newsletter Editor)
Dr Edmund Marshall, St Albans
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